



GCE

French

Advanced GCE A2 H475

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H075

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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F701 French Speaking

General Comments

The standard of candidates continues to be high, with very few candidates inappropriately entered. In most cases, the topic discussion subjects had been individually chosen and researched, and the candidates displayed genuine enthusiasm which came across to examiners, who find these discussions particularly interesting to listen to. Progress has been made with the role plays over the course of the specification, with more candidates showing some initiative and imagination.

Examiners are aware of the pressures that teachers face, and it is most appreciated that the vast majority of centres upload or post their recordings promptly, and that working mark sheets are completed and sent with the topic forms. The examination is externally marked, therefore there is no need for teachers to mark their candidates. Any such annotations on the marksheets are ignored by examiners. Please be aware that CDs can break in the post and it is important that appropriate packing is used to minimise the risk, such as bubblewrap.

Most centres use the correct code for the entry they require: 01 for the Repository, 02 for CDs and 03 for visiting examiners. A majority of centres are now using the Repository, and teachers are reminded that the paperwork (attendance register, mark sheets and topic forms) needs to be either sent to the examiner through the post, or scanned and uploaded to the Repository at the same time as the recordings. The postal option is currently administratively a little easier for examiners, but either option is completely acceptable.

Centres can use any reasonable file type, MP3 and WMA being the most common. File sizes vary tremendously between centres, ranging from 3MB to 24MB. Smaller file sizes are much quicker for centres to upload and for examiners to download, and are preferred if possible. Centres are reminded not to zip files prior to uploading them as this causes difficulties for examiners trying to retrieve them.

Comments on Individual Questions

Role plays

Use of Stimulus

Half of the marks are available for this grid, and some Centres have clearly understood how to get the best out of their candidates. Although the role play can be completed in any order, the most successful candidates usually follow it through in the order it is written, and convey the points from the text in order. This makes it easier for their teachers to ensure that they have said everything they need to. Some teacher-examiners routinely asked their candidate if there was anything else they wanted to say, and this gave an opportunity to say anything that had been missed. Others were very alert, and prompted quickly for missed information.

Task A

The Dunmore Dance Summer School provided a fair challenge to candidates. Marks were sometimes lost through omission, such as 'fun' in KP7. Some candidates were not sure of the French for 'August', and 'accommodation' and 'en-suite' were frequently given as cognates by candidates despite their relatively regular appearance in role plays.

Task B

Candidates were comfortable with the topic of technology, and vocabulary items were not usually a problem, other than 'network'. 'Loss, damage and theft' caused some difficulties, although other candidates were able to be more creative when unsure of an expression.

Task C

Candidates mostly followed the logical order of this role play. Many did not know a suitable word for 'factories', and the road name A303 caused difficulties with some leaving part or all of the road name in English, 'trois oh trois' being common. Some candidates incorrectly linked the ideas in KP8 and 9. Prices were mostly well done, although a few did not know the word for 'pounds'.

Task D

Omission was a common cause of loss of marks once again, such as missing out that the hotel was family-run, some of the tasks, and who the customers were. KP13 proved particularly difficult, although inventive candidates found good alternatives for 'travel expenses' which examiners were able to credit.

Task E

This role play was not used by many Centres due to its position in the randomisation order. KP6-8 proved the most challenging in terms of vocabulary, but most candidates were able to supply an alternative. As long as the idea is conveyed, the candidate will be credited, as exact wording is rarely required.

Task F

Candidates responded well to this role play, although 'designer' and 'fashion parade' provided problems. Omission again caused loss of marks, such as KP8 where several missed out that you could eat the ice cream. 'Parts' in KP13 proved difficult, with many candidates using a cognate.

Response to Examiner

The same issues continue to be encountered every year. Candidates must show initiative and imagination throughout to get into the top band. Many centres still focus initiative and imagination only on the extension questions, although an increasing number are encouraging candidates to show more creativity during the transactional part. This may involve adding extra details, or a frequent reference back to the teacher-examiner about their circumstances, such as indicating that the teacher's daughter is just the right age for the dance school in role play A, or that the daughter speaks both English and French in role play D. The most successful candidates throw themselves into the role and give a very convincing and persuasive performance.

Centres are reminded that examiners stop listening and assessing at six minutes. Most candidates were able to complete the task within this time, but sometimes it is extreme wordiness on the part of teacher-examiners that makes timing problematic. Some Centres choose to ask the extension questions during the main transactional part. Sometimes this leads to the teacher forgetting where they had got to in the role play and missing out details, and the answers are nearly always shorter and less extended than when they are left to the end, as the teacher-examiner does not know how much time they can afford to give to the extension at that stage. Overall, it is a practice that is rarely advantageous to candidates.

Teacher-examiners' practice on the extension questions varies tremendously. Where a candidate's reply is brief, most take the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to encourage the candidate to speak at length, and also make the most of the opportunity to use complex structures and show what they can do unprepared. Sometimes, it would be better to spend the time ensuring that candidates have covered all the stimulus material in cases where key ideas have been missed out or were not expressed well first time. Teacher-examiners have a fine judgement to make sometimes, and they need to consider what will get the most marks for their candidate.

Quality of Language

Very low marks for quality of language are rare, but there is nevertheless a range of performance. There seemed to be a little less ambition in the language used in the role plays this year, and centres are reminded that the use of complex structures will always be rewarded.

The opening questions, although better done than in the past, continue to give difficulties, especially those that involve talking about the teacher-examiner's son or daughter. This manipulation is required every year, and centres are advised to work further on this aspect. A significant number of candidates continue to refer to *son fils* or *sa fille* rather than *votre*.

