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French (8190/9190)

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Examiners' Report

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AS Unit 1 (6441) - Listening and Writing

Some 1900 candidates sat this paper, which was an increase on previous January entries. The style of paper remained similar to that used in previous sessions, and the allocated one hour appeared sufficient for most candidates to complete the paper. The only apparent difference was that candidates in Q1 were required to place a cross in one of three multiple choice boxes to indicate their response, rather than simply placing a tick next to their chosen response. This change was clearly explained on the front cover of the paper. The candidates' cassette contained, as is customary, four passages whose total duration was just over 5 minutes. Passage 1, relating to Q1, was a multiple choice exercise worth 4 marks, which dealt with an SNCF initiative to encourage holidaymakers to travel by train. Passage 2, divided into two parts which related to Q2 and Q3 respectively, was about an exhibition concerning the history of the Tour de France. In Q2, worth 4 marks, candidates chose correct responses from a pool of target language items and in Q3, worth 6 marks, candidates had to select the only possible phrase to complete the sentence correctly, and to write the letter of that phrase in the grid provided. Passage 3 related to a restoration project at the *château de Versailles*, and provided the stimulus for Q4, a target language comprehension test worth 12 marks, and for Q5, worth 16 marks. In Q5, candidates were required in (a), to give their opinions based on Passage 3, and in (b), to respond more personally and generally on justifiable types of building preservation. Passage 4 consisted of a report on Edouard Safres, the oldest candidate to sit the *baccalauréat*. Q6 was a guided summary in English from Passage 4, worth a total of 8 marks.

Assessment Principles

In Q1 and Q3, only 0 or 1 could be scored for each part, with a single correct response being accepted. Similarly in Q2, only one response could gain credit, but recognisable and unambiguous misspellings were accepted. As in previous sessions, examiners assessed responses in Q4 and Q6 in the order that elements were written by the candidates, and considered no more elements than the number of marks available. For instance, in a one mark question, only the first element of the response offered would gain credit. Repeating the question, or preambles to an acceptable response, did not count as elements in the response. While harmless additions did not cause credit to be withheld, vitiation through incorrect additions did. In Q5, (a) and (b) were considered independently of one another. In either case, candidates needed to gain at least 1 mark for Content to access any marks at all for Language, and *vice versa*. In Q5, examiners read no further than the end of the sense group after 40 words in either response. In Q6, given that it is a summary exercise, and whole sentences are not required, examiners did not credit responses after the 60th word.

Candidates' responses

Question 1

The great majority of candidates gained all four available marks, and this question, as intended, was therefore accessible to nearly all candidates. (a) and (b) were generally correctly answered. (c) was somewhat less successfully undertaken, with *cars* being mistaken for *des voitures* by many of the candidates who did not answer correctly. (d) enabled most candidates to gain the mark, and of those who did not, many selected *le coût avantageux seulement*, which suggests that *embouteillages* was not understood as a factor which would slow holidaymakers down.

Question 2

This was again answered with a high degree of success, and the vast majority of candidates gained the maximum four marks available. Although credit was not withheld where the correct response was chosen, but incorrectly copied, a significant minority of candidates could exercise more care in copying spellings and accents. Few candidates left unfilled gaps, and most errors appeared to be phonetic, rather than due to misunderstanding of the context. Therefore in (a), where 85% of candidates gained the mark, *une cinquantaine* was the most frequent incorrect alternative. All but 2% of responses were correct to (b), making it the most successfully attempted part of the paper. In (c), a few candidates did not take account of *moins* and wrote *inconfortables*. Among the 80% of correct responses, as alluded to above, *comfortables* was not infrequent. In (d), *professionnel* was the most common incorrect response. *determine*, devoid of accents, was accepted, and occurred in a noticeable minority of responses.

Question 3

Most candidates succeeded in scoring reasonably well on this question, and a majority gained all the available marks. Few candidates chose a given letter twice, or left blanks in the grid. In both Q2 and Q3, many candidates, even when choosing an incorrect response, were guided by grammatical considerations, and avoided responses which would have rendered the sentences ungrammatical. 92% of candidates gained the mark in (i). Those who did not nevertheless usually selected a construction with *être*, and perhaps did not understand *étape*. (ii) was again very successful, as were (v) and (vi), correct responses accounting for 77%, 89% and 87% of candidates respectively. Candidates were able to use adjectival endings to guide their choice of response. (iii) was correctly attempted by 63% of candidates, while many thought incorrectly that the stick had a defensive purpose. 65% of answers to (iv) were correct. Misunderstanding of *sacoche* and *outil*, coupled with unfamiliarity with *soi-même* were potential causes of error.

Question 4

This question discriminated effectively, such that candidates across the ability range gained reasonable credit. Simple responses which targeted the questions, rather than simply lifted from the passage were often fully rewardable. The majority of candidates gained over half the available marks, often accessing both available marks in two mark parts. Few candidates either scored 0, or attempted no parts of Q4. Dates and numbers were frequently inaccurately rendered, and the tenses of verbs were often erroneous, especially given the tense in which the question was asked. If passive forms were incorrect but recognisable and unambiguous, they were rewarded. Responses with more elements in them than the marks available sometimes caused candidates not to access full marks.

Q4(a)

74% of candidates responded correctly. Untargeted lifts accounted for many of the remaining 26%: *une programme pour la restauration du château* targets the programme, rather than the renovation itself. *restoration* was a frequent and acceptable misspelling of *restauration*.

Q4(b)

The correct spelling of *vingt* or *vingtaine* was required to score, which happily affected relatively few candidates adversely. Recognising that *vingtaine* is an approximation, between 2024 and 2028 were acceptable dates of completion. A preposition such as *en* or *dans* was needed to gain the mark, since without one, the response was oblique. Some candidates did not score, since *les travaux vont durer*

vingt ans does not indicate the start date of these renovations. *ans* or *années* were misspelt by a significant number of candidates.

Q4(c)

68% of candidates scored 0 in this part, and few gained both marks. It was envisaged that either the notions of more rooms open, after the renovations; or as more rooms will be open, it suggests that some are currently closed, would be offered. A significant minority of candidates wrote one correct element, often relating to more rooms being open later, but without reference to the renovations. *sale(s)* was a frequent misspelling of *salle(s)*. Responses were credited if they targeted renovations to the *château*, but not to *statues* or more generally *bâtiments*.

Q4(d)

Again relatively few candidates gained both available marks, while 65% gained no credit. *A votre avis* was not well handled on the whole, since many candidates did not make suggestions within the context, and others sought in vain for material in the passage. Any plausible facilities were accepted, such as *les visites*, *les tours*, *les salles de classe*, *les livres sur le château*. However *l'histoire* and *les peintures* exemplify aspects of Versailles which might interest the tourist, but which do not address the provision of teaching or educational facilities directly, so were not credited. Frequently candidates responded erroneously to the supposed question of whether such facilities would be beneficial or not.

Q4(e)

Happily most candidates, 56%, gained both available marks, communicating with various degrees of comprehensibility that handicapped visitors will benefit from better conditions at Versailles. Incorrect but unambiguous passive attempts were accepted, such as *ils seront accueillerai*. Plausible examples were credited: *il y aura des rampes*; *les portes seront élargies*. *meilleure condition* in the singular was frequently written and accepted. *meilleur* and especially *accueillir* were sometimes so misspelt as to impede communication, so one mark was withheld.

Q4(f)

Given the tense of the question, the present or future tense was required, hence a conditional or past tense invalidated one mark. As in (e), the most frequent score was 2 marks. *le premier parti* was accepted, provided that it was disambiguated by *des travaux* or *du travail* after it. The correct spelling of *la première partie* was rare. If the notion of finishing was present, and the rest of the response was incorrect, but within the context, one mark was awarded, as in *les rampes pour les handicapés seront finies*. Some candidates gained only one mark, as they believed that the whole project, not just the first phase, would be complete by 2009.

Q4(g)

Over three-quarters of candidates gained the mark here in the best answered part of Q4. A few candidates omitted the currency, wrote *milliards*, or mistook *cent* for *cing* at the beginning of the number. Candidates can confine themselves in Q4 to figures, and some who provided words and figures vitiated their response: *13500000 Euros (cent-trente-cinq millions d'euros)*

Q4(h)

Almost equal numbers of candidates scored as did not in this part, with many candidates writing: *c'est la première fois. siècle*, not infrequently spelt *ciècle*, and

19th, considered to be an English spelling, did not score. *dix-neufième* was a common, acceptable misspelling. A preposition was not necessary to gain the mark, but *avant le dix-neuvième siècle* vitiated the response. Untargeted lifts merely containing the right date were unsuccessful, such as *c'est la première fois depuis le dix-neuvième siècle*.

