



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2016

JAPANESE

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

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1. Introduction

1.1 Syllabus Structure

The current Leaving Certificate *Japanese* syllabus was first examined in 2004. The syllabus shares a common structure, including common aims and objectives, with those of the other modern European language syllabuses.

The syllabus aims to cater for a wide range of pupil ability. Assessment is at two levels: Ordinary and Higher. While the syllabus is the same for both levels, the performance targets involve language use of varying degrees of complexity. Differentiation between the levels is therefore achieved through differing levels of difficulty and complexity of the tasks set on the examination, along with different relative weightings between productive and receptive language skills.

This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers, the published marking schemes and the syllabus for this subject. The examination papers and marking schemes are available on the State Examination Commission's website www.examinations.ie and the syllabuses are available at www.curriculumonline.ie.

1.2 Assessment Specification

The core assessment objectives reflect the four areas of language use that arise from the productive and receptive use of the oral and written language. These are: understanding the spoken language; understanding the written language; communicating in the spoken language; communicating in the written language. They are often summarised for convenience as listening, reading, speaking and writing. The assessment objectives are specified more fully in the syllabus. The relative weightings assigned to the four areas are also specified in the syllabus. These weightings differ for the two levels, in recognition of the fact that, in the ongoing language acquisition process, the receptive skills (listening and reading) develop earlier and to a greater degree than do the productive skills (speaking and writing). The weightings are as follows:

	Higher level	Ordinary level
Speaking	25%	25%
Listening comprehension	20%	25%
Reading comprehension	30%	30%
Writing	25%	20%

Table 1: Mark weightings by level for areas of language use

The examination at each level comprises three components: an oral examination, which is taken at a common level and tests the candidate's ability to communicate in the spoken language, a listening comprehension test (understand the spoken language), and a written paper containing both a reading comprehension section (understand the written language) and a written production section (communicate in the written language). The marks for these components and sections are allocated according to the above table.

1.3 Participation Trends

Table 2 gives the overall participation rates of candidates in Leaving Certificate Japanese for the last five years.

Year	Japanese Candidature	Total Leaving Certificate Candidature*	Japanese as % of Total
2012	240	52939	0.45
2013	257	53119	0.48
2014	298	54225	0.55
2015	296	55219	0.55
2016	326	55966	0.58

Table 2: Participation in Leaving Certificate Japanese, 2012–2016

The participation rate in Leaving Certificate Japanese has slowly grown in the last five years. This is in part due to the uptake of Japanese as a fully timetabled subject in a small number of schools throughout the country; and an increase in the number of students taking Japanese as an extracurricular subject in afterschool classes provided by the Post-Primary Languages Initiative. In 2016, total candidature surpassed the 300 mark for the first time. Approximately 16% of the candidates came from one school. If the structure of the provision of Japanese in Ireland remains the same, numbers are not likely to fall or grow dramatically for the foreseeable future.

Candidature at Higher and Ordinary Level Japanese, 2012-2016

The breakdown in terms of participation at Higher and Ordinary levels over the last five years is given in **Table 3**.

Year	Total Japanese candidature	Number at Ordinary level	Number at Higher level	% Ordinary level	% Higher level
2012	240	46	194	19.2	80.8
2013	257	49	208	19.1	80.9
2014	298	74	224	24.8	75.2
2015	296	62	234	21.0	79.0
2016	326	81	245	24.8	75.2

Table 3: Number and percentage of candidates at each level, 2012–2016

The gender breakdown of candidates taking Higher level and Ordinary level Leaving Certificate Japanese 2012-2016 is given in **Table 4** and **Table 5** respectively.

Year	Total Higher level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2012	194	118	76	60.8	39.2
2013	208	138	70	66.7	33.7
2014	224	140	84	62.5	37.5
2015	234	144	90	61.5	38.5
2016	245	142	103	58	42

Table 4: Gender composition of Higher level Japanese cohort, 2012–2016

Year	Total Ordinary level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2012	46	20	26	43.5	56.5
2013	49	26	23	53.1	46.9
2014	74	41	33	55.4	44.6
2015	62	31	31	50	50
2016	81	39	42	48.1	51.9

Table 5: Gender composition of Ordinary level Japanese cohort, 2012–2016

The only observation made in respect of relative participation rates by gender is that participation rates by gender are similar to other language languages, such as German.

2. Performance of candidates

2.1 Higher Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is given in **Table 6** (lettered grades) and **Table 7** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	A, B, C	D	E	F	NG	E, F, NG
2012	26.3	28.9	20.1	75.3	18.0	10.9	2.2	0.0	6.7
2013	22.6	36.6	22.6	81.8	12.9	2.4	2.9	0.0	5.3
2014	21.9	32.5	26.4	80.8	15.7	2.7	0.9	0.0	3.6
2015	23.9	31.2	26.5	81.6	14.5	2.1	1.7	0.0	3.8
2016	22.8	29.7	24.5	77.0	17.1	4.9	0.8	0.0	5.7

Table 6: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Higher Level Japanese, 2012–2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	16.5	9.8	8.8	11.9	8.2	7.2	6.7	6.2	8.2	4.1	5.7	4.6	2.1	0.0
2013	12.5	10.1	13.0	11.1	12.5	8.2	6.7	7.7	3.8	5.3	3.8	2.4	2.9	0.0
2014	11.2	10.7	12.9	9.8	9.8	11.2	6.3	8.9	5.4	5.4	4.9	2.7	0.9	0.0
2015	12.4	11.5	8.5	13.7	9.0	11.1	7.7	7.7	5.1	5.1	4.3	2.1	1.7	0.0
2016	11.8	11.0	11.0	12.2	6.5	6.5	9.8	8.2	6.1	4.5	6.5	4.9	0.8	0.0

Table 7: Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level Japanese, 2012–2016

Examiners estimated that the percentage of candidates achieving an A grade included in 2016 a cohort of approximately 5% of native to near-native Japanese speakers, a decline of about 10% since 2012. It also included a number of candidates (estimated at approximately 50%) who take Japanese at Leaving Certificate level as an extracurricular subject or as an additional curricular subject in after school and Saturday classes provided by the Post Primary Languages Initiative. Candidates who participate in such classes tend to be highly motivated, and perform extremely well.

