



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission**

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2006

RÚISIS

RUSSIAN

ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The syllabus

The present syllabus was examined for the first time in 2003. The syllabus is modelled on the Leaving Certificate syllabuses for other modern languages within the Irish post-primary curriculum. The syllabus and examinations are designed for learners of Russian as a foreign language.

1.2 Russian as a foreign language in the Irish post-primary curriculum

The majority of candidates presenting for the Leaving Certificate in Russian over the past 4 years have been either native speakers, heritage speakers (for whom Russian is the language of the home), ethnic Russians from former Soviet Republics or (former) citizens of the Independent States that resulted from the break-up of the Soviet Union. The standard of literacy skills suggests that many have had a significant portion of their education in Russian-language schools; others have learnt Russian as a first foreign language; yet others have had little or no formal training in Russian literacy skills. The standard of oral and listening comprehension skills, which are more impressive than written proficiency, suggest that most candidates have lived at some stage in an environment where Russian was, if not the dominant language, then at least a significant second language.

The increasing numbers taking Russian in the Leaving Certificate examination reflects the increasing representation of the communities listed above in Irish society:

Table 1: The number of candidates presenting for the LC 2003-2006

Year	Ordinary Level	Higher Level	Total LC cohort
2003	3	55	59525
2004	2	73	58753
2005	10	111	57422
2006	18	158	54110

Some schools offer Transition Year modules in Russian; some schools provide formal or informal Russian-language support to students who have a prior knowledge of the language and wish to present for the Leaving Certificate. There is evidence that many candidates are unaware of the various components of the examination. Many candidates commented during the oral examinations that they did not know what to expect either at the oral or indeed in relation to any aspect of the examination.

1.3 The examination

1.3.1 Number and type of components

The Leaving Certificate examination in Russian tests the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading comprehension and writing. Candidates may take the examination at Higher or Ordinary Level. Marks are allocated to the various components as follows: -

	Ordinary Level	Higher Level
1. a written language paper	220 marks	220 marks
2. a listening comprehension test	100 marks	80 marks
3. an oral examination	80 marks	100 marks

In 2006 the format of the examinations was fundamentally the same as in previous years with one adjustment: the Written Language Paper was brought in line with other modern language papers and the examination lasted two and a half hours, instead of three.

While the orals in the Modern Languages were conducted before Easter, the Russian Leaving Certificate oral test was conducted at the end of May, between the end of teaching in most schools and the beginning of the written examinations. The recording of all candidates' oral tests was retained as in previous years. A monitoring and moderation process was carried out during May-June.

The Reading Comprehension and Written Production were examined together in a two-and-a half-hour examination followed by a 40-minute Listening Comprehension Test. In 2006 these were held on Friday 9th June, beginning with the written examination at both Higher and Ordinary Levels from 9.30 a.m. to 12.00 p.m., followed by the Listening Comprehension Test from 12.10 to 12.50 p.m.

1.3.2 Structure of the written paper (Ordinary Level)

The written paper is divided into two Sections.

Section I: Comprehension (160 marks)

This section tests the candidates' understanding of Russian and is further sub-divided into 4 sub-sections:

A.	Information retrieval	60 marks
B.	Mix and Match	40 marks
C.	Structuring discourse	20 marks
D.	Comprehension	40 marks

Section II: Writing (60 marks)

This section tests the candidates' ability (A) to express themselves on a topic relating to Russia and/or Russian life or culture and (B) to express themselves in Russian:

A.	Short answers: Cultural awareness	30 marks
B.	Extended Writing	30 marks

SECTION I: A. This section requires candidates to read short informative texts (advertisements, public signs, posters, brochures, guides, instructions, brief news reports etc.) and to attempt the following types of exercises:

- Answer factual comprehension questions, requiring candidates to scan the texts to locate specifically required information. These questions require no knowledge outside of the text.
- Questions requiring candidates to demonstrate that they understand abbreviations, initials and acronyms.

SECTION I: B. This section requires candidates to match words, concepts, issues, historical periods, titles (of books, magazines, TV programmes etc.), names of historical figures, newspaper headlines with short descriptive or informative texts. Candidates are also required to:

- Answer questions asking candidates to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of basic grammatical concepts and structures.

SECTION I: C. This section requires candidates to complete a text by inserting the words supplied in the appropriate spaces. All words are supplied in the appropriate form.

SECTION I: D. Candidates are required to read a text and answer comprehension questions in English or in Irish.

SECTION II: A. Candidates are asked to write 3-5 sentences on 2-4 topics. These topics require knowledge of aspects of Russian culture. The topics are selected from themes and concepts arising in the texts in Section I. Answers are accepted in Russian, English or Irish. Marks are awarded for relevant content and textual coherence.

SECTION II: B. Candidates are required to write a short essay (80-100 words). Candidates are given a choice of three titles, each requiring essays of a slightly different genre: a letter, a story/narrative or an interview. An indication of 3-5 of the issues to be dealt with is provided.

1.3.3 Structure of the written paper (Higher Level)

The written paper is divided into two Sections.