Question 5

Many candidates responded appropriately to the tasks set, and confined their responses to the word limits. However a number of candidates still do not vary the emphasis between (a) and (b), and scores were generally lower in (b) than (a), or indeed, than in the last session. While only 1% of candidates failed to gain any credit in (a), 13% of candidates obtained no marks for either Content or Language in (b), due largely to untargeted responses, or where no type of building to be preserved was even implicitly indicated. Generally, candidates averaged slightly higher Language than Content marks. References to the First World War seemed implausibly frequent, but given responses centring on the Treaty of Versailles, not the *château* itself, a number of candidates had seized upon the historical context, rather than on the details given in the passage. There was evidence of sophisticated structures, such as appropriate subjunctives, varied forms of opinion, passive constructions in tenses other than the present tense, and preceding direct object agreement. There was sometimes excess opinion, which used up words gratuitously: *En ce qui me concerne, je pense que...* However there was widespread error in tense choice and formation, use of accents, and adjectival agreements, including in responses which also exhibited some of the impressive items mentioned above. The present passive, part of the programme of study, was not always well rendered, with common incorrect formations, such as *le château doit préserver; les murs sont repeindre/ repeint*.

Q5(a)

The overwhelming majority of candidates scored, and the wide range of details about the restoration work at Versailles allowed 99% of candidates to give some rewardable opinion about the project. The most frequent score was 3 for both Content and Language, with most candidates viewing the restoration positively. The most successful responses developed elements of the passage with personal opinion and further insight or contrast. For example a successful line was reference to repainting, followed by consideration of the wider economic benefits which a restored *château* would bring to the whole region. An original tack was discussion of what cost over several years was entailed by the restoration work, and how this money could have been better deployed on social problems, while admitting the benefits for handicapped visitors. Nuanced responses were sometimes particularly effective and succinct: *Quoiqu'il coûte beaucoup, ce projet est utile, pour que les enfants apprennent l'histoire du château qui sera très beau*. The majority of candidates dealt more or less effectively with educational and access benefits, the increased tourist numbers, and the importance of preserving a national landmark. The gender of *idée* was frequently incorrect, and less successful responses frequently involved untargeted lifting of elements, evidently from Q4, and offered without much of the necessary personal opinion. The responses which scored highly were not necessarily the most complex, but consisted of clear opinion, and possibly inference, based on a number of elements gleaned from the passage.

Q5(b)

Scores were generally lower than in (a), and 2 marks each for Content and Language were most often awarded, with responses frequently rather vague, and lacking insight or development. A number of candidates displayed from their

responses probable incomprehension of *bâtiments*, or thought that Versailles was still being discussed, so referred, for example to the Hall of Mirrors. 13% of candidates did not score at all, since they did not mention a specific type of building, as in *les bâtiments sont importants à préserver par ce qu'ils sont très beaux*. Some candidates repeated their response to (a), but given that the emphasis in (b) was on the type of building, rather than the type of work undertaken, these responses were not wholly successful. Historical buildings were most frequently identified as worth preserving, with reference to their place in a country's heritage, and the legacy that would be lost to future generations if they were not preserved. Although reference to Versailles was legitimate, many candidates confined their responses to this building, rather than considering a wider range. Another familiar line was the fact that all buildings should be preserved. If nuanced this was sometimes convincing: *A mon avis on devrait préserver tous les bâtiments, mais il faut choisir les bâtiments plus historiques. Il n'y a pas assez d'argent pour préserver tous. les statues* were incorrectly considered by a minority of candidates to be buildings.

Question 6

The English summary is a familiar question type, but the number of candidates who exceeded the 60 word limit was greater than in previous sessions, often attributable to convoluted responses in (c). This depressed to some extent scores in (d), but especially (e). A significant number of candidates continue gratuitously to respond in full sentences, hence wasting words. Fortunately almost no candidates responded in French. However candidates should check that individual words have not accidentally been written in French. Q6 provided a wide range of achievement, with a heartening number of candidates gaining at least 6 marks.

Q6(a)

53% of candidates gained the mark in (a). Some candidates understood the fact that Edouard was the oldest candidate, but vitiated their response by incorrect translations of *quatre-vingts*: *he was the oldest candidate at 45 years old*. Others did not convey the superlative notion, *oldest*. *se presenter* was mistaken for *passing* the examination in a noticeable number of responses.

Q6(b)

Most candidates gained some credit, often not gaining the second mark because they presented three elements in a two mark question: *law, Italian and science*. *italien* was a French spelling from which credit was withheld. *italien en deuxième langue étrangère* was mistaken by a number of candidates for Italian plus two other languages. Although it is true that Edouard had been a civil servant and lawyer, these are not school subjects, as required by the question.

Q6(c)

Candidates frequently rendered their responses ambiguously by an unclear use of *his*: *his father was not pleased with his education*, and examiners were as sympathetic as possible to what was logical. However suggestion that Edouard's father was still living vitiated one mark: *his father thinks that it is amazing*. *Edouard's father was an extraordinary man* was treated not as the first element, but as a preamble. Candidates needed to indicate that his father's disappointment was about Edouard's learning in school, not about his work generally, nor about the quality of the education he received. Therefore *his father felt that he was badly educated* or *his father was disappointed with his work* were not sufficiently targeted, so did not score. The second mark proved especially elusive, and required the notion of remedying the fact that Edouard had disappointed his father

during his education. *Edouard is now trying to repair his fault* was not acceptable, as the idea of *making amends* was sought.

Q6(d)

In order to gain the two available marks, two of three possible correct elements had to be offered. *He worked for eight hours per day* was incomplete, and required *...for ten months* to gain the mark. *He memorised thousands of pages*, or some equally great quantity of pages was sought, while *he memorised many pages* was not specific enough to score, and *millions* or even *billions of pages* were implausible. 41% of candidates gained 1 or 2 marks respectively, and the majority of candidates gained a mark for the fact that he worked *alone*.

Q6(e)

Many candidates did not target the notion of the main quality required, and 61% did not gain the mark. Succinct responses were most successful: *want it, determination, desire. To be able to and want to* did not identify the principal quality, but simply offered two qualities with equal weighting, so did not score. *To be able to and especially to want to* therefore gained the mark, as it prioritised the notion of wanting success, over the ability to succeed. *to want to* made no sense in response to the question, so gained no credit, whereas *to want to succeed* was creditable. Untargeted responses accounted for many 0 scores in (e).

Advice and Guidance

1. Candidates need to ensure the accuracy of their written French, particularly in basic constructions. Inaccurate tense formation and verb conjugation, or omitted prepositions, can impede comprehension.
2. Teachers might consider dictating short sentences and phrases, to hone the correct spelling of numbers, use of accents, and verbal and adjectival endings.
3. Candidates need to experience a broad range of stimuli, leading both to verbal and non-verbal responses. This prepares them for a variety of question types.
4. Candidates should practise focusing their responses on the question asked, since oblique or untargeted responses may score less well, even when the relevant section of the passage has been correctly understood.
5. In Q4 especially, candidates are required to draw inferences from the passage, and they should practise questions which require opinions which are plausible within the context, but not explicitly given in the passage.
6. In Q5 and Q6, candidates must practise writing succinctly and within the word limits.
7. In Q5, candidates must remind themselves that (a) and (b) may both require personal responses, but with somewhat different focuses.

AS Unit 2 (6442) - Reading and Writing

Description of the Unit

Four passages were set to test comprehension using a range of verbal and non-verbal question types. In addition, there was a test of continuous writing in French in response to a structured outline based on a stimulus passage, both expressed in French. In setting the material, the examiners consulted the tables of assessment objectives on pages 8 and 13 of the Specification, General Topic Areas 1 - 3 on page 15, the description of the Unit on page 19 and the Notes for Guidance on page 88.

Q1, worth 5 marks, was an exercise based on a short passage about a young man from Guadeloupe. Candidates answered in a true or false grid. The candidates had to correct the statement if it was false. Passage two concerned an initiative to bring neighbours together. Q2 (8 marks) required the finding of an equivalent in the text. Q3 (5 marks) was a new question type, which required candidates to compare life in the flats before and after the party. Passage 3 concerned the lifestyle of a man who had chosen not to work in a conventional way. Q4 (10 marks) required answers in French to questions in French about the passage. Passage 4 concerned the development of the *Livre de Poche*. Q5 (12 marks) required answers in English to questions in English about the passage. In Q6 (40 marks) candidates had to write an article of 140 - 160 words in French about school life following a visit to France.