The distribution of sub-grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Table 8** (female candidates) and **Table 9** (male candidates).

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	16.9	11.0	12.7	10.2	8.5	6.8	8.5	7.6	5.1	4.2	3.4	5.1	0.0	0.0
2013	13.0	9.4	12.3	11.6	15.2	8.0	8.0	7.2	3.6	5.8	2.9	1.4	1.4	0.0
2014	10.7	10.7	13.6	10.0	9.3	12.9	6.4	9.3	5.0	3.6	6.4	2.1	0.0	0.0
2015	11.1	14.6	10.4	17.4	11.1	9.0	6.9	6.3	4.2	3.5	4.2	0.7	0.7	0.0
2016	12.0	12.7	13.4	13.4	4.9	5.6	9.9	7.7	7.0	4.2	4.9	4.2	0.0	0.0

Table 8: Percentage of female candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level Japanese, 2012–2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	16.0	8.0	2.7	14.7	6.7	8.0	4.0	4.0	13.3	4.0	9.3	4.0	5.3	0.0
2013	11.4	11.4	14.3	10.0	7.1	8.6	4.3	8.6	4.3	4.3	5.7	4.3	5.7	0.0
2014	11.9	10.7	11.9	9.5	10.7	8.3	6.0	8.3	6.0	8.3	2.4	3.6	2.4	0.0
2015	14.4	6.7	5.6	7.8	5.6	14.4	8.9	10.0	6.7	7.8	4.4	4.4	3.3	0.0
2016	11.7	8.7	7.8	10.7	8.7	7.8	9.7	8.7	4.9	4.9	8.7	5.8	1.9	0.0

Table 9: Percentage of male candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level Japanese, 2012–2016

Overall, female candidates slightly outperform male candidates.

2.2 Ordinary Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is given in **Table 10** (lettered grades) and **Table 11** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	A, B, C	D	E	F	NG	E, F, NG
2012	0.0	21.6	37.0	58.6	28.2	10.9	2.2	0.0	13.1
2013	2.0	26.5	32.6	61.1	28.6	6.1	4.1	0.0	10.2
2014	1.4	27.0	39.2	67.6	21.6	8.1	1.4	1.4	10.9
2015	0.0	16.2	29.0	45.2	32.3	17.7	4.8	0.0	22.5
2016	2.5	30.8	22.2	55.5	25.9	9.9	7.4	1.2	18.5

Table 10: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Ordinary Level Japanese, 2012–2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.0	0.0	4.3	4.3	13.0	6.5	10.9	19.6	13.0	2.2	13.0	10.9	2.2	0.0
2013	2.0	0.0	2.0	14.3	10.2	12.2	10.2	10.2	4.1	16.3	8.2	6.1	4.1	0.0
2014	0.0	1.4	2.7	10.8	13.5	12.2	16.2	10.8	10.8	5.4	5.4	8.1	1.4	1.4
2015	0.0	0.0	3.2	6.5	6.5	9.7	4.8	14.5	8.1	11.3	12.9	17.7	4.8	0.0
2016	0.0	2.5	6.2	8.6	16.0	7.4	6.2	8.6	11.1	6.2	8.6	9.9	7.4	1.2

Table 11: Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level Japanese, 2012–2016

It is believed that some candidates taking Ordinary Level Japanese are self-taught, their interest in Japan stemming largely from Japanese anime and manga. It is possible that some of these candidates are not aware of the Japanese literacy requirement even for Ordinary level, explaining the failure rate at Ordinary level. In addition, it is believed that some candidates take on Japanese after the Junior Certificate, instead of another language, in order to fulfil the matriculation requirement for some colleges and universities. An analysis of the work of candidates who obtained an E grade or lower revealed that in some cases, entire questions were omitted or extremely short answers were given.

The distribution of sub-grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Table 12** (female candidates) and **Table 13** (male candidates).

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	25.0	10.0	20.0	10.0	15.0	5.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2013	3.8	0.0	3.8	11.5	15.4	11.5	7.7	11.5	3.8	15.4	11.5	0.0	3.8	0.0
2014	0.0	2.4	4.9	7.3	17.1	9.8	19.5	9.8	9.8	7.3	7.3	2.4	0.0	2.4
2015	0.0	0.0	6.5	6.5	6.5	12.9	6.5	19.4	0.0	12.9	9.7	16.1	3.2	0.0
2016	0.0	2.6	5.1	15.4	20.5	7.7	2.6	12.8	12.8	5.1	10.3	2.6	2.6	0.0

Table 12: Percentage of female candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level Japanese, 2012–2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.0	0.0	3.8	7.7	3.8	3.8	3.8	26.9	11.5	0.0	15.4	19.2	3.8	0.0
2013	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.4	4.3	13.0	13.0	8.7	4.3	17.4	4.3	13.0	4.3	0.0
2014	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.2	9.1	15.2	12.1	12.1	12.1	3.0	3.0	15.2	3.0	0.0
2015	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.5	6.5	6.5	3.2	9.7	16.1	9.7	16.1	19.4	6.5	0.0
2016	0.0	2.4	7.1	2.4	11.9	7.1	9.5	4.8	9.5	7.1	7.1	16.7	11.9	2.4

Table 13: Percentage of male candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level Japanese, 2012–2016

3. Analysis of Candidate Performance

3.1 Engagement and Performance

Statistical information on engagement with and performance on the various questions in the written and aural components is presented below. Data on performance in the various aspects of the oral component are not captured centrally in a manner that allows for similar analysis.

