Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE in French (4FR0/02)
Pearson Edexcel Certificate in French (KFR0/02)

Paper 2: Reading and Writing

PEARSON

International GCSE/ Edexcel Certificate French
Unit 2: Reading & Writing
Examiner Report

General

This June 2016 session was the third for the specification, International GCSE French 4FR0, thus the third series in which the new specification for 4FR02 and KFR02, Reading and Writing was available, set in accordance to the specification for International GCSE French 4FR0 Issue 4.

There were some 9000 candidates, made up of 4FR0 and KFR0 candidates for this single tier qualification. This represented a further increase on the June 2015 candidature.

The marking principles and rubrics are unchanged and the total time allocated to this 60 mark paper remains 1 hour 30 minutes. Questions 1 to 5 were compulsory, and in Q6, candidates selected from three tasks, each worth the same 20 marks. The vast majority of candidates attempted all questions, and performed at all levels of attainment.

Teachers have obviously continued to support their candidates carefully in achieving some excellent performances which responded appositely to the demands of the paper. Three sets of past papers in addition plus the sample assessment materials are very useful preparation resources for candidates.

The questions all came from the five topic areas and their subtopic taking a variety of sources. The six questions were of increasing demand, with early questions targeting F and G grades, and Q6 seeking to elicit grades up to A and A* grades.

Q1 was worth 5 marks, and required candidates to indicate which foods featured in each image.

Q2 was a visual multiple choice question on school life worth 5 marks, where candidates read short sentences and crossed one of three images offered.

Q3a, again worth 5 marks, was a more extended passage on the writer's holiday, and candidates had to match the five pairs of sentence halves, from a choice of seven sentence endings, which tested understanding of this passage.

In Q3b, a free response on home offering up to 10 marks, (5 marks for Communication and Content, and 5 marks for Language), gave candidates four prompts which, in contrast to Q6, were merely suggestions, not requirements. Details taken from the passage could be reworked appropriately, and wholly relevant responses which ignored some or all of the prompts could obtain full marks.

Q4 was an extended passage about how pupils should make choices on their next phase in education. Five marks were on offer for the identification of the five sentences which correctly borne out the passage, from a total of ten sentences.

Q5 is the longest reading comprehension task, worth 10 marks; this session based on a substantial passage discussing aspects of life in the countryside. Responses were marked for communication only.

Twenty marks were available for any one of the three tasks in Q6, where Q6a was the most popular, Q6b was a little less so, and Q6c the least. Ten marks were on offer for Content, where, ideally, each of the four bullet points was addressed; 5 marks for Knowledge and Application of Language, and 5 marks for Accuracy of Language.

In Q1, 1 mark was available for each of five parts where candidates had to read the food, or an opinion of it, and match it with a cross to the food in the image. This question was very well attempted by candidates of all abilities, and there was a mean mark of near 100% success, as in the last two sessions. 99% success was attained in all parts. This question provided a most encouraging start for the whole candidature, from which it is evident that food is a familiar topic area.

Equally in Q2, there was overwhelming success in accessing the five available marks for the question based on school life, with all parts having a mean mark of 97% success, or better. The examples in Q1 and Q2, as later, showed candidates unfamiliar with the specification how to attempt the question. The error noticed by examiners was in (iii), where C was sometimes chosen for A. This may stem from candidates learning 'l'équitation' and 'la natation' as two activities which do not resemble their English equivalents, and confusing them. In (iv), a 'un repas chaud' was indicated, so there needed to be some processing of the fact that the image in C was a hot meal, not simply a sandwich as in B, which was offered by some candidates. In (v), there was roughly equal error between B and C, suggesting that 'flûte à bec' was not within the vocabulary of lesser able candidates.

The mean mark in Q3a was above 80% in all parts, with Q3a(3) being gained by 98% of candidates. Since this question targeted grades up to around the C grade, it is expected that there will a high level of success, but there was, never-the-less, some discrimination between parts. Candidates would be well advised to look at the sentence halves and to consider what is grammatically possible.

