

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE French (6FR03) Paper 1A

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## General Introduction

The purpose of this report is to review the operation of this year's session by:

- analysing and commenting upon candidate performance
- commenting upon teacher examiner performance
- suggesting ways in which examiners can help candidates perform well
- suggesting ways teachers can help candidates prepare.

It will also serve to introduce new centres to the examination.

## Purpose of the Test

This unit seeks to assess the candidate's ability to **discuss a limited number of issues in some depth**.

Centres' attention is drawn to **Section A, page 6, of the Specification** where the Aim of the unit is set out. Candidates are expected to:

- **interact effectively** with the teacher examiner
- **defend** their views on a chosen issue
- **sustain discussion** as the teacher examiner moves the conversation away from the chosen issue to a further 2 or 3 issues.

Centres are reminded that the test is an examination of the candidate's ability to use language **creatively** and **spontaneously, eschewing memorised material**, as far as is possible.

The trend observed over previous years to produce over-rehearsed tests continues to grow. Centres should be aware that this is a practice that is not without its dangers. Not only is it contrary to the spirit of the examination but it also runs the risk of being interpreted as "learnt-by-heart" material. Such material is heavily penalised.

## Format of the Test

The test should last between 11 – 13 minutes.

Centres are reminded that timing starts from the moment the candidate begins to make the opening statement and not when the examiner begins the preliminary discussion.

Including these details in the overall time can lead to a test being assessed as short. This will incur a penalty that will affect the overall grade.

The statement of the candidate's stance about the chosen issue should last no longer than 1 minute.

A robust challenge of this position should then be mounted by the examiner and debate should continue for a further 4 minutes.

Candidates who are allowed to make too long a presentation limit the amount of time left for debate and demonstration of their research. This will have an impact on their mark. Similarly, candidates who are not required to defend their position by refuting counter-arguments and are required only to give their reasons for thinking as they do, will not score well on the Debate section.

At the conclusion of this section, the examiner will signal that the test is now moving to a second phase by making an appropriate remark to that effect. Thereafter, examiner and candidate will discuss a further 2 or 3 issues, in some depth, until the conclusion of the test.

Too many centres fail to observe this stipulation. This can cause confusion for examiners. When the first subsequent issue is very close to the initial one, it is not always clear whether the latter is being extended or a fresh one taken up.

## **Defining terms**

Centres often ask what the various terms used in the Specifications mean. The following remarks may help to gain a better understanding.

### **The Issue**

An issue is generally a morally or ethically contentious problem – such as abortion or the death penalty.

Very careful attention should be paid to the choice of issue. It needs to be capable of sustained argument from both sides and should contain the seed of possible further issues for discussion, remembering that the second issue will arise from something touched upon in the initial debate. For example, a debate on abortion will raise issues of the sanctity of life, the right of others to decide on an individual's right to life, women's rights, adoption etc. Any one of these could offer an opening to the second part of the test.

So, for example, an examiner might say, after the initial 5 minutes:

*“Bien, il faut qu'on arrête de parler de l'avortement maintenant, car le temps s'est écoulé mais tout à l'heure nous avons évoqué brièvement la question du caractère sacré de la vie et j'aimerais savoir quelle est votre position concernant l'euthanasie ... ”.*

In turn this discussion will throw up other issues that the examiner could draw upon to embark on the next stage of the test.

This approach has been advocated at INSET meetings over the years. It has produced good results in the main. However, an increasing number of centres have chosen to subvert the original intention, which was to enable candidates and examiners to project possible avenues for further discussion and prepare accordingly, by producing formulaic tests in which candidates are cued to produce rehearsed material in a pre-ordained order which is then not challenged in a spontaneous way but accepted uncritically and passed over in favour of the next question.

Teacher examiners are reminded that the purpose of the test is to assess whether the candidate is capable of “thinking on his/her feet” in the language. There must therefore be an element of unpredictability in the way they put their follow-up questions if their candidates are not to be judged to be lacking in spontaneity.