Examining

Although examining has improved since the specification began, examiners encounter the same issues every year. Small changes in examining technique could improve candidates' chances considerably. The most common problem continues to be the giving away key vocabulary. It is important that teacher-examiners realise that the prompts on the examiner's sheet are written in a specific way so that no vocabulary is given away that is needed in a key point. Unfortunately, some teacher-examiners choose not to use the prompts and make up their own questions. This often loses marks for their candidates, most frequently where there is reference to a website. For example, they may ask if there is somewhere they can get further information from, when the prompt asks if there is a website. If the key point is 'The website gives further information about...' then the candidate has lost half a mark. *Le site web* is already given on the candidate's sheet, so markers are crediting the idea of further information.

Direct questions such as 'Is there a show at the end of the week?' or just 'Is there anything at the end of the week?' in role play A lost marks for candidates. It can be difficult to think quickly, but a prompt such as 'Is there anything else?' will often elicit more information without risking giving anything away.

Topic discussion

Choice of Topics

As is usual, a wide range of topics was offered by candidates, and there were some very original angles taken on familiar topics this year. Many appeared to have chosen an area of personal interest, and such discussions were often particularly successful. Events in the world have led to candidates choosing religion and immigration as topics, and it is important that centres are familiar with the list of AS topics in the specification, as some of the choices made were A2 topics, which affected the mark which could be awarded in Grid D.

Some candidates talking about education in France actually spend much of their time speaking about education in England, explaining at length how A-levels work. Comparisons can be made, but it is vital that reference to a non-French-speaking country is not extended. Some topics, such as obesity, eating disorders and technology are particularly international, and Centres need to ensure that all examples and statistics used relate to France or another French-speaking country. Films or books can be offered, as long as the themes relate to one or more AS topics. Centres are welcome to seek advice if unsure as to whether a topic is suitable or not.

Ideas, Opinions and Relevance

Despite the title of this grid, it is nevertheless important that candidates do show evidence of research. Very factual topics with few ideas will be limited in this band, but so will topics where the candidate has many opinions but little substance. Candidates who have lived in France frequently choose to speak about the educational system, and it is important that information is not entirely anecdotal.

The markscheme credits developed ideas and opinions, which should be backed up by factual information. Some candidates speak with an *assistant(e)* and then spend time giving this person's opinion on the matter in hand. It is the candidate's ideas which are of interest. Many candidates will give a block of factual information and express opinions at the end. However, the most successful candidates will often express opinions throughout, making use of their factual material to support their argument. When done well, this is a most successful strategy.

Fluency, Spontaneity, Responsiveness

There were some very short topics of under eight minutes, but it continues to be more common for topics to be over-length. Examiners are able to make a judgement within this time and indeed stop listening at exactly ten minutes, so there is nothing to be gained for the candidate by speaking at greater length.

Although there was the inevitable over-use of pre-prepared material in some cases ranging from six minute presentations without interruption, to the more common series of presentations given in response to expected questions. However, many candidates were able to use their preparation flexibly and show off their knowledge without responding to a set list of questions. Those who have demonstrated their ability to speak fluently during the role play are also perhaps more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt.

Language

Although some topics lend themselves more to topic-specific vocabulary, all topics give scope for candidates to show that they have learned the complete range of structures in the AS specification, and examiners should ensure that they ask questions that will encourage this. Most candidates demonstrate at least a reasonable grasp of complex structures in this sections.

Pronunciation

As every year, a real attempt at sounding French is sought rather than perfection, recognising the difficulty in producing a convincing French accent just one year beyond GCSE. Whilst French intonation is difficult to master at this level, candidates should aim at being secure on the pronunciation of individual sounds. The same sounds cause difficulty every year, especially nasals and certain topic-specific words such as ‘alcool’. The excessive use of pre-prepared material is so often accompanied by poor pronunciation, especially the sounding of silent letters such as -ent and an S at the end of a word.

Examining

It must be remembered that the topic discussion is intended to be exactly that – a discussion. Too many teacher-examiners treat it as a presentation, and indeed even refer to it as that when introducing it, the opening ‘question’ from the teacher being quite simply ‘Vas-y’ or ‘Je t’écoute!’ It is a difficult task to think of questions whilst listening to the candidate. Whilst it is inevitable that the candidate will hear some questions in practice that are then heard in the exam, it is important to hold some questions back for the exam day, or for one teacher to practise and one teacher to conduct the exam.

F702 French Listening, Reading and Writing 1

General Comments

On the whole the majority of candidates had been well prepared to deal with the various sections of the paper. This year, non-verbal tasks (Tasks 1, 2 and 5) were rather more successfully answered than previously. The transfer of meaning (Task 4) was also well done – better than in any previous sessions. Whereas Task 3 performed as expected, Task 6 proved very demanding for many candidates who struggled to adapt the language of the text in a meaningful way. Very few questions (other than in Task 6) were left unanswered. As for Task 7, too many excessively long essays were submitted. Instead of writing so much unnecessarily, candidates should use the time to plan and organise their answer and also to check it and avoid careless language errors.

Time management didn't seem to be a problem but poor hand-writing is an issue. Examiners cannot give credit to answers they cannot decipher. Finally a few candidates lost many potential marks by answering Task 3 in French.

Comments on Individual Questions

Task 1

This task on Internet dating provided a good indicator of the candidate's overall performance. Listening attentively and taking note of grammatical markers had an impact on the outcome.

- (a) Very few, other than the best candidates chose *lieu*. Most wrote *possibles* in spite of seeing *avoir* in front of the gap. Had *possibles* been correct, the verb would have been *être*.
- (b) Global understanding of the relevant sentence of the text was required here; the weaker candidates found it demanding. The better candidates knew an adverb was needed.
- (c) This was a good indicator of the quality of candidates: the weaker did not select a verb; others chose *garder* or *cacher* (the latter possibly because of their own experience of internet profiles). The better candidates selected the correct *dire*.
- (d) The article *une* in front of the gap pointed to one of the four feminine nouns in the list. The better candidates chose *envie* linking *avoir tendance à* and *avoir envie de*. The others chose the three remaining nouns in equal proportions.
- (e) In the context of an internet dating site, the word *virtuelles* would seem a suitable qualifier for *rencontres*. Those who listened carefully to the text and heard *face-à-face* knew that the meetings were the very opposite of virtual.
- (f) This question was very well answered by the majority of candidates.
- (g) A slightly more demanding question than (f) but many candidates could link *si personne ne vous répond* and *une absence de réponse*.
- (h) This question too was generally well answered as *dans un lieu fréquenté* could be associated with *en public*.
- (i) Some candidates chose *cacher* although this did not fit with the rest of the sentence (*ses impressions pour soi*). Others had already used the correct answer (*garder*) in (c).