Section I: Comprehension (120 marks)

This section tests the candidates understanding of the language and is further sub-divided into 3 Questions:

Question 1	Comprehension text and tasks	50 marks
Question 2	Comprehension text and tasks	50 marks
Question 3	Structuring extended discourse	20 marks

Section II — Grammar, language use and guided writing (100 marks)

This section tests candidates' ability to use the language correctly and with a certain degree of fluency. This section is also sub-divided into 3 Questions:

Question 1	Grammatical accuracy	30 marks
Question 2	Short essay	30 marks
Question 3	Extended/guided writing	40 marks

SECTION I: Questions 1 and 2. One of the comprehension texts is a narrative (literary, (auto)biographical, historical, diary), the other is discursive or informative/expository (journalistic, brochure, letter etc.). Candidates may be required to answer comprehension questions in English, Irish or Russian. Candidates should be advised to read the instructions carefully. The types of questions asked of the candidates include:

- Factual questions referring to the material presented in the text, and where no knowledge external to the text is required.
- Questions requiring the candidates to extract salient points in order to summarise the whole text, a specific topic and/or the underlying point of a text.
- Questions asking candidates to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of basic grammatical concepts and structures.
- Questions asking candidates to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the cultural background to the texts. Candidates may be asked to write short notes on key concepts introduced in the text and/or to demonstrate that they understand abbreviations, initials and acronyms.
- Questions asking candidates to comment on the style and register of a given text. Answers to this type of question are accepted in Russian, English or Irish.

SECTION I: Question 3. This section requires candidates to demonstrate that they understand how texts are structured. The following tasks may be included:

- Matching questions and answers from an interview or matching the beginnings and ends of sentences in an expository or narrative text.

- Identifying the order of questions and answers in an interview or identifying the order of sentences in a narrative or informative text.
- Providing questions in an interview where only the answers are given.
- Transcoding or re-coding information (from question and answer format into narrative or *vice versa*; supplying headings for paragraphs; summarising a text by stating the main points).

SECTION II: Question 1. This question tests candidates' knowledge and understanding of the grammatical structures of Russian. Exercise types include:

- Putting words supplied in brackets into the correct form.
- Inserting words supplied in the correct form into the spaces provided.
- Completing truncated words.

SECTION II: Question 2. Candidates are required to write a short informative/expository essay (50 words) on one of a range of topics given. The topics require candidate to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of aspects of Russian culture.

SECTION II: Question 3. Candidates are required to write a piece of extended prose (maximum 140 words). In this question, candidates are offered a choice of tasks. Candidates could be required to do one of the following:

- Write a letter (to a friend or in response to an advertisement).
- Write a narrative.
- Write an analysis of responses to a poll.
- Respond to a short discussion piece on a topic of contemporary relevance.

1.3.4 Structure of the listening comprehension test

The Listening Comprehension examination, of 40 minutes duration, is in four sections, all of which are answered in English or in Irish. Candidates are required to answer all questions in all sections.

The material within each section is played three times: first right through, then in three-five segments with pauses and, finally, right through again.

The texts are the same for both levels. The questions at Ordinary Level contain more contextual information than those at the Higher Level.

Text types: The subject matter of the texts is consistent with the subject content of the syllabus. Aural stimuli may include conversations, interviews, public announcements, advertisements, news reports, extracts from the radio and other sources.

Question types: At the Ordinary Level there are two question types:

- selected responses, where students are presented with several options.
- short-answer responses, where students are required to produce brief answers.

Higher Level candidates are required to demonstrate an understanding of general information and specific detail. At the Higher Level all questions require candidates to produce brief answers. The types of questions asked of the candidates include:

- Factual questions referring to the material presented in the text, and where no knowledge external to the text is required.
- Questions requiring the candidates to extract salient points in order to summarise a specific topic/the underlying point of a text.

1.3.5 Structure of the oral examination

There are **3 sections** to the oral examination, in the following order:

Section 1:	General Conversation: narrative	(4-5 minutes)	(40 marks)
Section 2:	General Conversation: discursive	(4-5 minutes)	(30 marks)
Section 3:	One of the options below:	(4-5 minutes)	(30 marks)
	(a) Project		
	(b) Picture Sequence.		

Section 1: General Conversation: narrative and descriptive

The first section focuses on general conversation about the candidate's life and interests. Typically, candidates are asked to answer at least 7 questions about subjects such as their family home, their neighbourhood, their school, their leisure pursuits, holidays, and plans for the future.

Section 2: General Conversation: discursive

The second section focuses on the candidate's awareness of Russian culture. Candidates are presented with a list of topics related to Russian culture, history, or contemporary life. They must choose one of these subjects for discussion. The list includes subjects such as a Russian book or film, a favourite Russian artist, musician, or famous personality. Candidates are also given an option to present a comparative analysis of everyday life in Ireland and Russia. Again, candidates are asked approximately 7 questions relating to the chosen topic.

Section 3: Project/ Picture Sequence

In the third section candidates are given two options. They may choose to present a written project or they may opt for a picture sequence.

Candidates who choose to do an oral presentation of their project are asked to talk about the project without interruption for 2-3 minutes. The examiner will then ask the candidate up to 3 questions relating to the content of their project or ask for an explanation of the process involved in doing the project. The examiner will also invite the candidate to explore some general points arising from the

presentation of the project. Candidates who opt for a picture sequence are requested to select one of 5 picture sequence cards. They are given one minute to prepare a story and then are required to tell the story, by talking without interruption for approximately 3 minutes. Following the narration, candidates are asked 2 or 3 questions about the picture story and are invited to express their opinion on wider or more abstract issues arising from the exploration of the picture sequence.