### **Strong/Good issues would be:**

Je suis pour la légalisation du cannabis / Je suis contre l'IVG / je suis pour la limitation de l'immigration / je suis contre l'euthanasie / je suis pour le mariage homosexuel / je suis contre l'adoption homosexuelle / je suis contre les cartes d'identité / je suis contre la suppression des symboles religieux / je suis pour la peine de mort / je suis contre les concours de

beauté / je suis pour la chirurgie esthétique / je suis pour le vote à 16 ans / je suis contre la prison pour les juvéniles / je suis contre la gratuité des frais universitaires / je suis pour le mariage des prêtres catholiques / je suis contre l'expérimentation animale / je suis pour le "don présumé" des organes / je suis contre l'énergie nucléaire / je suis pour la recherche sur les cellules souches / je suis contre les OGM's / je suis pour la prostitution / je pense que l'intégration des immigrés est préférable à leur assimilation / je suis contre la discrimination positive / je pense que les femmes sont responsables du sexisme / je suis pour le droit de vote pour les détenus / Issues such as these are preferable because they:

- are contentious
- allow both sides to mount good arguments
- have enough substance to permit sustained, detailed discussion
- suggest possibilities for the first "subsequent" issue.

### **Examples of weaker issues:**

je suis contre l'influence des magazines adressés aux jeunes filles / je suis pour internet / je suis pour la taille minimum / je suis contre la laïcité en France / je suis contre les JO à Londres / je suis pour les mesures plus draconiennes pour protéger la planète / je suis pour le génie génétique / je suis contre les éoliennes / je suis pour la voiture électrique / je suis contre le don des organes obligatoire

Issues such as these are less satisfactory because they are unarguable in the way they have been framed.

For example "je suis pour internet" puts the examiner in an invidious position for, whilst it is possible to argue against the internet, most people would find the exercise rather pointless as, in reality, opinion is universally in favour of this great tool for communication. Some aspects of it may be objectionable such as "identity theft" but in this formulation, the candidate has not stated that as the aim.

Similarly, when a candidate claims they are against **laïcité** in France, what they usually mean is that they are against restrictions on dress codes rather than the separation of State and Religion.

Thus, these issues are not weak because they are inappropriate but because they are poorly defined through not having been thought through properly. Tests that ensue from poorly formulated issues are generally unsatisfactory as little serious thinking has gone into their preparation.

### **The following are examples of weaker choices:**

Les troubles alimentaires ne sont pas causés par les médias / je suis contre le tabac / je suis contre les mannequins trop maigres / je suis contre l'organisation des compétitions de "surf" / je suis contre la pédophilie / je suis contre la participation à la guerre civile, il y a d'autres moyens de défendre la démocratie / je suis contre l'exploitation des ressources naturelles / je suis contre les jeux olympiques / Dieu existe because they are un-arguable

Teachers should be aware that because the Specifications require candidates to conduct individual research into an issue they choose freely, this is not a reason to refrain from offering critical comment on the appropriate wording and approach adopted.

## **Effective interaction**

Candidates are deemed to be **interacting effectively** when they **address directly** comments/remarks/questions/prompts made by the examiner. (The same is also required of the examiner).

It has been noted that the exchanges between candidate and teacher examiners often proceed as if each were in a separate room. The teacher examiner asks a question, the candidate generally makes an appropriate response, although not always. Then, instead of probing for further comment - needed to demonstrate understanding - the teacher examiner moves on to the next question for which there is another more or less appropriate prepared answer, and so on. This is poor conduct of the test. Neither candidate, nor teacher examiner, is acknowledging what the other is saying by addressing their subsequent remarks to what has just been said.

This cannot be construed as **effective interaction**. It is a succession of pre-arranged exchanges and in the worst cases, it may be inclined to conclude that the test has been "scripted" and therefore marked accordingly. In any case, it will have an incidence on the mark achieved for Development. If a candidate is moving through a list of vaguely related issues and not developing them, they cannot be rewarded for doing so.