(j) Most correctly chose *seulement*, showing they had understood the last sentence of the text.

Task 2

The second text was of a similar level of demand as the first one. Yet this task, dealing with the plight of free newspapers, was slightly more successful than Task 1. This may be due to the multiple-choice format with only three possible options for each question, as opposed to many more from the list in Task 1.

(a) The correct answer was chosen by most. Those who did not generally went for Option A, possibly because of the name of one of the newspapers.

(b) This question in two parts was more demanding. Candidates first needed to understand that *popularité* was equivalent to *succès*, which many managed; the second part was more testing, particularly for those who did not understand *allégée* – a word they should have come across in the context of food. Many only scored one mark out of two.

(c) As the text was about free newspapers, gist understanding of the passage should have led to option C. Most candidates chose the correct answer. The weaker chose *vendus*.

(d) This was the most demanding question. Candidates had to understand *il ne s'agit que de* and its implication on the size of the drop in newspapers readership.

(e) This discriminated quite well. Success depended on understanding *ont moins le réflexe de prendre le journal*.

(f) In this 2 marks question, B (*lecteurs*) was a popular incorrect choice for the first part as many did not link *ressources* and *revenus*. For the second part, option A (*trois mois*) was often incorrectly given, possibly because candidates heard *trois* and ignored *trimestres* which followed. The better candidates had no problem in identifying both correct answers.

(g) This was a very successful question because candidates could associate *la seule source* and *entièrement*.

(h) Hardly anyone chose option B. Option C (job losses) was a very plausible outcome which attracted many. Those who understood the text went for option A, the only one that matched *faire disparaître un gratuit*.

Task 3

The third listening text on Cats Cafés seemed to appeal to candidates. All answers were attempted and imagination was allowed to take over when understanding wavered. A few instances of candidates answering in the wrong language were reported.

(a) Some thought that Cats Cafés had started in Paris; most understood that they originated from Japan. The second mark was more elusive: the concept of provincial cities was not generally grasped and many misheard or mistook *province* for *Provence*.

(b) Candidates had to understand *on peut déguster une pâtisserie tout en caressant un chat*. Most worked out the meaning of *déguster* for the first mark. Some noticed 'stroking a cat' in Task 4 and made the connection. It allowed them to avoid the fanciful, and at times amusing, renderings of *caressant*.

(c) Most candidates correctly identified that relaxing stressed customers was the aim of the Cats Cafés; that the soothing sound of cats purring was how it was achieved was correctly identified by a few.

- (d) Misunderstanding of *entre* and mishearing of *genoux* for *journaux* led the weaker candidates to think that cats were jumping on tables, sitting on customers' newspapers and even reading them. The other candidates managed to score at least one of the two marks.
- (e) Many were able to say where the cats had come from; those who thought they had come from a specific animal rescue centre and used the definite article forfeited the mark.
- (f) This was a demanding question for many who could only identify one of the qualities. Words were made up (e.g. 'sociableness') and many confused 'social' and 'sociable'.
- (g) This was the most successful question of this task, with nearly all candidates scoring at least two of the three available marks. A few forgot the negative in front of each rule. When they put *nourrir* into English some candidates wrote 'eating' instead of 'feeding'.
- (h) A number of candidates invalidated a good response, namely that cats had their own room, by adding "when/if the kitchen is closed." Most candidates got the point about customers not having access to the cats' room.

Task 4

Generally, candidates responded well to this transfer of meaning task, usually finding ways round unknown items of vocabulary and conveying the required ideas, at least in part.

The more problematic words and phrases were: *fond* (occasionally left in English), *toys* (often rendered as *jeux*), *left alone* (with *laisser* frequently omitted), *outside* (often *dehors* or *à l'extérieur*), *opening hours*, *to look after* (a range of inappropriate verbs were used such as *regarder*, *soigner*, *nourrir*), *to stroke* (*toucher*, *sentir* and other unlikely verbs such as *brosser*, *étrangler*, *étouffer*, *embrasser*), *to adopt* (often *acheter*, *trouver*) and *to keep* (frequently *avoir*, less so *ranger*).

Lateral thinking and other strategies enabled many to overcome these difficulties. For example they used *aimer bien*, *peluches* or *poupées*, *laisser tranquilles* or *laisser en paix*, *quand le café est fermé* and thought of what they had heard in the text of Task 3 to produce a close enough phonetic rendering of *caresser*.

The quality of language varied greatly. Some answers were extremely well and accurately written others showed a lack of awareness of basic grammatical rules: adjective agreements ignored, verbs left in the infinitive, random use of pronouns especially when transferring the last component of the message (*ceux qui* or *chez eux* were seldom seen). However, many used the subjunctive after *bien que*; fewer after *je ne pense pas que*. The question in part 3 was often accurately phrased, as was the present passive in part 4 (*est servi* - although *servir* was often thought to be an –er verb). Many used the conditional in part 5 but the majority used the perfect rather than the imperfect in part 4.

Task 5

Two separate exercises were set on the text about active holidays with a theme. The multiple-choice task proved more accessible than the gap-fill exercise as the latter did not offer the additional help of grammatical markers.