Marks in all three sections are awarded for fluency and ability to engage in and to sustain conversation, for linguistic accuracy, for competence in using a wide range of structures and vocabulary as well as for cultural knowledge.

2. ORAL EXAMINATION

2.1 Performance of candidates

As in previous years, the majority of the 179 candidates for the 2006 Russian oral examination had native or near-native competence. The standard of their spoken Russian and of their comprehension of the spoken language was very high. The average mark for 2006 was 98%.

On the basis of performance in this year's examination, there are three categories of candidates:

1. Heritage-speakers from the Russian Federation who speak Russian at home as their language of communication.
2. Ethnic Russians, who lived in countries of the former Soviet Union, mainly Russian-speaking minorities, before coming to Ireland.
3. Candidates mainly from the Baltic States and some other countries of the former Soviet Union for whom Russian is the second or third language.

2.2 Analysis of candidate performance

In general, candidates were able to speak freely and were at ease about topics relating to their personal life. On the whole they demonstrated the ability to use an impressive range of lexis, idioms and an excellent use of abstract language. There was some evidence of interference from English idiomatic constructions.

The second part of the examination proved more challenging than the first. Some candidates found it difficult to select a topic relating to Russian culture and to discuss it with the examiner. Many candidates from the second and third groups listed above had a limited and fragmentary knowledge of contemporary Russia, Russian culture and Russian life. Many candidates felt more comfortable comparing life or culture in Ireland with their native country.

The picture sequence section did not pose any difficulty for the majority of candidates. As in previous years very few candidates (7) took up the project option. Among the topics chosen were:

“The Russian Poet Boris Pasternak”, “The Battle of Stalingrad”, “Victory Day in Russia” and “The History of St. Petersburg”.

2.3 Conclusions

- The majority of candidates showed impressive communication skills and the ability to deal with a wide range of issues in general conversation.
- Candidates demonstrated a wide range of relevant information and opinions and displayed an impressive range of lexis and idiom.
- There is some evidence of interference from English-language syntactic and idiomatic constructions.
- A number of candidates appeared anxious at the prospect of talking about Russia and/or Russian culture. Perhaps they are not aware of how much they know.

2.4 Recommendations to teachers and students

- All candidates should familiarise themselves properly with the examination structure. Many candidates commented during the Introduction Session that they were unaware of the examination requirements and of the examination structure and procedures.
- Candidates should be encouraged to speak about general topics at greater length and be advised to respond to all questions in as full and detailed a manner as possible. Candidates should avoid using short, undeveloped answers.
- Candidates should be aware that their knowledge and understanding of Russian culture and/or life is assessed. Russian culture, in this context, is used in the broadest possible meaning. They should give some thought as to what topic interests them.
- Candidates should be made more aware of the project option in the examination.

3. ORDINARY LEVEL – Listening Comprehension and Written Expression

This report should be read in conjunction with the 2006 marking scheme.

3.1. Introduction

The Listening Comprehension examination consisted of four sections. Section 1 was made up of four brief news items about building projects in Moscow; Section 2 was a news report about the reception of the film “The Da Vinci Code” by the Minsk city authorities; Section 3 was an advertisement for a doll and puppet museum; Section 4 was an interview with the space tourist Marc Shuttleworth. In all sections candidates were required either to answer multiple choice questions or to give information in short answers.

The Written Language paper consisted of two sections. Section I tested the candidates’ reading comprehension skills; Section II tested the candidates cultural awareness and their ability to express themselves in Russian.

Section 1

The comprehension tasks in Section I included reading an advertisement for a café and information from hotel brochures (A), brief news items (B), an interview with the young pop star Ilya Lagutenko (C) and a brief narrative (D). Tasks included understanding information, scanning to locate information on a single point or more than one point and interpreting the text by using knowledge of the world (A); skimming to obtain the gist of the text and distinguishing the main idea from supporting details (B); understanding/expressing relations between part of the text through lexical and grammatical cohesion devices (C) and following the thread of a narrative, extracting salient points to summarise an idea/topic in the narrative and interpreting text by making inferences and integrating information within the text with their own experience (D). In Section 1 candidates’ language awareness was also tested: they were asked to find examples of various parts of speech and words of specified gender and number (A); they were also asked to scan the text to find the Russian for a number of words and phrases (D).

Section II

In Section II (A) candidates were required to supply three details in 3-5 sentences on two of eight topics. Candidates were permitted to choose whether to reply in English, in Irish or in Russian. The topics were very general and were loosely based on material from Section I. In Section II (B) candidates had to choose one of three topics on which to write an essay in Russian. One was a letter to a friend, one a story about a journey and one an interview with a famous person of their choice.

3.2 Performance of candidates

Number and percentage of candidates achieving each grade in the current year and in the last three years:

Table 2: The range of grades in the LC Russian (Ordinary Level)

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG	Total cohort
2003	33.33	33.33	33.33					3
2004				100				2
2005	50	30		20				10
2006	33.4	66.7						18

Eighteen candidates took Russian at Ordinary Level. Most candidates were not native speakers of Russian but probably from countries in the former Soviet Union. Some difficulties with the script and significant issues with spelling and the conventions of written Russian would suggest that candidates had minimal formal tuition in Russian at any stage during their education. The command of lexis, idiom, morphology and basic syntax was, on the other hand, commendable and showed that candidates had considerable exposure to Russian as a means of oral communication.