## **Spontaneous discourse**

The mark scheme refers to "***spontaneous discourse***" and it is crucial that centres understand what is meant by this term. Some of the remarks here reiterate some of what has been written above but the points are worth making again.

***Discourse*** describes the exchange of opinion and information on an issue between two or more people. In practice, this means that each participant addresses the points made by the other in previous remarks. Simply put, this means candidates should respond appropriately to the teacher examiner's input whether that be a question, a comment, a remark or a request.

Candidates should not assume that by saying something vaguely related to the topic they will be deemed to have fulfilled the criteria for discourse. They should be trained to listen closely to what the other person says and respond appropriately, engaging fully with what has been said.

***Spontaneity*** is often perceived as a troublesome notion but it need not be. Clearly, candidates who have been properly prepared for the speaking test will have a store of ideas and phrases they can call upon as required. This is not only perfectly reasonable but also very desirable. Spontaneity does not equate to novelty. Candidates do not have to produce wholly new utterances in response to questions they have never encountered before. Spontaneous use of language arises from manipulating the reservoir of structures and lexis they have acquired in preparing for the examination in response to the unpredictable nature of the discussion as it unfolds. The unpredictability is created by the teacher examiner picking up on a remark and probing for greater clarity or further explanation or opinion. The role of the teacher examiner in ensuring that a proper level of spontaneity is maintained cannot be overstated.

Tests where neither candidates nor teacher examiners explore the detail of what one or the other has said, cannot be accepted as examples of proper discussion and do not qualify as spontaneous discourse. As will be seen when this report comes to discuss the mark scheme, this could have a negative impact/consequence for the Response mark.

### ***Sustaining discussion***

It is important for centres to understand that this does not mean “keeping going till the end of the 13 minutes”. It refers to the exploration of each subsequent issue. Each of these will have multiple facets to be explored and cannot be despatched in a one-line answer. Investigating these facets and the candidate’s response to them ensures that a proper discussion is going on. The longer the exchanges persist on an issue, the more discussion is sustained. Properly conducted tests will reap the benefit across the mark scheme, as sustained discourse has repercussions for every other assessment category – showing greater knowledge and understanding in Reading and Research and Comprehension and Development.

**Centres must note that the temptation to prepare candidates for the test by over-rehearsing the expression of single views on a long list will not be rewarded by the mark scheme.**

## **The mark scheme**

The mark scheme embodies the features of the specifications highlighted above. It rewards candidates who:

- have something of substance to say about topical issues, under close examination
- can communicate their thoughts spontaneously and clearly, with no loss of meaning
- display a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and structures.

**The total mark obtainable is 50.**

Markers assess 4 skills:

### **Response (a possible 20 marks)**

This box asks the following questions:

- is this ***spontaneous discourse*** or rehearsed response – and to what extent
- is the nature of the discussion largely of an ***abstract nature - i.e. about ideas: discussion as opposed to narration, explanation or description***
- how comfortable with this type of discussion is the candidate
- what ***language resources*** does the candidate display?

If candidates engage reasonably in useful discussion of abstract issues, they will score in the 9 – 12 box at least. If, however, it is clear that the test is not a genuine discussion but merely a sequence of pre-arranged questions and answers, they will not progress beyond 8.

### **Quality of language (a possible 7 marks)**

The central issue here is: is this candidate *communicating without loss of message*? If there is no loss of message the candidate will score at least 4 - unless the incidence of basic error is so intrusive as to be a distraction.

### **Reading and Research (a possible 7 marks)**

This box assesses the candidate's level of **awareness** and **understanding** of both general issues and the chosen issue for debate. Whilst detail is an important element when assessing how well the candidate has prepared for the initial issue, it is unreasonable to expect candidates to produce as much detail when discussing subsequent unpredictable issues. In this case, what is sought is evidence that the candidate has read widely, and in some depth, on issues that an informed young person sitting Advanced levels might be expected to have thought about.

