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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

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In French (6FR04) Paper 01

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This was the last major session for Unit 6FR04. It will be offered again in June 2018 but only to those wishing to re-take and it is not anticipated that there will be a large candidature. This was, therefore, the last time in which students had the opportunity to write in a creative or discursive way and in which they had a free choice of subject matter in Section C, as long as the topic was set in a francophone context. Performance and selection of questions were largely in line with those seen in previous years. Many students would have gained more credit if they had responded more closely to the precise detail of some questions. However, on this occasion there was no widespread misinterpretation of any of the tasks which had been set. All those sitting this paper were obliged to do Q1, the translation of a short piece of English into French. In Section B the discursive essays proved to be much more popular than the creative options. This year none of the four discursives was a run-away favourite, Q2(g) and Q2(d) attracted the most interest. As usual, the vast majority of essays seen in Section C dealt with a film or text in answer to Q3(d). Amongst the films *La Haine* remained the most commonly studied with *Intouchables* and *Au revoir les enfants* the other favourites. *Un sac de billes*, *L'Étranger* and *L'Avare* were once more the most favoured texts.

The translation was again marked according to the 'chunking' method. The passage was divided into five 'chunks' and for each a mark of 2,1 or 0 was given based on the successful transfer of meaning and the degree of grammatical accuracy achieved, thus giving a mark out of 10. In the new specification, which will operate from next year, a points-based method of marking will be used in the assessment of this exercise. This year's passage, which concerned reading habits, and thus was taken from the Literature and arts General Topic Area, proved to be an excellent discriminator. Most students found the first and last of the five 'chunks' challenging but the middle three sections provided the opportunity for almost all to gain varying amounts of credit. Some lexical items proved difficult and failure to render them appropriately led to a certain loss of meaning. These included 'increasingly', 'protests' and 'libraries'. Using *librairies* to translate the latter led of course to a definite loss of meaning. The use of an imaginary verb *expresser* had the same outcome. As far as accuracy is concerned, a large number of versions revealed the ability to cope capably with future and past tenses, adjectival agreements and negatives. The correct use of the subjunctive after 'I do not think' was quite common but by no means universal. However, it was very disappointing to see how few students could render the English passive in 'I have been told' in acceptable French. '*J'ai été dit*' was encountered more than anything else. In the last 'chunk' the English 'holding' and 'reading' also proved to be challenging. In the phrase 'those who express' the first word was given in various incorrect ways but rarely as *ceux*. The verb *préférer* was most often followed by *de* and a variety of prepositions was found after *essayer*.

Overall, however, the piece was handled satisfactorily. Full marks were not completely rare and many translations could be awarded a score of well above half marks. A few students struggled throughout the piece and could be given little or no credit but there were pleasingly not very many of these.

There were a few very creditable answers to the creative writing tasks but overall the responses were not impressive. As has been the case in previous sessions, the picture story, Q2(a) received most attention amongst the relatively small number of students who wrote creatively. Whilst some students produced good descriptions of the situation of the safari expedition, using a range of appropriate vocabulary, most struggled to construct a convincing, plausible story around the picture. Many concentrated on what had led up to the situation, giving rather long-winded accounts of how the people featured had come to be on a safari. Several pieces came to no conclusion, the story was left in mid-air. The reader was presumably expected to supply a satisfactory ending.

The least popular item in the whole paper was Q2(b) which required the candidate to finish off a short extract taken from a piece of fiction. Relatively few of those who chose to do this adequately explained why the couple were in possession of a large amount of money and why they were the object of interest to a policeman posted outside.

Usually Q2(c), the journalistic piece, engenders good answers from people who have very obviously been carefully prepared for this particular type of writing. There were a small number of such responses this year but not as many as in previous sessions. Most students were content to produce a rather, rambling, banal story which did not capture a particularly journalistic tone with features commonly found in newspaper articles. These accounts normally involved some sort of domestic dispute which had caused the mother to absent herself voluntarily for a certain period with her children. The discursive essays formed the most popular part of Section B. With so many students choosing one of the four titles there was inevitably a range of performance. All found something of value to say on the chosen subject and some produced excellent, well-reasoned pieces argued in accurate, appropriate French. Most essays treated both sides of an issue but there was no obligation to do this. The whole assessment range was available to a convincing treatment which dealt exclusively with one side of the debate.

Students found it relatively easy to deploy relevant points on Q2(b). In favour of tourism they spoke of economic advantages and employment opportunities. Some saw a benefit in the influx of people of a different culture and outlook. On the other hand there was much talk of environmental damage, of loss of identity, of inconvenience to locals and of a rising cost of living. The most convincing pieces illustrated their arguments with named locations. It was noticeable that most students set their treatment in the distant, exotic setting of emerging countries. It was somewhat surprising that relatively few talked of the effects of tourism on locations nearer to home when many writers must surely have lived in areas affected by tourism. A small number of essays did not concentrate solely on the effects on a region but spoke instead of the advantages and disadvantages of travel for an individual which was not closely relevant to the precise question set.

Similarly in Q2(e) a small number of students paid little attention to the word *professionnel* in the title, preferring instead to discuss the advantages or otherwise of sport in general on health and well-being. Those who did

address the task more relevantly commonly raised pertinent points such as excess pay and commercialism, drug taking, sports stars as role models, good or bad, for young people. Professional sport was said to bring undoubted pleasure to millions and to show the value of dedication and hard work. In general students seemed to be more well-disposed towards professional sport than opposed to it.