3.3. Analysis of candidate performance

The following table summarises the performance of candidates in the listening comprehension paper in 2006.

Table 3: The performance of candidates in the listening comprehension (Ordinary Level)

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Marks allocated to each question	30	20	27	23
Average mark	25	17	26	21
Average mark as %	84%	83%	94%	92%
Lowest mark	12	10	21	14
Lowest marks as %	40%	59%	78%	61%
Highest mark	30	20	27	23
Highest mark as %	100%	100%	100%	100%

The following table summarises the performance of candidates in the written language paper in 2006.

Table 4: The performance of candidates in the written language paper (Ordinary Level)

	Section I				Section 2	
	Information retrieval	Mix and match	Structuring discourse	Comprehension	Short answers: cultural awareness	Extended writing
Marks allocated to each question	60	40	20	40	30	30
Average mark	48	38	19	33	19	17
Average mark as %	80%	94%	93%	84%	62%	57%
Lowest mark (excluding a nil mark where candidates omitted to answer a question)	29	28	14	18	5	12
Lowest marks as %	48%	70%	70%	45%	17%	40%
Highest mark	58	40	20	40	30	28
Highest mark as %	97%	100%	100%	100%	100%	93%

As the two tables above illustrate, most of the Ordinary Level candidates had strong receptive skills both in the listening and in the reading comprehension tasks. All candidates attempted all comprehension exercises and made a serious attempt to engage with the exercises. In (A) the hotel brochures elicited better responses than the café advertisement. Many candidates supplied more information than had been required. This was a sensible strategy given that a number of them appeared to have problems understanding the questions, possibly because their command of English was poor. On the whole candidates' ability to extract salient points to summarise the underlying idea of a text or to skim to obtain the gist of a text was slightly better than their ability to locate details.

78% of candidates obtained full marks for the exercise matching news items and headlines (B). Part (C) was very well answered, showing that candidates have a good understanding of the structuring of discourse and the relations between parts of a text (40% obtained maximum marks); a number of candidates were penalised in this exercise for introducing spelling mistakes when transcribing their answers (*што* for *что*; *сколко* for *сколько*). Part (D) was on the whole well answered. This section possibly most acutely showed up problems some candidates had with English and others had with Russian. These problems were principally lexical. Where there were no contextual clues to help unlock the meaning of certain details, there was evidence of guesswork. Much of the guesswork was based on the sounds of words and suggests that candidates are more comfortable with the spoken language (e.g. he liked to sing for *он любил поест*). Some candidates lost marks because the quality of their English severely impeded comprehension of their answers. The one exercise type in Section I which caused serious problems was the first language awareness question. Three candidates did not read/understand the instructions; four candidates did not attempt the question and only one candidate obtained full marks.

In Section II (A) candidates chose to write on the following topics: Russian cities (11); Russian food — this topic provided mouth-watering discussions and descriptions of Russian dishes and breads (10); Russian musicians — this topic provided lively and varied answers on a range of modern popular musicians and groups, including Shura, Mumu Trol, Alla Pugacheva, Tatu, Dima Bilan, Korn, Kirkorov (7); Leisure facilities (2) and Russian tourist resorts (2). No candidates wrote on Lake Baikal, Travel in (or to) the Russian Federation or the Media in the Russian Federation. Most of the answers were well informed and interesting; most candidates could supply two relevant details on their chosen topic (particularly when it came to topics within their personal experience, such as food or music). Some details were, however, too vague or general to gain full (or any) marks and some comments or value judgments were not supported with evidence (see Exemplars of Standard). Some candidates wrote their replies in note form, others wrote 3-5 discrete, unrelated or barely related sentences. These candidates were penalised in the award of marks for Textual Coherence. Some candidates only wrote on one topic (perhaps they failed to read the question carefully enough?); one candidate did not write on any. Two candidates answered this question in Russian.

In Section II (B) candidates chose to write the following essays: Letter to a friend (12); Interview with a famous person (2) and Travel narrative (1). Three candidates did not attempt this question.

3.4 Conclusions

Strengths of extended writing:

- **lexis**: candidates use a good range of appropriate lexis and idiom
- **functions**: candidates are able to communicate basic functions such as greeting, signing off, enquiring about someone's health/well-being, inviting, sending best wishes/regards to others, thanking, expressing a desire/wish, expressing regret, expressing that they miss someone/something, suggesting a course of action
- **word order**: candidates have a good sense of Russian-language word order.

