

Report on the Units

June 2006

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2651 - Speaking

Introduction

As in previous years, there were many very good performances, both in the Rôle Plays and in the Topic Discussions, where candidates showed initiative, imagination and an ability to take charge of the conversation. There appeared, however, to be an increase in the Summer 2006 examination in the number of weaker candidates, some of whom had difficulty in expressing themselves clearly in the Rôle Plays, and in conveying adequate information and expressing ideas in the Topic Discussion.

Rôle plays

Response to Written Text

Task A

This was the most frequently used of all the tasks as it was placed first in the randomisation sequence. The task was generally well done, but some candidates did not mention many of the suggestions for spending a day in London, apart from the picnic concerts: the circular walks and fresh air were omitted by some, as were the art galleries. A number of candidates did not know the French word *expositions*, although this word has occurred several times in previous Rôle plays.

Some candidates still have problems expressing numbers. In this task, *douze* was frequently expressed as *deux* in the train fare, and the telephone number was sometimes incorrect. Some candidates are still giving telephone numbers in single figures rather than in the normal French way, in pairs.

It was not infrequent to discover candidates unable to convey *a return ticket* in French.

Nevertheless, many candidates were able to explain fully the things to do in London, the walks in the Chilterns through villages, meadows and woods and the benefits of such activities, as well as correctly conveying numbers and prices.

Task B

This task was well done by many candidates, who showed initiative and imagination in dealing with the key points. *Improve* and *secure* were vocabulary items unknown to some candidates, who expressed them as *improver* and *sécre*. The point about the use of the conservatory was not always completely covered, and some candidates had difficulty in expressing *any time*, *any season* or *any purpose* clearly.

On the other hand, it was encouraging to hear candidates taking charge of the conversation and showing the ability to express details such as percentages, discounts, telephone numbers and dates in correct French. It was also pleasing to hear candidates able to give information without relying too heavily on the examiner's questions.

Task C

This task was done by fewer candidates than Tasks A and B, owing to its position in the randomisation sequence. Most candidates conveyed clearly the points about the *paid holiday*, the *rates of pay*, the *discount* and the *telephone number*, but weaker candidates had some difficulty in expressing the ideas of *working together*, *range of goods* and *training*, as a result of

the lack of appropriate vocabulary. The point about the recruitment of staff for the period between Easter and May Day was not always clearly or fully conveyed.

Task D

This task was generally well handled and most candidates were able to cover the key points without too much difficulty. *Games* was sometimes rendered by *joues*, and some candidates did not know *ascenseur* or *verre*. *Toys* was frequently rendered by *jeux*.

Task E

Most candidates were able to explain clearly the points about *meals, prices and length of flights, payment* and the *telephone number*. Some, however, found difficulty in explaining clearly the *themed flights* over football grounds, as they did not know *au-dessus* nor did they have the vocabulary to express the idea using synonymous words. Not all understood that the flights took off from pubs and restaurants, and many of them did not know the French for *map*.

Task F

This was the second most frequently used Rôle Play. Many candidates were able to convey the key points successfully, but some of them did not explain clearly the progression in the operations of the chocolate company from 1993 onwards. As in the other tasks, some candidates were unable to express numbers correctly, both for dates and telephones. The adjective *belges* was frequently rendered as *belgiques* or *belgians*, although this did not impede comprehension of the point. Some candidates did not know the French for *box*. The information about the horses' heads was generally quite well conveyed, and there were not too many instances of confusion between *chevaux* and *cheveux*. In this task, the telephone number was allowed as an extra key point in place of information, which had either been omitted or not expressed clearly.

Response to Examiner

The two preliminary questions were handled better this year than in previous examinations, and it was encouraging to hear some candidates using imagination by introducing them with phrases such as *je voudrais savoir* or *pourriez-vous me dire?* However, some candidates are still confusing *quel* and *qu'est-ce que*, for example, in Task A with *qu'est ce que le type d'activité?* and *qu'est-ce que le moyen de transport?* Similar problems occurred in the other tasks, for example, *qu'est-ce que la raison* and *qu'est-ce que les changements?* in Task B.

In Task A, *quel type d'activité vous intéressez?* was by no means infrequent. In Task C, some candidates did not relate the questions to the son or daughter and there was some lack of clarity over the pronunciation of *fils* and *fille*. In Task E, some candidates did not change the possessive adjective from the third to the second person, although this error occurred less frequently than in previous examinations. In Task F, failure to use the passé composé correctly impeded comprehension of the first question to some extent.

As described in the section Response to Written Text, most candidates were able to convey a good number of the key points successfully and only a minority of candidates scored fewer than 3 marks in this area. However, some candidates could have explained the points at greater length and should also have relied less heavily on the examiner's questions. While a monologue on the part of the candidate is to be avoided, it is encouraging to hear stronger candidates taking the initiative and giving some of the information without the need for a question.

The extension questions were generally well handled, candidates showing a certain amount of initiative and imagination. In Task A, some candidates could have given more than two simple

reasons for the importance of physical exercise. In Task C, candidates had plenty to say about the advantages of working abroad, but fewer ideas about the ways to gain the maximum benefit from this experience. In Task F, most candidates coped quite well with the extension questions, but could have explained at greater length the things a small company could do to make its products better known. The extension questions for Tasks B, D and E were on the whole well handled.

Language

As in previous examinations, the quality of language varied considerably between candidates. Numbers still cause difficulty for some candidates and there is sometimes confusion between *deux* and *douze*, *quinze* and *cinquante*, *quatre*, *quatorze* and *quarante* and *mille* and *million*. *Quatre-vingts* is not infrequently rendered as *quarante-vingts*. Some items of vocabulary also caused problems, for example, *gare* (sometimes rendered as *station* or *guerre*), *boîte*, *aller-retour*, *promenade*, *prix*, *champ*, *carte de crédit*.

Other errors included:

visiter à London
pour mange
de Londres de Birmingham
les promenades permet
de le, de les
sont faire
aimez voyage
les chèques-cadeaux durer
peut considère
qui travailler
beaucoup des
les adultes peut
aux les
à le
vous donné
peut promenade
sont vend
plus meilleur
per cent
vous obtenir
je sais il y a
doit regarde
les promenades vait
pour exemple
l'employés
ils vend
en London
dans Grande-Bretagne
dans Angleterre
vous regarde
ils a
ils faisent
vous peut

Incorrect genders of words such as: chose, maison, vue, gare, nombre, langue, promenade, valeur, santé, boutique, réduction, boîte, société, île, idée, vie, table.

Anglicisms: stadiums, improver, meadows, London, circular, boat, l'individual, négociater, advertiser, medium, value, range, available, exhibition, place for endroit.

Examining

The Rôle plays were well examined by most Teacher-examiners. In a minority of cases the introductory paragraph was not used, and sometimes it would have helped the candidates if, after the preliminary questions, the examiner had asked for their interlocutor's suggestions. This would have allowed the candidates to start to explain the key points of the text without an awkward silence at the beginning. Examiners should ask candidates to clarify or expand points where necessary, provided that time allows. Of course, they should give the candidates the opportunity to develop the two extension questions as far as possible. However, it is important to adhere to the time limit of five minutes, and examiners should not try to drag every key point out of slow candidates, if this means exceeding the time limit or leaving insufficient time for the extension questions.

Examiners should take care not to give information or vocabulary, which the candidate is expected to supply. Marks cannot be awarded for information given by the examiner. Care should also be taken not to ask for information, which has already been given, as this causes confusion and leaves candidates wondering whether something important has been omitted.

It is also recommended that examiners see their part as a role which they, like the candidates, are playing, rather than simply asking questions on a text. This will encourage candidates to see that Rôle play as a situation and not simply a question-and-answer exercise.

Conclusion

As in previous examinations, there was much good performance and response in the Rôle plays, and it was encouraging to hear many candidates able to convey information and to speak at length with a good level of accuracy.

Topic Discussion

Presentation

In most cases, the topics chosen by candidates were suitable or at least permissible for this examination. However, while some centres ensure that their candidates offer a spread of interesting and relevant topics, such as le Français, les Prisons françaises, la Scolarité des handicapés, la Résistance française, Jeanne d'Arc, l'Académie française, Charlemagne, other centres allow their candidates to choose well-worn or banal themes, such as le Tour de France, le Tourisme à Paris, l'Alimentation or Thierry Henri.

Subjects such as le Tabagisme, l'Alcool, and l'Obésité, although they are acceptable themes, are not specifically orientated "French" topics, and it is often noted by Examiners that candidates do not succeed in including sufficient information or opinions specifically about the French-speaking country; instead they make remarks which could apply to any country. Candidates choosing "education", for example need to include information, which goes beyond the obvious and well-worn.

Candidates should make full use of the maximum three minutes available for the presentation. The best presentations are those where the candidate structures the information with an introduction and conclusion. Many presentations are cluttered with figures and dates. Placing events or people in context and using facts and figures to support the basic facts is much better and more stimulating for the listener.

Candidates should try to deliver their presentation in as spontaneous a way as possible. Some presentations consist of a gabbled regurgitation of facts, which may or may not be interrelated. The presentation should build into a climax which prepares the ground for the following discussion.

Candidates should be discouraged from using excessively detailed notes. Headings on small cards are more likely to produce a spontaneous presentation. In order to score in the very good band, candidates should attempt to present the topic with a certain amount of style, so that it is interesting for the listener.

In the Summer 2006 examination, many candidates showed enthusiasm for their topics and were able to present the information in an interesting way, with a considerable amount of detail. They were also able to react positively to the examiner's questions and to add further relevant facts. They displayed evidence of research and in some cases were able to convey some more unusual information. Weaker candidates tended to produce only a thin factual content, with few details and in some cases, little reference to a French-speaking country. They did not provide evidence of very much research, and as a result, could not score higher than the Adequate band. Candidates placed in the Poor or Very Poor bands displayed serious gaps in their knowledge, being frequently unable to respond to the examiner's factual questions.

Spontaneity and Fluency

The best discussions in this examination were those in which the candidate was able to offer additional relevant factual material and also to extend beyond the fact into the area of ideas and opinions. The strongest candidates took charge of the conversation and were not too reliant on the examiner's questions. They were both spontaneous and fluent and were able to extend their ideas in an impressive way.

Candidates, who were less successful in this area, did not develop their ideas as far as they might have done. Some of the discussion remained on a largely factual level, and there was little development of ideas. Some candidates continued after the presentation to recite rehearsed answers to the examiner's questions, and there was little evidence of spontaneity or an ability to extend further.

Although making comparisons between the situation in the French-speaking country and the UK is acceptable, candidates should ensure that the references to the UK are minimal, being no more than a fleeting point of reference. Most of the information must be about the French-speaking country or community.

Pronunciation and Intonation

As in previous examinations, the quality of pronunciation and intonation varied enormously. The strongest candidates sounded French most of the time and there were few errors of pronunciation. Candidates, who were less successful in this area, had rather anglicised intonation, producing significant errors of pronunciation. A few candidates were placed in the Very Poor band in this area. In these cases, comprehension was seriously impeded owing to very poor intonation and to major errors of pronunciation.

Errors of pronunciation included:

parents, occasions, organisation (a pronounced as in English)

dans, dégâts, client, Etats-Unis, avaient, effet, arrêt, dehors, disent, doivent, aiment, cas, veulent, monuments, respect, aspect, est, ils, également, étaient, et, jeunes, plats, arts, gens, trop (silent ending sounded)

Incorrect pronunciation of the *im-* and *in-* prefixes in words such as introduction, incroyable, influençer, important, impact and also in the middle of words such as principal

Incorrect gn sound, for example, in signifie, gagner

Anglicised pronunciation of words such as alcool (pronounced as cool in English), gouvernement, danger, spectacle, méthode (*th* pronounced as in English), emploi (incorrect nasal sound and also *oi* incorrect), femme (*e* incorrect), société

Incorrect nasal sound in words such as an, écran, decline

Y incorrect in symbole, Olympique

Language

The range of vocabulary and structure of many candidates was good, and there were many instances of the use of the passive, the subjunctive, après avoir/être, en + present participle and a variety of tenses including the conditional perfect. Candidates who were less successful in this area, tended not to attempt more than simple sentences with little evidence of subordination or more complex tenses. Candidates whose language is very simple cannot have access to the good or very good bands.