Assessment Principles

The 28 marks available for questions 1 - 4 were awarded positively for correct information successfully retrieved and conveyed. Credit was withheld if understanding was not conveyed. No half-marks were awarded. For all questions, the draft mark scheme was amended in the light of the candidates' responses.

For Qs 1, 2 and 3 candidates received 1 or 0 for each part of the question.

In Q4, credit was given for the required information in French, whether in complete sentences or not, provided that errors of language did not obscure transmission of meaning. As the rubric was missing from the paper, answers in English were also accepted.

In Q5, the marks were awarded for transfer of meaning from French into acceptable and unambiguous English. As the rubric was missing from the paper, answers in French were also accepted.

In Q6, under a generic mark scheme for content, candidates were assessed for their degree of success in completing the task (20 marks). 20 marks were awarded for quality of French. For Communication, the examiners took account of factors such as the candidates' understanding of the scenario, their degree of success in addressing and developing the four bullet points within the word limit, the overall structure and coherence of the answer and the suitability of the format adopted for the article. For Quality of Language, marks were awarded for correct French which conveyed meaning, within the confines of the Grammar syllabus on pages 47-48, and for the range and variety of structure and lexis used; there was no negative

marking. Language falling outside the defined grammar syllabus was ignored, e.g. the conditional perfect tense.

Candidates' Responses

A wide range of achievement was represented.

Generally, the basic meaning of the passages was understandable and the subject matter was accessible and largely familiar. Nevertheless, large numbers of candidates once again lost marks probably within their grasp because they did not read the passages and the questions closely enough, or did not pay sufficient attention to the articulation of their answers.

Passage 1 Question 1

Marks were lost most commonly by misunderstanding the words *métropole* and *réputée*.

Passage 2 Question 2

Most candidates understood the passage and the requirements of the question. However, many candidates lost marks in questions (f) and (h).

Passage 2 Question 3

This question type was an innovation. Most candidates understood the need to give information about what happened after the party. However, some candidates thought they had to give an equivalent and others answered in an elliptical fashion.

Passage 3 Question 4

- (a) Many candidates copied phrases from the text, which could not be rewarded.
- (b) Most candidates understood that Fabrice's reading had influenced his decision.
- (c) Few candidates understood the question or found it difficult to express their answer in understandable French.
- (d) Most candidates understood the implications of this question.
- (e) Few could handle the past tense (perfect or imperfect) needed for an answer.
- (f) There was widespread misunderstanding about the meaning of *trous*.
- (g) Probably as a consequence of the above, few managed to apply the idea of gaps in a CV to Fabrice's circumstances.
- (h) There was a lot of misunderstanding of the question *est-il* and consequently candidates often did not directly answer the question about Fabrice's particular position

Passage 4 Question 5

Once again the misunderstanding of some key words led many candidates to invent often bizarre answers. Those key words were:

grands textes, librairie, déchire, concurrence, innover, les grands auteurs, romans policiers, ventes, une hausse.

- (a) The misunderstanding of *grand* led to widespread error.
- (b) Few candidates understood the events that led to Filipacchi's big idea.
- (c) Most candidates understood the idea of greater access but little else.
- (d) This question was generally understood.
- (e) A lot of candidates answered this question well.
- (f) Because *ventes* was not generally known, many candidates could not answer this question.
- (g) Many answers were based on "Roman" and "politics".

Passage 5 Question 6

Content

There were few answers that were too short but there were very many that were too long. A candidate's mark is greatly reduced if they do not answer the bullet points within the word limit. Most candidates addressed the points in order. However, bullet one was often answered as a description of a school day. This first bullet point often took up too much of the article. The second of the bullet points was often only partially answered. Candidates should be encouraged to answer both parts of a question where two are asked. Bullet point three was often not addressed or was taken to be a school subject and summarily dismissed. Bullet four was often only partially answered, as many candidates did not understand *inquiétudes*. The most successful candidates fully addressed all parts of the four bullet points in order and in separate paragraphs. They also developed each of their points with a clear sentence or two of explanation or illustration.

Quality of language

Written accuracy was poor for the majority of candidates. Gender, adjectival agreement, and spelling were erratic. The lack of ability to handle forms of the present and perfect tenses in the first and third person is still a major weakness for a very large number of candidates. Verb endings were once more haphazard in the majority of candidates. The most successful candidates managed to produce grammatically accurate sentences that contained subordinate clauses.

Notes for Guidance

- 1 Candidates should read the paper carefully. They should not begin answering a question until they have read the specific instructions for it. The wording of the question should be studied closely and answers should be related to the stimulus passage.

- 2 The whole text of passages 1 - 4 should be read before the questions are attempted. Candidates should try to identify the overall theme and the thread of any argument.
- 3 Candidates should be aware that the questions on passages 1 - 4 will be of varying difficulty, and that some will require deductions to be made or inferences to be drawn.
- 4 In answering questions on passages 3 and 4, candidates should try to ensure that their answer provides a **direct response** to the question set.
- 5 Answers in English should be checked for clarity and logic.
- 6 When attempting Q6, candidates should: (i) read the whole rubric carefully (ii) write within the word limits, since short answers will be self-penalising and excess beyond 160 words will not be marked (iii) try to allocate time for systematic checking of basic grammar.
- 7 In preparing for Q6, candidates should have experience of writing letters (formal and informal), reports and articles.
- 8 The instructions and guidance given in the Specification and the Teachers' Guide should be followed.
- 9 Candidates should write their final answers in ink.
- 10 Candidates should write within the borders of the page and avoid use of supplementary pages whenever possible.

AS Unit 3 (6443) - Prepared Oral Topic

The purpose of this unit is to give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their level of oral proficiency while allowing them a considerable degree of personal choice and freedom. The required personal research will enable them to "*explore and develop their understanding of the contemporary society, cultural background and heritage of one or more of the countries whose language is being studied*" (Specification Page 7).

The test is designed to:

- assess the candidates' ability to present information and opinion about a topic relating to a francophone country.
- assess the quality of language used by the candidates when doing this.
- assess the extent of the candidates' knowledge and understanding of the topic.
- assess the candidates' ability to engage in a genuine, spontaneous discussion on their chosen topic.

As there is a relatively small entry in January this report will pay particular attention to a limited number of areas that sometimes gave cause for concern.

Preparation for the Test

1. *Choice of Topic*

"Students will be required to prepare a topic dealing with an aspect of culture and/or society in the relevant country of the target language..." (Specification Page 21)

It is important to remember that at AS Level Assessment Objective 4 (Knowledge of society/culture) is only tested in the Oral Examination. As this is 15% of the total AS assessment, it is clearly vital to select an appropriate topic and approach it correctly.

General advice has been given on the choice of topic in previous subject reports; it is essential that Centres consider whether the discussion can retain a Target Language focus throughout the test, as well as whether it will give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate both Knowledge *and Understanding* in addition to a range of language.

Centres should bear in mind that a number of former French colonies, such as Algeria and Morocco, no longer have French as an official language. Choices which focus on the French influence, the time as a French colony or wars of independence will be appropriate. Those which deal vaguely with geography, holidays, or even current politics, will not. This January there were also problems with tests on Haiti and Rwanda; if tests are to be conducted on countries where French is only one of two or more official languages the francophone context must be clear throughout. **As has always been the case, if there is any doubt about the topic choice, guidance should be sought from Edexcel.**

Despite advice offered in previous subject reports, some candidates continue to prepare topics that contain comparisons with or refer at length to a non-francophone country, thus reducing the relevance of the discussion and the

opportunity for the candidates to display extensive Knowledge and Understanding. Any comparison with other countries (unless French-speaking) should not form the title of the topic or appear as a heading on the oral form, nor should it be invited by the examiner.

Some centres allowed their candidates to select a title formulated as a question. This was of no benefit; if the candidates failed to address or answer the question posed there was an effect on the mark for Knowledge and Understanding. Such tests sometimes resembled Unit 4.1 too closely and did not retain the necessary focus on the TL context throughout.

In a very few instances candidates from the same centre chose the same topic, sometimes with identical headings on the Oral Form. Although the Specification does not forbid this practice, it is against the spirit of the examination and can lead to almost identical tests as well as making the teacher examiner's job more difficult, particularly in respect of unpredictable questions.

2. Source Material

"In preparation..., students will need to research their chosen area and undertake extended reading from a variety of sources in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the contemporary society and/or cultural heritage of the target-language countries or communities."

