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Examiner's Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Japanese (1JA0)

Paper 4H: Writing in Japanese

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Introduction

All concerned with this exam are by now familiar with the demands of the tasks set and know what they need to do to meet those demands. There is, therefore, no need for too many general comments, as most of what the examiners felt should be communicated to teachers and candidates alike has been said in past years. Some points, however, are probably worth repeating at this juncture before going to consider each task in turn.

Task content

As has been stated before, it is essential that candidates address each of the bullet points (BP) to be sure of achieving a good Communication and Content (CC) mark. No matter how good an essay may be, if it only tackles one or two of the BP given, then it will be impossible for there to be 'consistently effective development of key points...'. It is good to be able to report that this message seems to have reached everyone; overall, there were relatively few examples of writing in which there was missing content.

Length of task

Candidates should all aim to fulfil the requirements of the writing tasks set, both Q1 and Q2, within the space provided; there should not normally be any need for extra paper. As has been stated before, even though in normal circumstances Japanese etiquette might demand a suitably polite beginning and end, this is not necessary for this exam. Not only does it not normally create any rewardable content, it also increases the risk of the candidate's running out of space, and thus having to use extra paper. Certainly, if it is only a matter of a few characters or a single sentence, this is best written **on the same page** above the 原稿用紙. If there is really no option but to use extra paper, then candidates should write across from left to right; for technical reasons, there is no need to try to simulate 原稿用紙! A clear indication should also be left for the examiner to show where the continuation of the essay is written. However, it must be stressed that the preferred procedure is for candidates simply to use the space provided. Writing **in pencil** also removes the need for crossing out lines of script, something else that may necessitate the use of extra paper.

Q1 (20 marks)

Option (a) – Weather - was chosen by more candidates than (b).

- As stated above, greeting Hiro was not necessary. If thought really essential, a short comment like たいへんですね would have sufficed.
- BP1: almost all candidates were able to use their weather vocabulary successfully, in some cases adding detail of what activities suited such

weather. Candidates should take care when using words such as いい, as for some, this could mean rain!

- BP3 was where candidates were meant to show their ability to write in past tense, but in a few cases the ~ます form was used (together with a confusing time adverb) meaning that it sounded as though, for example, rain repeatedly made you cancel your picnic, rather than it being a single occasion in the past.
- saying 旅行します was not considered to be an answer to the BP4 as it did not make the choice of destination clear.

Option (b) – Being friends

- it was important for BP1 that candidates made it clear what they had (or had not) in common with their friend(s). Just to say 友だちはアニメが好きです without saying whether they shared this passion or not, was not taken as an answer to the BP.
- candidates should bear in mind when writing that the examiner knows what the task is; there is, therefore, no need to say, as in BP3, 'when I have time on my own'. (This structure is not within the GCSE specification anyway.) Many candidates tried hard to express this: 友だちはいません, 私は一人です etc. By simply leaving a square empty, the candidate can signal to the examiner that a new point is being made. Some candidates mentioned activities (e.g., tennis) that are unlikely to be done when alone!
- as has happened in previous years, some candidates were confused about the meaning of 'once you have left school'. Whilst examiners were generous in their interpretation of what was written, answers such as ほうごサッカーをします seemed not to have understood what was being asked. There were, however, many impressive answers to this BP, the clearest mentioning use of technology to stay in touch. (It was presumably because they knew the word ながみ that some candidates were going to keep in contact this way!)

Q2 (28 marks)

Option (a) – Screen time – was seen by the majority of candidates as the more approachable task.

- the information needed to answer BP1 was essentially very simple, but a surprising number of candidates omitted to say 'where' they watched television.
- the best replies to BP2 not only named the programme (in accurate katakana!), but also went on to give original ideas as to why it was particularly good or bad. However, it was not, of course, essential to name a TV programme to be able to deal with this point. Most candidates realised that this BP was the place to make a 'successful reference to [the] past...'

- it was encouraging to find that the majority of candidates knew the word わかもの and were able to think of good reasons why TV was good or bad. Popular 'good' reasons included being a source of useful knowledge, and providing material for conversations with friends, while 'bad' reasons often revolved around the idea of wasting time that should be used for study, or the deleterious effect too much TV time had on the body, more particularly the eyes.
- in answer to BP4, most thought they would be too busy with work or study to be watching television in the future or would be using other platforms to view TV programmes. Some looked far enough ahead to imagine themselves watching TV with their own children!