Candidates must make sure that they have a thorough grasp of the vocabulary, idioms, jargon and/or technical phrases relevant to their chosen topic, without which they cannot expect to be able to speak convincingly or fluently about their subject.

The vocabulary of most candidates was adequate to the task, although in some cases anglicisms were evident, for example, inhabitants, mosque, response, exceptional, traditional, professional, actual, definitement, réflécté, significant, inconvenience, range, réinforcer, disadvantage, billion, result, success, change, reconnisé, spirit, personalement.

As in the Rôle play, the accuracy of candidates' language varied considerably. The most successful candidates were those who had been to France on a visit, an exchange or through family links. Weaker candidates lacked knowledge of basic grammar and in a few cases had difficulty in putting a sentence together.

Errors included:

très beaucoup

voulais de trouver

il y a for c'est and vice versa

devraient permet

je préférer

elles a

à le, à les

de le, de les

les étudiants aller

au université
les émeutes commencé
peuvent compris
sont appelle
millions touristes
qui changer
vous êtez
les gens prend
les personnes doit
dans Europe
le deuxième mars
per cent
à France
beaucoup des
je pense c'est
ils acheter
sont achetant

Incorrect genders of words such as ville, idée, population, partie, problème, qualité, société, langue, musique, ligue, règle, mode, moitié, raison, entreprise, boisson, différence, voiture, semaine, guerre, plupart, révolution, loi, télévision, radio, nourriture.

Examining

This part of the examination was well examined by many teacher examiners, who asked relevant and helpful questions designed to elicit factual information, to allow the candidates to develop ideas and opinions and to extend as far as possible. They created a friendly and relaxed atmosphere which put the candidates at ease. They listened carefully to what the candidates said and were able to ask searching questions, which extended the headings on the Oral Topic forms.

In a few cases, candidates were not given the opportunity to make a two- to three-minute Presentation. The Presentation was sometimes interrupted by the examiner, with the result that it was unclear where the Presentation was supposed to end and the Discussion to begin. It is important to allow the candidates to speak uninterrupted at the beginning of this part of the examination, so that they can convey a good amount of information, which provides a basis for the following discussion.

During the discussion, examiners should ask questions to allow the candidates to add further facts, but they must also give the candidates the opportunity to develop ideas and opinions by asking relevant and searching questions. In some cases in the Summer 2006 examination, the Discussions remained on a factual level and candidates were not asked questions to enable them to express any ideas. Some examiners limited themselves strictly to the headings on the Oral Topic forms.

Candidates should not be allowed to use extensive notes or to read from a script. The best Presentations and Discussions are those where the candidate has headings on small cards and is therefore able to speak spontaneously. Questions should be designed to encourage spontaneity and to prevent candidates from reading or reciting rehearsed material. The headings on the Oral Topic forms may serve as a basis for questions, but other questions should arise out of the Presentation and Discussion to draw out the candidates' ideas further.

Conclusion

There were many interesting and well-informed Topic Discussions in this examination. The most successful centres are those where candidates are encouraged to pursue and research their own particular interests. They should be encouraged also by appropriate questions to extend their range of language and to develop their ideas in fluent and complex French.

2652 - Listening, Reading and Writing 1

General Comments

This paper discriminated well and produced a wide range of performance. The improvement noted last summer was confirmed this year, especially for Task 4 (“World of Work” Listening). To improve performance on Section 2 further, candidates should be aware that the last three tasks all fit within a context and that information from one component may be useful to complete another successfully. In general, candidates would be very well advised to read rubrics and questions carefully before attempting to answer individual questions. Of course, regular practice in all test types will make their task easier on the day of the examination and is therefore strongly recommended.

Comments on Individual Questions

Task 1: Listening

Candidates are familiar with multiple-choice exercises. They should nevertheless be reminded that there is nothing to be gained by leaving a question unanswered. As ever, careful study of rubric, title and questions should give them clues as to the subject matter of the passage, even before they listen to it. This should be part of their strategies for coping with listening tasks. A number of candidates found this task challenging, but it discriminated well and most candidates scored between 3 and 8.

- 1) This was designed to be an easy question, accessible to most candidates, and they correctly identified B as the correct answer.
- 2) This was also well answered, as intended, but some of the weaker candidates chose *plus tard* (A), possibly because of *plus* in the question and in the text (*plus rapidement*).
- 3) This question was aimed at the top end of the range, although an awareness of the context and of the implications of Q1 should have led candidates to (B). Instead, the presence of *éditeur* in the text encouraged many to go for (A).
- 4) This was also aimed at the better candidates but, as for Q3, *exemplaire* on the tape – albeit as a noun – led them to (C), where it was an adjective, with a different meaning. They should also have noticed the difference between *près de* and *plus de*, so this should have told them that (B) could not be correct.
- 5) This was well answered.
- 6) The most common error was (C). To reach the correct answer (A), candidates needed to understand *ne plaît pas à tout le monde*.
- 7) This was an accessible question correctly answered by most.
- 8) Not all were able to work out that if other TV magazines *offrent deux fois moins de programmes*, the quantity of information was part of the attraction of “Télé 2 semaines” (B); many chose (A).
- 9) Many candidates latched on to *efficacité* in the text and chose (B) instead of listening to the whole phrase.

- 10) The 'Media' topic word *tirage* was not generally known, so it made the last question difficult for many candidates. Answers were divided between (B) and (C) – the correct answer.

Task 2: Listening

Where candidates read the instructions thoughtfully, this task was a good discriminator; it was a pity so many failed to do themselves justice by careless reading of the question. Many candidates ignored both the instruction "*cochez 10 cases*" and the mark allocation - another indication that 10 ticks should be made to gain access to the full range of marks. Many (covering the full range of ability) ticked fewer, usually only 7.

The commonest erroneous choices were Q2 *Laurent*, Q4 *Laurent*, Q6 *Ni l'un ni l'autre* and Q7 *Maëlle*.

Some candidates were clearly not thinking very hard about what they were doing because they sometimes ticked both *Ni l'un ni l'autre* and one of the other boxes.

Task 3: Reading

This task worked well and produced a full range of marks. Lack of vocabulary is partly responsible for the poor performance of some in this task.

The first part of this exercise tended to be better done than the second, possibly because it was in a frequently used format. Some tried to complete the task without reference to the text and, of course, they could not get the correct answers. Statement 4 was the mostly frequent incorrect answer – possibly because common sense made it likely; unfortunately it did not feature in the text. Another common error was to tick statement 5; this may have been due to reading the text too hastily.

In section 3B, Q15 and Q16 targeted Grade E candidates. For the weaker candidates, these were the only two correct answers of this section. Some seemed to have picked their answers at random, possibly because they did not know some of the words in the box, *barreaux*, *volets*, *vitres* and *outils* especially.

For Q12, a common error was to choose *barreaux* – probably because candidates did not know what it meant and could think of other words to fit elsewhere. Another frequent error was *vitres* possibly because candidates thought it meant "windows". The only answer that really made sense here was *volets*. There was no real pattern elsewhere.

Task 4: Listening – The World of Work

It was pleasing to see that candidates were more willing to tackle this exercise than in previous sessions. There were fewer blanks, so there was less need to scale down the language mark because questions had been attempted. It seems that most candidates had understood the passage and were able to write something sensible.

However, the quality of language was disappointing and candidates would be well advised to take time to check that basic grammatical rules have been applied and that the French they have written does make sense.

Transcription errors brought marks awarded under grid 2A down. Had candidates concentrated on the text and attempted to answer in their own words, it is likely that their language mark would have been higher.

- 1) This question was generally correctly answered, even by the weakest.
- 2) The same is true of this question: most were able to score the comprehension mark, although a few gave just one of the two required elements - either *mariage* (frequently spelt as in English) or *anniversaire*.
- 3) Many candidates scored one mark here. A wide range of spellings for *bouquet*. Given that the word was written in Q5, it was very disappointing that so many did not go back to this question to correct their errors. A number of candidates tried to transcribe from the recording but only managed *comparable et/à un bouquet français* (although not always spelt correctly). Without a verb and a subject, this made no sense and did not show understanding. When present, the verb was not always accurately rendered and *serai/serais/sera* were the most common variants.
- 4) This was a straight forward question but a few went for (A).
- 5) This question was designed to make candidates manipulate the language that they had heard on the tape. In this instance, they had to change an adjective into a noun. However – many gave one adjective (usually *varié*) and a noun (*qualité* or *couleur*). Candidates should be aware that language manipulation is required in this exercise; it is not always appropriate simply to write what they have heard, regardless of the context. Hardly any candidate inserted the definite article, yet the same structure (*tenir compte de*) appeared in Q6. As for the spelling of *bouquet* in Q3, candidates should be aware that clues may be found elsewhere in the test.
- 6) This non-verbal question was not as successfully answered as Q1 and Q4. Many were lured by the possible answer (A) provided.
- 7) This question was more demanding and was aimed at the better candidates.
 - a) Attempts to transcribe *qu'on aurait pu acheter* were frequently meaningless. Real weaknesses in grammar were shown here. The second part of the answer was not easy either and *n'importe de qu'elle marche/marcher* was a frequent mis-transcription.
 - b) It seems that candidates had understood the second element of the answer better than the first, but many encountered problems with verb and tense formation. For example, *ne correspondait pas* and *se composait* were often rendered by a past participle (*ne correspondé pas; se composé*). This was disappointing because at this level, the imperfect should be well-known. Another problem was caused by the failure to transpose the 1st person pronoun from the tape (*à ce que j'avais payé*) to the 3rd person *elle avait payé* which resulted in the wrong message being conveyed.
- 8) This was the least well done of the multiple choice questions, with a fair number of candidates selecting *emballage* (B).

- 9) a) This was the most successful component of Q7. However, although the question clearly referred to the florist (*le fleuriste français*), many candidates answered in the 1st person. Another frequent mistake was the use of *elle* (*elle n'est pas responsable*) or of *ce* (*ce n'est pas responsable*), all of which conveyed the wrong message.
- b) The passive construction caused candidates problems, as they mixed up *ont été*, *étaient* and *était*. Inappropriate renderings of *transmises* would indicate that some were transcribing without having understood much.
- c) In this section it was *c'est auprès de* and *se plaindre* which gave most difficulties. This really did sort out those who had understood from those who were just guessing. Sadly, less than half the candidates could spell *Angleterre* correctly.
- 10) This was quite a demanding question. In a certain proportion of answers it was not at all clear that the letter had been sent but most candidates managed to give one of the two reasons for writing the letter. Even where the verb *rembourser* was mangled beyond recognition (at least 25 different spellings of it were encountered), the mark was scored for demonstrating comprehension of *expliqué tout cela*. Those who kept their answer short generally scored better marks. It was very depressing to note that so many could not write *elle a écrit* correctly. Attempts to render *Je vous saurais gré d'y répondre au plus vite* frequently met with little success (e.g. *je vais sans regret de la reponde oplivite*) but could, fortunately for the candidates, be ignored.

Task 5: Reading

This task differentiated well and produced a full range of marks. Candidates understood the text as a whole but they tended to cope better with the demands of the first paragraph than the second.

The quality of English was satisfactory, but too many candidates were still happy to translate words one at a time, even though the resulting sentence made little sense in English. The weakest scripts contained incidence of gibberish such as *He also wanted us to consider whether the success we have had also the success they have had, to explain the success* but, at the other end of the spectrum, the best scripts contained little if any error. Misuse or absence of capital letters was not uncommon as were problems with incorrect use of prepositions. Words that tended to be incorrectly written by quite a lot of candidates included *business*, *succeeded*, *principal*, *florists*, *developing*, *competitive* and *superior*. Many showed themselves unable to distinguish between *its* and *it's*

Some candidates seem to think that, if they are unsure of a word, offering alternatives is a good idea; it is not, because Examiners always take the first rendering and ignore the others.

1st paragraph

The first paragraph was generally better rendered than the second, although the nouns in apposition at the beginning of the letter caused some problems for the weaker candidates, particularly *de grande renommée*. Surprisingly, many thought that *il y a 39 ans* meant "he was 39 years old". Careless reading led some candidates to miss the pronoun in *mon père lui a succédé* which became

“my father succeeded”. The next stumbling block was *s’est efforcé d’élargir la base*: the reflexive verb went unnoticed and this was often translated as “was forced to enlarge the base”. It was pleasing to note that some candidates were familiar with topic specific vocabulary: they knew the meaning of *succursale*, or at least used a word which was acceptable and conveyed the right idea. *J’ai pris la relève* also proved problematic for some. Many used the context to get on the right track but others did not take time to think of the passage as a whole. As they saw similarities between *relève* and *réveil / réveiller* or with *rêve*, they tried to make these words fit. The word *réseaux* was misunderstood and frequently equated with “resource” or “research”. Some candidates found the last sentence confusing, possibly because they did not know the word *croissance*; so they decided to ignore it. They often stuck to the French word order and the outcome produced clumsy and garbled renderings. Many translated *que* regardless of their English structures and offered a rendering such as “This is why ... that I am writing to you.”.