Higher Level

Table 14 is a summary based on an analysis of a random selection of 20 scripts (approximately 8% of all scripts).

Section	Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
<i>Aural</i>	<i>Total (80 marks)</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>56.3 marks (70.3%)</i>	<i>1</i>	
	Part A (18 marks)	100		10.7 marks (59.4%)	9	Survey on lotto winning/making plans for the future
	Part B (18 marks)	100		12.2 marks (67.7%)	4	Informal conversation-invitation to an event; understanding directions; expressing opinion
	Part C (24 marks)	100		18.8 marks (78.3%)	1	Capturing the main information from news items; weather forecast
	Part D (20 marks)	100		14.5 marks (72.5%)	2	Conversation in formal register, experience learning Japanese; personal details
<i>Reading comprehension</i>	<i>Total (120 marks)</i>		<i>2</i>	<i>79.4 marks (66.2%)</i>	<i>2</i>	
	Question 1 (30 marks)	100		21.7 marks (72.3%)	3	Katakana question-authentic floor guide
	Question 2 (50 marks)	100		32 marks (64%)	6	Adapted magazine article on Japanese schoolbags, Kanji and grammar
	Question 3 (40 marks)	95		25.7 marks (64.3%)	5	Email about life in Ireland, Kanji & grammar
<i>Writing</i>	<i>Total (100 marks)</i>		<i>3</i>	<i>61.6 marks (61.6%)</i>	<i>3</i>	
	Question 4 (40 marks)	95		24.3 marks (60.8%)	8	Diary entry on hiking or a film festival
	Question 5 (60 marks)	95		37.3 marks (62.2%)	7	Email to a Japanese student coming to Ireland

Table 14: Popularity of and average mark awarded for each question, Higher Level Japanese, 2016

Candidate achieved the highest marks overall in the listening comprehension section. On the listening comprehension section, Part C, understanding the main items on a news broadcast was awarded the highest marks. On the reading comprehension section, Questions 2 and 3 contained specific grammar questions. The difficulty for candidates in grammar questions may account for their lower average mark in Questions 2 and 3. The written production section was the section of the examination in which candidates achieved the lowest marks. Examiners reported that many of the poorly performing candidates struggled with the demands of the Written Production section and in some cases did not attempt both questions.

Ordinary Level

Table 15 is a summary based on an analysis of a random selection of 20 scripts out of a total of 81 scripts (approximately 24.7% of all scripts).

Section	Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
Aural	Total (100 marks)		1	59.9 marks (59.9%)	1	
	Part A (28 marks)	100		13.35 marks (47.7%)	8	Survey on lotto winning/making plans for the future
	Part B (24 marks)	100		19.4 marks (80.8%)	1	Informal conversation-invitation to an event; understanding directions; expressing opinion
	Part C (24 marks)	100		15.65 marks (65.2%)	2	Capturing the main information from news items; weather forecast
	Part D (24 marks)	100		11.5 marks (47.9%)	7	Conversation in formal register, experience learning Japanese; personal details
Reading comprehension	Total (120 marks)		1	68.05 marks (56.7%)	2	
	Question 1 (30 marks)	100		16.6 marks (55.3%)	5	Katakana information flyer
	Question 2 (61 marks)	100		34.75 marks (57%)	4	Reviews from a travel magazine Grammar, Kanji
	Question 3 (29 marks)	100		16.7 marks (57.6%)	3	Diary of a foreigner in Japan
Writing	Total (80 marks)		2	40.2 marks (50.25%)	3	
	Question 4 (30 marks)	100		13.8 marks (46%)	9	Gap filling of key words
	Question 5 (50 marks)	90		26.4 marks (52.8%)	6	Summer holidays

Table 15: Popularity of and average mark for each question, Ordinary Level Japanese, 2016

Overall the listening comprehension section was awarded the highest marks. The lowest scoring section was the written production section. Candidates managed to hear and match Katakana words with their English equivalents (Listening Comprehension, Part B) better than they were able to read and decode Katakana in Question 1 of the reading comprehension section. Examiners reported that poorly performing candidates struggled with Question 5, the written production

section where attempts were often very short or in some cases, candidates did not attempt this question.

3.2 Attainment of Key Syllabus Objectives

Communicating in the spoken language (oral examination)

The oral examination is a common examination worth 100 marks (25%) at Higher Level and Ordinary Level. Examiners do not know at the time of examination which level a candidate will choose in the written examination. The 15-minute Japanese oral examination consists of three sections as follows:

Section 1: General Conversation (35 marks) Candidates are asked questions from a range of syllabus topics.

Section 2: Topic (30 marks) presentation and discussion of a topic

Section 3: Picture (35 marks) description and discussion of a picture

The current topics in Section 2 and Pictures in Section 3 were examined for the first time in 2016. Overall, examiners reported a broad range of performance and were impressed by the thorough preparation and excellent performances of a significant number of the candidates who presented for the Oral examination. Well-prepared candidates demonstrated a high standard of communicative proficiency in all sections.