Thorough research is an integral part of the preparation for this unit. The Examiners remain very concerned by the fact that a number of candidates gave little evidence of having addressed this area of preparation. A few facts from a course book or a single newspaper article are insufficient; the evidence gleaned from research should underpin the tests, enabling candidates to demonstrate thorough knowledge and understanding. Examiners continue to express concern that a minority of candidates choose to rely on anecdote and limited personal experience of, for example, an area of France visited on holiday.

It is wise, and educationally sound, to remind candidates that facts found on the Internet may be out-of-date, biased or inaccurate. Proffered facts must be accurate.

As in previous sessions, the best tests were those where the candidates had a genuine interest in the topic chosen, had carried out sensible research and were given every opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of facts and their understanding of the French context, supporting what they were saying with evidence.

Many centres are to be commended for facilitating this research and supporting their students in this integral element of the Unit. It was also a pleasure to listen to well-researched tests on more original topics eg *Michel Odent et son travail*, *Le canal du Midi*, *Blaise Pascal* and *les fromages savoyards*.

3. Oral Forms

"[Students]...will be permitted to take into the examination a list of 5 - 10 target-language headings, as a prompt to remind them of key aspects of the topic."

Despite detailed advice given in previous reports, there were still a number of oral forms that were inappropriately completed. Some of these were from new centres so it is important to underline the importance of the Oral Forms.

They should give the title of the topic selected and between five and ten brief target-language headings. (If for any reason a teacher examiner is unable to conduct the oral tests, another examiner should be able to work from these forms with no difficulty.)

Headings should *not* be the first 3 - 4 words of each sentence of the presentation; such headings are completely meaningless and give no indication of the research undertaken. It is also very difficult to credit the "unpredictable" discussion (see below). Some candidates simply list up to 10 questions that they are prepared to answer and these are addressed in the same order by the teacher examiner, with no addition or variation. Yet others list all the factual information, dates, figures, statistics or proper names required in various headings; if these provide the only factual information proffered in the test the candidates are unlikely to attain a high mark for Knowledge and Understanding. It is also important that the overall title, in French, be given. There is no value in including in the headings *Introduction, Mon opinion, pourquoi j'ai choisi ce sujet, où j'ai trouvé l'information* or *Conclusion*.

Centres are reminded that the forms should be completed by the candidates themselves, although teacher examiners may check them and ensure that the candidates submit forms completed in accurate French. There were instances of teacher examiners completing all their candidates' forms. There were also forms completed in red or green ink, and in pencil; the latter was nearly illegible.

4. Practice

Preparation for a genuine oral discussion must clearly form a vital part of the AS course. This does not, however, mean rehearsing the entire test beforehand. If the candidates carry out careful research and have regular linguistic practice in maintaining a discussion on any topic at all, recognising and responding correctly to the various means used by Examiners to seek further information, opinion, exemplification or clarification, they will be prepared for a lively and spontaneous discussion on the chosen topic. One effect of this test should be to give candidates confidence in maintaining a discussion in French; over-preparation or excessive rehearsal will mean that they lose confidence in their ability to say anything if it has not been scripted and learned by heart beforehand. This would seem to run counter to the aims of language-learning in general and this examination in particular. Although the majority of tests were conducted in the correct spirit, those tests that were not at all spontaneous stood out for their lack of authenticity.

Conduct of the Test

The test should last for 10 - 12 minutes. The candidates are first invited to make a presentation of the chosen topic lasting 1 - 2 minutes. This presentation may well be learned by heart, as it gives the candidates the opportunity to overcome initial nerves and feel ready to embark upon the discussion. If possible, candidates should be dissuaded from presenting their topic unnaturally fast. The best presentations are those that set out clearly the candidates' line of thinking and the aspects of the topic that they have prepared. Less successful are those which

consist of a simple reading of the headings on the form, or alternatively, use up all the factual information and statistics that the candidates have learned.

At the end of the presentation (or at two minutes if the candidates seem likely to speak for too long) the examiner will effect a move to the discussion, seeking information from the candidates supported by example, clarification, detail and opinion. (There were a number of examples this January of teacher examiners allowing candidates to speak uninterrupted for as long as 5 minutes. This is of no benefit.) The examiner will be prepared for the general lines of the discussion by previous study of the Oral Form (see above) and will also develop it further by responding to points made by the candidates or by selecting an aspect indicated on the form. It is very important for the teacher examiner to listen to what candidates say and to respond appropriately; there were examples this January of candidates making factual errors that could well have been corrected had the teacher examiner sought brief clarification. Such questions as *"Vraiment? Je ne savais pas ça!"*, or *"C'était bien mille neuf cents?"* can give candidates the chance to rescue a situation that may have arisen from a simple slip of the tongue. It is also important that the conversation be as natural as possible in the circumstances. This discussion will be pursued in such a way as to enable the candidates to demonstrate their control of the language as well as knowledge and understanding of the topic chosen.

It is not necessary to cover all the headings offered on the form in the course of discussion, and it will not have a negative effect on the candidates' marks if they are not. Although it is not wrong to work through the headings as they stand, this tends to lead to an unnatural discussion, encouraging the production of pre-learned speeches, which should be avoided. The test should be brought to a smooth conclusion after 10 to 12 minutes; there is no benefit to be gained by long tests, since examiners are instructed to stop marking after the allocated time.

"Examiners will also be expected to test students on their ability to engage in a conversation that goes beyond the target-language headings but remains within the chosen topic area." (Specification, Page 21)

This is the element that is referred to as the "unpredictable" area, that is to say questions **on the topic** but not to be anticipated from the headings submitted. It may be that these unpredictable areas arise naturally in the course of the discussion; if they do not, it is part of the examiner's responsibility to ensure that this requirement is addressed. "Unpredictable" questions should *not* be general ones on eg the candidates' taste in films, leisure activities, future or holiday plans or their smoking and drinking habits. Despite advice given in previous subject reports, this was again frequently a problem this January.

In this session there are always a number of candidates who are taking the examination for a second time. "Unpredictable" questions used in the summer session should not be repeated in such circumstances.

The candidates should be sufficiently in control of their material to develop answers with additional information or examples to illustrate the point being made. This is not the same as allowing the candidates to control the entire test. In some Centres candidates are allowed to produce lengthy pieces of pre-learned material. If candidates are to do themselves justice they must be deflected from regurgitating such language. *"Students should not attempt to read aloud from their Oral form or recite material learnt by heart: this will earn no credit and*

wastes valuable time." (Specification: Notes for Guidance Page 89); they also tend to lose control of pronunciation and intonation at such times. It is important that the dialogue is authentic in that the examiner's questions respond to what the candidates have previously said and that the candidates actually answer the question asked.

Concern has been expressed again this January at the lack of complex questions in a number of tests. If the "questioning" is restricted to «*Parle(z)-moi de*», «*Je vois que vous voulez parler de... Allez-y*», «*Continue(z).* » or the teacher examiner reading out the next heading verbatim, the candidates cannot achieve the upper mark ranges for response.

Opinion is not a mere proffering of personal response, but considered thought supported by evidence drawn from the candidates' research; understanding and more abstract ideas cannot emerge if questions are not asked beyond the purely factual. It is unnecessary to list sources used or names of websites in order to demonstrate that research has been carried out. The research will quickly become evident in the quality of evidence adduced to substantiate what candidates are saying. Vague, unsupported assertions and sweeping generalisations do not demonstrate understanding. In some tests the level of questioning, and therefore response, showed no advance on GCSE.

Centres where the examination is conducted in the right spirit are a pleasure to listen to; the candidates sound as though they are enjoying the experience and usually achieve their potential. It is also clear that candidates do best when a brisk pace is maintained; an unnaturally slow conversation does not seem to benefit weaker candidates.

Teacher examiners also need to resist the temptation to help candidates by providing vocabulary or completing phrases or sentences; nor should they offer alternative ideas or rephrase questions before the candidates have had time to formulate their initial response. No benefit is gained if the teacher examiner summarises the points that the candidates have made (or intended to make) or if a possible answer is given in the phrasing of the question. All such teacher examiner input pre-empts the candidates' time and space and may make it impossible for them to demonstrate Knowledge and Understanding. The teacher examiner's role is to facilitate the performance of the candidate by asking a range of open questions, pressing for clarification or development without becoming too intrusive.

Assessment Principles

The candidates are assessed positively for: **quality of language**, including pronunciation and intonation, accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and structure, idiom, grammar and ability to deal with the unexpected; **response**, including comprehension, spontaneity and the ability to develop answers; **knowledge and understanding**, including information, evidence of research, organisation of material, awareness of implications of topic, relevance, presentation, opinion and justification.

Candidates' Responses

Many candidates were well prepared and understood what was required of them; they had clearly conducted careful research and were able to give examples to

support their assertions, encouraged by skilful questioning from well-prepared teacher examiners.