Problems in extended writing:

- **the script**: poor formation of letters; confusion between the Cyrillic and Latin scripts
- **orthography**: candidates tend to write words as they sound (confusion between voiced and unvoiced consonants); candidates are uncertain about word boundaries
- **syntax, idiom and collocation**: there is evidence of interference from English and candidates' first language
- **textual coherence**: a number of candidates gave little attention to structuring and organising their discourse; development of ideas was sometimes patchy and/or unambitious and/or rambling and/or repetitive
- **common errors**:
 - collocation, which may show interference from English: *я имею экзамены/хорошие новости, я заболел насморк, я делаю мой 18 лет там*
 - syntax: failure to differentiate between 'location in/at' and 'motion to'; non-agreement within a noun phrase
 - morphology: conjugation of verbs in present and simple future tenses; use of soft sign in verbal forms
 - word boundaries: joining prepositions and nouns/pronouns (*уменя, вету ниделю, камне вгосте*); joining negative particle and verb (*давно невидзьильс; нескучьаи, я никак несмогу, небуло время*); other (*такшто, что бе*)

- common spelling mistakes: *хочу: хачю, хотчу, хочю, хачиу; очень: очен, оцень, очени, отчен, очьн, очин; здесь: здес, сдесь; что: што, цто; сейчас: шась, сетчас, счась; нравится: нравиться, нравитса, нрависа*
- punctuation: full stops and question marks tended to be the only forms of punctuation used

3.5 Recommendations to teachers and students

Recommendations to teachers

- Candidates need more practice in writing, in order to improve the legibility of their script and to minimise confusion between the Cyrillic and Latin scripts
- Candidates need advice on what constitutes ‘relevant’ information in the cultural awareness sections.

Recommendations to students

Candidates should

- read the questions carefully
- attempt all questions
- provide as detailed answers as possible in the comprehension exercises.

Candidates should not:

- write in pencil.

N.B.

Pencil smudges easily; this tends to render answers illegible. Correcting fluid should not be used. A candidate wishing to invalidate an answer should put a stroke through it.

4. HIGHER LEVEL – Listening Comprehension and Written Expression

This report should be read in conjunction with the 2006 marking scheme.

4.1 Introduction

The Listening Comprehension examination consisted of four sections. Section 1 was made up of four brief news items about building projects in Moscow; Section 2 was a news report about the reception of the film “The Da Vinci Code” by the Minsk city authorities; Section 3 was an advertisement for a doll and puppet museum; Section 4 was an interview with the space tourist Marc Shuttleworth. In all sections candidates were required to give information in short answers.

The Written Language paper consisted of two sections. Section I tested the candidates’ reading comprehension skills; Section II tested the candidates knowledge and understanding of grammar and their language use in extended writing. One of the writing exercises also tested cultural awareness.

Section I

The first comprehension task in Section I was based on an interview with Vladimir Putin about his early childhood and education. Tasks included understanding information, scanning to locate information on a single point or more than one point and interpreting the text by using knowledge of the world. Candidates could also choose either to write on Putin’s career or to write short notes on three concepts referred to in the text which relate to Russian culture and society.

The second comprehension task in Section I was based on an article from the press about a British agricultural worker who settled in Siberia. Candidates were required to skim through the text to obtain the gist of the text and distinguish the main idea from supporting details and to follow the thread of a narrative, extracting salient points to summarise an idea/topic in the narrative. Candidates were tested on their language awareness, using material extracted from this second text. They were asked to derive infinitives from finite forms of verbs; they were required to indicate the gender of noun phrases from the text; they had to find words in the text from one of three semantic fields.

The exercise in the structuring extended discourse part of Section I required candidates to indicate the order of sentences in a story by numbering randomly ordered sentences.

Section II

In Section II (1) candidates were required to put words in brackets into the correct form. The text was a short biographical sketch of a young actress. Candidates were also required to insert appropriate question words in an interview with a young actor. The question words were supplied in the appropriate form. In Section II (2) candidates wrote a short essay on one of nine topics. Most of the topics related to Russian culture and/or society. The topics were very general and were loosely based on material from Section I. In Section II (3) candidates had to choose one of three topics on which to write an essay in Russian. One was a letter, one a narrative about a journey and one a discussion of their experience of the Irish post-primary sector.

4.2 Performance of candidates

Table 5: The range of grades in the LC Russian (Higher Level)

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG	Total cohort
2003	83.7	14.6		1.8				55
2004	79.5	13.7	2.8	2.8	1.4			73
2005	90.1	7.2	2.7					111
2006	86.7	10.1	1.2	0.6	1.3			158

Higher Level: 158 candidates took Russian at Leaving Certificate Higher Level in 2006. As in previous years, the majority of candidates were native or near-native speakers. This is reflected in the high proportion of A grades.

4.3 Analysis of candidate performance

The following table summarises the performance of candidates in the listening comprehension paper in 2006.

Table 6: The performance of candidates in the listening comprehension (Higher Level)

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Marks allocated to each question	22	14	24	20
Average mark	18	13	22	19
Average mark as %	82%	93%	92%	95%
Lowest mark	0	0	4	9
Lowest marks as %	0%	0%	17%	45%
Highest mark	22	14	24	20
Highest mark as %	100%	100%	100%	100%

The performance of candidates in the listening comprehension was extremely good, as evidenced by the average marks obtained in each section.

The following table summarises the performance of candidates in the written language paper in 2006.