In Section 1, General Conversation, well-prepared candidates were able to engage in meaningful dialogue with the examiner on topics dealing with themselves, their pastimes, where they live, their reasons for learning Japanese, their interests in Japanese culture and their plans for the future. Many candidates demonstrated good ability to manage and maintain a conversation using ‘aizuchi’, *そうですね、あのう、えと、で、* and fillers such as *そして、それから*. Such candidates were also proficient in asking for repetition and clarification in the target language without impeding the flow of conversation using expressions such as *すみません、___は何ですか* and *ちょっとわかりませんが*. Candidates who showed less oral competence gave very short answers without elaboration, resulting in a one-way question session by the examiner rather than a two-way conversation.

In Sections 2 and 3, many candidates had excellent speeches and presentations prepared. As the three topic cards in Section 2 and the four pictures in Section 3 are available to candidates for the two year duration of the Leaving Certificate course, a good standard is expected in the delivery of presentations of the topic and picture. Examiners reported that high achieving candidates

delivered very interesting and individual presentations and were well prepared for the follow-up questions. However, examiners noted that some candidates' presentations were too short, did not have engaging content and lacked grammatical accuracy. In some instances, candidates had only prepared 2 out of the 3 topic cards, and showed disappointment when the unprepared topic card was chosen. For the picture section, where all pictures were loosely related to the topic of school, some candidates who achieved lower marks presented about school in general rather than focussing their narration on the specific picture.

Examiners commended candidates who communicated naturally using a variety of structures on the syllabus rather than sticking to the です・ます form. While it is not required to attain full marks, some candidates also introduced more advanced structures not on the syllabus in order to convey their feelings, e.g. ければなりません。-やすい。にくい、Some high-achieving candidates improved their fluency using expressions such as じつは、さんねんながら and connecting words. Well-prepared candidates also performed well on comparative and contrastive linguistic structures including のうほうが..より、しかし、が、...くらべると as well as structures to convey their opinions including ...と思います.

Well-prepared candidates also demonstrated very good cultural awareness, communicating similarities and differences between the Japanese community and their own culture. Of particular note, was candidates' knowledge of Japanese manga and anime, and indeed pop culture in general. Many candidates had prepared 日本に行ったら or ロットに当たったら in Section Two. Well-prepared candidates gave informative and interesting answers as to why they would like to go to Japan demonstrating their understanding of Japanese culture beyond 買い物 and すし.

Examiners noted that candidates who obtained lower marks did not have the level of basic communicative proficiency to understand and manage a conversation. The understanding of some key question words including どう、どうやって、どんな was underdeveloped, as was the ability to express incomprehension or ask for repetition. Use of appropriate register was problematic for predominantly self-taught candidates, perhaps a result of immersion into Japanese manga and anime. Examples of this are おはよう、そうだよ、うん行った.

Finally it was observed that some candidates had a tendency to deliver lengthy rote-learned answers, often irrelevant to the question posed by the examiner, and they were thus unable to achieve high marks as a result of having answers learned by rote. Candidates are encouraged to desist from learning by rote, but should use their knowledge of the language to construct individual and unique responses to the questions posed.

Understanding the spoken language (Listening comprehension)

Higher level

The Listening comprehension test consists of four parts. All parts had to be attempted and answered in English. For many candidates, there was a close correlation between their performance on the aural paper and the written paper. In the case of lower performing candidates, the aural section helped to improve the candidates' overall grade. Also, only native or near-native speakers managed to obtain the full 80 marks. Part A appeared more challenging than any other part.

Part A (18 marks) examined the theme of making plans and discussing action for the future. In this interview where people were asked what they would do if they won the lotto, the performance targets of declaring intentions and asking about and describing future plans were understood quite well. Of particular importance was understanding of the structure *たいです*. Very few candidates obtained the full 18 marks on Part A as their answers lacked detail. For example, many answers to Part A, Question 4 *Why would they give the money to this person?* lacked insufficient details. The most common answer was *she's nice*. For full marks, *she always supports her family* was required. Also, candidates had some difficulty picking out and understanding the meaning of Katakana words, related to everyday activities and places, e.g., ベトナム、チェロ、サポート、ドイツ. The vocabulary item ^{かんごし}看護師 *nurse* proved difficult for most.

Part B (18 marks) which was a conversation amongst friends spoken in the informal language register, was answered well by the majority of candidates. This part focussed on the performance targets of inviting and making arrangements as well as giving directions and confirming plans. Examiners were particularly impressed with candidates' ability to abstract the main information in the conversation which used the informal register. Given the lack of exposure to the informal register in a formal teaching environment, comprehension of the informal style can be intimidating for learners of Japanese. The most challenging question for candidates was Question 1(iii) which dealt with the linguistic skill of giving and receiving information on location, *What directions are given from the station to Nakano Sun Plaza?*. Also in Question 2 (i) *What are two things Ciara enjoyed about the event?* candidates had difficulty comprehending the linguistic skill of expressing approval and disapproval. While many candidates obtained 2 marks for *costumes* many lost marks for *songs* or *lights*. Also Question 2 (ii) *Write two negative comments Miki made about the event* was the most poorly answered question in the aural examination. While there

were four details (2 marks, 1 mark) many candidates did not succeed in obtaining marks here.、シートがあまりよくなかった、ステージが遠^{とお}かった、サウンドがよくなかった。

Part C (24 marks) consisted of three sections, two news items and a weather forecast. Part C was the highest scoring segment of the aural examination for most candidates, indicating that candidates displayed ease with the syllabus performance target of understanding the main elements of contemporary aspects of Japanese news in entertainment, sport and present day culture. Key linguistic skills of comprehension of phone numbers was well handled, though many candidates missed the detail きよ年 in the dates *last (year) September* きよ年9月. Also, in Question 2, while many candidates missed a key item of information, *Sharran Alexander is a woman*, they were able to score the full 8 marks as there were many other details to give. Part C Question 3 focussed on the understanding of the general weather pattern in different cities. Key word understanding 晴れ、風が強くて、雨、むしあつい were handled well, though many candidates missed out on one point by omitting the detail *all day* 一日中 rain 雨.