For example, Q3a(1) cannot match with B or D, simply because they begin with a vowel. Q3a(1) was matched with C, but while its distractor is E, incorrect answers varied without especial bias. Q3a(3) was very successful, so candidates across the ability range made the inference that 'le château et la cathédrale' are examples of 'des bâtiments historiques'. Q3a(4) was usually correct, but the grammatically correct distractor, C, was quite common. Q3a(5) was very successful, perhaps through general knowledge or personal opinion.

In Q3b candidates can recycle and adapt material from Q3a, and if incorporated appositely, it is well rewarded; but examiners are alert to excessive lifting and wholesale copying which cannot be credited greatly. Many candidates legitimately ignored material in Q3a in Q3b, and gained full credit. This task was generally very well undertaken, even better than in June 2005, with the mean mark up by about half a mark to 9.5 marks. Most candidates managed to write a good amount, relevantly. Some credit was lost where candidates wrote about holidays without expressing anything at all about what they liked about them.

As many candidates going on to attain B grades or better obviously attempted this question, there were very few un-rewardable or non-existent responses, and many which were happily far beyond the requirement of Q3b, being ambitious, lengthy and sophisticated in terms of lexis and grammar. Ten marks could be earned by work wholly in the present tense, but many candidates were insecure even in basic present and perfect tense formation, sometimes rendering the message barely comprehensible.

Anglicisms also impeded communication: 'les vacances sont affordable et enjoyable'. 'C'est très amusement'. Examiners were generous in their understanding of holiday activities, and there was consequently deemed to be relatively little irrelevance. Staycationers and those treating 'vacances' as 'vacances scolaires' could access full marks. There is no upper word limit, excessive word count per se does not increase scores.

The topic of choices in education seemed well within the scope of most candidates, and the mean mark approached 4 marks, with 4 being the modal mark. Though a close reading of the passage was rewarded, common sense could play a part: thus I and J are likelier than C. However, C was quite frequently chosen, and was not borne out by the passage, so may be more a guess based on personal perception. A was often correctly selected, H tended to be the most elusive part, as there had to be the processing of the fact that 'des classes où le nombre n'est pas trop élevé' related to 'les petites classes'. H discriminated well.

Q5 is marked for comprehension only, not language. The mean mark was over 5 marks once again, and 8 was the modal score, so candidates of all abilities obtained some decent scores on this question. In a one mark part, the first element is considered, and in a two mark part, the first two elements are considered, regardless of any extra details included. This marking principle rewards an accurate comprehension, rather than approximate or lengthy lifting from the passage. However a targeted lift can gain full credit. Candidates need to infer in some parts, and as in June 2015, such parts proved the most challenging.

Q5a provided an easy start, with most candidates scoring. 'elle travaille dans un hôpital' was rejected, as it does not specify that she is a nurse. The most frequent cause of lost credit in Q5b was an oblique lift from the third and fourth lines of the passage: 'le trajet est long et les trains sont peu fréquents'. This is true but does not give the inference needed to respond accurately, namely that a short journey, more frequent or cheaper trains would all help. Two details were needed.

In Q3c, again many candidates gave correct information, 'il travaille' au lycée' and this was sympathetically treated as a preamble, but only the better ones mentioned his work on the farm. Working at school is precluded by 'aussi' in the second sentence of the question part. A variety of prepositions was accepted: 'dans', 'sur' 'à' but 'de' was rejected as meaningless.

Q5d was largely accessed, and the treatment of 'le ciel était couvert' as a preamble ensured that correct references to rain or other plausible bad weather, scored.

Q5e was one of the least successful parts, as candidates seemed to struggle with the variant on the idiomatic 'comment vas-tu?' in this form. Therefore credit was given quite liberally, as long as the target was Hanan's better health or relief from asthma. The first time only that a candidate used the first person, one mark was withheld in an otherwise scoring part, as this is oblique: 'je ne souffre plus d'asthme' when Hanan is the focus of the question.

Q5f required inference as in Q5b, and despite the passage stating explicitly that public transport is good, many candidates, perhaps through general knowledge, cited it as one of the problems. Mention of needing a car also abounded erroneously. 'aller à la bibliothèque ou aux magasins' and its variants were a succinct route to two marks, proffered by a number of candidates.