Table 7: The performance of candidates in the written language paper (Higher Level)

	Section I					Section II		
	Q.1		Q.2		Q.3	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3
	Comprehension	Cultural awareness	Summary	Language awareness	Structuring discourse	Grammar	Short essay	Guided writing
Marks allocated to each question	32	18	37	13	20	30	30	40
Average mark	30	15	32	10	18	26	29	38
Average mark as %	93%	85%	87%	77%	91%	86%	95%	94%
Lowest mark (excluding the nil mark where candidates omitted to answer a question)	6	4	6	1	2	4	19	10
Lowest marks as %	19%	22%	16%	8%	10%	13%	63%	25%
Highest mark	32	18	37	13	20	30	20	40
Highest mark as %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Comprehension: Higher Level candidates’ receptive and comprehension skills are very strong, as borne out by the average marks obtained (Question 1: 93%; Question 2: 87%). In some cases candidates did not give enough detail. Candidates found it more challenging to skim to obtain the gist of a paragraph, to differentiate primary from secondary details and to structure their responses as summaries than they did to locate specifically required information.

Cultural awareness: In Section I, Question 1 the majority of candidates elected to write short notes on three topics rather than a paragraph on one (Putin’s career). Those who elected to write on Putin’s career relied overly heavily on the information in the comprehension text, where they were being asked to provide information not given in the text. The general standard of answers was very good, as evidenced by the average mark of 85%. Two candidates did not attempt this question.

The short answers highlight a number of issues which candidates found problematic. When asked to write short notes on a concept/issue from the text candidates were unsure whether to answer in

relation to the Russian or the Irish context: двор becomes an Irish school yard, электричка becomes the DART. [One candidate resolved this issue by making reference to both contexts. *Первый класс: В первый класс идут дети учиться от шести до семи лет. (Конечно, в каждой стране по разному, в Ирландии с четырех)*]. Some candidates wrote short autobiographical texts relating their own experience of the concept or issue [*Первый класс: Я некогда забуду день когда пошла в школу первый раз...*]; others wrote short opinion pieces arguing for or against a concept or issue [*Школьная форма: Я думаю что каждая школа должна иметь свою школьную форму которая должна отличаться от других школ. И каждый ученик должен ее носить с гордостью ...*]. Answers were sometimes overly general; some answers contained non-factual value judgments which were not substantiated or illustrated. A number of candidates did not read the instructions and wrote a paragraph about one of the topics rather than 1-2 sentences about three topics; others wrote short notes on all topics.

In this section candidates are permitted to choose in whatever language they wish to answer. Candidates should answer in the language in which they feel most comfortable as marks are awarded for content and textual cohesion, but not for the quality of language/expression. Very few answered in English. None answered in Irish.

Language awareness/use of grammar: Section I, Question 2, Language awareness: The section in which candidates performed least well was the first question where they were asked to derive the infinitive from a finite form. The most common errors included: omitting the soft sign (*ь*); incorrectly spelling the reflexive ending (*ca* instead of *ся*) or leaving it off altogether, and altering the aspect of the verb. Candidates also had difficulty with verbs of motion, it would appear they consider the ‘default’ form to be the prefixed perfective form. A significant proportion of candidates had difficulty naming the gender of noun phrases. This suggests that many candidates, though they have a high degree of fluency and excellent comprehension skills, have had little or no formal learning of the language. The exercise requiring candidates to find words belonging to semantic groups did not pose difficulties.

Section II, Question 1 (i) where candidates were required to put the words in brackets into the correct form was well answered. The average mark was 86%. A number of candidates were penalised for introducing spelling mistakes into their answers; others lost marks for inserting words other than those which had been supplied in brackets (for substituting город *Казань* for *Казань*;

Екатерина for *Катя*; *актер* for *актриса*). The second exercise in this question posed no serious difficulties.

Structuring discourse: This question was very well answered as a rule: the average mark was 91%. Four candidates did not attempt this question.

Short essay: In Section II, Question 2 candidates elected to write on the following topics; the topics have been listed under each heading in order of choice:

Most chosen topic	Less chosen topic	Not chosen
Moscow	City transport	Agriculture
The Russian village/countryside	Siberia	
Sport in the RF	Higher Education in the RF	
Film/cinema in the RF	Russian actors	

Candidates were required to answer this question in Russian. The quality of the Russian was excellent. Candidates had no difficulty writing expository prose, the average mark was 95% and the lowest mark (of those who attempted this question) was 65%. The quality of the content varied considerably. Most candidates were able to give five relevant points on their chosen topic, many gave considerably more points. Some candidates should give more thought to the organisation of their ideas. One candidate attempted to include all topics into their short essay. Four candidates did not attempt this question.

Guided writing: The letter option was by far the most popular option. The narrative and discussion were as popular as one another. Assistant examiners commented on the extremely high quality of written Russian in some scripts and on the pleasure it had been to read some of the texts, which were not only well written, but also imaginatively conceived and well structured. The most successful answers were spontaneous and authentic using idiomatic Russian. Candidates took ownership of their chosen topics and made a genuine attempt to address the stimulus. There was no evidence of pre-packaged or learned-off material. Answers demonstrated rich and complex language, candidates employed a wide range of appropriate lexis and idiom and showed a high degree of sophistication in

the manipulation of the structures of the language. Tone and register as a rule was wholly suited to the chosen task. A number of the essays demonstrated considerable knowledge of the world and exceptional maturity. The average mark was 94%.