2nd paragraph

The main problem with this paragraph was due to a lack of attention to significant details. In the first sentence, few associated *unique* with *Europe*; instead, they assumed that it was the system that was unique. It was disappointing that so many thought that *d’achat* meant “selling” rather than “buying / purchasing”. Few knew the verb *parvenir*, so *parvient à obtenir* was loosely translated, seldom correctly. It was surprising that superlatives were mostly rendered by comparatives; consequently, many marks were lost. All understood *moins cher* but *grandes surfaces* produced all sorts of offerings, some fairly close, such as “big retailers”, and others rather wide of the mark, such as “big surfaces”, “on the surface” or “in the area”. It would seem that *chiffre d’affaires* was beyond the scope of most, but *supérieur à 54 millions d’euros* should have been accessible; yet most linked *supérieur* with the wrong word and produced unlikely renderings such as “superior (business) figures” or even “our digits of superior business”, whatever this means. In the next sentences *informatisé* was the stumbling block for the weaker candidates who thought it meant “informed” or “informative”. Another “work” specific word frequently incorrectly translated was *patron*, often left unchanged in the English version or rendered as “customers”. Finally, at the very end, candidates often used a past tense to render *en bénéficiant*. Within the context of the situation, the present tense was required.

Task 6: Writing

This task was quite demanding but the majority of candidates managed to cover all the required points, with a varying degree of success. Some showed initiative in finding ways of conveying the different components of the message; they must be congratulated for their ingenuity in paraphrasing the stimulus. As in previous sessions, judicious use of pre-learned phrases, appropriate to formal writing, was in evidence. However, if the standard was quite pleasing in terms of communication, the quality of the written French was disappointing. Though there were some very accurate letters demonstrating ambition in the use of structures and vocabulary, basic errors, such as incorrect concordances between subject and verb and between noun and adjective, seemed to predominate. The ability to use the correct register, basic pronouns and possessive adjectives also left a lot to be desired.

If the first part of the first bullet point was accessible to most (with such renderings as *nous tenons à vous remercier de ..*), the same cannot be said of the latter part: very few knew the gender of *offre*, let alone how to spell it correctly, and *offert* was by far the commonest version. As for “exciting”, this proved to be beyond the reach of most – the noun (*excitement*) rather than the adjective was the favourite choice.

In the second part of the message, the idea of belonging to a group was poorly communicated. Those who did not know the French for “to belong” correctly tried to think of an equivalent; this was mostly “to be part of”, variously rendered as *nous sommes part/partie/partis*. Hardly any knew the expression *faire partie de*. The latter part of this component was slightly better rendered, although few could supply *bénéficions*. In this section, the adverb *déjà* was frequently placed in front of the verb, as in English (*nous déjà sommes ...*).

Many were familiar with the phrase *de plus amples renseignements* but most used it with *savoir* (*nous voudrions savoir de plus amples renseignements*) rather than *avoir*, possibly mixing this expression with *faire savoir* (*pourriez-vous nous faire savoir ...*). Another common error was due to the confusion over the use of articles (*nous bénéficions des avantages* rather than *d’avantages*). It was pleasing to note that many thought of using the French text to help them deal with the second part of this section (*système informatisé*) but sadly, they did not always think of changing the possessive adjective from *notre* to *votre*. The conditional *nous voudrions* should have been known by all at this level, yet many wrote *nous voudraions*.

Asking questions is still difficult for many. Some candidates do not know the difference between *qu’est-ce que* and *quel* and the inversion of subject and verb is not properly mastered.

Lack of vocabulary was the main problem here. Some had come across “rules”, which appeared in an earlier paper, but “those who run shops” seemed to present a major hurdle. *Patron*, as in the reading text, would have been quite acceptable, but many gave a literal translation which was meaningless (*les personnes qui courent votre [sic] magasins*). Another frequent mistake was the failure to change the 3rd person possessive adjective (their) to 2nd person (*votre*).

The last bullet point was the least successfully rendered of all. Some managed to use the passive effectively to convey the meaning of the second part, but they were the minority. Common sense should have told candidates that when dealing with flowers, *pas bien fabriqué(e)(s)* or *cassé(e)(s)* would unlikely to be an appropriate rendering of “damaged”. This word was frequently given as *damagé / dommagé*. For many, “managers” also proved testing – again *patron* could have been used.

Some seem to think that, if in doubt, the use of an English word – slightly disguised to make it look ‘French’ (*especiallement, un manageur, des avantages, les rules*) – will do. Sometimes, it works, but generally, there is no substitute for learning vocabulary. As for grammatical rules, they need to be applied more consistently, but mastering common verb forms should be a priority. Examiners were concerned to note that examples such *nous sont, ils font, nous faisons qu’est-ce qu’ils faire, quoi ils font, que ne vendre pas* were not uncommon.

As this task is assessed for quality of language, candidates should allow more time to check that they are not letting themselves down because of unnecessary careless errors.

2653 - Reading and Writing

General

This session produced a wide range of marks, from single figures to 60/60. The non-verbal comprehension questions (Tâches 1 & 2) proved to be excellent discriminators. In the writing task, overall performance in the comprehension element was better than usual, the personal response varied in quality but was generally quite good, and the standard of language ranged from near-perfect to virtually incomprehensible. The grammar question (Tâche 4) was quite well done by the majority of candidates.

Tâche 1

Many candidates achieved 5 or more correct answers out of 7. Some clearly did not equate concerts with culture in (c), and many decided that anything to do with school could be classed as *excursions scolaires* in (d). Most mistakes, however, occurred in (e), where candidates failed to read – or perhaps to understand – *ne...jamais* and confused it with *assez peu* (Jean-Christophe Rufin).

Despite the warning in the rubric that a sentence might apply to more than one person, and the mark allocation of 7, a number of candidates ticked only five boxes. There were some instances of more than seven boxes being ticked, and a few candidates placed a tick in one of the boxes of the example.

Tâche 2

Although a number of candidates achieved full marks, many performed poorly in this question. Some seemed to have looked at the two lists of words in isolation, without relating them to the text or to the words underlined. This led to combinations such as *éviter/déterminer la position de*, *repérer/choisir*, *bouchons/débuts de vacances*. Other unlikely answers included *bouchons/sérieux*, *disparités/mortels*, *repérer/embouteillages*. Although this is not a linguistic exercise, it should have been possible to avoid some of the worst mistakes by reference to the parts of speech.

Tâche 3

There were few cases of short answers (well below the recommended limit of 200 words), but far too many who wrote at great length. Additional sheets should not be needed; almost all candidates who write too much penalise themselves in the Language mark (and often in the Response marks as well if they include comments which are not understandable). On the other hand, centres could reassure candidates that they do not need to make an accurate word count and that there is no need to cross out sentences if the limit is exceeded.

Language

The standard of language, as always, varied enormously. At the top end scripts were almost flawless, candidates using a wide range of structures with a high degree of accuracy. At the lower end some seemed unaware of any of the basic grammatical concepts, and littered their answers with English (and sometimes Spanish) words: *overallement*, *un body*, *un petite amount de chocolate*, *nous improverons la situation*. Incorrect copying of words from the text was rife, particularly *adolescents*, *scolaires*, *graisse*, *distribuent*, *pratique*, *essentielle*. *Problème*, despite being preceded by *quel* in the question, was almost always made feminine. It was disappointing to note that candidates whose French was otherwise quite sophisticated were often let down by poor verb formation and endings (*je crois*, *ils vendrent*, *c'est ne pas*, *on pourrait boit*, *ils peuve*, *ils font*) and adjective agreement (*les enfants obése*). Mistakes frequently encountered this year included *l'écoles*, *de les enfants*, *au moins de* (which cannot be credited for

comprehension: is it intended to mean 'at least' or 'less than'?). *Tu* and *vous* were used indiscriminately in the same sentence, where *on* would have been preferable anyway. Some candidates wrote phonetically ('*comifaux*' for *comme il faut*, '*un notre*' for *un autre*.) On the positive side, infinitive constructions were well used, the subjunctive after *il faut que* and *je ne crois pas que* were popular, and pronouns were used with more confidence.

Confusion of vocabulary this time included *besoin/boisson/bois*, *boire/boiter*, *obésité/grossesse*, *conservateur/préservatif*, *intéressé/intéressant*, *parce que/à cause de/la cause de, ce que/ceux que* (there was an unintentional hint of cannibalism in *il est important que nous mangeons ceux que nous aimons*).

Comprehension

Candidates generally scored more marks for this element than has been the case recently. Some omitted important details: the suggestion was to remove vending machines from schools, obesity is a problem among young people, tea and coffee should be taken without sugar, regular exercise is important. Some misunderstanding occurred, particularly of *distributeurs* (often taken to mean *companies*), *famille d'aliments* (*il faut manger avec la famille*), and many understood *et doit le rester* to mean 'it's important to rest'. Most scored more points in (b) than in (a).

These questions should be answered, as the rubric clearly stated, with close reference to the text. Some candidates included their own knowledge of the topic, such as 'eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day'. This could be relevant to the personal response, but was not stated in the passage.

Response

The subject was clearly one to which candidates could relate well. Some confined themselves to general 'catch-all' comments (*le gouvernement devrait faire quelque chose, nous devons agir maintenant, je suis choqué par l'article*), which only score highly if they are developed: what the government should do, why we must act now, why I was shocked. Many lost marks because a native speaker who knew no English would not understand: '*quand santé est involvé, c'est tres important d'être concieux d'un quel vous mangez*', '*les enfants seraient non sucré*', '*c'est idéal si tu varié votre alimentataire avec moins de saut dans le repas*'. It is the overall quality of the response that is assessed, not just the comprehensible parts.

Some comments were unintentionally amusing: '*il doit arrêter de manger pour la santé de la génération future*', '*il y a plus de jeunes qui aiment le sport et en mangent moins que normal*', '*on devrait interdire toutes produits qui provoquent les enfants d'être insalubres et grossesse, c'est un fromage que les gens ne mangent pas un régime équilibré*'. Some tried to re-word the text and in doing so changed the meaning: '*un adolescent sportif n'a pas le besoin d'une femme vieille*'.

Centres should remind candidates that if two questions are asked they must respond to both, though we are not necessarily looking for a completely balanced answer.

There were, as ever, some outstanding answers, many of which showed real insight and imagination. Several commented that in a country like France, renowned for its gastronomy, it is surprising that so many children eat unhealthy snacks, or that the economy might suffer in future if many overweight people are too unwell to work. One candidate felt that if people eat too much and die, that is natural selection (examiners do not have to agree with the comments to give them credit). Other views which were frequently encountered included '*les enfants peuvent acheter les produits sucrés ailleurs*', '*on peut souffrir des crises cardiaques si on est obèse*', '*les parents ne savent pas cuisiner donc leurs enfants ne mangent pas bien chez eux*', reference to the problems of anorexia and bulimia, TV adverts for junk food, premature death, parental responsibility, need for a greater range of sports to inspire young people to exercise, and many more. There was excellent use of topic-specific vocabulary.

Tâche 4

Fewer candidates obtained full marks this session, though many did very well and only a small percentage scored less than 5/15. Most errors occurred in (a), (b) in which many ticked A without looking at the next word in the sentence, (l) (masculine plural of adjectives ending in –al is not well known) and (k). The passive is now much better understood, as is the need for a singular verb after *tout le monde*, the uses of *qui/que/dont*, *pronouns*, and *en* + present participle.

An unusual situation occurred in relation to (e). Although students are taught that *il semble que* is followed by the subjunctive, and this was the answer originally expected, reference to a number of prestigious sources indicated that it is possible to use the indicative, depending on the degree of certainty implied. The sources were split 7:3 (subjunctive:indicative) on the issue, but it was decided on this occasion to accept either A or C, or indeed both since it could be argued that candidates had known that either answer was possible. This situation is unlikely to recur.

