



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **French 1651** *Specification*

**FRE2T      Speaking**

# **Report on the Examination** *2009 examination - January series*

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## FRE2T

In this first report on the new Unit 2 speaking test it is encouraging to be able to state that, though the entry for January 2009 was small, there were many performances that were excellent or very good. Candidates had been generally well-prepared for the test and the tests were conducted largely in accordance with the guidelines. That said there are aspects of both candidate preparation and the conduct of the tests that require some detailed comment and this is offered later in this report to all centres as a means of ensuring that the summer tests run as smoothly as possible.

In most centres, the stipulations regarding the coverage of the four topic areas as well as the guidelines for the timing of the two parts of the test were observed. There were a few cases of tests being either significantly longer or shorter than 15 minutes and teachers are reminded that close adherence to the prescribed times is in the interest of the candidates as examiners stop marking at the 15 minute point.

In general terms it was clear that the range of topics in the new specification generated many interesting and engaging conversations and discussions and it was gratifying to listen to candidates speaking about topics which were genuinely of interest to them rather than some of those legacy unit topics for which interest has been somewhat feigned in the past.

Centres are asked to pay particular attention to the following matters:

- Clear recordings with no background hissing and with candidates well-positioned in relation to the microphone so that their responses are audible
- Accurate time-keeping and the correct allocation of time to the relevant sections of tests as set out in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations booklet
- Accurate completion of official documentation with all information provided
- Consistency throughout the tests in the use of either *tu* or *vous* and attention paid to maintaining this consistency with possessive adjectives and all pronouns
- Responsive questioning that ensures natural interaction and engages the candidate in some degree of spontaneous exchanges rather than questions picked off from a set list with little or no follow-up on what a candidate actually says
- Differentiated questioning according to levels of ability so that less able candidates are not left struggling to respond to questions that are clearly beyond their level of proficiency
- Discouraging candidates from giving detailed descriptions of what is on a stimulus card.

### Part 1 Discussion of the stimulus card

The assessment of this first part of the test is divided between the candidate's performance in response to the five printed questions – worth 5 marks – and the candidate's response in the more general discussion of the sub-topic given on the stimulus card – also worth 5 marks. . It follows that the time taken for these two sections should be as evenly balanced as possible. Unfortunately, this was often not achieved because many candidates gave only brief answers to the printed questions and failed to 'develop relevant points', as the mark scheme envisages. It was therefore often not possible to award the higher marks of 4 or 5 for this section even if candidates proved themselves to be quite eloquent in the ensuing discussion.

Teachers preparing candidates should therefore be aware of the importance of the development of points in response to the printed questions and candidates should be encouraged to look for every opportunity to develop such points in their preparation time. It is anticipated that the first question will still prompt a fairly brief answer but thereafter each question should be seen as an opportunity for candidates to develop as many relevant points as possible. There is a significant difference between making a point and developing a point and a candidate will only access the highest mark in this first part if he/she uses the questions to sustain a conversation for approximately two and a half minutes. The candidate who gives only the briefest of responses to the printed questions will achieve only a low score. It is essential, therefore, that candidates are well practised in maximising their use of preparation time so that they can respond as necessary. There is no opportunity for the examiner to “draw out” more from the candidate in this section as the mark awarded is based on the response to the printed questions.

The second part of Part 1 requires the examiner to develop the discussion but within the confines of the sub-topic specified on the stimulus card. This is an important aspect of the correct conduct of Part 1. If the stated sub-topic is, for example, Music, there should be no drifting into the sub-topics of Cinema and Fashion/Trends within the Popular Culture topic. Generally, in this season, teacher-examiners were very good at following this requirement but there were one or two instances where “topic-drift” occurred. There may well be instances where this is the candidate’s doing rather than the examiner’s and in such cases the examiner should tactfully steer the candidate back to the sub-topic under discussion.

## **Part 2           General Conversation**

The vast majority of examiners made sure that they explicitly invited the candidates to nominate their chosen first topic for conversation and some excellent exchanges ensued. The cinema was a very popular first topic and while it is good that candidates can choose to talk about a film that they genuinely find interesting, excessive story-telling or “what happens next?” questions should be avoided as these rarely lead to an expression of meaningful views and opinions. There is absolutely no requirement that this should be French cinema but where candidates did choose to talk about a French film, examiners drew out some good comparisons with British and American cinema. The nominated topic must be treated as an integral part of the conversation and not as a presentation. There were a few instances where teachers allowed candidates to give an uninterrupted talk on the first topic.

Most centres fulfilled the requirement of covering the remaining two topics of the specification in the remainder of the general conversation. Timing was an issue in some cases and centres are reminded that the aim in this second part of the test must be for a fairly even allocation of time to each of the three topics, approximately three minutes per topic. During the discussion of a topic area, it is not necessary to address all three sub-topics. As is the case in Part 1, it is important that candidates are given the opportunity to develop ideas and this can best be done if examiners follow up on candidates’ responses and pursue a few points in more depth rather than covering many aspects superficially. Candidates should also be steered away from delivering chunks of pre-learnt material as this will have an adverse effect on the mark awarded for Interaction.

## **AO3   Knowledge of language**

Although the entry was limited, performances covered both extremes and virtually everything in between. There were examples of some truly excellent candidates who had a very solid grasp of a wide range of vocabulary and structures which they used to very good effect to express mature and well-developed views and ideas. There were also some, though not many, candidates who were clearly struggling to express themselves in any coherent or accurate way. Less able candidates need strategies in the prepared responses part of Part 1 to avoid trying to

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formulate answers in English and then “translate” these into French. Simple but reasonably accurate language will be rewarded more than attempts at the more complicated which result in an at times incomprehensible misuse of French.

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

With effect from Summer 2009, the following ruling will apply to the marks which can be awarded for Interaction in the Part 2 Conversation.

The *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* state that approximately 3 minutes must be allocated to each of the three topics to be covered in Part 2. Therefore, a candidate who spends less than 2 minutes on any topic in Part 2 will have their mark for Interaction reduced by one band, eg a candidate who is judged at 8 marks would have the mark reduced to 6. A candidate judged at 9 marks would have their mark reduced to 7. This same ruling will apply to candidates who do not meet the requirement of the specification for the test to cover all four AS topics. This may occur if the teacher-examiner covers a topic in Part 2 which has already been covered in Part 1.

All teacher-examiners should be made aware of this information in advance of conducting the tests.

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2009 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the AQA website in due course.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.