Marks were lost mainly where candidates failed to understand part of the question or failed to include content details that were required. There were minor spelling errors in most essays. These were not penalised as in all other respects the essays exceeded the requirements. Some candidates did not structure their writing at all well. The discursive essays were sometimes more like personal accounts than discussions and they included too many anecdotes at the expense of argument.

4.4 Conclusions

- The standard of answering was very high.
- More attention to detail in the reading comprehension sections would have raised marks even higher.
- Candidates tended to give full answers and made sure to cover all points in the written sections.
- Difficulties in understanding or expression in English had a significant impact in the case of a few candidates.
- A small number of candidates can read and have cultural knowledge but appear never to have learned to write in cursive script.

Most common errors:

Orthography

Use of soft signs (ь) in verbal forms

Use of -в- instead -з- of in -его/-ого endings (*про него*)

Standard spelling rules (*хочю, приезжают, -кий*)

Use of -е- instead of -э- (*этот, это, эмигрант*)

Single/double consonants (*ранно, ученик*)

Word boundaries

чтомо (for *что-то*)

Preposition + noun/pronoun	<i>в основном</i> (for <i>в основном</i>); <i>с первых классов</i> (for <i>с первых классов</i>); <i>по ней скучать</i> (for <i>по ней скучать</i>)
Negative particles	<i>ни о чём</i> (for <i>ни о чём</i>); <i>не обходимо</i> (for <i>необходимо</i>)
Idiom (anglicised collocations)	<i>старшая/вторая школа</i> (for <i>средняя школа</i>)
Syntax	overuse of <i>это</i> punctuation conventions
Anglicised constructions	<i>после два года</i> (for <i>через два года</i>)

4.5 Recommendations to teachers and students

Recommendations to teachers

- Teachers should stress to candidates to make every attempt to write legibly.
- Teachers of students who have near-native competence should focus on literacy skills, the language appropriate to various text types (letter writing, narrative and discussion) and on English-language summary writing skills.
- Some candidates need advice on the level at which they should sit the examination, others might be advised and given the opportunity to study another language, one which is possibly closer to their mother tongue.

Recommendations to students

Candidates who are not receiving formal instruction in Russian should consult the SEC web-pages for (a) a description of the paper, (b) past papers and (c) past marking schemes.

Students should

- Read the questions carefully and do what is required. There are no marks for irrelevant or additional material.
- In reading and listening comprehension sections, elaborate as much as possible in answering. There is no penalty for giving too much detail, but marks might well be lost for giving too little.
- Give some thought and devote some time to organising their ideas before writing the answers.

- In the grammar test, candidates should not substitute words for those given in brackets.
- Attempt all questions in all sections as required.
- In the writing section, read the instructions carefully. Marks are allocated for what is asked. No marks are awarded for irrelevant information.
- In the writing section, organise ideas into paragraphs.
- Write legibly.
- Check how many questions/sections should be answered. Do not leave questions/sections unanswered.
- Familiarise themselves with basic grammatical terminology (parts of speech [noun, verb, adjective, etc]; basic grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, case) in either Russian or English.
- Read a range of text types that interest them (web-sites, newspapers and magazines, literature, biography and memoir) in Russian in order to develop your reading skills, then discuss them in English.
- Check in what language answers should be.

***N.B.:** Pencil should not be used to answer any section of the paper, not even the Listening Comprehension. Pencil smudges easily; this tends to render answers illegible. Correcting fluid should not be used. A candidate wishing to invalidate an answer should put a stroke through it.*

5. EXEMPLARS OF STANDARD

5.1. Ordinary Level

The following answers were written by candidates in the 2006 examination

Short answers: cultural awareness (15 marks per answer)

Blinchiki: This type of dish is very popular and you would always see it at parties, weddings etc. (4) It is made of eggs, flour, milk (4) and then you put anything you would like like cheese, meat, chocolate ect. Most of people use chees and meat. (4)

This answer obtained **twelve** marks for content and **two** marks for textual coherence (material generally developed within a planned framework. Generally well constructed but lacking coherence in places).

Russian city (Moscow): Moscow is a very beautiful city. There are loads [sic] of things to visit. It is also the capital of Russia. (4) There are loads of historical things you can go and visit. (2)

This answer obtained **six** marks for content and **one** mark for coherence (Satisfactory organisation of materials. Development of ideas patchy and/or unambitious.) This answer illustrates a fairly common problem: candidates do not supply evidence for value judgements and/or supply answers which are so vague that they could refer to anything anywhere. No marks were awarded for reference to Moscow's beauty. Reference to *historic things to visit* should be supported with at least one example to obtain full marks.

Extended Writing (30 marks) [Errors in script are in bold.]

Привет Том! (A2)

Как и тебе дила? (A1) У мене всьо нормально (B2) скоро законшу школу (B2), устроулса на вищирам на работу (B1). Вету ниделю бил оцень красиваи дьни но толка плоха (C2) то цто я забалел насморк и кацаль (C2). Надеяись што вета лета я вирнись дамои (D2) может через месез или два (D2). Пуридаи всем привет (E2)

Name of candidate

This answer demonstrates a good knowledge of Russian idiom, an acceptable range of appropriate lexis. The tone and register are appropriate to the task, expression is fluent and the candidate fulfils most of the task requirements and produces a well constructed (if unadventurous) piece of text. The candidate was penalised for errors in orthography and inflectional morphology. He/she also lost marks for content, failing to make reference to seeing his/her friend and for failing to sign off.