### **Comprehension and development (a possible 16 marks)**

What is being assessed here is the ability to:

- decipher the sounds of the language correctly
- decode the meaning accurately – including inferred meaning
- exploit the issue under discussion by developing it further independently.

Centres should concentrate on the idea of the degree of difficulty required to respond to the examiner's prompt rather than structures used to express the question. Questions generally only become complex and challenging by the responses they require.

Taking an extreme case by way of illustration, a candidate faced with the following question:

*Q: "Diriez-vous que le président Hollande ait fait le bon choix en cherchant à imposer une taxe supplémentaire sur les résidences secondaires dans le but d'éliminer la dette publique?"*

*could well reply*

*A: Oui*

In which case

*Q: Pourquoi?*

becomes a difficult question

Thus, teacher examiners should think in terms of what a question will require a candidate to do rather than what it demands in terms of understanding as the wording in the mark scheme seems to imply.

Examiners should take care to ensure that they do reproduce a GCSE type examination by pitching questions at too low a level.

Candidates can do well in this area. If they display no problems understanding they will obviously be awarded a high mark for that element, which may or may not be maintained depending on how well they are able to develop the discussion, by offering further pathways for investigation.



## Candidate performance

It is again very pleasing to report that very many candidates were able to discuss issues easily. Indeed, some examiners, visiting in particular, expressed huge admiration for the ability of many candidates to discuss as freely in French as in their own language.

Centres are to be congratulated on their achievement in helping candidates reach such a level of competence.

Where tests were conducted correctly, candidates could engage in productive discussion of their chosen and other issues.

However, the outcome for many still reflects the fact that tests were conducted in a manner that did not meet the requirements of the specifications either in respect of spontaneous discourse or demonstrating awareness of an issue through sustained discussion – or both.

**The importance of the proper conduct of the test in achieving a good outcome cannot be overemphasised. Centres should ensure that not only are their candidates well prepared but also their teacher examiners.**

## Response

Many candidates are still unable to conduct a spontaneous discussion on a limited number of issues. Virtually all were able to provide a generally appropriate initial response to a comment or prompt but it was clear that for many that this was the extent to which they were prepared, or had been prepared, to go.

Once again, this is not a “question and answer” test. Candidates must show initiative and a willingness, as well as an ability, to pursue an issue without further prompting, whilst examiners must ensure that the development is not merely regurgitation. Candidates who seek to dictate the course of events by dominating the exchanges are the ones who are best placed to take maximum advantage of the mark scheme. Regrettably, too many are still content to give the “right” answer and wait for the next question.

Candidates should be trained to structure their contributions along the following lines:

- declaring an understanding of the examiner’s remarks
- acknowledging what truth they see in it – if any
- indicating where they might be at odds with it
- stating why
- substantiating their own view with examples or reference to some recognised authority
- conceding that not everyone may share their opinion
- offering further pathways on the same issue for the examiner to explore.

For example, the following might be appropriate:

*J'accepte votre point de vue lorsque vous dites que ..... et je reconnais qu'il y a une part de vérité dans votre argument concernant ... notamment quand vous dites que ... mais, sauf votre respect, je pense que vous vous trompez quand vous dites que ... car à mon sens ... et je ne suis pas le seul à penser de la sorte car Monsieur Untel du Monde a dit que ... j'accepte qu'il n'a peut-être pas entièrement raison mais ... etc..*

This is not being suggested as a model for every response, as not all issues or approaches to issues will allow a response of this nature. The point being made is that candidates need to learn to think in terms of 2, at least, preferably 3 phase responses, rather than just the one. In this way they will be seen to be using the language of discussion and debate in a spontaneous, capable and sustained manner and this will be reflected in the marks for both Response and Comprehension.

### Range of lexis and structures

An assumption is made here that language comprises different parts of speech and that correct usage involves adhering to a set of rules. The extent to which these rules are applied correctly will be dealt with in a later section. This one will deal with the conceptual components of the language.

