



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **French 1651** *Specification*

**FRE2T      Speaking**

# **Report on the Examination** *2010 examination - January series*

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## FRE2T

### Administration

In the vast majority of cases the tests were conducted in accordance with the guidelines, with a generally accurate allocation of time to each of Parts 1 and 2 and to individual topic discussions within Part 2. This is very encouraging indeed. However, for those centres who did not adhere to the prescribed timings, the following guidance is provided as a reminder.

The test itself should last a total of 15 minutes and examiners stop marking at the end of 15 minutes. Within this time the “very best practice” test will have kept to the following timings:

#### *Part 1 Discussion of the Stimulus Card*

5 minutes (approximate split 2½ for printed questions and 2½ minutes for discussion)

#### *Part 2 Conversation*

- Discussion of candidate’s nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Obviously it is difficult to achieve exactly this allocation of time and so, for example, a Part 2 that was divided 4 minutes, 3 minutes and 3 minutes across the 3 topics would be perfectly acceptable. However, if any of the Part 2 topics is discussed for less than two minutes, the Interaction mark is reduced by one band. This is why it is important to keep the Part 1 discussion to only 5 minutes since any over-run at this stage can have an adverse effect on the time spent on the last topic before the total 15 minutes are over and marking stops.

### Quality of recordings

The quality of the recordings was generally good although in the course of some tests it was obvious that candidates were inadvertently knocking the table or desk on which the microphone was placed and this was picked up. Centres are reminded about the rules governing the presence of mobile phones in the examination room: there were a large number of occasions where recordings picked up interference from mobile phone calls or text messages. Most centres seemed to prefer to use cassettes or CDs rather than the newer technologies for their recording medium, although there is no doubt that the quality of tests recorded on PCs or laptops as sound files is far superior.

All centres should pay particular attention to the quality of recordings submitted for marking to ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged. Examiners can only mark what they can hear. It is essential that the equipment for recording the tests is tested in advance of the tests to ensure both candidate **and** teacher-examiner can be heard clearly and there is no background hissing or hum.

Centres are reminded that AQA has produced the AQA Audio Recorder based on *Audacity* to assist them in making recordings of speaking tests as sound files. The AQA Audio Recorder and a comprehensive User Guide can be downloaded from AQA’s website using the following link: [http://web.aqa.org.uk/mfl\\_audio\\_recorder](http://web.aqa.org.uk/mfl_audio_recorder)

Please note there is an underscore ( \_ ) between *audio* and *recorder*

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Further information is also contained in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations for Summer 2010 (MFL/TN).

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 stimulus card**

On the Tester Performance Record that is sent to centres it is acknowledged that the teacher-examiner has little influence on the allocation of time within this first part of the test since much depends on how effectively the candidate has used the preparation time. That said, there was clear evidence in the January tests that candidates had taken on board the need to develop as wide a range of relevant points as possible to access the highest mark available and proportionately more candidates were achieving marks of 4/5 or 5/5 in January than had done so last Summer. In the very best cases, this development of a wide range of relevant points involved responses that reflected a consideration of a number of perspectives or angles to the questions, and there was an impression that candidates producing such answers had considered the questions very carefully indeed to see which initial response would enable them to develop as full an answer as possible. Card E question 3 serves as a good example of this : *A votre avis est-ce que tous les couples peuvent faire de bons parents?* The majority of candidates interpreted the *tous les couples* as meaning married or unmarried (ie all those mentioned on the card) and said that all such couples can make good parents. Those candidates, however, who really focussed on the *tous* and reflected on whether any couple or every couple could be good parents, found that they could develop a very full response. This invariably led to their responding by saying no – and candidates should not feel they are expected to agree with every opinion expressed on the cards – and then being able to outline types of couples whose parenting skills or suitability might well be less than desirable: violent couples; couples who are drug addicts; couples who spend little time together because of how and where they work etc.