Part D (20 marks) was the second most successfully answered section of the aural examination. Candidates demonstrated a good understanding of general and specific information pertaining to a variety of themes including personal details, family and home, describing studies, work and daily activities. This section incorporated a wide range of structures and grammar from the syllabus including the linguistic skills of expressing ability ことができます, reasons. ガールフレンドがいますから、て form of verbs, たり form, たいと思います、と言っています、かもしれませ^{ゆかた} etc. Knowledge of culture specific items including 浴衣、お酒^{さけ} was to be commended in Part D, Question (iv).

Ordinary level

The Ordinary level Listening comprehension examination carries 100 marks and candidates are required to answer all the questions in the four parts in English. For the majority of candidates, this was their highest scoring section of the examination. It is to be expected that receptive skills of aural comprehension are more advanced than language production skills.

Part A (28 marks) examined the theme of making plans and discussing action for the future. This interview about what people would do if they won the lotto was the most difficult part of the examination for the majority of candidates. Three questions were highlighted by the examiners as being challenging for candidates. The first was Question 2 (i) *Where would she go?*

Asia/Vietnam, and the second and third were from Question 3 (i) *What would he like to study? The cello* and Question 3 (ii) *His good friend wants to... study nursing*. Question 2 (i) and Question 3 (i) required a high level Katakana decoding skill (チェロ/アジア・ベトナム), while Question 3 (ii) involved specialist vocabulary (かんごし).

Part B (24 marks), was very well answered by the majority of candidates. All questions were in multiple choice format. Questions focussed on the syllabus performance targets of understanding for inviting and making arrangements, giving directions, confirming plans and expressing how much something is liked/disliked. Examiners reported that Question 2 (ii) stood out as the most difficult question in Part B. Question 2 (ii) provided a lexical challenge with the correct answer (d) *an earache*. (耳が痛くなった)

Part C (24 marks), consisted of three news items dealing with contemporary Japanese society - a robot hotel, a female sumo wrestler and a weather forecast. Question 1 was answered very well by the majority of candidates, particularly the telephone number in Question 1 (iii). The information gap style of questions requiring understanding of the general weather pattern proved problematic for many candidates. Understanding of key weather related key vocabulary including 晴れ、風が強くて、むしあつい and the temperatures proved challenging. Most candidates managed to understand the one weather detail 雨 rain.

Part D (24 marks), consisted of five multiple choice questions and one information-gap question type. The general theme was of giving personal details, discussing family and home and describing learning Japanese. Only a small minority of candidates succeeded in answering *Saito* in Question 2. Also difficult was the lexical item おじいさん *grandfather* in Question 3.

Understanding the written language (Reading comprehension)

Higher level

To perform well, candidates were expected to demonstrate an understanding of, and extract relevant specific information from, all three texts in the reading comprehension section - worth 120 marks. The real challenge with Japanese to achieve this objective is the attainment of high level of literacy in reading Hiragana, Katakana and the approximately 100 Kanji listed in the appendix to the syllabus. A candidate's success depends on recognition of individual characters, extracting meaning from a string of characters that form lexical items, then phrases and then

paragraphs. Given the time constraints of the examination, the speed at which meaning can be extracted is very important.

Question 1 (30 marks) was the most successfully answered question on the reading comprehension section. Particularly impressive was candidates' mastery of Katakana, and their ability to decode an authentic floor guide in Part A. Where marks were lost, it was generally for not specifying enough detail, e.g., Question 3 (i) *Name two musical instruments available on the sixth floor. Piano* instead of *electric piano*, and *guitar* instead of *silent guitar* were commonly given as answers. Part B of the same question required candidates to understand the main elements of the surface meaning of customer product reviews on a website. Two phrases in this section were very challenging linguistically. (i) *Duty Free* のお店で買ったのは一万円だったけど and (ii) 他のヘッドフォンで音楽を聞くことができない. Students who understood these phrases correctly demonstrated a very impressive level of comprehension. Examiners also cited a lack of detail in answering as a reason why candidates lost marks in this section.

Question 2 (50 marks) focussed on a specific Japanese cultural tradition of use of a certain type of schoolbag ランドセル. Part A (30 marks) examined the performance target of extracting the main elements in an adapted magazine article. The remaining 20 marks were Kanji and Grammar related questions, and could have been successfully answered without reference to the article. In general in Part A, questions posed in English were answered better than those in Japanese, Questions 2 and 3 (i). However, the translation of some Katakana lexical items proved difficult for many candidates, e.g. ハート to *hat*, instead of *heart*, オランダ *Holland*, and カラーバリ エーション which was mistranslated as *collaboration*, instead of *colour variation*.

A new style of question was seen in Question 3 (iii) *Does Hitomi like the bag? Support your answer with reference to the text in Japanese or in English.* Candidates were required to identify meaning present but not overtly expressed. Examiners were impressed by the ease with which most candidates managed this level of understanding of the text.