Most candidates understand that:

- there is something variously called **gender and number** but frequently display erratic mastery of these notions – i.e. *“en ce qui concerne les femmes ils doivent avoir la droite de porter ce que vous voulez ...”*
- **nouns need to be supported by articles etc** but many extend this to proper nouns – as in *le Paris* whilst simultaneously refraining from doing so with names of countries – i.e. *France a besoin de ...* and plural nouns are very often unsupported – i.e. *“prisons sont des places de vacances ...”*
- **the usual place of the adjective is after the noun and the adverb after the verb** but too many still resort to English syntactical order **as in:** - *le seulement problème ... la financière crise ... un change très grande ... nous rarement mangeons en famille ... nous toujours avons des cartes d'identité ... ces télévision cameras ...*
- **clauses should contain a verb** although some do contrive to produce “sentences” containing no verb at all, statements such as *“et c’est pourquoi je contre le clônage”* are rare
- **verbs should be conjugated** but this rule is too often observed in the breach, especially when subordinate clauses are involved.

### Examples of verb error

- **main clause verb not conjugated** – *les hommes sentir que ... si les femmes rester à la maison les hommes continuer à travailler – beaucoup de jeunes rester à la maison ...*
- **subordinate verb not conjugated** – *les gens voient les immigrés qui venir dans leur pays – les jeunes qui commettre ces crimes – il faut que le gouvernement améliorer – tout le monde qui vivre ... les idées qui conflit ...*
- **subject / verb agreement** – *les femmes a besoin ... les patients veut rester dans sa maison ... le gouvernement devrions faire quelque chose ... ils fait ce qu’ils veut ... les musulmaïmes qui a fait les attentats*

*pour montre notre société ... il est vrai que les états qui maintenu la peine de mort l'a aboli ... les gens doit ...*

- **wrong choice of tense** – *de nos jours l'euthanasie a été un sujet de contraversion ... dans le passé les parents est plus strictes ... il y a 6 mois je cherche ... l'autre jour je parle à un ami qui me dit que ... si le gouvernement fait cela les terroristes viennent plus dans notre pays*  
....

In addition, most understand the notions of:

- **agreement** – article / noun : noun / adjective : personal pronoun / verb *although for many this is an optional extra*
- **examples of incorrect gender /agreement** – *tous les communautés ... le peine de mort ... le taille zero ... le mère ... la père ... je pense que les femmes, ils n'ont pas l'égalité ... une bébé ... tous les personnes ... un société ...*
- **tense** – predominantly the Present and the Conditional - with infrequent excursions into the Perfect, Imperfect and Future as the dictates of the discussion require
- **negation** – although too many still experience difficulty applying a negative to a Passé Composé, especially when an object pronoun is involved and constructions *such as ils ne pas l'ont aimé ça* are not infrequent
- **further examples would be** – *je d'accord pas avec vous ... je ne suis d'accord ... n'ont aucun d'argent ... n'aucune personne n'a pensé que ... les immigrés ne veulent travailler ... il ne pas vrai ... ils ne jamais pas disent ... personne n'a pas dit que ... ce n'est juste pas ... les enfants pas pensent que ... ni personne doivent aller en prison ... il n'y a pas des raisons ...*
- **comparison** – but phrases like *Ils ont moins d'opportunités de leurs parents or Je l'aime plus comme lui* are not infrequent
- **representation**– through object pronouns when part of the verb group but not when used disjunctively (*i.e. moi* etc especially *lui* and *eux*) This is an area that is not well appreciated by many candidates
- **ownership** through personal adjectives – *mon/ton/son* etc – but not when used disjunctively (*i.e - le mien* etc)
- **designation** with demonstrative adjectives *ce/cette/ces* - although use is erratic and use of *celui/celle/ceux celles* is very rare.

### **Subordination**

Overall, it was observed that Subordination, which is a key feature of French, is not done well by a significant number of candidates.