Option (b) – Marking success

- as mentioned above, this task was chosen by fewer candidates, perhaps because of the apparent need to be able to express the terms 'success' and 'celebrate'; there was frequent use of katakana in an attempt to deal with these terms. (The phrase 'celebrating success' is clearly listed in the specification under the topic 'What school is like'.) However, many who chose this task realised that it was possible to answer the BPs without necessarily using those words.
- as with option (a), BP1 was designed to allow a relatively straightforward beginning to the task. Candidates came up with a range of activities, mainly based around exams, sports days, and partying.
- it was at times quite moving to read answers to BP2, as some related personal triumphs, such as being in a winning sports team, recovering from illness, or for the first time doing well in exams or forming close friendships.
- BP3 was probably the most demanding section of both Q2 options, not only because of the apparent difficulty with vocabulary, but also because of the need to think of a good reason to justify celebrating. It is possible, of course, that some who chose option (b) had been well prepared to address this point: interesting reasons included gaining in confidence, the motivation provided by celebrating to がんばる and reach further success, and the fact that a successful person can act as a role model for others.
- in BP4 future success for many was centered around a good job (and a good salary!), with those looking to enter the charity sector and help others in the minority. (This could, of course, have been due to being restricted by what candidates could say in Japanese!)

Q3 Translation (12 marks)

The translation is designed as a test of principally two things: grammatical structures and vocabulary. Whilst examiners were happy to accept a variety of ways of expressing 'stadium' (サッカー場、アリーナ、グラウンド etc.), there was not so much flexibility about grammatical accuracy (the past tense in sentence 3, for example), nor about omission of relatively straightforward details, such as 'often' or 'near'. (It was surprising how many times 'often' was translated as ときどき or いつも.)

The translation always throws up unexpected problems, and while for some of these a decision had to be made (do we accept マッチ?), for others it was clear that what candidates had written changed the intended meaning: 最近のオリンピックに行きたかったです is not the same as 最近、オリンピックに行きたかったです.

Further general comments on language

- the standard of katakana was generally rather low this year. The relative difficulty of writing 'stadium' (Q3) was recognised and small errors leniently viewed, but common words such as 'football' (Q3) and 'television' (Q2a) were frequently spelled incorrectly (サッカー、サーカー、サーカ; テルビ、テレビ), the latter, along with 'anime', often being written in hiragana.
- candidates need to show greater accuracy in forming the past tense, both of verbs and adjectives. In some cases, there was considerable fluency apart from the apparent inability to take the relatively simple step from, for example, 行きます to 行きました. Whilst adjectives are perhaps more difficult to handle, time would be well spent reinforcing the change from ~い to ~かった, also making sure that spelling is correct (さむつかた!).
- time words – an important part of any narrative – were a common source of confusion for examiners who had to work out, for example, that they should interpret 来週 in an answer to Q1a BP3 as a **past** time adverb. あした was clearly often intended to mean 'yesterday', but the word with the most wrong variations was 'last year': 先年、前年、きょう年.
- frequency adverbs too were a strangely common source of complaint from examiners this year, particularly how to express 'not often'. Sentences like 私はサッカーをよくしません ('I don't often play football?') and 私はサッカーをあまり見ます (from context clearly meant to mean 'I don't watch football much') were seen quite regularly.
- errors in making the ~て form are still noticeable, even in candidates whose work otherwise is of a very high standard.
- a common vocabulary error was the use of あそびます with an object, as in テニスをあそびます. Candidates would do well to think of this verb as meaning 'have fun' or similar in order to avoid this mistake.
- several examiners commented on the difficulty of distinguishing between い and り in some candidates' handwriting.
- for those who chose Q1a, there was in a few cases confusion between 天気 and 元気.
- although this is strictly above GCSE level, many candidates impressed by using という when giving the name of the TV programme (Q2a, BP2). However, in such usage hiragana should be used, rather than the kanji 言う.
- there was a general sentiment among the examiners that candidates would do well to expand the range of verbs that they know; sometimes potentially very good writing was hampered by a lack of verb **variation**.