Although many teacher examiners conducted the test appropriately, varying questions based on the candidates' responses with requests for further information, using the headings on the form or 'pushing' the candidates to develop and substantiate their ideas or assertions, there were areas of difficulty in some tests:

- candidates were allowed to speak uninterrupted for too long, using pre-learned material.
- candidates made factually incorrect assertions, which were allowed to pass unchallenged.
- candidates were not pressed when they did not answer the question asked.
- candidates were asked directly for comparisons with the UK.
- candidates were not asked about the specific situation in France (or the relevant country).
- candidates were not asked to engage in a conversation going beyond the target-language headings - candidates will not be able to access higher categories for Quality of Language and Response if they have not moved away from predictable areas.
- candidates were allowed to remain at the narrative/factual level even when it seemed clear that they could have ventured into more complex areas of discussion.
- candidates were not given the opportunity to develop responses.

Quality of Language: Many candidates had clearly researched carefully appropriate lexis for their chosen topic and some were able to produce a good range of structures. The best candidates were able to make spontaneous use of subjunctive structures, subordinate clauses and natural linking phrases and expressions, as well as a range of tenses *when the questioning allowed*. There were good examples of candidates at ease in dealing with abstract notions, who had the necessary language at their disposal. On the other hand, there were far too many tests conducted purely in the present tense, where no complex questions were asked and it was clear that insufficient thought had been given to the possible linguistic development of the topic. In the worst cases the standard attained showed little or no progress from GCSE.

Accuracy

Examiners reported that pronunciation difficulties, even with topic-specific lexis, were more evident this January, even with some of the best candidates. There were particular problems with the following:

- vowel sounds (*crier* for *créer*, *idie* for *idée*, *ouvre* for *œuvre*, *couteau* for *coûteux*, *cycle* for *siècle*, *essailler* for *essayer*, *religioux* for *religieux*, *armie* for *armée*, *mailleur* for *meilleur*, *joue* for *jeu*, *sour* for *sœur*, *ajourd'hui* for *aujourd'hui*, *richerche* for *recherche*)
- final silent consonants were pronounced (*et*, *forêt*, *cas*, *Paris*, *art*, *ils faisaient*, *cent*, *trop*, *grand goût*, *tabac*) as were other consonants (*c'est*, *aspect*, *habiter*, *concept*, *magnifique*, *campagne*)
- endings of words not pronounced (*tout le mond*, *ensuit*) and other consonant problems (*sucer* for *succès*, *fil* for *films*)
- confusion between the *ss* and *z* sounds (*religieuse/religieuse*, *église/église*, *voissin/voisin*, *ils ont/ils sont*, *aussi/aussi*, *baise/baisse*)
- nasals (*introduire*, *ainsi*, *ans*, *symbole*)

- key vocabulary for the selected topic (*l'alcool, peindre/peintre/peinture, l'extrême droite/droit/doigt*)
- anglicised pronunciation (*parents, variété, Europe, méthode, emploi, athlète, scène, société, social, extrême*)
- recurrent problems (*vie/ville, pays/paille, pour cent/per cent, magasin/magazine, fille/file, femme/fème, quand, qualification, question, guerre/gare, l'amour/la mort, couture/culture, mois/moins, temps*)

Pronunciation errors can, and frequently do, impede comprehension and cause candidates to gain lower marks for Quality of Language. Intonation is often an additional difficulty under the pressure of trying to recollect pre-learned material. Whereas many candidates make impressive attempts to pronounce French correctly, there are some who seem to think that correct pronunciation is unnecessary or irrelevant.

It seems clear that the greatest linguistic difficulties remain at a basic level; in these areas there is not much evidence of progress from GCSE. On the other hand, good structure or lexis acquired more recently can be used with a certain degree of confidence. However, very high language marks cannot be gained just by the insertion of several good phrases if there is a consistent incidence of basic errors.

Common errors noted this session were

- wrong or unclear genders (particularly of key vocabulary for topics eg *une problème, le femme, une manque, une voyage, le Tour Eiffel, la monde, la risque, la Tour de France, un chose, un personne, un loi, le/la livre, le/la voile, une lycée, une exemple, un parti/une partie (politique), le France*) This is increasingly exacerbated by careless pronunciation, so that it is difficult or impossible to tell which gender is intended.
- basic noun/adjective agreements
- subject/verb agreements (*les médecins devient...*) particularly, but not solely, with *qui*
- basic verb forms in all tenses (*ils sont boivent, ils choisent, ils avont, j'ai vi, elle offri, ils émissent, les gens comprennent*)
- problems with tense sequence and tense choice
- anglicised lexis, structures and word order (*controversial, le plus populaire sport, dans le soleil, les derners dix ans, M le Pen's exclusion*)
- inability to produce contracted forms of articles or misuse of contractions eg *au le vingtième siècle, de les régions*
- confusion of *avoir* and *être* (*je suis dix-sept*)
- infinitives not used when required (*ils doivent étude, tu peux utilise, pour travaille*)
- use of *c'est* or *il est* in place of *il y a* - especially in other tenses than the present
- prepositions (*à France, dans le début, en le passé, rien de faire, sur/dans la télévision*)
- relative pronouns eg *la manière que..., la ville qui beaucoup visitent, je sais qu'est-ce que je veux*
- subject pronouns eg [*les femmes*]/*ils*
- confusion between direct and indirect object pronouns (and their position in the sentence)

Range

Candidates need to be reminded that there is a register of language that is appropriate to an examination: *eh ben, ouais / c'est pas mon truc / c'est dégueulasse / ben, c'est moche ça / j'veux un boulot / t'as vu?* do not constitute the language expected in a formal discussion. It is the opinion of the examiners that candidates should be actively dissuaded from the use of *tutoiement* in the examination.

It is unimpressive if candidates can produce a phrase containing a subjunctive, but are unaware that the same structure still requires a subjunctive later in the discussion. In order to attain a good mark for quality of language the candidates need to demonstrate a consistent ability to manipulate the language.

Common difficulties noted this session included

- wrong, inappropriate or invented vocabulary (*financier, discriminaté contre, introducer, une range, les realms, politiquement, radique, expecter, ça ne matière pas, évoluer, ambigieux*)
- faux amis (*supporter/support, attendre/attend, place/place, effectif/effective*)
- *jeunes/gens/gènes/jaunes/jounes* - unclear if this was a confusion of pronunciation or lexis
- *assez/très/plus/trop* - frequently confused
- *mal/mauvais, gens/personnes, user/utiliser, temps/fois, matière/sujet, campagne/paysage, quitter/partir*
- *parce que/à cause de, avant/avant de/devant*
- *on/tu/vous* - sometimes all used in the same sentence
- number (*un mille sept cent quarante-vingt-trois*), including decimals (*six point cinq*) ; confusion of *mille/million*
- lexical confusion, possibly caused when using a dictionary eg *à propos de 5 hommes/about* (approximately)

Response: Many candidates listened to the questions, answered them appropriately and were able to develop the discussion. However, a number were still allowed to regurgitate pre-learned material without interruption, frequently using the next "question" as a cue to move on to the following area of "script". Some candidates who failed to understand a question simply went on to what they had intended to say next, regardless of its relevance; this led to some extremely improbable conversations. The teacher examiners' responsibility must not be underestimated if their candidates are to achieve the best standard possible. The oral examination is intended to be a genuine discussion, not a series of prelearned monologues. Examiners are not always convinced that candidates actually understand what they are saying in such circumstances. Unpredictable areas of discussion, complex and varied questioning and thoughtful preparation by the teacher examiner all play a part in reaching an acceptable mark in this section of the grid. There were a number of tests this January which consisted of question and answer sessions, and where the answers were frequently shorter than the questions.

Knowledge and Understanding: A number of candidates had obviously enjoyed research into their chosen topic and were able to produce a wealth of facts and examples as well as pursue more abstract aspects. However, candidates cannot score highly for Knowledge and Understanding if their tests become too general and lack the TL focus *throughout*. In addition, the teacher examiner needs to have considered how to enable the candidates to demonstrate Understanding; this

is where informed opinion should come to the fore, with candidates having to consider the information they had provided and formulate views on it. Difficulties were compounded by those teacher examiners who asked for candidates' personal views on issues of a general nature.

There were a worrying number of examples in this session of startlingly inaccurate pronouncements from candidates, which the teacher examiner accepted uncritically. It is incumbent upon teacher examiners to do a minimum of research of their own in order to be in a position to ask useful and helpful questions, as well as to question any confusion.