2654 - Speaking And Reading

General Comments

Once again there was a wide range of performance, from the gifted and well-prepared to the few who were out of their depth at this level; in between, large numbers of candidates showed themselves to be quite capable.

Candidates did not always have the grammatical knowledge to express their views convincingly. However, I would remind Centres once again that high marks on this paper are as much a reflection of the research candidates have done, their willingness to get involved in discussion and their ability to take the initiative as they are an indication of their level of language acquisition: Assessment Criteria 4B (Response to Examiner), 4C (Spontaneity and Fluency) and 4E (Knowledge and Opinions) carry a far higher proportion of the marks than 1F (Pronunciation and Intonation) and 4D (Accuracy and Range of Language).

In some cases, candidates performed only as well as they were allowed to by the examiner. It is still common for some examiners to chase candidates into giving a speedy response, even to push for a particular answer they may be expecting or hoping for. They appear unwilling to allow thinking time, sometimes interrupting a candidate who has omitted what, in their view, is a crucial detail. Yet others either repeat questions without awaiting a reply or simplify questions to a point where they cease to be a genuine test of comprehension.

Discussion of Text

The majority of candidates tackled their text confidently, demonstrating a reasonable level of understanding, whilst the best absorbed all the detail and impressed by their ability to develop the theme in response to the suggested questions (5, 6 and 7).

The majority of candidates found the themes familiar and were able to develop their ideas appropriately: security versus personal freedom; immigrant integration; cloning and gene transfer; threats to the environment; the shortage of 'social' housing; distance learning. The ability to grasp the essential points, to paraphrase successfully and to develop ideas expansively marked out very clearly the better candidates from those who depended too much on reading directly from the passage. Weaker candidates showed a high degree of dependence on the examiner's questions.

All of the texts were well used and it was hard to detect an order of popularity as one has been able to do in previous years. However, one marker conducted a survey of her allocation, revealing that Text D was seen by teacher-examiners as the most 'accessible' and was offered to 25% of candidates in that particular allocation. This was followed by Text A and Text E (both with 19%). Each of the remaining three texts (B, C and F) was used by approximately 12% of the candidates. It is by no means certain that the above distribution pertains to the candidature as a whole, as choices relate wholly to teachers' perception of a text's appropriateness and level of difficulty.

Some Centres made bad choices for the candidates concerned. This was particularly noticeable with the frequently chosen Text D, because candidates were thought capable of talking about the environment. Relatively few however brought out the full meaning of the text and many seemed to misunderstand quite significant sections of it.

Choosing texts to 'fit in with' topics studied by candidates appears to be a phenomenon that is on the increase. Worse than this, more and more candidates seem to be preparing for the

Discussion by learning by heart chunks of material on the environment, racism or some such topic which, it is felt, will almost certainly come up. Quite a few candidates spoke at some length in the Discussion but said little about the texts themselves. Obviously, this limited their mark on Grid 4A (Comprehension of Text).

Elsewhere, some examiners were themselves so poorly prepared that no flexibility was possible: minimal preparation of the texts meant that they relied on just reading out the suggested questions. As a consequence, good candidates – and even less good ones – covered points in their summary of the text that in the very next question or the one after, they were required to regurgitate.

Text A (La Sécurité, au prix de la liberté?)

This text enabled most candidates to say something worthwhile, but it obviously contained more difficulties than a superficial reading might suggest. It was well exploited by the best teachers who, having established that comprehension had been achieved, moved off in the direction of the 11 September attacks or the London bombings to discuss whether the measures proposed in France might have helped prevent them. The best candidates talked with fluency and conviction about their views on the question of balance between safety and individual freedoms, often taking the initiative in the conversation and thereby earning a very high mark in this section of the test. On the negative side, very few candidates were able to summarise Bernard Bouloc's comments, with insufficient focus on *vigiles* (a word which was glossed); few candidates dealt successfully with the concern regarding police intervention before a crime had been committed. Similarly, in paragraph 1, very few mentioned searching cars, especially *en l'absence des propriétaires*. The much easier paragraph 4 was not adequately explained by some candidates who failed to make the rather obvious point that the internet cannot be controlled by France. On the general questions, there were some intelligent and thoughtful responses, but also many worrying ones which suggested that the dangers of restricting liberty were not worthy of consideration.

Text B (La Nouvelle "Beurgeoisie")

This text elicited some excellent responses from candidates who had probably covered the question of immigration in France and/or related issues in the course of their studies and who were consequently able to use their knowledge to give added depth to their discussion of the points raised. However, sometimes, it was given to candidates who had elected to talk about *la Laïcité* in the General Conversation section of the test; Centres are reminded that, in the interests of fairness, they are responsible for ensuring that such an overlap does not occur.

As in the case of other texts, when invited to summarise the main thrust of the text, the best candidates gave quite a detailed summary in their own words, whereas the less good frequently contented themselves with the shortest of sentences that gave little idea of the depth of their understanding. Again, such a question as *De quoi s'agit-il dans ce texte?* is an open invitation to candidates to take the initiative from the outset; it is very important that teachers preparing candidates for this test encourage them to do just that.

Most candidates got the idea that young people did not vote because their parents had not been allowed to, with a pleasing number appearing to understand the pun of 'beurgeoisie' in the title. Rather fewer were able to explain the paradox that those involved in politics had rather respectful, conservative attitudes and probably only a minority understood the linguistic units *le gouvernement actuel* or *compte un petit nombre dans ses rangs*. Very few mentioned the idea of using their origin as an election tactic. There were some interesting views on the level of integration in Britain; some were very sophisticated, but there were also quite a number who thought that all French were racists and that Britain was a kind of immigrants' utopia in which everyone was welcomed unconditionally.

Answers to the last question were often at the extremes of the political spectrum: either that immigrants had the unrestricted right to come and go as they pleased, or that we had more than enough already and the government should clamp down. Similarly, most thought it a scandal that people who had lived in France for 25 years could not vote, but virtually none raised the issue of nationality or citizenship, and the risk that immigrants could easily change the cultural values of society if immediately given exactly the same rights as natives of a country.

Text C (Les Problèmes éthiques associés au clonage et à la transgénèse animale)

This text was often well exploited but it was sometimes given to candidates who clearly had little interest in and consequently little to offer on the issues raised. Most teachers know their candidates very well and are therefore ideally placed to judge whether a given text is likely to elicit a good response from a candidate.

Given the recent events in France with *la greffe du visage* it may have offered the possibility of using recently acquired vocabulary. The text focussed on some quite complicated concepts which good candidates took in their stride, thereby demonstrating excellent comprehension of the article before moving on to give their own views on the controversial techniques of cloning and gene transfer. Weaker candidates, however, often had recourse to reading from the text and needed a great deal of encouragement from the examiner to develop ideas.

Very few picked up, from paragraphs 2 and 3, the idea that there had been many failures, which could have involved suffering on the part of the animals concerned, and the idea of a possible *appauvrissement génétique* rarely figured. More understood the idea of virus transmission but hardly any fully explained the details mentioned in the last paragraph of the text involving organ transplants etc.

In the general questions, candidates were either wholly for or against cloning but virtually none stated that sick people should not be helped by this form of research.

Text D (Nature en danger)

Given that the environment is a subject dear to the hearts of most informed young people, this text often produced a rather disappointing response. Many summaries of the text were inappropriately brief; when questioned on the detail provided, too many candidates simply read from the page in front of them rather than attempting to demonstrate comprehension by using their own words. Similarly, though the best candidates took full advantage to develop, often very knowledgeably, the issues that they saw as a threat to their own future well-being, others ventured little and teacher-examiners had to work really hard to elicit even fairly basic ideas.

Again, one comes back to the point that candidates need to be trained to talk as much as possible in this part of the test; it does not matter if they make errors provided that communication is achieved. In the case of all of the texts, some linguistically quite weak candidates had taken this point on board and excelled themselves, thanks to their preparedness to be forthcoming and to develop the ideas that they had on the various issues under discussion. It needs also to be pointed out to candidates that the more forthcoming they are, the more they will be able to steer the discussion in the direction that most interests them. Please note that the latter comments should not be seen as an invitation to recite pre-learned chunks.

There was a lot of quoting of *par paresse*, *par ignorance*, *par intérêt égoïste* and *par profit*, without attempting to explain what these actually meant. In many cases, the word *déchets* immediately triggered *déchets nucléaires*. Paragraph 4 was not well handled generally: *surpâturage* was rarely understood and many did not know (or could not work out) *déboisement*.

Conversely, there were some very good answers to the last question on 'green' political parties, even from relatively mediocre candidates.

Text E (Alerte rouge pour le logement en France)

This text was well exploited by many candidates. Some steered the conversation in the direction of the problem that young couples face in this country, that of not being able easily to find the money to buy a first property; others were more interested in the problems of the homeless or in the housing problems encountered by students. All of these made for some interesting and often quite lively discussions that were a pleasure to listen to. However, a significant proportion had not used their preparation time as well as they might have done, giving only very partial answers when they were asked about the causes of the housing crisis and citing the Minister of Housing's reaction as one of disagreement. What was rather alarming at this level was the inability of some candidates to provide the verbal equivalents of some of the figures/statistics given.

Although the cost of housing was widely discussed, few candidates were able to link it to shortages by explaining *cette pénurie nourrit la flambée des prix* adequately. Not many made reference to the idea of 'market forces'; an equally small number demonstrated comprehension of *loyer*, referring constantly to the 'purchase' of property, and believing that the 40% related to the number of dwellings. Very few alluded - without prompting - to the text's focus upon *logements sociaux*.

Text F (Le Centre national d'enseignement à distance)

This text was well understood by most of the candidates who were given it. However, a small minority seemed to have little idea of what was going on: one rather frustrated teacher-examiner tried to help a candidate who was floundering somewhat by making the obvious comparison with the Open University, but to no avail. Similarly, most candidates waxed lyrical on the pros and cons of *l'enseignement à distance* and on the merits and disadvantages of computer-aided learning. Just a few gave the impression that the subject was of no interest to them whatsoever, thereby making the teacher-examiner work very hard indeed trying to find an avenue that might light a spark and ensure that they could gain access to at least an adequate mark.

The question about pupils and teachers was poorly dealt with by most. Few understood the idea of practising professionals in vocational-type areas and limited themselves to talking about universities, which rather missed the point. Rather a lot of candidates also failed to deal with *la valeur des supports interactifs*, simply listing the types. Similarly, few understood the suggestion that cassettes were now rather *passé* in relation to floppy disks (no doubt equally *passé*?).

The response on the general questions was better than might have been expected, some candidates presenting what was a humorous and doubtless realistic picture of their own strengths and weaknesses when deciding whether this kind of course would suit them.

General Conversation

Topics prepared for the General Conversation test were often carefully chosen and well researched, with many conscientious and capable candidates learning an impressive amount of material, as well as demonstrating an ability to manipulate it flexibly. **In an increasing proportion of interviews, however, this prepared material lacked spontaneity.** OCR examiners once again reported **a worrying number of candidates who had learned everything by heart,** so that the discrepancy in performance between Discussion and General Conversation became even greater. Where candidates' work lacked substance, it was often because an inappropriate choice of subject limited the scope for discussion. The most interesting conversations came from candidates who had chosen their own subject and were prepared to tackle it from an original angle. Others provided a multiplicity of facts and figures, but were incapable of offering any ideas or opinions by way of justification; pre-learned and rehearsed topics were rewarded accordingly. It rather gave the game away when a candidate started to answer the question before the teacher had finished asking it!

Some candidates had clearly done a lot of research on their chosen topics: they were armed with an impressive battery of information and statistics and had a whole array of interesting opinions and observations that they were able to substantiate with fluency and conviction. At the other end of the spectrum, some linguistically very gifted candidates and some who were not so gifted had clearly done very little: in some cases, there were a number of references to conversations with pen friends or relatives living in France but they often ill-concealed a flimsy mastery of the topic chosen. Not least, a small number of teachers seemed to have little idea as to the level at which the discussion should be pitched and, as a result, their questioning rarely, if ever, rose above a level that one associates with GCSE. It was disappointing and disadvantageous when all the candidates from one Centre presented the same topic, using the same material, even the same words; they were asked the same questions and gave identical, rehearsed replies. Such practice is entirely against the spirit of the requirements of the specification and is a form of "malpractice".