- (a) This question was generally correctly answered.
- (b) This was more demanding. Many incorrectly chose *attirant*.
- (c) The context should have made this question easy, yet all three options proved equally popular.

- (d) This was more challenging. Careful reading of the text should have excluded option A. The text also offered little support for Option C. Many simply guessed.
- (e) This too was demanding; in the context of volcanoes *sommet* could be quite tempting. Many chose *paysage* probably because they associated *sentiers* with countryside.
- (f) The first of the gap-fill answers was well done. Most correctly wrote *comprendre*. Those who did not often wrote *apprendre*.
- (g) This proved demanding. The correct answer (*dissimuler*) may not have been generally known but none of the other verbs made sense in the context of the passage.
- (h) This was often successful as candidates could link *renouveler* and *transformer*.
- (i) Many correct answers here. Those who had already chosen *apprendre* in (f) made another error here and occasionally wrote *comprendre*.
- (j) Only a good understanding of the penultimate sentence of the text, dealing with the spectators' feelings and sensations could lead candidates to the correct answer (*ressentir*). It proved demanding.

Task 6

This was not as successful as the other sections of the paper. The subject matter was familiar to candidates but the third paragraph was demanding. To answer the questions candidates had to manipulate the text and occasionally to read between the lines. This proved difficult for many.

- (a) Most candidates scored at least one point here - for driving under the influence of drugs. The idea of it being on the increase was frequently missed out. There was also confusion between *au volant* and the verb *voler* leading to answers with *en volant*. This confusion was repeated in subsequent answers and was treated as a consequential error.
- (b) The correct answer (*alcool*) was very rare because the inference was right at the beginning of the sentence.
- (c) Most candidates understood that the price of cocaine had dropped but few appreciated that its use was more widespread in general, not just among drivers (cf *démocratisée*).
- (d) Attention to detail was required to gain the mark. Too many wrote about the risk of having an accident, as opposed to causing one and few mentioned the nature of the accident.
- (e) This question was generally well answered. Those who over relied on the text and used *ils* forfeited the mark because they did not answer the question.
- (f) Only the best candidates were able to explain the *cadences infernales*. Many referred to the lorry drivers' reliance on drugs to deal with the *cadences* without explaining what they were. This was the most frequently omitted question.
- (g) The first part of this question was accessible and those who lost marks either used the perfect tense or forgot to include the adverb (*régulièrement / souvent*) in their answer. The second part was more demanding. Few managed to manipulate the text (*Ça me remet en forme*) meaningfully as the object pronoun was often made into a reflexive one (e.g. *La cocaïne se remet en forme*).
- (h) This was a demanding question targeted at the most able candidates. In the first part, the correct idea was difficult to express and many used *fatigué* instead of *dormir*. Limited command of language accounts for the disappointing outcome of the second part of the question as candidates could not rely on the text to answer it.

- (i) A frequently correctly answered question. Those who did not get the mark either used the wrong tense or said he realised his stupidity, which on its own did not answer the question.
- (j) This was a good discriminator. Pronouns in the text had to be converted back to nouns to make sense – something beyond the weaker candidates. In addition a lot of details were required and some were often left out.

The quality of language varied greatly. There were fewer instances of lifting from the text than previously. The level of manipulation required caught out the weaker candidates: if most managed to change the 1st person singular to the 3rd, few were able to handle pronouns correctly and used *se / le / lui* randomly. Very brief answers using only simple language cannot gain high marks.

Task 7

The stimulus text on the *bac* was very topical and the issues related to it were very relevant to candidates taking a similar exam.

- (a) This task is meant to be a guided summary of the text. Yet, many candidates included information which did not convey problems associated with the *bac*. Some wrote at length, occasionally commenting and developing the points they picked out which is not the aim of this task.

Most candidates were able to identify points 1, 7, 8 and 12 and also point 6 occasionally. The section of the text relating to points 2 and 3 may not have been well understood because few candidates mentioned them. Those who did so often mistakenly thought that *locaux* referred to people, when they referred to buildings. There was confusion relating to point 4 where a number of candidates mentioned teachers not being paid or not being paid enough. As for point 5, it was not always well understood: some thought it was the number of candidates taking the exam which was decreasing. Point 10 was often only partly conveyed because candidates omitted to mention that it was about their children's future that parents were concerned. Finally for point 11 few successfully conveyed that it was the parents' stress which caused their children's stress to be worse, writing instead that the parents put them under pressure.

- (b) The candidates had plenty to say about this task - more about exams than succeeding in life. Some responses were excessively lengthy and had unnecessary introductions. A significant minority did not really address the question they were asked, explaining what they thought of the *bac* or what people generally thought of exams.

Most tackled the essay by listing the advantages and disadvantages of exams and a few candidates wrote plans. Overall, candidates had very negative attitudes to exams and education, both seen as a waste of time because of little relevance in adult life. At best exams were seen as a test of memory, not intelligence, only useful to those who wanted to go on to university and have a professional or academic career. Some pointed out that it was possible to be rich, successful and very happy without qualifications, listing as evidence many famous people who had left education early. Others suggested the exam system was flawed and continuous assessment, practical work experience or apprenticeships were the way forward. Those with a more positive outlook pointed out that exams give motivation to revise and study with some even claiming they enjoyed the challenge. Success in exams and good qualifications help employers identify those who have potential and can cope with pressure. More mature candidates tried to analyse what being successful in life really meant, others thought that earning a lot of money was the only true sign of success.

Although a wide range of issues were considered by some, the quality of the ideas expressed was overall a little disappointing. Frequently, the weakest part of the essay was the conclusion, which often just repeated what they had said before, instead of pulling together the strands of their thinking. There seemed to be fewer outstanding essays than previous years.