There were again instances of native or bilingual candidates who had assumed that they would be able to perform well in this Unit and had therefore neglected careful research. Indeed they sometimes did not attain the highest category for Quality of Language as their French lacked range and was sometimes in the wrong register for such a discussion.

PROBLEM AREAS

Particular areas are detailed below in the hope that Centres will be able to avoid such difficulties in the future.

Topics

- Some were too general eg *les problèmes des jeunes*
- Some titles lacked the necessary focus on the French or francophone context throughout, eg *la santé au Canada, la musique algérienne, les problèmes à Haïti*
- Some candidates spent too long comparing with (and therefore talking about) the situation in the U.K. or another non-francophone country
- Some topics offered insufficient scope or were clearly not based on any research
- Some topics might appear to offer too wide a scope eg *la Révolution française, Paris, le système éducatif en France*

Presentation

- The presentation lasted under 1 minute or was interrupted too soon.
- The presentation was far too long.
- The presentation contained everything the candidates knew and they could offer nothing in response to questions for the remaining 8 - 10 minutes.

Oral Form

- There was too much factual information eg dates, statistics, proper names
- Headings related only to material mentioned in the presentation and were not developed
- There were fewer than 5 headings
- No title was given
- Headings were in English
- It was a vocabulary list
- Headings were part sentences used to cue in the presentation or answers to questions
- Out of date forms were used
- Forms were not submitted with the cassettes

Timing

- The presentation was too short (15 - 30 seconds)
- The test was too short (some were under 5 minutes)
- The presentation was too long (eg 5 minutes out of an 8 minute test)
- The test was too long (some were up to 20 minutes; marking will stop shortly after 12 minutes)

Recordings

Examiners report that this January there were many more problems with very poor recordings. Edexcel examiners should not have to listen to tests several times because the quality of sound is so poor. Centres are responsible to their candidates for the quality of the recording sent to the Edexcel examiner. Inaudible material can gain no credit.

- The background noise made the candidates all but inaudible
- Noisy machines were used
- The examiner's voice was far louder than the candidate's - the placing of the microphone should favour the candidate although *both* parties should be clearly audible
- Some candidates spoke so quietly that the volume had to be at maximum to hear them at all
- The examiner's questions could not be heard; this made it impossible for the Edexcel examiner to discern unpredictable questions
- Old tapes were used, so that the recording was blurred or the previous recording could also be heard
- There was interference from mobile phones. Mobile phones have no place in the examination room
- Tests were recorded at the wrong speed

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Attention to the following should ensure that the candidates are well-prepared:

- careful selection of an appropriate topic, avoiding the general or insufficiently focused
- avoidance of a comparative approach
- availability of appropriate source material
- thoughtful preparation of the Oral form so that it serves its purpose for both candidate and examiner
- a clear and thoughtful presentation which will give the candidates confidence and provide a secure springboard to the discussion
- preparation for development of the topic, including examples to substantiate assertions made
- consideration of problems/solutions/implications of the topic chosen
- thorough grasp of topic-specific lexis
- avoiding rehearsal, but rather making sure that the candidate knows the essentials of the topic and is equipped linguistically to deal with them
- ensuring that candidates have practice in answering questions directly and that they will recognise the relevant interrogatives .

Centres should study carefully the Specification (including Notes for Guidance Pp 89 - 90), the Teachers' Handbook Pp 30 - 33 and previous Subject Reports. Teacher examiners should study carefully the Handbook of Instructions for Centres in advance of conducting the examination.

Practical Matters

Attention to the following would make the marking process operate more smoothly:

- ensuring that recording is of good quality
- ensuring that both candidate and examiner are audible
- ensuring that all tapes are rewound to the start of Side A
- using C60 tapes for Unit 3 - 2 tests on each side
- ensuring that cassettes themselves (as well as boxes) are labelled with centre and candidate numbers
- ensuring that centre and candidate numbers are announced on the tape
- ensuring that Oral Forms are sent to the marker with the cassettes and that the correct forms are used
- ensuring that correct timing is adhered to

Administration

There were some administrative problems this January. A number of centres conducted their examination outside the specified examining period. The dates are available on the main timetable and can be confirmed with Edexcel. When centres conducted the tests late and then failed to send the Oral Forms to the Edexcel examiner with the cassettes an unnecessary amount of extra work was created. Some centres conducted the tests in December but failed to post them to the examiners until well into January.

The examiners greatly appreciated the impeccable manner in which some centres carried out the administrative procedures.

A2 Unit 4.1 (6444/01) - Oral Discussion of Issues

With the usual small entry in the winter series which included many single-entry Centres and a few larger ones, some candidates were 're-sits', but many appeared to be using the January session as a 'mock' test. While it is difficult to give an overview which would be valid for a larger and more representative entry, it is appropriate to indicate the features which particularly concerned examiners.

There have been no changes since last year in the format or the criteria of the test. Some centres still appear to be unaware that the issue does not have to be rooted in a French-specific area of interest since the AO4 element is tested only in Unit 3 (AS) and in Units 5.1 and 5.2. It is not the case, either, that seeking factual information in the further areas is appropriate, whether relating to French-focused facts such as how the education system works, or to general facts such as the medical consequences of smoking or alcoholism.

Unit 4.1 takes the form of a debate followed by a discussion during which candidates are awarded one third of the total marks for demonstrating their ability to debate and to justify their views. This has implications for both the examiner and the candidates. If the examiner does not engage in debate by challenging candidates' stated views in the first section, no debate can take place and the ensuing interchange is insufficiently demanding to give them the opportunity of gaining credit for Justification and Debate. At the same time the candidates have a responsibility to observe the rubric in the Specification which requires them to carry out reading and research to support their arguments. If they rely solely on assertion and fail to produce evidence to back their stance, their performance will be self-limiting.

It is important, too, to be aware of the timing of the test as stipulated in the rubric. Clearly short tests do not give the candidate the same opportunities to express and defend views and to demonstrate competence in dealing with unpredictable areas: marks cannot be awarded for material not produced. Long tests, particularly when the initial debate is extended beyond the time specified - in the worst cases, taking up most or all of the test - present the problem of insufficient time being devoted to unpredictable further areas. This disproportionate focus inevitably affects the marks.

Choice of Issue

Many candidates favoured traditional ethical favourites, such as *pour / contre la peine de mort, l'euthanasie, l'avortement, l'interdiction de fumer* (which many candidates persist in referring to as *le tabagisme*) *dans les lieux publics, la dépénalisation du cannabis, le mariage homosexuel / le droit des homosexuels d'adopter des enfants /, le clonage, les OGM, l'expérimentation animale, la chasse au renard*. There was a good deal of interest in *les émeutes* in various forms which offered varying scope for debate. Political issues such as *l'énergie nucléaire, les éoliennes, l'union européenne, la guerre de George Bush en Irak, l'entrée de la Turquie à l'Union Européenne, l'immigration, le port du foulard islamique* were other recurring choices. Some candidates chose social and personal issues such as *la chirurgie esthétique, la greffe des organes pour les alcooliques, le fast food*. It was encouraging that many candidates exercised independent choice and debated issues less frequently considered, such as *les bébés sur mesure, la biométrie, les compagnies aériennes à faible budget*. The requirement to choose a genuinely debatable issue appeared to be heeded

generally, though in a few cases the 'issue' was not viable and this led to difficulties in challenging effectively, for example *contre les mauvais aspects de l'Internet, contre les mauvaises influences du monde du cinéma*. Some stances such as *je suis contre le racisme, je suis contre le terrorisme, je suis en faveur de la préservation de l'environnement* were morally or logically hard to oppose. It should be noted that inappropriate choice of issue will limit access to higher marks for Justification and Debate.

Declaration of Issue Forms

Most candidates entered a clear stance but some simply offered a statement. Some candidates entered their issue as a question without any indication of their stance. The teacher examiner then had to establish what the stance was before debate could commence.

A few candidates did not enter their Unit 3 and / or Unit 5 options. Centres are reminded that the whole form should be completed *by the candidate*, with the issue *in the Target Language*.

Quality of Recording

Most Centres produced clear tapes but there were some cases where the recordings were of very poor quality with persistent hum, hiss or crackle or where there was distracting background noise. Automatic microphones often produce problems and the correct positioning of the microphone is vital. In a few cases the recordings were barely audible and marking was difficult. Centres are reminded that they are responsible for ensuring that candidates and teacher examiner can be clearly heard, and that they do their candidates a great disservice in not checking equipment, choice of recording environment and quality of tapes and recordings before submitting the tests for marking.