As far as the choice of topics was concerned, some were refreshingly current: they included *Les Émeutes de 2005-2006*, *La Grippe aviaire en France*, *Ségolène Royal*, *le Viaduc de Millau* and *La Greffe du visage*. Some, however, such as *Le Port du voile* and *La Canicule de 2003* had lost somewhat of their currency and, as a result, some of those who chose them were not very successful in bringing them alive and the viewpoints expressed often came across as stale and/or hackneyed.

The old fruits were again common currency, notably *La Pollution*, *L'Avortement*, *L'Euthanasie* and *La Drogue* and with them came the perennial problem of candidates **and** teacher-examiners failing to ensure that the discussion is **firmly rooted in the culture of a target-language country.** If teachers cannot succeed in dissuading their students from selecting these sorts of general topics, it is incumbent upon the candidates to research into and present information about them which is particularly related to the target-language country; information which is unequivocally special and unique to the target-language country. Comparison with or mention of these cases in the UK must be strictly avoided.

Too often, whether it was the candidate's fault or the teacher-examiner's or both, the majority of the conversation was conducted at far too general a level and references to a target-language country were few and far between. Centres are reminded that this failing precludes access to a high mark for knowledge and opinions (Grid 4E). It may be worth mentioning also that the latter topics often lead candidates to use vast numbers of highly technical words which they can rarely pronounce, thus decreasing the mark for pronunciation and intonation, as well.

Views on *la laïcité* and related topics seem to continue, increasing in sophistication and this year the background often went back as far as 1789! In fact, in a couple of cases, there was so much historical background that I started to worry that it was no longer a **'current issue'**. Most

candidates, however, brought their focus back clearly to the 21st century. The debate on racism was sometimes very one-sided, as mentioned above in relation to Text B.

General

Some candidates made a very positive and rewarding attempt to use a wide range of grammatical structures and to introduce sophisticated vocabulary. Elsewhere, however, there were still too many errors of an elementary kind: adjectival agreements used indiscriminately; singulars and plurals carelessly used (*ils vient, ils peut*); genders randomly applied to very basic or key vocabulary.

The use of prepositions was again poor, resulting in ambiguity especially with *de* and *à* (mentioned last year).

Tenses are usually well handled, and this year was no exception. While it has now become almost universal to build in a couple of subjunctives, there remains frequent confusion between *il y a eu / il y avait* and *a été / était*. Occasionally, there was excessive reliance upon the present tense, as reported in previous years. The infinitive was sometimes employed instead of a tense, and avoided when genuinely required (*d'accepte, peut existe, veut commande*).

Pronunciation problems included the usual inability to differentiate between *jeunes / gens* and a number of words like *pédagogique, atteintes, immunodéficience, immigrés* (often pronounced [*amigré*], and sometimes by teacher-examiners), *vigile, restreintes* etc. Final consonants are still being sounded: *ils, elles, dans, beaucoup, forêt, état*. Intonation and rhythm were sometimes so poor as to create an obstacle to communication, especially when units of pre-learned material were being forced in.

Other matters

Every year, I ask my teams of examiners to record all instances of good practice. Many excellent teacher-examiners perform reliably and competently year after year.

I am sorry to have to report this year, however, some less creditable features. Some examiners believe that the level of unacceptably bad practice (malpractice?) has reached almost epidemic proportions – so widespread is the evidence of candidates who simply learn the whole topic off by heart and appear not to have been dissuaded from doing so by their teachers.

One highly experienced, highly respected examiner this year described the standard of examining - and occasionally the standard of French - as poor. Where centres had native speaker teacher-examiners, they often appeared to lack understanding of the British education system and were frequently poorly-prepared themselves. Quite a few treated the articles as '*explications de texte*', asking repeated questions about the same point until they got some sort of an answer, and in the process demoralising and disadvantaging the candidate by running out of time and failing to cover all the material. Others seemed to feel that there were "right and wrong answers" in the General Conversation and delivered a lecture to the candidate if they did not agree with what was being said; they appeared woefully lacking in training in examining technique, answering questions themselves, intervening before the candidate had had time to respond, asking two questions at the same time, finishing the sentences for candidates who struggled to find a word and, increasingly, 'summarising' what the candidate had said, presumably in the hope of being marked in place of the candidate.

There were again reports of problems with cassettes not being rewound to the beginning and quite a number not recorded two candidates per side, thereby causing a lot of wasted time. The standard of recording was on occasions barely adequate, in an age where we should be able to

take the technology for granted. For a relatively modest sum, it is possible to purchase good separate microphones which transform the results (the PZM non-directional type which are placed flat on the table are particularly good, but few Centres appear to have invested in them).

The level of background noise in a significant minority of Centres was totally unacceptable: doors banging (possibly in the examination room itself), children screaming and shouting (and in one case swearing) loudly for several minutes when examinations coincided with a change of lesson, candidates kicking the table through nerves (with no attempt made to limit the effect of this by putting a cloth or similar under the microphone), a cement mixer and other intrusive machine noises. Centres must put effort into ensuring that their A Level Languages candidates are given a quiet and comfortable venue. The above is, fortunately, not the norm!

2655 – French Listening, Reading and Writing 2

General Comments

The level was appropriate and the paper discriminated well between candidates of different abilities. Most candidates were entered appropriately, and marks spanned the whole range. However, the level of performance of some candidates indicated that they were not ready to sit the paper.

Many candidates showed a good understanding of the texts they heard and read and in the listening exercises there were not as many transcription errors as in previous sessions.

There was much evidence of good and appropriate preparation, with many candidates performing relatively evenly over the different skills demanded in this paper. Many candidates showed a sound knowledge of topical vocabulary and complex structures but accuracy of language was a problem for quite a few. Adjectival agreement seems to be a more common weakness than basic verb errors at this level, while the passive mood and object pronouns caused notable difficulties. Accents also seemed to be suffering from some neglect. It was pleasing to see a widespread confident use of the subjunctive, particularly in the final task.

This year most candidates followed the instructions, did not write excessively long essays for question 7f and as a consequence scored better marks. Some, however, wrote far too much, spilling out of the space allocated into margins, headers, footers etc, in a manner which was difficult to follow and may consequently have cost them marks. It is thus important that candidates read the questions carefully and respond in a concise manner.

In an alarming number of cases, the handwriting was hard to decipher, making it a challenge to reward valid points made in good faith. Candidates should be encouraged to write legibly and present their work neatly.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A Task 1 was usually better done than task 2. Some candidates had problems getting the correct information under the correct question and others who were unsure tried to give too much information or duplicated their answers.

Task 1

- (a) Most got this right although a few went for a qualitative remark e.g. *ils ont aimé la journée*. There were also transcription errors e.g. *doublier* for *d'oublier*; *pas prêt de* for *pas près de*; *la semblée nationale* for *l'Assemblée Nationale*
- (b) i *Passer une journée comme un député* was accepted as an alternative answer for (b)i but not (b)ii. This question was usually well answered but sometimes *politique* was given instead of *civique*. *Leçon* was often spelt *lesson* or even *le sens* and *une journée de travail* was often spelt *une journée de travaille*.
- (b) ii We were looking for two activities: *réunions* + *discussions*, which most candidates gave but the latter word was often incorrectly spelt (*discution* or *discucion*).

- (c) Most candidates answered this question correctly but many failed to produce the correct agreements of the adjective and past participle. *République* was often spelt with a *c* and some wrote *préposition* instead of *proposition*. Those who put *une/la proposition de loi est devenue une vraie loi* did not get a mark. Very few chose to quote the example from the text which was an acceptable answer.
- (d) i Many had difficulty here with the verb in the passive form and ended up saying that the young people were listening to the adults. Some of those who used the passive form omitted the agreement of the past participle or wrote *écouter*. *Adultes* was often spelt without an *e*. Some gave here the answer for (dii). Some candidates had transcription problems with *s'engager et agir* e.g. *sans gager et agir* or *engager et s'agir*.
- (d) ii *Lutter contre le racisme, l'indifférence et la misère* was accepted as an alternative answer. Some candidates used *pour que* + subjunctive, which was good. Both adjectives *juste* + *solidaire* were needed to get the mark. Some wrote *solitaire* instead of *solidaire*.
- (e) This question challenged many candidates. The use of *rendre* + adjective was not generally known; most used *faire*. *Rivières* et *forêts* sometimes appeared in the singular form. The word *forêt* was also often spelt incorrectly e.g. *fauré / foray*. It was not generally realised that *forêt* is a feminine noun, hence the past participle *entretenu* did not receive the correct agreement. The complex *pistes cyclables* issue was rarely conveyed correctly; *voies* hardly ever appeared correctly (*voix* was usually preferred), and it was generally felt that the issue hinged around encouraging greater bicycle use. Those who failed to recognise *vélo* and only heard the sound *lo* associated it with *l'eau*, and thought the text was referring to the improvement of the flow of water. Some failed to read the question properly and wrote *Lutter contre le racisme, l'indifférence et la misère* which is incorrect as the question was referring to the environment.

Task 2

Those who had a good knowledge of the vocabulary of this topic did well; others struggled in places and often transcribed incorrectly what they heard.

- (a) The idea of increasing temperature over the next fifteen thousand years was required to score two marks. The most common mistakes here were the use of *million* for *mille* and of *pour* for *pendant*. For a few candidates, *au moins* also caused some difficulty. *Le thermomètre* was often not recognised and transcribed as *la terme à mettre*.
- (b) i The ideas of size + sample were both needed to get one mark. Those who did not understand the text often badly transcribed *échantillon* (e.g. *chantion* or *enchatillon*). Those who understood but did not know how to spell the word got round it by giving a valid alternative (e.g. *un morceau de glace*). *La glace* was often spelt *la glasse*. The dimension issue was sometimes not included, which incurred the loss of the mark.
- (b) ii Not many took the opportunity here to show their knowledge of the relative pronoun. The idea of depth/distance to which scientists descended had to be conveyed. Some candidates still conjugate *descendre* with *avoir* and others, who had used *être*, failed to make the past participle agree. *Profondeur* was sometime spelt badly e.g. *profound d'eur*.

- (c) A variety of expressions were used to answer this point, most of them correct. Good candidates showed their knowledge of demonstrative pronouns. Those who did not understand often came up with *comme les conditions astronomiques*.
- (d) Most candidates were able to convey the historical point, but started to stumble when they got into man's CO2 emissions because of cars and industry. Man's contribution to global warming caused some difficulty. Additional vocabulary, not presented in the original listening material, indicated that a number of candidates had been very well prepared in the environmental area. 2 out of 3 was a common score here. Some did not understand *influence* and transcribed it as *affluence*. Many had problems with *rejetée du dioxyde de carbone*; *charbon* was not accepted as a substitute for *carbone*. Verb endings were often incorrect.
- (e) Very few candidates got this right; the opposite of the correct answer was usually given to this demanding question. Many contented themselves with just a mention of *la chaleur*.
- (f) Many succeeded here, but some lost a mark because they wrote *réduire à/par* instead of *de*. There were also many incorrect forms of *réduire*.

Section B

Task 3

The most common error was the addition of superfluous words e.g. *qui distingue* instead of *distingue*. For (e) *coupe du monde* and *coupe du monde extérieur* were also accepted. Some incorrect answers were *espoir/aimerait/aimerait avoir/voudrait* for (d) and *écoliers/élèves* for (f).

Task 4

This is where some candidates lost marks under grid 5B because they failed to manipulate the language in order to provide an accurate answer. *Les mères* were referred as *ils* in a number of scripts. Weaker candidates sometimes copied wholesale from the text; quite a few wrote too much, and lost marks because they inserted wrong information in the middle of correct information.

- (a) Usually answered correctly. Some wrong answers included *veulent être actives/veulent un contact avec les autres/ont besoin de communiquer avec des adultes*.
- (b) Many candidates lost a mark because they referred to the mother's status/role rather than her work at home.
- (c) Many candidates found this question difficult as they failed to pick up that *sont essentiels à leur équilibre* referred to the women's mental state and not their organisation skills. Some wrong answers included : *avoir une balance dans leur vie/avoir une vie balancée*.
- (d) Some failed to pick up that a verb in the gerund was required there. The verb *fréquenter* was unknown to some.
- (e) Candidates usually got this question right, but there were some added distortions e.g. *travailler avant l'enfant est né*.