Quality of language

Language varied according to the candidates' ability. Generally, they tried to use a range of structures and vocabulary, more so in 7(b) than in 7(a). There was evidence of pre-learnt sentences occasionally incorrectly rendered or inappropriately used, but most candidates tried to enhance their writing. Quite a number of candidates left words in English or occasionally made them look French with an added 'e' or an accent. – often they were key words (e.g. *abilité*, *capabilité*, *passer un examen* (for *réussir*), *course*, *achiever*, *performance*). However, there seemed to be more examples of good linking words and phrases than in previous years, especially in answers which were paragraphed – although this was not common practice. A number of complex structures were also successfully attempted. Because candidates seldom make time to check their work, accuracy was more problematic, even from very good candidates.

Some examples of good language:

- Use of subjunctive (e.g. *il est triste que les examens soient essentiels pour réussir sa vie ; il est important que les enseignants puissent comparer les résultats...*)
- *Si* clauses (e.g. *Cela démontre que si on se concentrerait sur ce qu'on aime faire à l'école, au lieu de passer des examens, on pourrait facilement réussir sa vie.*)
- Conditional (e.g. ...*personnes croient que le système devrait être changé, mais je doute que ce soit possible*)
- pronouns (e.g. *les bons résultats leur donnent confiance ; ... découvrir ce qu'ils comprennent et ce qu'ils ne comprennent pas... les raisons pour lesquelles il faut que... ; des excuses pour ceux qui sont paresseux*)
- Future after *quand* (e.g. *on se sait jamais quand on en aura besoin*)
- Link words (e.g. *en outre* ; *d'autre part* ; *par contre* ; *par conséquent*)

Areas where there is scope for improvement:

- Agreement of adjectives
- Incorrect verb forms (especially present of common irregular verbs)
- Position of pronouns
- Use of prepositions after verbs (e.g. *commencer à*; *réussir à*; *choisir de*)
- Use of reflexive verbs
- Use of *rendre* versus *faire*
- Confusion over use of *qui* / *que*
- Use of partitive

As a rule, it would be very beneficial for candidates to set aside 5 or 10 minutes just to go over their answers.

F703 French Speaking

General Comments

The overall standard of work was significantly higher than last year, with many excellent performances. There was ample evidence of extensive research across a wide range of individual topics, with real improvement in overall communicative competence. In the past, a recurring feature has been a discrepancy between the two parts of the test: candidates have often found greater difficulty with the Discussion of Article, struggling both to pinpoint the necessary information and to express themselves coherently. This year, however, the majority were able to provide assured summaries of the texts and could also develop their ideas and opinions in response to teachers-examiners' questions. My impression was that the percentage of native or near-native speakers was higher than in previous years.

Discussion of Article

This year, many candidates coped admirably with the demands of the articles and could go beyond the text, thus earning them marks in the top bands.

Few teacher-examiners persisted in asking as their first question *De quoi s'agit-il dans cet article*? Whilst this is a perfectly acceptable introduction, it has the disadvantage of inviting candidates to deliver summaries based on their notes, rather than targeting specific information paragraph by paragraph.

There remains a small amount of evidence that some candidates use their preparation time to write out full sentences which they then proceed to read out. Candidates are of course encouraged to make notes on their card, but the practice of writing out whole sentences is one that Centres should vigorously discourage. The Discussion of Article test seeks to assess spontaneous oral expression rather than measure reading ability.

Comments on Individual Questions

Text A

In terms of popularity, Text A was probably the least selected by teacher-examiners. This reflected, I suspect, less the fact that teachers judged their candidates unlikely to manage the ideas involved, but rather because many would be touching on environmental issues in their Topic Conversations. The majority of candidates who were offered this text coped well with it, although a few produced summaries of each paragraph irrespective of the angle targeted by the specimen questions; the latter were, incidentally, very widely used verbatim. Few chose to stress the value of biomass as a source of energy *qui ne risque pas de s'épuiser*. However, more often than not, strong candidates squeezed a lot of 'content' out of this text, pointing out the additional advantages of providing employment locally, as well as convenient local access to appropriate amounts of biomass.

Text B

Most of the candidates who were given this article seemed at home with the issues involved, recognising the importance of the various strands of advice on offer. With material drawn essentially from the AS topic list, few candidates experienced difficulties with the vocabulary; *l'entrevue* from the text was routinely paraphrased by *l'entretien*, for example, as candidates effortlessly showed their familiarity with the subject matter. It was particularly pleasing to see so many dealing confidently with the precise implications of *la formation*, a word whose meaning has often caused problems in the past. Elsewhere, some ignored or expressed rather badly the perceived value of consulting *des gens ayant beaucoup d'expérience de la vie*. Similarly, *portez attention à votre langage corporel* was widely misinterpreted.

In the general discussion, as well as stressing the importance of solid school-based qualifications, a number explored the psychology of the *tâche écrasante* on their way to discovering *une carrière qu'on trouvera enrichissante*. Many of the ideas that emerged gave rise to fascinating insights, admirably reflecting work done in the classroom over the two years of the A Level course. It is often when an article's main function as 'stimulus for discussion' is successful that the highest marks are gained; the candidate can most easily demonstrate initiative and take a lead.

Text C

This article worked well with the vast majority of candidates who were given it; many were able to combine objective assessment with personal experience. A number of candidates expressed surprise that a Monsieur Poubelle had given his name to a now familiar object, but even more so that his innovations dated as far back as 1884. Indeed, dates and figures were handled very much better than in some previous years. Not all were able to deal satisfactorily with some of the content of the second paragraph, viz. *éitant leur simple destruction par incinération ou abandon en décharge*; reference to this was regularly omitted in response to the second sample question. It was to be hoped that the repetition of *le tri* in a variety of contexts throughout the article, as well as the mention of *trier* and the introductory *la collecte sélective*, would enable everyone to identify the key concept; yet, a few candidates struggled to elaborate or comment on *le geste de tri* in sufficient detail. Also, in response to the fourth sample question, some candidates experienced difficulty attempting to explain *les risques si la qualité du tri n'est pas bonne*.