The notion that phrases / clauses have to be linked in French and cannot be merely collocated as in English, continues to trouble many candidates.

**Qui** and **Que** are interchangeable for too many still. Whilst, in general, candidates remember to include **que** when it is part of their initial

response, often in a stock phrase such as *je pense que* beyond that point the relative tends to disappear as in ... ***et je sais les parents veulent contrôler quoi leurs enfants faire.***

Use of ***ce qui*** and ***ce que***; ***dont, lequel etc*** is reserved to the more able candidates, although encouragingly ***en ce qui (me) concerne*** is quite widely used.

**Verbs in subordinate clauses** are frequently in an approximate form, somewhere between the finite and the infinitive (see above).

**Dependent infinitives** are generally acknowledged, although prepositions are used inconsistently.

**Examples of incorrect use:** *c'est difficile d'accepte ... le gouvernement ne doit pas les permet ... on doit considère que ... on doit règle ... les medias presser les jeunes paraît très beaux ... quand je vois des gens fumant ... après avoir être ... ils sont très efficaces de notre (sic) protéger ... doivent être punir ... je voudrais plus sure ....*

**Reflexive verbs** are generally only used correctly in stock phrases such as *il s'appelle ...* or *je m'entends bien avec mes parents ....* Attempts to use them in the past or with a negative will fail to score marks.

**The subjunctive** is used frequently but again mostly in stock phrases such as: *je ne crois pas que ... / il est important que / il faut que* and the famous *autant que je sache*. Most candidates who observe the rule in these circumstances would fail to do so when using *"je voudrais que ... / je n'aime pas que ... / il est possible que ....*

**The passive voice** is not required in the productive mode.

### **Hypothetical Language**

using *"si"* – given the similarity with the English construction, nearly always produces error and correct usage is found in the performances of only the more able candidates.

### **Examples of errors**

**Sometimes the verb in the "si" clause is wrongly chosen** – *si les femmes pourraient* but generally it is the second verb that is wrong... *si les problèmes a une incidence les jeunes suiveraient ... si le gouvernement fait cela les gens dire que ... à l'avenir si le gens recycleront, la planète est sauve.*

**Modals confuse many candidates who seem to feel that "devoir" contains the verb "être" or "avoir" and so do not use it, as in *il devrait une loi.* Or they confuse the conditional of "être" with "pourrait" as in *il serait être une loi***

**Pronunciation and Intonation** – most candidates have a tolerably good accent but loss of message still occurs as a result of poor pronunciation, which can also be the feature that decides whether a 3 or a 4 for Accuracy

is awarded. All the features highlighted in previous reports are present in this year's cohort:

- **final consonants** – *ilz, lez, nouz, danz le casse où, passer le tempes, disposer de son corpse, il est treize petite, bioucoupe etc*
- **nasal vowels** – *innetéressant, symepathétique, mennesonge, il est mort de femme(!), la faim est l'égal de l'homme - le pain de mort (seems harsh on the baker!) les musulmans*
- **semi-vowels** – *les gense qui résident dans cet paille*
- **poor middle vowels** - common pronunciation errors – *les jeunes , les gens et les jaunes*
- **opposition [y] / [u]**
- **amour – mort** – this occurs frequently and gives rise to statements along the lines "un enfant a besoin de beaucoup de morts dans sa vie".

#### **Other frequently noted errors**

**Confusion over il y a or il est (avoir / être)-** *je pense qu'il n'est pas assez de jeunes ... je pense que vous ne devez pas avoir le droite de vote quand vous êtes 16 ans ... il ne sera pas un parti avec la majorité ... il n'a jamais été des preuves ... je pense qu'ils sont très peur ... ils ont (sont) destabilise(s) il a des gens comme moi ... i l est des lois qui ....*

#### **Confusion over Connaître and Savoir**

*Je connais qu'il est difficile ... Je sais quelqu'un qui ....*

#### **Anglicised syntax – largely restricted to phrases of two types as illustrated**

*c'est important pour les parents prohiber leurs enfants regardant les films violents ... les professeurs doivent enseigner les étudiants quoi est nécessaire ....*