- (f) Some candidates gave the reverse of the first two points, writing that they were less qualified and had lowly jobs; this suggested either that they had not looked below the surface of the text, or that they had misread the question and were writing about the women who had given up work. The third item involving their husbands was the least well-answered.

Task 5

Most candidates did quite well, but those who were unsure lost a mark by giving several definitions. In such circumstances, Examiners are instructed only to mark the first one.

The fact that some of the expressions were plurals and/or feminine often went unrecognised in the explanations that were offered. Sometimes candidates failed to recognise parts of speech.

Parts (a) and (b) led several candidates to mix pronouns, writing something along the lines of *l'argent qu'on gagne pour votre travail*.

- (a) Answered correctly by most candidates but some candidates did not attach the money to the concept of its being earned.
- (b) Found difficult by a lot of candidates. Some offered *à temps partiel, séculaire* or referred to maternity leave.
- (c) A fair number of responses suggested that the women had no qualifications at all, but this was the best-handled item in this task.
- (d) *le cadre* proved to be the least known of the five expressions; if understood it was not always explained effectively.
- (e) Candidates did not always provide the marital link here; *petit ami/partenaire* were popular, as was *quelqu'un qu'on habite avec*. A significant minority understood *conjoint* as being a colleague, and some just put *ensemble*, or *quelqu'un qui travaille à côté de soi*.

Task 6

This task became progressively more difficult. Most candidates were able to do well at the beginning and then less so as they worked through towards (e) and (f), which were the least well answered. The task was generally handled in an intelligent manner and most candidates did well; however, on a number of occasions, candidates did not attach the correct information to the appropriate question. At times, it was the quality of the English they used in their answers that let candidates down rather than their lack of comprehension of the French stimulus material.

- (a) *unemployment* and *health problem* were invariably correct, although *moving house* was found to be more challenging. *Divorce, redundancy* and *demotion* appeared from time to time.
- (b) Answered correctly by the majority of candidates.
- (c) There was frequent confusion between the contractual aspect (which was required) and the environmental conditions (which were not); few candidates were awarded a mark for this point. The second item regarding getting a job back at the same level was often understood, but frequently rendered in rather opaque English. The two childcare points were well understood and effectively conveyed.

- (d) The most common mistakes were the distortion of the meaning of the French text when candidate said that *Samuel Plateau founded the organisation 25 years ago* and the literal translation of *accompagner les femmes dans leur retour au travail*.
- (e) The first two points were often understood, but often communicated in a clumsy way. However, the item about the workplace being where one meets the most people caused some difficulties, and provided perhaps the most hard-won marks in this task, as some candidates did not know that *monde* had two meanings *people* and *world* and wrote answers such as: *work is where you can meet the world again*. *Les connaissances* was often understood as *knowledge* instead of *acquaintance*. Some also failed to understand *peu à peu*.
- (f) Many missed the issue about the job having changed while the women are away, but the other two points were frequently correct, particularly the training one. *Grossesse* was sometimes believed to mean that the women had put on weight.
- (g)i The fact that it was women with responsible jobs who concerned us was regularly omitted. Some just wrote *the mothers* (t.c.)
- (g)ii This question was usually understood.
- (g)iii Most candidates won the mark here, although there were some rogue answers involving the words *disposable* and *reliable*. Some suggested that women were less capable after childbirth.

Task 7

On the whole candidates responded well to the task and most of them had strong views either for or against hunting, only a few accepted both sides of the argument. Every script offered an opinion and the number of candidates who easily mentioned 10 points was higher than in previous years. It was relatively rare to have to cap the Range mark; in these instances, the nature of the candidates' writing usually confined them to the lowest marks on this scale anyway, so there was no material effect on their mark.

Most scripts kept to around the eighty-word limit, but there were still a few who went over the top (about 900 words in one case). Candidates must remember to prioritise quality over quantity. A few candidates wrote too much in answers (a) to (e) and very little in (f) which is the section where candidate can write freely and show their knowledge of language and, by doing so, gain more marks.

- 7
- (a) The two items regarding children were quoted on most scripts, although the figures were occasionally wrong; on the other hand, the fact that hunting is the favourite pastime of many French people was the least favoured.
 - (b) Many candidates found the issue of political influence to be difficult to convey; this also pertained to the concept of being harmful to agriculture. Some misunderstood the prompt, believing that it referred to both ROC and LPO, so put correct information in the wrong place.
 - (c) *espèce* was not frequently known, and candidates found it challenging to produce synonyms. Few mentioned both the [migration] and [reproduction] points; the latter solicited some comic renderings e.g. *la saison quand les oiseaux produisent des enfants*.
 - (d) *30 millions* occasionally lost or gained a zero, but this point was found to be one of the most accessible.
 - (e) The two protection points were generally handled well, if the two items relating to opposition were not

- (f) There were some very interesting and well-couched personal responses, showing a substantial improvement on previous years. The weaker candidates usually tended to repeat points they had made earlier, using roughly the same words. Many candidates were well prepared for this section with an array of useful phrases.

2656 - Culture and Society (Written Examination)

General Comments

Candidates sitting this examination in the June 2005 session offered an approximately equal number of answers on prescribed literary texts and non-literary topics; there were considerably fewer answers on the literary topics questions. On the whole, candidates appeared to have a good knowledge of the texts they had studied. Many candidates who answered the non-literary questions had studied the topics in depth and presented a number of relevant facts to support their arguments, but there was also a significant number who answered non-literary questions and seemed to have little factual information on the topic available to them. It should again be emphasised that candidates answering non-literary questions are expected to have a level of factual knowledge which is equivalent to that of candidates who have a thorough knowledge of their set literary text. Other candidates (in both literary and non-literary questions) tended to write generally about the text or theme without strictly addressing the question.

The number of rubric offences appeared to have increased slightly. The most common infringement was candidates answering both parts (a) and (b) of the same question, thus answering four questions in total. At the other extreme, a number of candidates only attempted one part of the tripartite literary context questions. A few candidates attempted to combine the three sections of a context question into a single essay answer: this is not necessarily self-penalising, but such questions are designed to be answered in three discrete parts. Most essays were of an appropriate length, although there were quite a number which fell below 200 words, which normally would be considered inadequate. Equally, while no maximum length is imposed, some essays were over 1,000 words: such essays tended to try to be all-embracing on a text or topic and suffer from both irrelevancy and poor internal organisation, although certainly some very high quality long essays were received.

In conclusion, it was felt that standards were generally similar to past years. It is encouraging that candidates are for the most part entering the examination having clearly studied a text or topic in considerable depth, and are able to express coherent and quite sophisticated ideas in French which is at least readily understandable and at best highly accurate, fluent and ambitious.

Comments on Individual Questions

Q No)

(sub)

Section A: Prescribed literary texts

1)

Camus: *La Peste*

- (a) There were fewer takers for the Camus context question than the essay question. Answers were often superficial and lacked any real idea of analysis. In particular, part (i) received some very vague responses, with the notion of 'injustice' not really being taken on board, and little reference being made to the randomness of the deaths caused by the plague. One candidate replied: "L'injustice du bonheur, ça veut dire quand quelqu'un est très content" – that was the entire answer. Some better candidates answered part (ii) well, making close reference to the language used by Camus to illustrate the differences in attitudes during and after the plague. In part (iii) candidates tended to give appropriate examples of exile and separation during the plague (Rieux and Rambert both being separated from their wives), without really providing an effective answer to the question.
- (b) This was a popular question, which allowed candidates to demonstrate an encouraging knowledge of the text. Often essays gave accounts of the deeds of a variety of characters forming a hit-parade of heroism, some of whom scarcely merited mention in truth. Rieux, Rambert and Tarrou all had their supporters, while the best candidates were able to refer very effectively to the notion of the team ethic and the communal contribution to the fight against the plague. A number of candidates were aware of Camus' own contention that Joseph Grand was the real hero – but few shared his point of view.

2)

Giono: *Regain*

- (a) **No answers to this question were received**
- (b) Although relatively few candidates answered on this text, those who did were able to make plentiful and effective reference to the text. Candidates differentiated well between the first and second halves of the novel, but not all grasped the important point that the renewed fruitfulness of part 2 was due to man and nature working in harmony.

3

Ionesco: *Tueur sans gages*

- (a) This text was only studied by a small number of candidates. Answers to the context question were mostly competent and displayed a reasonable overall knowledge of the play, although some bizarre answers to what should have been a relatively straightforward question in part (i) were received. Parts (ii) and (iii) were well answered, showing that candidates had understood the absurdity and futility of Bérenger's revolt.
- (b) Only a very small number of answers to this question were received. They tended to display knowledge of the text but be rather superficial in nature, demonstrating little understanding of exactly how Ionesco creates comedy (use of breakdown in communication, the grotesque, etc.), or the effect of juxtaposing comic and tragic components.

- 4 **Molière: *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme***
- (a) *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was clearly a widely studied text, and the context question was extremely popular with candidates. Sound knowledge of the text was demonstrated, but, while candidates almost unanimously understood the nature of M.Jourdain's fantasies in part (i), answers to part (ii) tended to be rather wordy and anecdotal instead of defining the « qualities » displayed by the protagonist, such as gullibility, vanity, stubbornness, stupidity, etc. Part (iii) was answered competently but often some key scenes from the text, which would have improved the answer considerably, were omitted, such as Dorante returning ostensibly to settle his debts but in reality to borrow more money, or his passing off all M.Jourdain's gifts to Dorimène as his own.
- (b) While fewer candidates attempted this question than 4(a), a number of excellent answers were received from candidates who tied in the double intrigue very neatly, showing how the course of the young persons' love affairs was actually served by M.Jourdain's pretensions. A number of essays neglected to refer to Covielle and Nicole, which was obviously an important omission. However, good use was made of the 'Grand Turc' ceremony to demonstrate the interaction of the two plots.
- 5 **Proust: *Un amour de Swann***
- (a) **No answers were received on this question.**
- (b) No answers were received on this question.
- 6 **Rocheftort: *Les Petits Enfants du Siècle***
- (a) This new text on the specification proved a popular choice. Candidates generally answered the context question very well and succinctly, especially part (iii) where examples of black humour, irony and satire were freely provided. The combination of humour and social commentary in the choice of nicknames attributed to the Mauvin boys was often very intelligently brought out. The idea of having children not out of love but for material gain was also one which was commented on with great effect.
- (b) A remarkably large number of candidates answering this question did not consider that this was a feminist novel at all. The roles of men within the families was not always clearly interpreted and the exposure of their crassness and stupidity went unmentioned. Better candidates did see the feminist aspects coinciding with other themes such as the treatment and liberation of children, but many answers were simplistic, suggesting that Josyane's apparently taking the same route as her mother was a betrayal of womanhood. No knowledge of the author's own feminist views were discussed

7 **Sartre: *Les Mains sales***

- (a) Plenty of candidates opted for this question, which on the whole was adequately rather than impressively answered. Candidates certainly seem to know the play – how well they understand it is a more contentious issue. Candidates grasped in part (i) that Hugo's reaction was because Olga had revealed to him that the Party had changed its politics, but only the better ones reflected on the impact this would have on Hugo with regard to his feelings towards the crime he had committed. Parts (ii) and (iii) tended to produce rather vague answers: again, only better candidates referred to the Party's pragmatism and lack of ideological purity, and only a handful of high quality candidates saw this episode as the trigger to the mechanism which causes Hugo finally to declare himself 'non-récupérable'.
- (b) This was a popular question, and was generally well answered. Candidates demonstrated their ability to understand the dichotomy between a crime of passion and a political assassination. Hugo's ideals and motives were closely examined, and the role played by Jessica in the killing was widely and effectively discussed. The best candidates referred in detail to Hugo's own re-examination of his motives after discovering that the Party had changed its politics, and a number of effective and balanced essays putting forward arguments for both cases were received: these tended to be better than answers which dogmatically came down on one side of the fence or the other. Some candidates did get rather bogged down in Existentialist theory: interpretations based on Hugo's 'en-soi' and 'pour-soi' were not clear enough to add much to the value of the argument.