Question 3 (40 marks) was no more challenging than Question 2 and on average examiners noted that candidates scored equally well on both questions. Part A of Question 3 which was awarded 20 marks, required candidates to demonstrate an understanding of an email written in the informal register. The remaining 20 marks were awarded for Kanji and grammar, and as in Question 2, candidates could have performed well on these sections without reading the text. Questions 1-4 in Part A posed in English helped to guide candidates to extract information from the text. The most

difficult question to score full marks in was Part A Question 2 *What does Haruna do to improve her English?* Candidates were required to carry the *ともだちと*, through three activities and then link with *ずっと英語を話している*. Only very capable candidates managed this level of comprehension of the text. In the Japanese questions, Section B, Question 2, some candidates extracted the information directly from the text without manipulation and could not be fully rewarded as a result.

Kanji-specific questions, independent of the text, were worth 20 marks of the total 120 marks. Examiners noted high achievement levels in Kanji transcription into Hiragana as well as Kanji translation. The Kanji that appeared most challenging were *人気* *popular* and *間* *interval/between*, with many candidates mistaking them for *元気* *well* and *聞く* *listen* respectively.

Grammar specified on the syllabus including particles, formal/informal register, as well as verb structures to fit a variety of grammatical structures, was by far the most difficult section of the Higher Level paper. The grammar sections combined, which could have been managed without reference to the reading comprehension passages, were worth 20 marks. Particles in Question 2 C (10 marks) were very well answered by the majority of candidates with the exception of *いつしよ* *に*. Question 3 D (10 marks) was the least well answered section of the examination. It required the switch from plain negative to positive verb, noun and adjectival forms, and the manipulation of verbs. Candidates who scored full marks here demonstrated a very confident grasp of the more difficult elements of the syllabus.

Ordinary level

To perform well, candidates at Ordinary Level had to extract relevant specific information from all three texts in the reading comprehension section worth 120 marks. To achieve this objective, mastery of Hiragana and Katakana was vital. Of the 100 Kanji listed in the appendix to the syllabus, of key importance were numbers, time expressions, basic verbs and Kanji related to the self and family. Ordinary Level candidates needed to find the information in the text, rather than extract meaning from the full passage.

Question 1 (30 marks) was an adapted flyer for the Toyko orchestra kids' workshop. Examiners noted with interest that this Katakana decoding exercise was the least successfully answered question on the examination indicating that many Ordinary Level candidates struggled with the individual Katakana and Hiragana characters. Questions where no English words were given, particularly Questions 4, 5, and 6 worth 14 marks in total were difficult for most candidates.

Question 1 (6) worth 4 marks requiring a direct transliteration of any two of *しゃくはち*、*しゃみせん*、*こと* was very problematic. Another common error was the translation of *July 12th* (7月12日) as the *7th December* showing a poor grasp of basic Kanji.

Question 2 (61 marks) focussed on the comprehension of reviews of popular spots in Tokyo adapted from a travel magazine. The reading comprehension section was worth 31 marks out of the total 61 marks. It was possible to obtain full marks on the Kanji section worth 10 marks and the grammar section worth 20 marks without referring back to the text. Most candidates managed to abstract the key information of location of the famous places in Question A (1) worth 9 marks without difficulty. Confusing the Kanji for *高校生 high school students* with *小学生 primary school students* meant that some candidates answered Question A (2) as *chocolate* instead or either *strawberry / cream*. Examiners were surprised that some candidates left out one section of the True/False section, as such a section has been a feature of the Ordinary Level paper for a number of years. Choosing a Japanese phrase to support your answer constituted 10 of the 15 marks, so candidates who omitted this section scored quite low on this question. The most challenging question for all candidates was Section B, the grammar section which involved manipulation of negative non-past and past adjectival and verbal forms into their positive equivalent. The Kanji section was answered very well by a significant number of candidates.

Question 3 (29 marks) was an adapted magazine article in Japanese on the diary of a day in the life of a foreign student. It followed a similar layout to previous years with three information-gap style of questions answered in English, followed by three multiple choice questions and three questions posed in Japanese. While the former two question types were managed well by many candidates, examiners reported that the latter Japanese questions were often left blank indicating that many candidates were unsure of the interrogatives *何時*、*だれ*、*どんな*.

Question 3, Section B, the culture and society question of the examination paper required candidates to describe and discuss everyday life in Japan. Candidates were required to describe how a typical Japanese high school student's day differs from their own. Many candidates wrote down some excellent points and scored full marks as a result. Examiners reported that many candidates linked their answers to their preparations for the topic of life in a Japanese school in the picture section of the oral exam.

Communicate in the written language (Written production)

Higher level

Examiners noted that this section Questions 4 and 5 of the written paper, while managed well by the majority of candidates, was the most challenging and the lowest scoring section of the Japanese paper for many candidates.

Question 4 (40 marks) offered a choice of two diary entries, in which candidates were required to give an account of either (a) a hiking event or (b) a film festival in the past tense. Both diary entries in Question 4 were popular. Candidates were required to address two questions and examiners noted that this assisted candidates to focus on providing comprehensive answers to both. However, many candidates wrote more about the first question, thus scoring lower content marks on the second question.

A recurring issue highlighted by the examiners was that many candidates did not take the actual question asked fully into account. In Question 4, many candidates wrote about an event that happened yesterday or a few days previously, instead of addressing the question which asked about an event that happened today.

In Question 5 (60 marks), candidates tended to describe their locality in (4), rather than answer the topic of *things to do in your locality*. Similarly in Question 5 (5), candidates wrote general information about their school size, subjects and teachers rather than describing *学校での日常生活* a typical day in your school. There was evidence here of candidates regurgitating rather than adapting material learned for the oral. In Question 5, very few candidates paid attention to the instruction *Write your first email*. High achieving candidates wrote diary entries which were interesting and imaginative, and steered away from the very predictable accounts of seeing a Japanese anime (Question 1) followed by dinner at a Japanese restaurant (Question 2). They also managed to express their feelings well, often bringing some humour into their writing. Similarly in Question 5, some candidates wrote a lot more about one topic area particularly *家族紹介* than another.