In Q5f and Q5g, there was some overlap, and 'faire les courses' could score twice, for example. The question asks 'Que ferait Hanan...?' so 'membre d'un équipe de foot' needs a verb to score. 'boire' (t.c.) does not convey the conviviality of a drink in a caféor with friends so was too laconic and vague to score.

Some general points apply to all three Q6 tasks: il y a in any tense is taken as one word, as are proper nouns, names or titles, though this was not significant in Q6 in either this or the last session. There was no penalty for responses under 150 words, as they were simply assessed using the three mark grids, and there is no upper word limit. A word has a space either side of it, and was counted as the candidate presented it. There was no requirement to respond in a particular register, such as a blog style or letter format, and no credit was withheld or awarded per se for any register attempted. The examiner is looking chiefly to assess the response no its format.

While Q6c, possibly due to its different layout, was less popular, all questions attracted a large number of candidates and the questions were clearly within the range of many. Few really ineffective responses were found, though some candidates did not even attempt Q6, perhaps through unfortunate time management.

As always in Q6, the examiners are looking for candidates to respond plausibly and in decent French to all four bullet points, rather than treating the four points as four discrete questions in a reading comprehension. Communication and Content (C) marks were awarded as follows. These marks are maxima, and less could be awarded, for example, if bullet points are addressed tangentially.

• C9-10 maximum requires some response to all four bullet points. More successful candidates will develop their response to these bullet points.
• C7-8 maximum is where three bullet points are addressed, directly or partially.
• C-6 is the maximum where two or three bullet points have been omitted.
• Candidates must score in each of the three mark grids. Nought in any grid means nought overall for Q6. As in June 2014 and 2015, all of the Q6 tasks, the compulsory bullet points suggested the necessary range of time frames.

Question 6a

This was the most popular Q6, and most who attempted it managed to respond well, with plausible development.

Bullet 1: Most candidates gave a direct response, and expanded into how they obtained money, either from parents as pocket money, in return for helping at home, or through part-time work. Where there was overlap with Q6c, if relevant, it was of course fully rewardable. A few candidates plunged straight into bullet 2, and omitted bullet 1, thus capping their score at 8 for Content.

Bullet 2: This was often conflated with Bullet 3, but as long as there was response to both bullet points, credit could be fully awarded. Bullet 2 needs some development for better credit, so 'j'ai acheté une chemise, c'était bon' does address Bullet 2 and in some way Bullet 3, but it is rather superficial. Better responses developed a couple of advantages, such as the fact that having one's own money gives independence and to freedom to shop without recourse to parents, others developed the negative side: that earnings from a job meant that parents were less inclined to respond positively to requests to subsidise socialising.

Bullet 3: This was the most elusive part because candidates either ignored it, and wrote about purchases generally, or even about dream or future purchases. There needed to be a specific past purchase for full credit, and development on this point. 'J'ai acheté des bonbons hier. Ils étaient délicieux' would suffice as a simple level for a full bullet.

Bullet 4: The conditional notion was key to this bullet, and candidates need to pay careful attention to details of what is being asked. Many wrote about their own having to work or otherwise for money, but did not always give an opinion on this. An oblique response quite often seen related to whether children should work at all, but this did not target the 'argent de poche' side.

Question 6b

This was a popular choice, too, and candidates had a lot to write about technology. This was good, in that there was plenty of rich development, but sometimes there was a tendency for candidates to write all they had learnt or memorised on the subject, and there could be closer targeting of the bullet points.

Bullet 1: This was well attempted with most candidates giving a means of staying in contact, some development, and possibly some reason why other methods, such as texting or phoning, were less congenial. The comment above about candidates recounting all they knew what evident here, where a number of means of staying in touch were given, each with amplification, but without any personal preference, so these responses could not score fully.

Bullet 2: As in the third bullet point above, there needed to be an explicit past tense element, this time relating to school work. Less successful responses did not target school work, or discussed internet use generally, and either ignored the past notion, or talked about possible future uses, such as virtual classrooms.