8 **Voltaire: *Candide***

- (a) *Candide* was a very popular text, with about equal numbers attempting the context and the essay question. Candidates demonstrated a fair knowledge and understanding of the text, but often tended to be excessively wordy in their answers, not always sticking closely enough to the key points. Most candidates understood the overall irony of the decision to leave Eldorado, but not all picked out the ironic nuance in the phrase "les deux heureux se résolurent de ne plus l'être." While *Candide's* motives for wanting to take the riches of Eldorado with him were effectively covered, part (iii) answers frequently contained omissions, with candidates seemingly forgetting the way in which *Candide* systematically lost all his jewel-laden sheep to natural dangers and human deceit.
- (b) This question was generally very well answered as candidates understood that while *Candide's* character and outlook on the world evolve as his experience increases, those of his two mentors Pangloss and Martin remain static despite all evidence that points to the contrary. In particular, attitudes towards what represents 'le meilleur des mondes possibles' were effectively discussed. Most also referred to the physical evolution that Cunégonde undergoes, and integrated this successfully into the argument,

Section B: Literary topics

- 9 Pagnol's *La Gloire de mon père* was the most popular text used by the small number of candidates who attempted this question. This should have been an ideal choice for this question, but answers tended to quote descriptions from the text without really analysing the impact or importance of the child's point of view.
- 10 Very few answers were received to this question but some candidates who had studied *Les Mains sales* chose to attempt it rather than one of the questions on the prescribed text. These involved character studies of Olga and Jessica and were reasonably effective answers.
- 11 Again, Vercors's *Le Silence de la Mer* and Maupassant's *Boule de Suif et autres contes de la guerre* were used prominently and reasonably effectively to answer the question on war in literature. There were some well-constructed essays, but also a number that were too narrative and did not address the question in detail. Little reference to narrative technique as a means of transmitting authorial comment was made. Candidates did however show good knowledge of the texts they had studied. An attempt to use *La Peste*, which might have been effective if the allegorical nature of the text had been discussed, omitted this aspect and did not provide an appropriate answer.
- 12 This question fitted study of *L'Étranger* very well and some of the essays received on this text regarding who was to blame for the conflict were of outstanding quality, presenting a coherent, balanced argument and displaying an impressive knowledge and understanding of the text. A couple of candidates tried to use *Les Mains sales*, but it was not easy to integrate the idea of a 'milieu social' into such answers.
- 13 This question was attempted by relatively few candidates, but among those who did choose it, some good answers using *Cyrano de Bergerac* were received, which demonstrated how Cyrano's love for Roxane, despite being a forlorn one, added meaning and richness to his existence.
- 14 No answers were received to this question.

Section C: Non-literary topics

- 15 (a) This question was attempted by very few candidates, who in general displayed little knowledge of the topic. Answers were superficial and seldom referred to any specific programmes or channels.
- (b) A number of candidates answered this question who did not really appear to have studied the topic. While some coherent and interesting arguments were made, the result of this was that these essays were not substantiated by any relevant factual content.

- 16 (a) This was a very popular question. Candidates displayed in-depth knowledge of the current problems in the French educational system, as well as youth unemployment problems and disaffection among children of immigrant families. Only the better candidates, however, used their knowledge as an effective tool for providing a response to the question of priority, and did so by referring to the reactions of young people to recent educational reforms and measures, of which many had an excellent knowledge. Plenty of candidates were able to use statistics effectively to demonstrate the number of young people taking the Bac and passing into higher education. The topic had clearly been very thoroughly studied by a large number of candidates. Weaker candidates tended to provide a description of the French educational system, and attempt to answer the question by claiming (without much factual back-up) that things like material possessions, socialising and romantic liaisons were at least equal priorities for France's youth.
- (b) This question was only answered by a few candidates, who on the whole tended to generalise and write essays with very limited relevance to France. However, a few good answers were received which were able to quote relevant statistics about divorce and single-parent families, as well as reflect on the current trend away from families sharing time together as had traditionally been the case, especially at mealtimes. The absence of moral guidance was effectively argued as a cause of increasing alienation and delinquency among young French people.
- 17 (a) The notion of the 'culte de la star' was not really grasped by candidates, who produced potted autobiographies of actors and argued, for example, that Depardieu was a star because he was bilingual and had been in American films with a much wider audience. This was not the point of the question, which was to examine whether the French film industry had been 'star-driven' in the same way as Hollywood, and also to see whether the fascination with stars' private lives had also been a phenomenon that had reached France.
- (b) A very small number of candidates attempted this question. Answers were very superficial and backed up by very little factual information.
- 18 (a) The meaning of the slogan was not always understood by the relatively small number of candidates attempting this question, and the knowledge of environmentalist parties and policies which they displayed was very thin. On the other hand, candidates had a good working knowledge of the environmental threats facing France, and this allowed a number of answers that were satisfactory in content, if not entirely addressing all sides of the question.
- (b) This was a popular question, well answered by a good number of candidates, who backed up their arguments with an impressive range of statistics. Knowledge of patterns of energy consumption and uses of and attitudes towards alternative energy sources such as 'éoliennes' and energy-saving initiatives were well established. While weaker candidates trotted out an all-purpose environmental essay, even these had factual merit in most cases.

- 19 (a) This question, while very popular, was one of the least well-answered on the paper. Candidates knew plenty of facts about their chosen region or town, but almost invariably came up with what was little more than a list of tourist attractions and their historical origins. This resulted in the great majority of essays on this question having no discernible argument, structure or logical progression. Many offered an 'everything I know' approach, which caused frequently lapses into irrelevancy: a side and a half on the cultivation of mushrooms in Saumur did little to convince. The question of economic impact was given very short shrift, and only one or two better candidates addressed the question of what local authorities might do to encourage (or discourage) further tourism.
- (b) Far fewer candidates chose this question than 19(a), and essays on the whole were very general and often barely touched on the question of unemployment, remaining relevant to the sub-topic of 'Problèmes locaux' more than the specific slant of the question.
- 20 (a) This was the less popular of the two questions on 'La France multiculturelle'. Generally, little knowledge of relevant facts, either past or contemporary, was shown and essays tended to be vague and general. Indeed, more than one took the approach 'I don't know anything about anti-Semitism so I will tell you all about the situation of Muslims in France instead'. This 'design-your-own-essay' method is not recommended.
- (b) This question was extremely popular. Essays reflected wide reading by candidates and were well illustrated with facts and statistics. There were however frequent obvious omissions, such as how the culture clash can cause problems within the home of the children of immigrants. In fact, a number of candidates appeared to be rehashing a well-practised essay on racism which didn't really address the question. The recent riots were referred to but seldom used effectively as part of a relevant answer. It was quite common for candidates to overlook the second part of the question about whether these problems might be overcome in the future, although some good candidates did look at the measures which the French government have taken and could take. There were at the same time some excellent answers which took account of all the relevant issues and integrated them into a clear and informative discussion.
- 21 (a) Essays tended to be too generalised on the question of drugs and often made little or no direct reference to sport, certainly not in a French context. Most candidates unsurprisingly argued that the fight against drug cheats should not be abandoned, and believed that if such prominent drug-users went unpunished, this might encourage ordinary people, especially the young who regarded them as role models, to believe that drug-taking was quite acceptable and would lead to an increase in heroin and cocaine addicts. This argument has its flaws, but made for some interesting reading. Others gave interesting views on the ethics of cheating and the 'victory-at-all-costs' society in which we live: again, arguments were coherent but factual support was conspicuous by its absence.

- (b) The notion of 'traditions culinaires' was often either not addressed or misinterpreted by candidates. However, answers giving evidence for the need for a healthy diet, the dangers of obesity, etc. were commonplace and contained elements of relevance, whereas those candidates who went off on a diatribe against all unhealthy practices such as alcohol, smoking and drugs certainly suffered in terms of relevance. A number of candidates claimed that traditional French cuisine was extremely healthy, tending to cite Mediterranean practices as the norm and overlooking the cream and fat laden delicacies of the north and west! Arguments tended to centre around the idea that traditional French food was far healthier than the fast food culture which the MacDo generation are embracing, and concluded that far from abandoning traditional fare, the French would be better off returning to it. Such essays were not without some merit, but the answer did not entirely fit the question. There were one or two beautifully written answers from obvious connoisseurs who accepted ruefully that an element of lighter and better balanced diet needed to temper the effects of traditional French gourmandise. No-one mentioned vegetarianism!

Quality of Language

While inevitably there was considerable variation in the grammatical accuracy, ambitiousness in syntactical structures and breadth of vocabulary employed by candidates, it was noted that fairly few candidates fell below 'Adequate', inasmuch as they displayed an awareness of grammatical rules but were inconsistent in their application, and also made a conscious effort to introduce linguistic variety and complexity into their writing.

Spelling however, remains distinctly hit-and-miss. Jean-Paul *Satre* was a much-read author, who wrote a play about a *meutre*, according to many candidates. Correct use of single and double consonants was a lost art.

Certain irregular verbs caused problems in a variety of tenses ('battre' and 'combattre' were particularly noticeable). The verb *facier* was a very popular neologism, 'faire face à' appearing only very rarely. Adjectival agreements were observed with a somewhat cavalier attitude. Two very common mistakes were the use of *des autres* instead of 'autres' and confusion between 'il est' and 'c'est'.

In general, however, it is felt that teachers should be congratulated on their success in teaching the language element of the specification. There were many examples of excellent and apparently natural usage, with effective use of many advanced constructions, including good use of 'ce qui / ce que', 'dont', etc. Plenty of candidates who lack the ability to produce such language naturally were nevertheless able to use pre-learned phrases involving subjunctives, etc., in appropriate places, although the linguistic context often betrayed a weaker overall grasp.

2657 - French Culture and Society - Coursework

General Comments

It was pleasing to note that once again the vast majority of candidates approached the coursework component of their course with commitment and enthusiasm. Independent research was much in evidence and mostly carried out through the use of the Internet. The quality of work was good with very few sub-standard pieces submitted this year, possibly because Centres decided to withdraw candidates who had not produced adequate essays from this option.

On the practical side, there was less confusion over the documents that should or should not be sent to the Moderator with the work and most Centres were very prompt in responding to the Moderator's request when documents were missing.

Topics

Centres submitted a wide range of suitable topics, all clearly linked to the French-speaking world. It was worrying to note that in spite of warnings given in last year's report, some Centres seemed to be preparing candidates for the coursework essay as a class exercise and encouraging them to write on the same topic. This is not in the spirit of Coursework. This occurred mostly with literary topics where all candidates were allowed to write on variations of the same titles and all wrote on similar aspects of the text they had studied in class. Such an approach does not encourage individual research or originality and must be avoided. Centres wishing to prepare candidates in such a way should be entering them for the essay paper rather than for the Coursework option.

Literary texts formed the basis of approximately 20% of the work that was submitted this year. Along with the old favourites (Camus, Pagnol, de Maupassant, Sartre, Joffo, Anouilh, Molière, Voltaire etc.) some contemporary authors were also studied (Philippe Grimbert, Amélie Nothomb). They all provided suitable material to display knowledge and analytical skills. The most successful pieces came from Centres that left the candidates free to select their own angle because the writing that ensued had a genuine freshness. This could not be said from the work coming from Centres where all candidates wrote on the same theme, albeit under slightly different titles, making the same points and using the same quotes to support them.

A wide variety of non-literary topics were covered, with social issues in the forefront, especially the Autumn riots, including up-to-date reference to the CPE and frequently coupled with a study of *La Haine*. Also popular were topics relating to racism and immigration and more particularly the policies introduced by Sarkozy. Most of these pieces tended to be one sided and showed little support for the government agencies. The plight of the homeless, inequalities in French society, euthanasia – prompted by the case of Vincent Humbert – health related issues (*obésité*, increase in life expectancy, caring for an aging population etc.) were also well represented. So was the cinema with films from popular directors (*Truffaut, Jeunet, Besson, Kassovitz, Audiard, Barratier*), politics (the role of France in the European Union and the referendum on the European constitution, Nicolas Sarkozy versus Ségolène Royal for the presidency) and environmental issues (the choice of nuclear energy, dealing with pollution, protection of the environment).

A number of candidates followed their own interest to study aspects of sports, history, science, language, arts, poetry, music etc. Some of these were very well researched and highly individual, making reading them all the more interesting. This approach should be encouraged at all times; it is the very "raison d'être" of the Coursework essay.

Titles

Titles must be chosen so that they give scope for developing an argument and making a case and not merely invite a narrative or descriptive approach. Titles such as « *Les émeutes de 2005* », « *L'obésité est-elle un problème en France ?* », « *Le rôle de l'Académie française* », « *Les causes de la Révolution française* », « *Le racisme en France et le rôle de SOS racisme* » or « *Jeanne d'Arc, une héroïne française* » must be avoided. A number of able candidates under-performed under grid 6A2 because their title led them to produce what was essentially a presentation. Most titles, however, did not fall in this category. Many were clearly focused and phrased as a question, which provided a good angle for genuine analysis. Long and unwieldy titles did not help candidates either. In such cases, they almost inevitably ended up skimming or omitting certain aspects and could not do themselves justice in achieving a balance by addressing all parts of their question within the word limit.