Although there is no requirement to write in the plain form, a small number of candidates are to be commended for their consistent and correct use of the plain form in Question 4. This demonstrated a deep understanding of the more complex linguistic skills of differentiating between plain and polite forms. Most of these same candidates then reverted to the polite form in Question 5, further displaying their skills in plain/polite form usage.

Most candidates are to be commended on the clear layout of their written work with a suitable opening/introduction, one paragraph on each question or topic and a concluding remark. However, one area where many candidates lost expression marks was that of text cohesion. Connecting words, paragraph and sentence starters, and conjunctions were often missing and the result was a disjointed set of short paragraphs that didn't connect into a cohesive flow. Many of these candidates scored higher on content marks than they did on expression.

In terms of expression, many candidates lost marks for basic tense and particle errors, for orthographic errors particularly confusing Hiragana and Katakana, or for limiting the variety of grammatical structures and idiomatic phrases. One of the most common errors was the dropping of the final い in i-adjectives, eg *むずかし* or *やさし* and *好です* instead of the correct *好きです*.

Question 4 required candidates to write in the past tense. The past tense of nouns and adjectives was challenging for many. High scoring candidates managed to employ a variety of grammatical structures and expressions correctly and appropriately. Candidates who attempted to use a 'difficult' structure but did so incorrectly did not score highly on expression. Candidates were rewarded for using the Kanji on the Leaving Certificate syllabus instead of Hiragana. Many candidates footnoted a Katakana word which is considered good practice as incorrect writing of Katakana can make decoding difficult for the examiner.

Genkouyoushi was used correctly by most candidates. Some candidates wrote the full stops on the bottom right of the square instead of the bottom left, and others wrote the full stop on the next line when it should have been in the last square of the line. Many candidates omitted commas completely, and in the absence of a lot of Kanji, it made long Hiragana sentences difficult to read.

Ordinary level

Candidates scored an average of 50% on the writing sections Question 4 (30 marks) and Question 5 (50 marks), indicating that these sections were by far the most challenging for Ordinary Level candidates. The main reason for this is the high levels of literacy required to first read the gapped paragraph and the jumbled words in Question 4, and difficulty producing the written form of Hiragana and Katakana in Question 5. Overall, it was reported by the examiners that a significant number of candidates appeared to lack awareness of language requirements to perform well.

Question 4 proved more challenging than Question 5 for almost all Ordinary level candidates. It required a high level of literacy in extracting the meaning of words and phrases written in Hiragana and Katakana. Candidates needed to grasp the rules for many linguistic elements including adjectives, verbs, time rules, particle rules, etc. making this a very difficult question in which to obtain full marks. A very common error occurred in the first line, where candidates chose the answer なまえ instead of しゅみ. Examiners felt that with a certain amount of informed guesswork, e.g. 4時(v) から6じまで and 火曜日と(iv) 木曜日, many candidates managed to obtain a low score. Only a very small number of candidates obtained full marks in Question 4.

Similar to previous years, Question 5 was a highly structured question with a clear list of seven questions and two squared lines after each question for the candidate's response. Examiners reported that this question style is very appropriate for Ordinary Level. For candidates to score high on content, they also had to provide related information and not just simply replace the question word with an answer. The candidates were provided with a significant amount of vocabulary at the end of the page to ensure that they were clear about what they were being asked.

One common error here was that many candidates moved away from the structural layout of the question and ended up running into word order and particle issues. Candidates who stuck to the rule of replacing the question word with an answer and dropping the question word が managed to do well. To gain full marks in any question, candidates were required to add one additional grammatically correct detail.

4. Conclusions

Higher Level

In the language production section of the examination, namely the oral examination and the written production section, many candidates are to be commended for their ability to convey content, which was interesting and meaningful, in a manner which used an array of linguistic structures accurately. These high levels of communicative proficiency were rewarded with high grades. Candidates delivered often lengthy rote answers to unrelated questions and topics but they could not receive marks as they did not communicate what was asked of them.

Candidates who were able to communicate proficiently aspects of Japanese society and culture which interested them greatly impressed examiners. Too many candidates mentioned they wanted to go shopping, or to eat Japanese food if they went to Japan. Some more interesting reasons gave details of visiting a ramen museum, a cat café, a manga coffee shop, an area that had been ravaged by the Tohoku earthquake. Similarly in the writing section, some candidates managed to display their cultural knowledge by pretending they had been to a Japanese film festival, gave reactions to a Japanese film, and did something Japanese culture specific such as Karaoke after the event. Ask themselves how interesting is the content of my answer, e.g. 映画祭の後で、レストランに行きまひた。Over half the candidates who answered this question, answered in this way, じもとですること。お店があります。ショッピングセンターがありますから、いい買い物をするることができます。

To obtain high marks in the production section, candidates are required to use a wide range of linguistic and grammatical structures. However, it is important to note that where a range of structures is used, these structures must be used accurately. Complex structures used inaccurately receive fewer marks than accurately written simple structures.

The receptive skills examined in the listening and reading comprehension sections were awarded higher marks than the written production. Examiners noted that a lack of detail in the responses was the main reason for candidates losing marks. In order to maximise marks therefore, as much detail as possible should be given in response to the information gap style of question.

While examiners commended candidates' handling of the informal and formal register in listening, reading and writing texts, they also noted that the specific grammar section on manipulation of informal negative forms to informal positive forms, as well as the type of verb form required in front of formal sentence endings, was the most problematic part of the paper.