Text D

Candidates usually demonstrated good understanding of this article, showing themselves comfortable with the ideas presented in the text. However, a number of teachers had to work quite hard to elicit factual information from their candidates, with the first and third sample questions causing the most difficulty. Conversely, a few teachers appeared satisfied with minimal replies to the question about *l'impact des réformes scolaires*. Some candidates didn't recognise that the *responsable culture* was in fact a person appointed with the specific aim of implementing government policy as outlined in the first paragraph. In some cases, an appropriate supplementary question (e.g. *c'est un prof, alors?*) might have enabled candidates to get back on track explaining the detail contained in the following sentences – especially as *les professeurs* had been referred to in the previous paragraph. A few, incidentally, did not know the word *enseignants* when it appeared as the focus of the second sample question; they sometimes inferred that these were students. However, it was pleasing to see once again that *la formation* was widely recognised.

Text E

This unpredictably topical article (drugs in sport and beyond) was widely chosen by teacher-examiners - especially with boys - and the response was generally very positive, even if small details of the text were occasionally distorted or omitted. Surprisingly perhaps, a significant number of candidates failed to mention Lance Armstrong, thus missing the opportunity to show understanding of *nient leur culpabilité*; others didn't appear to appreciate the value of the radically contrasting view expressed by Jacques Anquetil. Unfortunately, that was what the article was all about: *Devrait-on autoriser.....?* Few elaborated fully the reaction of the tennis community, threatening to break away and set up *leur propre circuit professionnel*, whenever doping is mentioned. It may be a sign of the times that few candidates could pronounce the name McEnroe – not that it mattered in the slightest. It was the final paragraph that presented the really controversial comparisons, and it was wonderful to witness candidates really getting their teeth into the ideas stemming from these assertions.

Text F

The bulk of candidates coped well with this text on the power of the media and their ability to influence public opinion, with many expressing strong views about the text's findings. As with our own politicians, relatively few ideas emerged by way of 'solutions' to the alleged lack of press independence. Particular hostility was reserved for the notion that *certains média... impriment de l'invention pure et simple*. If there were any problems with comprehension, it was in relation to the stated circularity of influence: judgements are unlikely to be reasoned and free from prejudice when our main source of information is journalism that might itself be *influencé par l'attrait de l'argent..., (par) les pressions de l'entreprise... (et par) les partis politiques*. In the general conversation that followed, many candidates expanded on their reasons for not buying certain newspapers, not believing much of what they read and heard, and for maintaining a degree of scepticism – views wiser and more mature than we sometimes credit them with!

Topic Conversation

In terms of topic choice, *L'énergie nucléaire/Les énergies renouvelables, La laïcité, L'immigration* and *Les problèmes environnementaux* remain far and away the most popular and, once again this year, produced some outstanding analyses.

As usual, the best candidates were able to develop their ideas based on the wealth of information they had researched, whereas the weaker ones tended to allow discussion to be facts-driven. Some Centres clearly encourage each candidate to explore and research topics that resonate with his or her own individual tastes and interests; such a policy enables teacher and candidate to engage in a more natural and free-flowing conversation, unconstrained by a practised list of questions. Scripted conversations, however 'safe' they may appear in the preparation stages, do not allow Examiners to award high marks.

The issue of pre-learned material aside, another problem is the interpretation of the rule whereby candidates are allowed to bring one A4 sheet of notes into the examination room. It is emphasised that notes means precisely that (headings, bullet points, a date or a statistic, for example, to jog the memory) and that candidates should emphatically not write out whole sentences which they then proceed to read during the conversation. Examiners continue to report that this is not altogether an isolated phenomenon.

Language

Many candidates made a genuine attempt to extend their range of language. There was in particular good use of the subjunctive, the passive, the conditional, *si* clauses, relative pronouns etc., as well as relevant use of a variety of topic-specific vocabulary – all of which was very pleasing.

Pronunciation

There was much evidence that Centres generally had sought to improve this aspect of candidate performance, with some earning consistently higher marks than others; whatever the improvement techniques employed, they were noticeably successful!

It is a pity that the following errors prevail, especially in areas where the topic-specific vocabulary differs little from year to year: *environnement, déchets, renouvelables, radioactif, ville, États-Unis, pays, gouvernement, pour cent, dix, femmes, j'étudie* (for *j'étudie*), *prix, interroger*, the English sound 'sh' for the French *-tion* ending.

F704 French Listening, Reading and Writing 2

General Comments

The overall standard of candidates' work was similar to that of last year. However some parts of the paper were more challenging than in previous years, especially tasks 1, 2, 7 and 8. A small number of candidates appeared to have run out of time judging by the short length of some essays and the omission of some responses in Sections A and B. Rubric infringements were very few. Poor handwriting seemed to be more prevalent this year; candidates for future examinations are reminded that when assessing accuracy examiners have to be able to read every letter of every word.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question No. 1

Most candidates showed fair comprehension of the piece as a whole.

- (a) This item was fairly well answered, although some candidates were confused by *poumons* *verts*.
- (b) There were many correct answers, but some candidates misinterpreted *1,3 million* as '1,000,003'.
- (c) Some candidates homed in wrongly on *utilité capitale* and thought that this referred to money.
- (d) Part (i) was well answered, parts (ii) and (iii) less so. In particular only a few candidates rendered *matières premières* into correct English.
- (e) This proved to be a particularly difficult item, requiring comprehension of *part vers*, *revenir* and *meubles*. The latter word was sometimes mistaken for *immeuble*.

Question No. 2

This was a demanding task and candidates' attainment ranged widely. Careful listening was required in order to identify the relevant section of the recording for each sub-question. Some candidates appeared to transcribe the sounds they heard without paying enough attention to the meaning, which then resulted in an answer that did not make sense. For example, in part (i) the use of *placement* instead of *déplacement* showed a lack of comprehension and therefore no mark could be awarded even if the rest of the candidate's sentence was correct. On the other hand, some candidates were able to grasp the opportunities to manipulate the language skilfully, such as the use of the conditional perfect in part (i) and various verb constructions e.g. *encourager à* in part (I). There was widespread confusion between *elles* and *ils*, even among candidates who performed well overall.