Conduct of tests

Candidates should initiate a debate by introducing a stance on their chosen issue which teacher examiners will then challenge to enable the candidates to justify and defend their viewpoint with supporting evidence. After five minutes, the teacher examiner is instructed to effect a transition to discussion of at least two other unpredictable issues, moving on and away from the initial issue and lasting a further ten minutes, and not to return to the initial theme.

While some teacher examiners had clearly understood the requirements of the test and conducted their candidates' tests in accordance with it, many others did not respect the rubric and their candidates were sometimes disadvantaged as a result. The following problems have been pointed out in previous reports, but are repeated here because they recur.

Problems included:

- **Timing** - in some cases presentations of stance ran well over one minute, and / or the subsequent debate exceeded the time specified, thus limiting the opportunity to respond within unpredictable wider areas. A few tests were devoted entirely to the initial issue or to associated themes. There were some instances of short tests, where clearly candidates did not have the maximum time and space to express and justify views, thus restricting potential mark achievement in all three categories, but overlong tests were more frequent. Long tests can gain no additional credit, since Examiners

are instructed to stop marking after the allocated time, and in cases where the debate section has overrun, as explained above, the time remaining for further areas will be cut short.

- **In the Debate** - insufficient challenge to the candidate's stance. While some teacher examiners entered into the spirit of the test as 'devil's advocate' and used considerable skill in seeking out all possible counter-arguments, many others did not offer a robust challenge but instead pressed for factual information, or simply asked why the candidate held this opinion, or where research sources had been found. This tended to produce narrative or anecdotal material rather than stimulate the language of debate. Some questioning was only on the level of Unit 3.
- Too much input from the teacher examiner with convoluted questions, prompt phrases or suggestions of expressions or ideas, insistence on voicing personal points of view or intrusive and distracting interjections.
- Conversely there were a few cases of insufficient preparation on the part of the teacher examiner, who appeared not to have considered adequately what points to put, and this resulted in quite lengthy gaps and hesitations and created difficulties for the candidate.
- **In Further Areas** - failure to move away from the Initial Issue and / or choosing themes which were too closely related and did not give sufficient scope or stimulus for wider response to different areas (for example, a debate on *le port du foulard* followed by a discussion on *l'immigration* and *le racism*). It was sometimes unclear when and where the debate for the Initial Issue ended.
- Returning to the Initial Issue after the debate or allowing the candidate to do so.
- Allowing the candidate to produce learned monologues without deflection, or asking questions which had been pre-rehearsed and appeared to be anticipated.
- Asking factual questions which were sometimes exclusively related to France (for example about how the government or health systems were organised) and which did not afford opportunities to express opinions or to justify views. Such questions appeared in many cases to be anticipated, since candidates were able to deliver immediate funds of statistics, dates, laws etc. It should be noted that specialised factual knowledge is not required in this part of the test (cf. Specification, page 24) and that teacher examiners "...must ensure that students are not aware in advance of the further issues that will be discussed."
- Asking personal questions relating to the candidate's family, holidays, leisure pursuits or future plans; such questions were inadmissible.
- Abrupt changes of areas or dislocated questions with no logical transition (such as *le cannabis / la sécheresse en Espagne / Est-ce qu'un coup de foudre existe?*)
- In some cases too many further areas were covered, which resulted in superficial discussions and insufficient opportunity to develop ideas. The teacher examiner failed to follow up what the candidate had actually said.
- A few teacher examiners continued to maintain a confrontational style throughout. "You should not take an adversarial stance in this part of the conversation." (Handbook of Instructions for Centres, page 9).

The impression gained in some tests was that 'unpredictable' areas were, if not 'flagged' to candidates beforehand, certainly anticipated. The 'life and death' issues which were presented with some frequency often involved a combination of *la peine capitale*, *l'avortement* and *l'euthanasie*.

Performance of candidates

Quality of Language

Accuracy

The linguistic skills of the best candidates were most encouraging. They used a wide range of lexis, handled complex structures naturally and had authentic pronunciation and intonation. The weakest area for most candidates remains that of accuracy. All the basic errors of gender, verb forms, concords, agreements, pronouns, partitives etc. highlighted in previous reports were still very evident. Many examples of such difficulties were listed in the Examiners' Reports for June 2004 and 2005, but in this examination series the main problems included:

- incorrect forms of verbs in the present, and the use of the nameless 'non-tense' infinitive-sounding ending (*le gouvernement doit / peut // ils doivent / avont // vous dites / ils font / ils prennent / les gens penser / il n'aider pas / je préférer*)
- problems with attempts at other tenses (*j'aura / elle a mort / j'utilisé / il a vi / j'ai resté*) and with tenses often used indiscriminately, particularly confusion over perfect v. imperfect, future v. conditional
- problems with use of negatives, *ne* or *pas* being dropped, or *pas* included with another negative, eg; *il ne va pas jamais*, or incorrect word order, as in *n'être pas obèse / pour ne parle pas*
- concord of subject and verb (often a plural subject with a singular verb) such as *les médecins qui n'a pas... / la famille ont... / les politiciens fait ... / le gouvernement ont... / des mesures qui va... / les personnes qui dit ... /*
- finite verbs needing dependent infinitives (*ils veulent travaillent / il peut donne...*)
- difficulties with pronouns ([*les filles musulmanes*] *ils portent le voile / ils aident leur-même / le gouvernement les a donné ...*)
- partitives (*beaucoup des gens / il y a des autres choses / il gagne un peu de l'argent / quelque chose intéressant*)
- basic gender errors (often followed by ensuing wrong agreements) including *accident, choix, chômage, chose, drogue, emploi, état, façon, femme, forme, manque, pays, port, problème, qualité, racisme, règle, risque, système, sondage, voile*.
- *incorrect plural forms, eg. -als for -aux*
- *à + le(s) and de + le(s), eg. aux les problèmes, de les situations*
- articles omitted eg. *France a besoin... / il y a problèmes*
- incorrect prepositions (*sur la télé, en Paris, il dépend sur, au même temps, sur le sujet de... différent à...*) frequent confusion between *penser à* and *penser de* ; incorrect use of preposition, eg. *plusieurs de...*
- confusion of adjectives and adverbs (eg. *bon / bien , meilleur / mieux, mauvais / mal*)
- confusion over intensifiers (*trop beaucoup*); *très* for *trop*
- inability to use *peut-être* correctly
- incorrect use of *aussi* at the beginning of a sentence or clause.

Pronunciation and Intonation

The quality was very variable. While some candidates had generally good control of sounds and intonation, in the case of others who were not able to produce authentic p/i or whose first language patterns intruded, sounds and stress patterns were often inauthentic. This was exacerbated in cases where candidates were over-prepared and launched into long learnt monologues. Among the recurrent errors were:

- poor intonation with sentences ending in a rising tone ('upspeak') or a flat monotone, sometimes a characteristic of pre-rehearsed, regurgitated material
- inauthentic stress patterns
- problems with nasal sounds such as *important, intention, censurer, compréhension, compte, principal, contemporain, infidélité, enceinte, enseignant, symbole*
- anglicised words such as *société, identité, introduction, nationalité, immigration, éducation, varié, tradition*
- pronunciation of unsounded consonants in words such as *art, tabac, et, est, cas, coût, droit, ils / elles pensent, les jeunes, succès, beaucoup, gens, cas, dignité, ignorer, mort, temps, transport*
- incorrect pronunciation of *femme, danger, Le Pen, fille, emploi, méthode, eu, alcool, idée, créé, européen, euro, organe*
- poor vowel sounds resulting in unclear distinction between *jeunes* and *gens*, *pays* and *paille*, *amour/ meurt / mort*, *ait* and *aille*, *chose* and *choix*, *magasins* and *magazines*, *corps* and *coeur*, *introduire* and *interdire*.
- mispronunciations such as *fable* [for *faible*], *mailleur*, *amigrés*, *annocent*, *tout le mon*, *les déchats*, *les attentes* (for *attentats*), *un pêche* (for *un péché*) *l'obisité*, *communité*, *basse* for *base*, *baiser* for *baisser*, *le beef*, *le Grand Beton* [la Grande Bretagne] *la pain* [peine] *de mort*

Range

Most candidates were able to express their ideas, though with varying degrees of competence. There were some very good linguistic performances from non-native speakers with an impressive range of lexis and structures. Candidates who were not in command of more complex sentence patterns had, in many cases, tried to acquire appropriate vocabulary to discuss their chosen issue. Some candidates were able to handle the language of justification and debate, using abstract concepts and expressions which conveyed reflection, hypothesis and considered opinion, and with natural inclusion of subjunctives such as *pourvu que / à moins que / pour que / sans que...* but without artificially attaching subjunctive expressions such as *Il faut que vous sachiez que...* / *autant que je sache...* with unconvincing frequency. Subjunctives after *je ne pense pas que* were sometimes lacking. Candidates should be advised not to adopt too informal a register and to avoid conversational *mots familiers* and the use of *tu*, and should again be counselled against the use of over-dramatic and sometimes excessive expressions such as *tu es fou ou quoi? Mais non, c'est ridicule!* They should also avoid expressions such as *et comme ça / des trucs comme ça / c'est débile, quoi*, and not rely too heavily on *chose / choses* and *il y a* to fill gaps in basic lexis. Some native speakers did not make an effort to use the full range of structures at their disposal. Better candidates showed a confident use of tenses, including the conditional, though the passive voice still seems to cause confusion. For general statements candidates rarely used *on*, but relied (wrongly) on *tu*.