The more general discussions following the printed questions were on the whole well-conducted and candidates seemed to have plenty to say about all of the sub-topics featuring on the cards. Most examiners followed the guidelines in staying within the stated sub-topic; some allowed some slight 'topic-drift' when candidates introduced an aspect of the wider topic that was outside the specifics of the sub-topic. However, a small number of teacher-examiners quite clearly were not aware of the need to keep to the sub-topic and covered other aspects of the

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main topic – family and relationships as a follow-on to Card A, for example, or television and advertising as a follow-on to Card B. If a candidate does move away from the sub-topic, then the teacher-examiner should move the discussion back to the sub-topic on the stimulus card.

## Part 2: General Conversation

The first topic is nominated by the candidate but it is a **topic for discussion** and the discussion should begin immediately. Some teacher-examiners are still referring to the nominated topic as a presentation, inviting candidates to give a short presentation to ‘start the ball rolling’. Others are inviting candidates to hold forth – uninterrupted – for as long as two minutes. This nominated topic is the first of the three topics talked about in Part 2 and does not constitute a separate part of the examination in its own right. The purpose of the nominated topic is to give the candidate a confident start to the conversation and should be treated in the same way as the remaining two topics. Part 2 in total should cover as even an allocation of time as possible across the three topic areas that remain after the end of the stimulus card discussion, ie approximately 3 minutes on each topic.

Teachers are also advised to avoid moving from one topic to another with no clear indication of a change of topic. This practice creates difficulties for markers who need to be aware of the time spent on each of the topics.

With each of the three topics for discussion it is important that teacher-examiners consider their questions in the context of the mark scheme if candidates are to be given every opportunity to do their best. Too much time, in some cases, is being spent on question types that elicit factual information: in the context of a film, *De quoi s’agit-il?* is not the most effective question as it will invite and encourage a narrative summary of the film and the time taken to deliver that is so much better spent – in terms of the marks the performance will attract – on questions that elicit views and opinions. Likewise *Parle(z)-moi de...* in the context of family, friends, favourite television programmes, advertisements etc is also something of a ‘high risk’ (rather than a high mark) type of question. *Que fais-tu / faites-vous...?* in the context of sport and healthy living are again question types that do not readily lend themselves to being dealt with to elicit opinions.

In terms of preparing candidates for the test and linked closely to this would be the advice for them to avoid excessive use of *je* statements. Many candidates fail to hear in a question the more general perspective that is being sought: *que devrait-on faire...?* will be converted by the candidate to *que fais-tu / faites-vous?* It is challenging but very useful to encourage candidates to operate in *je* mode only when it has been introduced by *par exemple, moi*. Such a constraint encourages the discipline of concentrating on a more general perspective, on opinions and views, and also on developing such opinions and views through examples relevant to the candidate himself or herself. Factual information is useful as a source of development and exemplification of an answer: at this level it will not attract many marks for Interaction if it is all or most of what the candidate offers.

It is appropriate at this stage to say a word or two about pronunciation. There is very little evidence of poor pronunciation among candidates and very many candidates are awarded the mark for fairly good pronunciation: many of these, if they were to make the effort to sound that little bit more French, if they were to pay attention to one or two basic rules, if they were to get to grips with the correct pronunciation of some key topic words, could convert from Fairly Good to Good, and that may only be the difference of one mark but, that can make the difference between two grades.

### **AO3 Knowledge of Language**

Few candidates score in the lowest band or have great difficulty constructing basic sentences. Most performances are judged to be at least generally comprehensible to a native speaker or better. The vast majority of candidates can get their point across effectively but what distinguishes the good and very good from the mediocre is the range of structures and vocabulary that enable concise and succinct self-expression rather than somewhat clumsy circumlocution. Teachers should ensure that they are familiar with the performance bands and descriptors used in the assessment process.

### **Annual Teacher Support Meetings**

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2010 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 Events page of the AQA website ([www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)) 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.