- (a) This item was fairly well answered.
- (b) This item was a good discriminator. Many candidates struggled to express the key idea of the contrast between theory and reality.
- (c) This item was fairly well answered, although many candidates omitted the reference to *changement énorme* when mentioning how fathers might divide their time.

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- (d) Relatively few candidates scored both marks. The key idea for the first mark was the comparison between the sexes, which could be expressed either by quoting the two percentages given or by using a construction such as *plus de filles que de garçons*... .
- (e) Those candidates who identified the correct section of the recording usually gave the correct answer, although the word *échec* was clearly unfamiliar to some.
- (f) This item was fairly well answered, although some candidates omitted the essential reference to *des formations* in the second point.
- (g) This was the hardest item in Question 2. Only a few candidates gave the correct explanation for the first marking point, i.e. *Les entreprises anticipent que...* and the verb *promouvoir* caused difficulty in the second part of the answer.
- (h) This item was correctly answered by most candidates.
- (i) Many candidates showed at least partial understanding of the relevant section of the recording but then struggled to convey the key ideas in clear French. The verb *comprendait* meaning 'included' appeared to confuse some candidates.
- (j) Many candidates used the wrong tense in this item; however they could still score the second mark because the same (wrong) tense used for a second time counted as a consequential error.
- (k) Most candidates referred incorrectly to *congé parental* even though the relevant section of the recording made no reference to parental leave.
- (l) This item was a good discriminator. Stronger responses were characterised by the correct formation of the conditional tense and the correct understanding of *personnel* referring to the workforce.

Question No. 3

This non-verbal task was well tackled on the whole, although item (b) caused difficulty.

Question No. 4

Part (a) caused widespread difficulty, but the other items produced mainly correct answers.

Question No. 5

As well as testing comprehension of gist and detail from the reading passage, this question provided ample opportunities for candidates to show their grammatical knowledge. It was therefore a good discriminator. However candidates are reminded that it is not necessary to find synonyms for every key word; those who attempted to do this sometimes distorted the meaning and therefore earned no credit.

- (a) This item was fairly well answered, with some good examples of candidates' use of own words.
- (b) This item was generally well answered, although not all candidates were able to find appropriate verbs to convey the ideas of *rétention* and *élimination*.
- (c) Again, there was a good number of correct answers.

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- (d) This item was fairly well answered, albeit with some confusion between parts (d) and (e). Those candidates who attempted to paraphrase *hors norme* sometimes ran into difficulties.
- (e) Many candidates successfully conveyed the key ideas of a more intelligent population and a more competitive nation.

Question No. 6

This question as a whole proved to be a good discriminator. The need to insert words and phrases that fitted the grammatical context of the given sentence provided a challenge that not all candidates were able to meet, especially the requirement for a recognisable present participle in part (b) and a past participle in part (d).

Question No. 7

This transfer of meaning task proved to be a challenge for most candidates. The words and phrases that caused the greatest difficulty were:

- *immergé* (mistranslated as ‘tip’)
- *ressentent* (sometimes mistranslated as ‘resent(ed)’)
- *chantage* (mistranslated as ‘singing’)
- *ainsi* (mistranslated as ‘also’ – perhaps careless mis-reading?)
- *adeptes* (often treated as an adjective rather than a noun)

On the other hand most candidates understood *honte* and there were some good renderings of the last box, despite some confusion over what the pronoun in the phrase *qui la punit* referred to.

Question No. 8

This question was rather more difficult than Question No. 5, mainly because the sub-questions were phrased in such a way as to require the candidates to use their own words.

- (a) This first item was fairly well answered.
- (b) Only a few candidates gave all the required information.
- (c) Many candidates gave some correct information but did not distinguish clearly enough between the *débutants* and the *brouteurs expérimentés*.
- (d) Only a few candidates made the correct link between the question and the wording *arrivant même à harponner ... aux États-Unis* in the text.
- (e) The strongest responses here focused clearly on the key points, whereas many candidates included irrelevant information which then distorted their answer. In particular the reference to French-speaking victims was not relevant here.
- (f) This item discriminated well; as in part (e) weaker responses tended to include too much information, such as the fact that Albert was from Bordeaux.
- (g) Again this item discriminated well. The strongest responses conveyed the two key points clearly. The punchy style of the text made it natural for candidates to use their own words here, and some did so successfully with the use of constructions such as the present participle and pluperfect tense.

Question No. 9

This question was challenging and produced a wide range of marks. Many candidates gave an appropriate synonym for *sa bien-aimée* in part (c). The main difficulties were the inclusion of an appropriate pronoun such as (*dit qu'elle va*) *le* (*rencontrer*) in part (b) and finding appropriate synonyms for *chimère* in part (d) and *casse-tête* in part (f).

Question No. 10

This question again produced a wide range of attainment. At the top end it gave some good opportunities for candidates to manipulate the language, such as the use of a passive infinitive in part (d). The most difficult item was part (c), where not many candidates provided the two required elements of the answer, even though the subjunctive form of the verb was often correct.

Section B Quality of Language

Most candidates were able to use the common verb tenses correctly and use a reasonable variety of sentence patterns. However many made errors with adjectival agreements, confusion between the verb endings -é and -er and the omission of the plural -s on nouns. In this year's paper the present participle and the conditional tense caused difficulty for a number of candidates. Relatively few candidates went out of their way to use complex structures beyond the basic requirements of the task.