Ordinary Level

Ordinary Level candidates need to be aware of the minimum requirements of the syllabus to extract meaning from different written text types. These requirements are the ability to read Hiragana; the ability to read and decode Katakana; and the ability to recognise the meaning in English of the main Kanji on the syllabus. There appears to be a correlation between how well a candidate has mastered the syllabaries, and his/her performance on the reading comprehension section of the paper.

Similar to Higher Level, candidates should be able to communicate interesting reasons for learning Japanese and aspects of Japanese culture and society which interest them. Examiners noted that many candidates have an interest in Japanese pop culture, particularly manga, anime, and gaming. Particularly in the oral examination, candidates would benefit from communicating this knowledge of culture in simple, accurate linguistic structures.

5. Recommendations to Teachers and Students

The comments below refer to both levels unless otherwise specified. The depth of understanding and level of mastery required of candidates at Ordinary level is obviously less than that expected at Higher level.

5.1 Preparing for the examination

Teachers should

- Offer students advice on which level to choose, based primarily on their mastery of their reading literacy skills.
- Use Japanese in the classroom at all times. Constant exposure to spoken Japanese in the classroom is the most valuable language learning experience for students.
- Expose students to spoken Katakana words to develop their listening skills. Songs and advertisements are a good source of Katakana words.
- Dissuade students from delivering memorised, lengthy, complex accounts of pictures and topics in the Oral examination. This leads to many students delivering the same material - obviously rote learned.
- Incorporate an oral and an aural examination in all term and end of year examinations. Faced with the challenge of teaching basic literacy, i.e. Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji, the aural and oral components should not be excluded from assessment.
- Ensure that students are familiar with the number and type of grammar questions that can be asked. These are limited to the following distinct categories: particles, plain (informal) versus polite (formal) form of verbs, plain (informal) versus polite (formal) form of adjectives, and the correct verb and adjective endings used before grammatical structures specified in the syllabus.
- Enhance students' cultural awareness of Japan by introducing cultural project work, weekly news updates, news diaries, etc.
- Encourage students to write Japanese diaries on squared paper as soon as they have mastered Hiragana and Katakana. Early use of squared paper will firmly embed the rules of writing on *Genkouyoushi* by the time of the examination.
- Encourage students to pay as much attention to expression as to content. In order to achieve high marks for expression, answers should be linguistically accurate and students need a variety of grammatical structures. Teachers should also reward students who write interesting content.

Students should

- Engage with on-line resources, including Japanese films, dramas, music, advertising etc. to immerse themselves in as much authentic Japanese as possible.
- Prepare interesting personal content for the oral and written examination.
- For the oral examination, prepare their areas of interest well. If their hobby is reading, be prepared to expand on the theme, for example talking about the books they are reading at present, their favourite authors, etc.
- As the pictures and topics for the Oral examination are available for the two year duration of the Leaving Certificate course, a high standard of linguistically accurate presentations is expected by examiners. The content of the topics also should be interesting. Preparation for these sections of the examination should therefore not be left to the last minute.
- Practice and become confident with the basic question words including 何、どこ、いつ、だれ、どう、どうして、どうやって etc., both for the oral and the written work.
- Write a daily diary, practicing writing characters neatly on squared paper. This should be achievable once students have mastered Hiragana.
- Familiarise themselves with past papers. Students should not, however, expect the written and aural papers to have exactly identical structures to those of previous years.
- Go through marking schemes from previous years to familiarise themselves with the written production section marking scheme in particular. They should be attentive to the level of detail required to gain full marks.

5.2 In the examination

Students should

- Avoid answers which are too short, especially in the oral examination. Where yes/no questions are posed, students should expand on their answers without resorting to rote-learned answers.
- Students are not expected to understand everything in the oral. The key is to manage the conversation with the examiner, asking for repetition or clarification where required to keep the conversation flowing naturally.

- Use the polite register to the examiner and avoid the informal register completely. This applies particularly to self-taught students.
- Prepare topics for the oral which have interesting content. Remember that ‘to go shopping’ or ‘eat sushi’ isn’t really the most interesting reason to want to go to Japan.
- Read the instructions and questions very carefully, answering in the language stated. As a general rule, students should remember that when a question is asked in Japanese the required answer should be in Japanese, and likewise for English.
- Give as much detail as possible in the listening and reading comprehension questions.
- Highlight the Japanese question words in the reading comprehension questions, and remember the general rule for the answer. Replace the question word with the answer and drop か.
- Jot down or highlight in the reading comprehension section, Kanji they may need for the written section.
- Spend some quality time planning their written work. Students should ask themselves the question, how interesting is the content of my response. They should respond to the questions or topics asked and answers should remain focussed on the tasks in the questions.
- Display textual cohesion, and use many sequencers in their written work. The key is to make the written work flow, and not read as disjointed sentences.
- Lay out their written work clearly, indicating which essay/question they have chosen, and writing an introductory phrase/sentence/paragraph, a separate paragraph for each question/topic, and a concluding phrase/sentence.
- At Higher level, write more than the specified minimum amount of 200 characters in Question 4 and 320 characters in Question 5. Students should expand a little on each question/topic, which is difficult to achieve within the specified minimum limit.
- Allow some time to reread and correct their written production, paying particular attention to accuracy. Expression is worth half the marks, and it is important to write orthographically and grammatically correct sentences. Typical errors include 好です。 / いそがしです / incorrect tense / ですと / 行きたいます etc.
- Incorporate complex sentence structures to optimise marks. However it is better to write simple, accurate sentences than structurally difficult but incorrect ones.
- Footnote all Katakana words with a translation in English. This can save a lot of time for examiners trying to decipher Katakana words.