Content and expression: 18	Textual cohesion: 4 Total: 22
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5.2 Higher Level

The following texts were written by candidates for the Leaving Certificate in 2006

The following answers illustrate the assessment of expression in the short essay (Section II, Question 2). They illustrate in particular the difference between candidates who are awarded marks for expression (a) using the limited lower accuracy (LA) scale and (b) using the whole scale:

(a) *Самий извесный спорт в Руссии это футбол. Всём равница играти этот спорт. Этот спорт самаи интересныи. Мне очин ранвица сматрети по тыливизору как онии играет. Я и друзья играем футбол кажды дени. Я люблю спорт Российски. Я думаюоу через год я поиду в России на сматрети футбол. Я жду безумна паити.*

This essay illustrates the difficulty of assessing expression in many candidates whose life-experience has exposed them to Russian, but who have had limited tutoring in the language and possibly limited exposure to written Russian. This text exhibits a number of strengths - the candidate has a good command of tense, temporal relations and aspect; s/he uses complex syntactical structures, such as the subordinate clause introduced by **как** after a verb of perception; s/he is comfortable with the use of the dative to express the semantic subject of **нравиться**; s/he uses the irregular plural form of **друзья**; s/he has no difficulty expressing degree (superlative of adjectives). On the other hand he/she has difficulties with the cyrillic script (s/he prints, rather than using the cursive script) - s/he has problems with spelling of even the most basic words (a number of the spelling errors suggest interference from English футбол); there are problems with both basic nominal and adjectival inflections; some constructions suggest interference from English (играем футбол).

This candidate was awarded 10/20 marks for expression (LA).

(b) *Сибирь*

Сибирь находится на востоке России. Это место является одним из не многих которые есчо небыли сильно тронуты цывилизацией. Природа в Сибири очень восхитительна. Летом там температура похожа на весну на Икраине, скажым. Зема там сурова. Температура можит упасть до – 40. Поэтому здесь жывут очень одапмированные жывотные, как медведи, волки и олени. Сибирь находится очень близко к Американскому штату Аляска. Это очень ексклюзивное место превликает к себе охотничих туристов со всего мира.

This candidate's text exhibits some of the same difficulties as the previous one - a few problems with orthography and, indeed, some errors in the manipulation of the Cyrillic script. On the other hand, this candidate uses a far wider range of appropriate lexis; the tone and register are wholly suited to the task; leaving aside the question of orthography, this text is almost flawless in terms of accuracy and shows a high (native speaker) degree of sophistication in the manipulation of the language. This candidate was awarded full marks for Expression (20).

Section II, Question 3, Letter

The following two letters illustrate the difference between candidates who are awarded marks for expression (a) using the whole scale and (b) using the more limited Lower Accuracy (LA) scale.

(a) *Привет мама и папа!*

Спасибо что не забыли вы меня. Я рад что у вас все порядке. Как дела?

У меня теперь очень большой дом, больше чем бабушка имеет. Большой сад, тоже есть огород. [Короче мне этот дом самый лучший. Когда сделаю фотографии увидите. Дом серый – из камень.]

Сегодня большой день. Буду жениться если зобили. Я не как немагу забить как сделал предложение руки и сердца. Страно получилось!

Я с Татьяной думаем сделать визу. Тогда прилетим с Россией! Хочешь?

Да забил сказань что буду искать новую работу. Я хочу забыть о своем тракторе но нужны денги так нечево не поделаеш! Правда?

Я хочу поехать с своим детей и показать Санкт–Петербург и позже Калининград.

Хорошо нету у меня много времени. Так много нужно сделать. Передай привет бабишке. Фсе пока, до стече, скупяю.

Михайл

Expression 12/15

11-15	Vocabulary use good – rich, idiomatic and appropriate. Spelling mistakes rare, grammar generally correct: Good level of accuracy in verb endings, agreements; correct use of tense...
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(b) extract [Errors in script are in bold.]

Привет мамма и папа!!!

*Севодня я женюс (уже второй раз) но Татьяна оцен красивая и она меня очены любит. Очены жалка што вы неможиты участваваты, но мы скоро сней поёдим в Англию и тогда вы сможити его увидеть. У меня очены **вольшой** дом – они сдесь на много десевле чем Англий и трактор **и** меня есть. Так что небалшая хозяйство получается. Скоро буду покупаты лосяд и корови. Я работаю в колхозе отвецтвиным по трактораме а Татьяна сидит дома, потому что она здют нашу малинкую дочку Веронику – Поздравлаю Вы становитсе бабушкой и дедам! У меня здесь уже многа друзей и благодаря Татьяне я уже говорю по Русский язык. А и ишу я ...*

Expression: LA 11/12

11-12	Expression is very fluent, with a high degree of lexical, syntactic and idiomatic variety but serious problems with basic accuracy (spelling, word boundaries + inflectional morphology)// errors in every 2 nd or 3 rd word Vocabulary use good – rich, idiomatic and appropriate. No problem with use of tense , aspect and case . No difficulty with complex syntactical structures . Tone and register appropriate. Spelling mistakes common, problems with word boundaries
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