For weaker candidates, satisfactory completion of sentences was often difficult and there were basic lexical errors and anglicisms such as *political, physiquement, chimicaux, significant, obsédé, financier, un change, expresser, investir, exercisé, le catholicisme, l'argent d'Etat, ministère* for *ministre, La Bretagne* for *La Grande-Bretagne, en particulère, patrimoine, c'est d'accord* (for *c'est juste*) *vous êtes droit / vous êtes vrai* [addressing the teacher examiner], *un Maghreb, plus et plus, moins en moins d'une choix, la Belge* [for *la Belgique*], *il incombent aux écoles, le fumer, le tabagisme* [meaning 'smoking'], *faire mieux cette situation, autour du monde or dans tout le monde* for *partout dans le monde or dans le monde entier*.

misuse of *parce que* instead of *à cause de*

confusion between *place* and *endroit, passer* and *dépenser, devoir* and *devenir, gens* and *personnes, le mode* and *la mode*

use of *les gens français* rather than *les Français*

use of *les Françaises, les Anglaises* for *les Français, les Anglais*

use of *d'après* and *depuis* to mean 'after', *devant* for *avant*

Response

Many candidates responded readily and with enthusiasm, but often lacked the ability to answer in a well-structured way or to take the issue forward.

There were some good spontaneous performances with genuine and well-developed debate and discussion, and these tended to gain higher marks for Response, even for less able candidates, than those which sounded contrived and pre-rehearsed, with a set routine of questioning. The general level of comprehension overall was high. Where the initial issue did not overrun, candidates had the opportunity to respond within unpredictable areas and to develop their ideas. Native speakers, of course, had no difficulty with comprehension, but this did not always imply fluency: as with range, not all francophone candidates were willing to extend themselves to produce developed responses.

The differentiating factor in reaching marks in the higher boxes was the ability to develop ideas. Some candidates had difficulty in sustaining exchanges and tailed off with phrases such as "*Il y a des problèmes*" or "*c'est difficile.*" If they could not develop their responses the teacher examiner had to move on to other areas to give them further opportunities. In some tests there was an obvious use of prepared monologues, often identifiable by poor pronunciation and intonation and by an inability to develop responses to unexpected questions or to those which came out of an anticipated order; this can result in embarrassingly irrelevant answers when the candidates give a prepared response to the 'wrong' question. In a few cases the teacher examiner seemed to be providing prompts for these prepared monologues, and indeed a small number of tests appeared to be scripted. It must be emphasised that candidates whose teacher examiner encouraged a natural exchange of ideas had the opportunity of attaining the highest marks for Response. Some candidates who were asked inappropriate questions (see Conduct of Tests above) were disadvantaged.

Justification and Debate

The Debate

Where a clear stance from the candidate and a sustained challenge from the teacher examiner allowed for debate, there were examples of enthusiastic and lively interchange, with the strongest candidates keeping some key points of their argument undisclosed during the presentation of stance to use in the subsequent

debate. The best defended their stance with genuine passion and supporting evidence. Weaker candidates had little to contribute once they had voiced their main prepared points and they relied on repetition, re-assertion of opinion or anecdote.

Examiners reported that in many cases inadequate research had been undertaken to provide evidence and support for the candidate's arguments and to parry contrary views. Candidates were in many cases unable to argue convincingly with suitable justification for their views. Some who had carried out research on their chosen issue presented their material as information in isolation from their arguments and failed to make effective use of it.

Discussion of Further Issues

Better candidates continued to contribute opinions cogently on a variety of themes, though others limited their input to a superficial or simplistic level. Some candidates were given insufficient scope in cases where there was a considerable overlap between the initial issue and the further areas, or where personal and / or factual questions restricted potential for developing views (see Conduct of Tests above). These candidates would have attained higher marks for justification and debate if they had had more opportunity to demonstrate their skills.

Advice and Guidance

Since June 2004 there has no longer been a requirement to relate the initial issue to the culture and society of the target-language country. The A04 element is not now assessed in this Unit. The attribution of five marks for stance in the initial issue will be determined by evidence that candidates have undertaken research to argue their case (cf. Specification, page 24) and that they are able to demonstrate knowledge of the issue to be debated, and are not merely voicing unsubstantiated opinion or arguing only by assertion. Such knowledge may include relevant laws, practice, statistics, mores, attitudes, precedent or data drawn from evidence which may be historical, economic, geographic, social, political, scientific etc.

As indicated above in the introduction, though it has never been the case that the A04 element was tested in unpredictable further areas of discussion after the debate, some teacher examiners appear to have focused their questioning on French situations and institutions. While these are acceptable provided they are not purely factual questions more appropriate to Unit 3, the choice of further areas need not be restricted to issues concerning France.

A clear understanding of the Specification is essential for both teachers and students. In addition, Centres should read the *Teachers' Handbook* and the *Oral Training Guide*. Teacher-Examiners need to study carefully the *Handbook of Instructions to Centres* in advance of the Oral Examination.

Centres should also note the following points:

Timing - up to 1 minute for declaration of stance
up to 4 more minutes for debate
up to 10 more minutes for discussion in further unpredictable areas
TOTAL: 14 - 15 minutes

Choice of Issue - while there is no stipulation restricting choice of issue, it is not advisable for candidates at a Centre all to choose similar issues or to have a restricted range of issue choices. An appropriate issue is one that is

- an area of concern or debate, i.e. 'arguable'
- is morally possible to debate
- is clearly defined to permit of analysis and supportive evidence.

Guidance - candidates will need to be directed to possible research sources, as thorough research on the initial issue will be required to provide supporting evidence for their arguments and to show a thorough knowledge of their chosen Issue during the debate in the first five minutes of the test. They should note that it is not necessary, or indeed desirable, to explain at length what their sources were. The fact that they have carried out research should be apparent in what they say, and should not need to be re-stated in terms of web-sites etc.

Preparation for the debate -confidence can be gained from training of a general nature to argue and debate: voicing opinions, presenting and supporting ideas, challenging and parrying contrary points of view with relevant evidence, and justifying opinions.

Acquisition of appropriate lexis, and practice in speaking in the formal register of argument and debate, should be encouraged.

Stance - this is a clear statement of opinion which the candidate is prepared to defend, entered on the Declaration of Issue Form normally in the form of *Je suis pour / je suis contre*...and introduced in the one-minute presentation, which is designed to be a useful launching point for the subsequent debate, outlining the candidate's views without exhausting all the key points.

Preparation for the discussion in further areas - candidates should practise discussion over a wide range of issues and familiarise themselves with areas of interest - for example, social, moral, political, philosophical, legal - which are currently being debated in the press, on radio and television, in the family and in schools and places of work. Such practice will give them the opportunity for genuine self-expression and authentic reactions without dependence on pre-rehearsed question routines and responses or on prepared monologues. They can in this way be trained to acquire information and an awareness of possible arguments, yet retain the freedom to depart from pre-determined fixed positions.

Conclusion

Debate is increasingly seen as the means of encouraging informed comment and consideration of other points of view. The performance and achievement of many candidates suggest that this examination is a challenging and successful means of training and testing conceptual abilities and linguistic competence.

Statistics

Unit 1 Listening and Writing

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 50 | 35 | 31 | 27 | 23 | 19 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 90 | 72 | 63 | 54 | 45 | 36 |

Unit 2 Reading and Writing

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 80 | 51 | 46 | 42 | 38 | 34 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 120 | 96 | 84 | 72 | 60 | 48 |

Unit 3 Prepared Oral Topic

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 60 | 43 | 38 | 33 | 28 | 23 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 90 | 72 | 63 | 54 | 45 | 36 |

Unit 4.1 Oral Discussion of Issues

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 60 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 26 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 90 | 72 | 63 | 54 | 45 | 36 |

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