**Quantity - there are frequent examples of** *beaucoup des gens, plusieurs de personnes, milliers étudiants, plus et plus personnes.*

The fact that the Present and Conditional tenses are the most commonly used should be no surprise since they allow candidates to say what they think, how they see things around them and what they think should happen in order to bring about any necessary change or improvement. This is, after all, what the examination requires them to do – talk about things that are problematic and propose solutions. Teacher examiners should attempt to present candidates with situations that will force them to refer to other time frames with questions such:

*'est-ce que ça a toujours été comme ça ?/vous avez toujours été de cet avis ?/est-ce que c'était pareil pour vos parents ?/comment est-ce qu'on en est arrivé là ?' Etc.*

### **Quality of Language**

Most candidates are capable of producing language that conveys adequately what they have to say. This is achieved by using simple phrases aligned one after the other with little attention being paid to sentence construction. This aspect is found in the more able candidates. The level of accuracy is very variable. Given that this AO attracts a maximum of 7 marks, it is not surprising that centres have chosen to concentrate on quantity rather than quality.

### **Reading and Research**

Candidates continue to be well prepared for the initial debate and there was ample evidence of serious research having been done. Good to very good marks were frequently recorded for this aspect of the grid. However, assessment of wider reading was not so positive.

Centres are reminded that in the second part of the examination, care should be taken not to try and show a candidate's broad knowledge of the issues but rather their understanding of one or two of them. This means proper in-depth discussion of the subsequent issues, rather than one-line question and answer exchanges, as outlined above at various other points.

### **Comprehension and Development**

The oral test is used to assess candidates' understanding of the spoken language. If candidates show that they can make sense of the sounds they hear by responding in a way that demonstrates understanding of meaning, they will score highly.

If, in so doing, they can promote further discussion of the issue by offering avenues for development, they will reinforce their Comprehension mark.

No candidate was unable to understand what was being said. A few candidates misinterpreted a comment but these were rare and in the main candidates displayed a very good understanding of Spoken French in a conversational context. However, some were not always able to develop discussion of the issues, either because of lack of preparation and had no idea or they were not offered an opportunity during the exam.

### **Teacher Examiner Performance**

This is a crucial element of the examination. A poorly conducted test can disadvantage a candidate. Teacher examiners can benefit from training on how to conduct the oral examination.

Centres are reminded of the description of the unit to be found in Section A of the Specifications, on page 6.

“Candidates first outline their chosen issue for about **one** minute, adopting a definite stance towards the issue. They should then defend and justify their opinions for up to **four** minutes. The teacher examiner will then initiate a spontaneous discussion in which a minimum of two further unpredictable areas will be covered.”

There are several important implications for examiners here which are outlined below.

### **Timing**

Candidates should not be allowed to go beyond 1 minute when presenting their stance. To do so would take time from the ensuing debate and limit candidates' ability to demonstrate depth of research and ability to marshal arguments. This will inevitably be reflected in the Reading and Research mark. Nor should they be allowed to extend the initial issue beyond 5 minutes. The more time spent on a familiar well-rehearsed topic, the less remains for candidates to demonstrate their ability to deal satisfactorily with unpredictable issues. Again this will be reflected in the Reading and Research mark but also in the Response mark. Candidates who are allowed to discuss their chosen issue for the whole test, will not be demonstrating wide reading nor can they be considered to be reacting to unpredictable situations. In such cases, candidates' marks for Response will be restricted to the 5 – 8 box and will not rise above 3 – 4 for Reading and Research.

Adhering to the full span of time allotted to the exam is also very important as short tests mean that candidates' marks for Response and Comprehension and Development will be moved down to the box below the one they would have been put in if the exam had been of the right length. It should be observed that the test is timed from the moment candidates begin their presentation and not from when they are greeted and announced on the tape/CD track.