Bullet 3: This bullet point was sometimes very well attempted with extended accounts of alternative activities. However, some candidates overlooked this bullet point more than any other, and others simply stated that it would be impossible. There was some contradiction, where a number of candidates answered as if the question targeted a month without computers, so they stated that they would fall back on mobile phones to access to their Facebook accounts.

Bullet 4: This was a catch-all bullet point which any candidate who chose this topic seemed happy to address to some degree. Responses varied from the superficial, 'les gens ne parlent pas beaucoup', through the canonical references to sedentary lifestyles and internet security, to more innovative responses, about the death high street shopping, classroom teaching in schools and global terrorism through the dark web.

Question 6c

This was the least popular question, as is sometimes the case with such questions, it elicits polarised responses: some answers were detailed and original, others struggled with the vocabulary needed and expressed few thoughts.

Bullet 1: There was a past tense in each of the questions, so there was comparability between the three options, and a full bullet point was awarded only if there was a past notion here. There needed to be a personal angle, rather than general comments about whether children should help at home or not.

Bullet 2: This bullet point requires an opinion on having to help in the home, and recounting how children help or not did not respond fully, as the opinion was lacking. 'J'aide à la maison pour obtenir mon argent de poche' overlapped somewhat with Q6a, but did not develop relevantly enough.

Bullet 3: This bullet point could earn full credit with reference to times in the day or week, or an age, so ' J'aide à faire la vaisselle après le dîner' or 'J'aide chez moi depuis l'âge de dix ans' were both direct responses which could be developed profitably. Less effective answers did not heed the specific demands of the bullet points, and wrote about helping more generally.

Bullet 4: 'conseils' was not understood by all candidates, but a generous view of advice was accepted, and 'Tu devrais aider chaque jour' would have been the beginning of a direct response. Advice varied from standing one's ground in doing nothing to help, justified by the heavy burden of school work, to the need to help as much as possible, given that parents have the twin stresses of parenting and providing financially.

In some instances, as per previous sessions, there was sophisticated vocabulary and grammar usage, worthy of good A level candidates. après avoir, depuis, pronoun objects, demonstratives and si clauses were all often well-handled. There was good control of varied tenses and a range of linking structures and time frames, but in other instances, there is room for revision of basic structures, with reference to the programme of grammar study. Thus where the past, conditional and future notions were required in direct response to various bullet points, some candidates sometimes ignored or mangled them.

There was a tendency for some lesser able candidates to include gratuitous subjunctives, complicated conditional constructions and artificially frequent or convoluted idioms which were not always successful or apposite. Candidates might be better advised to use structures with which they are more comfortable and to deploy them appropriately, for when the message is so obscured by infelicitous constructions, the content mark suffers. Attention to basic matters, such as singular verbs with singular subjects, and adjectival agreement would enhance many performances.

The following guidance is based on June 2016 performance and might be of use in preparation for future sessions:

There are twenty marks on offer for non-verbal questions, and there is an incline of difficulty. Credit can be maximised by checking these questions.

1. Q3b offers suggested prompts for candidates addressing the question, but even more able candidates should heed the demands of the task. In this session, home area rather than home was sometimes the erroneous focus.

2. In Q6, directly addressed bullet points which are then relevantly developed are the most rewardable. Attention really needs to be given to targeting the bullet points.

3. Q5 is marked for communication only, but answers need to be unambiguous and targeted. Candidates should note the specific demands, including the tense, of the question.

4. Some parts may require inference and therefore manipulation of the passage. Lifts may be rejected if they are oblique.

5. In Q3, sentence halves had to be matched. Attention to grammatical accuracy will help candidates to narrow somewhat the possible correct pairs. Candidates should allow within the 90 minutes allocated to check grammar and spelling generally, and to ensure that responses target clearly the question or all bullet points.

6. Word counts are suggested minima, there being no maxima. In Q3b, a 50 word response can gain 10 marks, in Q6 a 150 word response can receive 20 marks.

7. Candidates are referred once again this session to the linguistic structures on pp29-30 of the Specification. This list is only indicative of the range and constructions which could be expected.

Grade Boundaries

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

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