Great care should be taken over the titles of non-discursive pieces. At last, it seems that advice often given in the past is being heeded: some of these pieces had a sub-title or an explanatory introduction setting out the candidate's intentions in submitting such an essay. It is essential that at the planning stage they clearly know what they want to prove in their piece of work, otherwise the end product is likely to be a narrative account which cannot be given high marks on 6A2 (see Coursework Guidance, section 4.2). A title such as « *La vie d'un étudiant français pendant 1968* » is not helpful to the candidate or to the Moderator who has to assess the work.

Please note that teachers are allowed to help candidates formulate their titles. They may also correct language errors in the title and it was disappointing to note that this had not been done in quite a number of cases.

Manner of submission

Plan

Fewer missing plans were reported this year and when this did occur, Centres were prompt in sending the missing document(s) to the Moderator. Some plans were written in English (this is not recommended) and others exceeded one side of A4. Plans should be printed in the same font size as the essay (i.e. 10 to 12) and conform to the description given in the Coursework Guidance booklet (section 5.3).

Extensive and excessively detailed plans must not be accepted. In some cases, candidates wrote full sentences – or even paragraphs – which were then reproduced verbatim in the essay. If this were to happen, Centres should insist on the use of quotation marks and exclude such paragraphs from the word count. Another consequence of this unacceptable practice is that when these “quotations” are excluded from the word count (as with all quotations), the essay may be short of the minimum word limit; this would lead to a scaling down of the language marks. As plans may be corrected, allowing such practice is akin to allowing plagiarism and should be treated as such.

Bibliography

The very concept of coursework implies that a topic will be read around. Sadly this was not always the case for literary topics, where the text seemed to have been read in isolation. Relying on class textbooks or similar is fine but only as a starting point. At this level, evidence of further reading and independent research is required. There was a worrying rise in the number of candidates who seemed to rely exclusively on the Internet, and an even more worrying trend to use Wikipedia as an authoritative source. When using the Web, it is a good idea to encourage candidates to print off main source articles, although it is not necessary to include them with the scripts sent to the Moderator.

Acknowledging sources and recording them correctly in the bibliography is improving but the listing of sources does not prevent plagiarism: candidates seem to assume that if they quote the source, quotation marks are not required. Candidates should follow the instructions set out in sections 4.6 and 6.7 of the Coursework Guidance booklet. Finally, there is still evidence that the reliance on English sources has an effect on the quality of language: translation leads to anglicisms and mistakes in the position of adverbs and adjectives.

Length

Fewer and fewer candidates seem to be opting to write two short essays. Except in the case of weaker candidates who would have difficulties in sustaining quality of argumentation and language over 1200 to 1400 words, this makes sense. This option rarely allows candidates to show the depth of knowledge and the quality of analysis necessary to warrant marks in the higher bands of the assessment criteria.

Moderators reported an increase in unreliable word counts. The specification states the upper and lower limits of coursework pieces. Centres should be more vigilant because failure to observe word limits results in some sort of penalty: over-long essays lose their conclusions, which will be reflected in the 6A2 mark and short essays are self-penalizing for content but also incur a scaling, as shown in section 6.8 of the Coursework Guidance booklet. Quite a number of Centres failed to apply this scaling or incorrectly applied it to the total mark, as opposed to the language marks (grids 6B) only. Such scaling should be clearly shown on the candidate's individual mark sheet. Quotations must be included in the word count.

Some very short single essays were submitted this year. If the number of words submitted falls below the figures stated in section 6.8 of the Coursework Guidance booklet, such a single essay must be assessed as if it were one of two 'short' essays, with 0 awarded for the missing second piece.

Administrative matters

Most Centres follow administrative procedures scrupulously but clerical errors were not uncommon (incorrect additions on the individual mark sheets or transcription from the mark sheet to MS1 especially). A few Centres are still using out-of-date mark sheets and assessment grids. It is possible to download the current version of the various forms from the OCR website (www.ocr.org.uk). Centres are reminded that half marks must not be used. Should a half mark appear as the result of halving the total of the two short essays marks, this must be rounded up and this rounded up mark is to be entered on MS1. When a request for amendment is made, forms should be returned to the Moderator within the prescribed time span; if not, another request has to be sent, which is wasteful, time-consuming for all parties and could potentially delay results.

All coursework must be authenticated. The Candidate Authentication Forms should be kept by the Centres and are not to be submitted with the work. However, it is essential that candidates sign their individual mark sheet. Teachers must also authenticate the work. For this purpose one duly completed copy of the Centre Authentication Form must be sent to the Moderator with the work.

A few cover sheets were either missing or incomplete (missing candidate's number, word count or bibliography mostly). Word counts should be accurate – many proved to be unreliable. Teacher's comments on the cover sheets, though not essential, are welcome and appreciated by Moderators, particularly when they provided an analysis on how the centre's marks were reached.

Content

Most candidates had researched their subject well but many did not know how to deal with the facts they had, so they included them all. Of course, extensive and detailed knowledge of the subject matter is expected to reach the higher content marks, but the ability to select relevant information and to use it to illustrate and strengthen the case they are trying to make is also required. This is still eluding a large number of candidates who use factual evidence as an end in itself.

Candidates are still inclined to narrate or describe rather than analyse or evaluate. The best essays were those that had been carefully planned. Of course, teachers are allowed to give advice on structure at the planning stage, but few plans showed the balance on which a forceful and logical argument could be hung. Yet, it was pleasing to see that in spite of unprepossessing plans, some candidates managed to submit a convincing and well thought out argument.

A good argument should put a case across, sustain a thesis and win the reader over. In this process, introduction and conclusion play a large part. An introduction that runs to a side and a half of A4 is unlikely to catch the reader's attention, so is one that fails to introduce the question. As for the conclusion, it should be the logical outcome of a whole essay specifically geared towards answering the title. However, the full version of the introduction and/or the conclusion should not be part of the plan. Ideally, candidates should have their own views about the subject they have chosen but the idea of evaluating, concluding, making a judgement, was too often equated with just giving personal preference or personal opinion, unsupported by logical argument.

A number of non-discursive pieces were submitted this year and the best were those that came in the shape of a newspaper leading article where the candidate took a position from the outset and tried to make a case (« *L'homme assis au banc des accusés est coupable* »; « *Les émeutes : le gouvernement aurait dû s'y attendre* »). Less successful were those that relied on empathy (« *le journal d'un soldat* » ; « *Un jour dans la vie de l'Etranger* ») because they were essentially story-telling and Grid 6A2 rewards analysis, not narrative. Language in such pieces also tended to be simpler and this should be reflected in the mark awarded for Grid 6B2.

This year, there was an improvement in acknowledging language that candidates had taken from their sources, with quotation marks and footnotes (See Coursework Guidance, section 4.6). However, many quoted so extensively that the essay read more like a commentary on quotations than an argument in its own right. It also made the essay difficult to read. Finally this gave rise to discrepancies in the word count because computers could not distinguish quotations from the candidate's work.

Language

The overall level of language seemed to be better this year, with most candidates achieving at least the 'Adequate' band and making genuine efforts to introduce variety in their language. Some candidates had highly developed language skills, with extensive vocabulary and an excellent command of the A2 structures, and applied their knowledge of grammar consistently and with flair. Many had more modest, but nonetheless appreciable qualities, and often showed good variety but lost control of accuracy.

Although it is pleasing to see candidates using a range of complex structures and ambitious vocabulary, it is annoying when the essay becomes stilted and difficult to read. Occasionally, language obscured meaning and many problems stemmed from attempts to translate from English (*les films tôt de Besson; le climat sirop son esprit; l'idée que ... n'est pas un nouveau un; un ami mensonges dans un lit d'hôpital*); this, of course, needs to be reflected in the assessment.

There were some recurrent language problems: basic errors such as incorrect word order (position of adverbs and pronouns), agreements (adjectives and past participles), prepositions and infinitive constructions, confusion over the use of *qui* and *que* (and also *ce qui/ce que* or *ce qui/ceux qui*), over definite, indefinite and partitive articles (including *les/des; beaucoup des; plusieurs des*) and also accents. Some expressions were frequently mis-used (*c'est/il est; il s'agit de; quant à moi* (instead of *à mon avis*), so were individual words (*les Françaises* – regardless of their sex).

It was mistakes with verbs that spoiled the effect of authentic French. The formation of tenses was generally adequate but there was mis-use of tenses (incorrect sequence of tenses, inappropriate use of perfect and imperfect, imperfect passive instead of perfect, and incorrect use of the passive generally, and of the conditional). At the other end of the scale, it was pleasing to see the idiomatic use of the conditional in sentences such as "*les deux jeunes auraient eu peur de la police et c'est la raison pour laquelle ils auraient pris la fuite*" or to note that candidates were able to distinguish between *aurait pu*, *pourrait* and *pouvait* but the use of *devoir* (particularly in the conditional) remains a mystery for many. Finally, some candidates made excessive use of the subjunctive, which made their French stilted and unnatural.

Some candidates seemed to be able to produce highly sophisticated language with an extremely high level of accuracy and for this they and their teachers must be congratulated.

Assessment

Assessment by Centres was usually accurate, consistent and remained within acceptable limits. At times, Centres appeared unaware of the standards to apply and were too generous, particularly in the application of the content grids. Occasionally, Moderators had to contact Centres when inconsistencies occurred. They were grateful for Centres' co-operation in re-assessing occasional pieces that had not been marked at the correct level. This was usually due to an inconsistent application of the assessment grids, mostly 6A1 and 6A2. After discussing plan and ideas with a candidate, the teacher knows what the candidate is trying to show; it is therefore not unusual for a teacher to read more in an essay than is actually there and to over reward.

Grid 6A1 assesses the amount and quality of relevant information displayed by the candidate in supporting his/her case. To gain access to the higher bands, the whole essay has to be focused on answering the title, not merely on referring to it. Too often Centres award marks in the 'Very Good' band to essays which show a great deal of knowledge about the topic but which are only loosely related to the titles. In other words, to be placed in the higher bands an essay must be fully and thoroughly geared towards answering its title. At times, it may be necessary to imply knowledge rather than overstate it. There were a number of 'Excellent' essays, but not as many as teachers thought. At the other end of the scale, hardly any candidate knew very little about their subject, although some did not go much beyond general knowledge.

Grid 6A2 rewards the quality of the argument that is developed in the essay. This includes the structure, the linking and development of ideas and the general progression of the piece as a whole. The point made above also applies here: Moderators do not always rate the sense of purpose of essays as highly as teachers who know what candidates are trying to prove. Finally, introduction and conclusion are not add-ons: they must be an integral part of the argument.

As candidates have plenty of time and access to dictionaries and grammar books, grids 6B should be applied as if they had been working under exam conditions. Basic agreement and gender errors, when repeated must bring the accuracy mark down to the 'Poor' band and the same goes for incorrect verb endings. Attempts to use complex language that fail to communicate cannot be considered as 'Good'. The purpose of language is to communicate. To merit a high mark for 'Range', the language has to be complex but it must also display a certain flair and fluency which goes beyond the use of the subjunctive or of a conditional clause.

It is gratifying to see that, in most Centres, teachers continue to show commitment and direction in guiding their students to approach their work with seriousness and purpose and for this they deserve praise. The Coursework option clearly brings much satisfaction and a sense of achievement to many candidates and Moderators appreciate reading the outcome of all their hard work.

**Advanced GCE (French) (7861/3861)
June 2006 Assessment Series**

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2651 01/02/03	Raw	60	47	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2652	Raw	80	62	55	48	42	36	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2653	Raw	60	49	44	39	34	30	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2654	Raw	60	48	43	38	33	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2655	Raw	80	57	50	43	37	31	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2656	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2657	Raw	60	50	45	40	35	30	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3861	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7861	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3861	26.83	47.95	66.81	81.57	91.16	100.00	3193
7861	34.42	62.29	81.50	93.13	99.01	100.00	2432

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
www.ocr.org.uk/OCR/WebSite/docroot/understand/ums.jsp

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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