Centres should review the issues related to the timing of the examination. Poor timing can disadvantage candidates and could cause them to under-achieve by as much as one grade.

### **Debate/Discussion**

The first section of the test is designed to assess whether candidates are able to marshal their thoughts under a sustained attack on their positions from the examiner. Therefore, tests that fail to do this and require only that candidates explain, clarify and exemplify their positions will not score well in this section.

The second section of the test is designed to assess candidates' ability to discuss a further 2 or 3 issues that they may have covered in class or

private study. The emphasis here is on discussion. Discussion is an exploration of another's views on a subject with a view to understanding why they hold them, it is not debate which is a way of testing argument and is therefore not appropriate for the second section of the test.

This section is often poorly conducted and teacher examiners would benefit from the below passage. Too many teacher/examiners do not discuss issues with candidates. Often they ask for opinions but do not seek to elicit the reasons why these opinions are held, moving quickly on to the next issue where the same procedure is observed. The result is a selection of superficial "question and answer" exchanges with no exploration of candidates' knowledge and understanding. There are many tests that resemble "good GCSE" exams in which identical topics are addressed – i.e. manger sain / garder la forme / la pratique d'un sport / les loisirs etc. As stated above, this is not an appropriate level for the A" examination and will be penalised at the marking stage, unless treated in a more abstract way.

The effects of such an approach will be seen in lower marks for Reading and Research and Comprehension and Development as candidates will not have been afforded an opportunity to display detail on the one hand nor the ability to expand the issue under discussion on the other.

### **Spontaneity / Unpredictability**

These points have been touched upon already, at several points in this report. When a teacher examiner conducts a test correctly, issues are treated unpredictably. This does not mean that candidates will be expected to talk about things they have never heard of. Candidates should be told that they will be expected to discuss any of the issues they have worked on in class or at home. Which ones arise and how they are treated constitutes the unpredictable nature of the test and thereby ensures that candidates' responses are spontaneous. Centres that use the same issues for each candidate and the same set of questions – should take note of this. Such an approach will adversely affect their candidates' marks.

Correct examining requires that an issue first be offered to the candidate and a response invited. Thereafter, having listened carefully to the candidate's response for possible related points to be explored further, the examiner's role is to probe for better understanding of how the candidate arrived at this position by, for instance, raising further questions/queries/requests for information or pointing to possible weaknesses in their position, or stating widely held counter-arguments in response to the candidate's answer. Candidates will naturally respond by drawing on their knowledge base and their linguistic resources and may frequently produce well-remembered phrases – but this still counts as



spontaneous use of language since it has had to be created in response to an unexpected remark on the examiner's part.

## **Centre performance**

### **Visiting Examiners**

It is expected that centres are to play an active role in organising and agreeing visiting dates and submitting paperwork on time in order not to disadvantage candidates.

### **Recording**

- noisy equipment / machine hum / clunky microphones
- one or more of the participants "faint" – generally the candidate
- outside noise
- colleagues intruding on the test – in person or via electronic means
- recording at the wrong speed
- failure to record candidates
- failure to announce candidates – i.e. name / number / Issue
- candidate order not specified on CD's
- CD's not formatted for play on multiple players.

### **Administration**

- poor labelling- or no labelling - of cassette or CD (most often)
- oral forms not filled in correctly by students
- oral forms not signed by candidate or examiner
- tapes/CD's not included
- oral forms not included
- out-of-date oral forms used
- issues expressed in English
- registers not submitted
- poor packaging – resulting in broken cassettes.

## **Conclusion**

There has been a considerable effort that has gone into preparing for the exam and the success that has accompanied this effort. Centres can take satisfaction in a job well done.

## **Grade Boundaries**

Much work has taken place on the comparability of the oral units for French, German and Spanish. The senior examiners have worked closely together to ensure their application of the common oral marking criteria is consistently applied across these three languages. This has been in response to queries from centres about the results at unit level on the oral examinations.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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