Section C: Extended writing task

As in previous series this part of the examination produced responses of widely ranging quality. Some candidates displayed thorough knowledge and understanding of their chosen topic and were able to make effective use of evidence from a French-speaking country to justify their points of view. Weaker responses tended either to include little specific evidence or to quote often very precise statistics without explaining their significance. Many essays exceeded the required word count, but a few were very short.

Relevance and Points of View

This year fewer responses had their mark for Relevance and Points of View capped at 4 out of 10 because of the lack of any relevant target language evidence. On the other hand a larger than usual number of responses gained a low mark for Relevance and Points of View because they addressed only the broad topic area and were not fully focused on the title, suggesting possible over-reliance on pre-learnt material. At the top end of the scale, it was a pleasure to read the work of candidates who offered genuinely insightful responses.

Structure and Analysis

As usual, the best answers were those that were easy to follow and kept on track in targeting the question asked. Typically they comprised an introduction, several paragraphs presenting each side of the argument, and a conclusion referring back to what was said earlier. It was usually better when there was reference to the terms of the question in the introduction, and again in the conclusion, as well as in the body of the essay when needed. A few candidates appeared to have pre-learnt the introduction which, therefore, had high quality language; however, the rest of the essay didn't always meet the same standard. In some instances candidates used appropriate linking words such as *d'abord*, *ensuite*, *de plus* and *pourtant* to help make the structure clearer, but the quality of their analysis was rather superficial and simplistic. Some candidates would have been better advised to spend more time on structuring their essay rather than listing their knowledge.

Quality of Language

Many candidates seemed to pay greater attention to accuracy in Section C than in Sections A and B. There were some examples of extremely well written essays with a good range of general and topic-specific vocabulary. The best candidates made effective use of a variety of tenses, as well as the appropriate inclusion of *si* clauses, the passive voice, *en* + present participle, *dont*, *lequel* etc, *celui* etc and *ce que/qui*. Some candidates made extensive use of set phrases, such as *il serait naïf de croire que...* or *nul ne peut nier que le chômage / l'environnement soit un thème brûlant de l'actualité*. The use of these phrases was sometimes but not always appropriate. A few responses included excessive use of the subjunctive. As far as accuracy is concerned, many candidates made errors with adjectival agreements, verb endings and the use of prepositions such as *permettre à qn de faire qch*. Among the most common anglicisms were ‘*efficient*’ (for *efficace*), ‘*effectuer*’ (for *affecter*), ‘*implémenter*’, ‘*préventer*’, ‘*un déterrent*’ and ‘*une incentive*’.

Comments on individual questions in Section C

Question No. 11: This question on solutions to the problem of unemployment proved to be the most popular choice in Section C. The strongest responses included appropriate evidence such as *Pôle Emploi*, *le CV anonyme*, *la loi El Khomri* and *le plan de relance de l'apprentissage* and gave a well-balanced explanation of the measures introduced so far, before going on to suggest further actions that could be taken – almost always involving the government spending more money! Some candidates devoted too much of their essay to discussing the causes and effects of unemployment, while others focused too much on a particular group such as immigrants. Detailed unemployment figures were rarely appropriate in response to this title. There were a few interesting discussions on the pros and cons of the national minimum wage, while a number of candidates showed good understanding of the importance of a good education in securing a worthwhile job.

Question No. 12: This question, which asked candidates to present a case for alternative solutions to prison for young offenders, was a fairly popular choice. Many candidates showed good knowledge of statistics regarding prisons and their problems; they used good topic-specific vocabulary such as *surpopulation*, *école du crime* and *la récidive*. Many suggested one or both of *le bracelet électronique* and *le TIG* as better options than prison. Some candidates gave too much information about the causes and effects of crime. A few candidates discussed ways in which the underlying causes of crime might be tackled more effectively, sometimes forming part of a creative response to the task.

Question No. 13: A fairly large number of candidates chose this question, which was a discursive task on the extent to which ordinary French people (or those from another French-speaking country) show awareness of pollution in their everyday lives. Unfortunately, most responses to this question struggled to remain focused on the title; they tended to deal with pollution in a very general sense and sometimes wandered inappropriately into lengthy discussions about nuclear energy. A few candidates managed to stay entirely within the remit of the question and discussed, for example, how Parisians have embraced measures such as *Vélib'* and *la circulation alternée* to reduce the environmental impact of their day-to-day travels.

Question No. 14: This question asked candidates to analyse the environmental awareness of city dwellers from the viewpoint of a new arrival from a rural area. As such the remit of the question was quite specific and many candidates wrote too generally about environmental issues without referring specifically to the issues faced in densely-populated areas. Many candidates did not take account of the intended readership – it was meant to be *un article pour un magazine écologiste* – and thereby missed out on opportunities to write persuasively and creatively. The stronger responses to this question usually centred on Paris and showed a good understanding of anti-pollution measures introduced in the city as well as their limitations and the reluctance of some Parisians to make sacrifices for the good of their fellow citizens.

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Question No. 15: The small number of candidates who tackled this question – dealing with how much priority should be given to funding medical research – usually did so effectively, bringing in plenty of appropriate evidence to present a case for maintaining or increasing current levels of financial support.

Question No. 16: This question asked candidates to write a persuasive piece promoting the use of digital technology throughout French society. The few candidates who chose it usually gave a coherent response, explaining the specific ways in which technology makes our lives better. However they were not always able to support their ideas with evidence from a French-speaking country.

Question No. 17: Only a small number of candidates chose this question, which focused on the tension between the cultural and commercial importance of the Louvre in the context of a branch of the museum being opened in the United Arab Emirates. A few responses tackled the issue sensibly and sensitively, while others did not really deal with the commercial aspect.

Question No. 18: This question, which invited candidates to highlight any day-to-day problems in French-speaking society and suggest possible solutions to those problems in a letter to an MP, attracted a small number of responses, which ranged widely in quality. The best responses took account of the phrase *au lieu de réactions aux événements* as well as suggesting solutions to the problems mentioned.

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