Q2(f) on the arts attracted the smallest number of takers but those who chose it seemed to have committed, heart-felt ideas. These sometimes led to digressions into a defence of the arts in general, which did not quite treat the exact question. Many of those who did address the concept of an elite rarely went beyond a consideration of money and finance. A few discussed whether one needed to be highly educated to appreciate artistic performances. Some students were of the opinion that only a privileged section of the community had the chance to practise the arts. There were many quite thoughtful reactions to this question.

Q2(g) on whether religion should figure in school life proved to be the most popular of the discursive titles, which came as a slight surprise to some examiners. It showed, however, that students' awareness was at the forefront of contemporary issues and events. A few were tempted to write exclusively about *laïcité* and some dwelt too long on whether the veil should be allowed in schools. Overall the consensus seemed to be that discussion of a range of religions should be permitted in schools, as this would lead naturally to greater understanding and tolerance and thence to a decline in extremism. On the other hand some saw the dangers of indoctrination and radicalisation. It was said that young people should be allowed to make up their own minds free of the influence of teachers or that it was the job of parents not schools to instruct their children in these matters. The greatest value of religious education was felt to be in the provision of a system of values for young people. This question gave rise to some good discursive writing in the true sense of the term.

Students produced a variety of ideas in this year's set of discursive essays. The standard of the French used varied somewhat but the forms of the language were in general pleasingly accurate and the desired message was conveyed. Most students were able to deploy some abstract language appropriate to the expression of ideas. The most widespread weakness was probably shown in the ability to manipulate the language with complex structures.

It is pleasing to note that hardly anyone set their Research Based Essay (RBE) in anything but a francophone context. Nor were there many instances this year of the rather strange habit of studying something in one of the possible four areas and then attempting to answer a question from a different area. Virtually all students obeyed the rather tight word limit, although some may have felt constrained by it. In the new specification there will be a recommended word limit but examiners will consider everything a candidate produces, although excess length does not often lead to enhanced performance.

As has been the case throughout the life of this specification, only a small number of students chose the Geographical Area option in Section C of the paper. Consideration of a variety of appropriate areas both within France and elsewhere was seen. Although it is stated very definitely in the specification that events which had or are having an impact on the selected area should be studied, most students found it hard to nominate an event which had affected their region. Some resorted to mentioning a very recent event, such as the election of a new President, but could not link this specifically to a particular region. Essays in which this happened could not attract much credit since a crucial part of the question was to assess the major impact an event had had on the region. Answers to Q3(a) were thus in general not at all impressive.

A period of francophone history again attracted a fair number of students. The overwhelming majority of these had studied the war-time Occupation of France. The task was to describe two people associated with the period and to determine which of the two had had the most influence. Amongst the personalities put forward for treatment, Jean Moulin featured a little. However, the two figures most commonly selected were Pétain and de Gaulle. These two and their actions were quite well described in many cases but few students were able to give an in-depth assessment of which of the two had had a greater influence. The most commonly expressed idea was that Pétain had had most effect on lives during the years of the Occupation but that de Gaulle had enjoyed greater long-term influence. This very tenable idea tended to be stated but little justification, illustration or proof was offered. Essays which relied mostly on description could be classed as very adequate but more reasoned analysis was required for them to be included in the good or very good category.

Part C of Section C has always been the least popular with students and only a very small number responded to Q3(c) in this session. Some were guilty of going too far back in history. France in the immediate post-war years or in 1968 cannot be deemed as suitable for contemporary study. Where candidate offered a more fitting subject, such as modern immigration, they typically began with a little description of associated problems, which was promising, but then proceeded to say what in their opinion **should** be done to solve them, rather than give details of what **has been** or **is being** done to this end. The essays thus revealed little evidence of careful study and research but turned more into a discursive essay rather than a RBE. Some credit could be given for the description but the lack of any meaningful analysis meant that such work could not gain many marks in total. This was another example of a failure to read questions carefully enough.

The task set as Q3(d), which was attempted by a large number of students, seemed a very straightforward one. Students were asked to describe an important character from a book or film and analyse that person's relationship with one or several others from the same source. However, several different approaches were commonly adopted which meant that the precise question was not answered closely. A considerable number of students wrote a lengthy and detailed character study of a person but ignored the requirement to discuss any sort of relationship. Conversely

some went straight into a consideration of the relationship between two or more people without specifically describing any one of them in any detail. In other versions one character was contrasted with another, which did not quite amount to a discussion of a relationship. Some students dealt at length with what a character was meant to represent which was again not quite the real point. This was commonly done with Meursault, presumably in an attempt to show their knowledge of the Absurd. Most of such essays revealed that the film or book had been studied in depth. The weakness was once again that many students did not read the question and consider its implications carefully enough before launching into their answer. With hindsight it might have been better to ask for a concentration on a relationship with one other person. Those who treated several people often ended up with a series of superficial depictions. The option of including several people had been included in case students wished to discuss a person's relationship with a block of characters, such as the teacher with his class in *Entre les murs*, or Meursault and the rest of the community to show his alienation from society, or Jo Joffo and those who would do him harm in *Un sac de billes*. Certainly, however, the most impressive essays were produced by those who described a character succinctly and then analysed that person's relationship with one other figure from the work studied.

In this last major session of this unit the performance of the students was very similar to that encountered on previous occasions. Examiners' reports have consistently pointed not to a widespread lack of knowledge in students or to an inability to express themselves in acceptable French but to a fairly common failure to address specific questions concisely. Students have often shown a tendency to write a response to what they would like to have been asked, rather than deal with the terms of the questions set. We look forward to seeing if this will not be the case when items to be studied are prescribed by the examining body.

