



LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2000

FRENCH

HIGHER and ORDINARY LEVELS

ORAL EXAMINATION

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

HIGHER LEVEL

1. Introduction

The French examination at Leaving Certificate has three discrete components:

- a. Oral Test
- b. Written Paper
- c. Listening Comprehension Test

At Higher level, the oral component merits 100 marks, i.e. 25% of the total; the written paper is allocated 220 marks, i.e. 55% of the total – divided between written comprehension, allocated 120 marks and written production allocated 100 marks. The listening comprehension test merits 80 marks, i.e. 20% of the total.

In 2000, the oral test was conducted nationwide during the two weeks, April 3rd to 14th. The listening test, lasting approximately forty minutes, followed – after a ten minute break – the written paper on June 13th.

The listening test, following the pattern established since 1997, consisted of five taped items in French. Most items were played three times, with built-in pauses for answering. The question paper had to be

answered by each candidate in English or Irish. All questions were to be attempted.

The written paper had two sections:

Section One: Written Comprehension, allocated 120 marks.

Section Two: Written Production, allocated 100 marks.

The only choice in the examination offered to candidates was in this latter section, where from four questions, each offering a choice, the candidate was asked to answer one of the Question 1 options, (40 marks) and two questions from Questions 2, 3, 4 (30 marks each).

1. Performance of Candidates

French was taken as a subject at Higher level by 16,789 candidates in 2000. This was a decrease of 6.5% from the 1999 numbers at this level, reflecting the combination of total, overall drop in numbers sitting the Leaving Certificate examination and the transfer of some candidates to Ordinary level.

The final breakdown of grades was:

A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
8.80%	22.90%	36.90%	27.80%	3.40%	0.20%	0.00%

No separate breakdown of grades is generated for the oral component of the examination. However, results in the combined written and listening tests were:

A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
8.81%	19.82%	32.72%	29.69%	8.30%	0.63%	0.03%

This is a combined A+B+C rate of 61.35%. The inclusion of the oral marks gives the overall A+B+C reading of 68.60%. From this, it can be seen that candidates, on the whole, scored better in the oral component at all levels [except at Grade A, where a consistently high mark in all components is achieved].

No such clear statistical statement is possible about performance in the listening test. From the breakdown of marks gathered at Sample 20 stage, an

uneven picture emerged. The general trend [80%] was a poorer score in this test than in the other components, i.e. it could be said that the overall performance of candidates in the listening test was somewhat disappointing.

There were, however, individual candidates and some clusters/centres which did not conform to this pattern.

2. Analysis of paper

A. Section I – Written Comprehension

Each of **Question 1** and **Question 2** in this section consisted of ten questions in French of 5 marks each, followed by one question in English meriting 10 marks.

Question 1 concerned a passage of literature; Question 2 was based on a journalistic passage in French. The latter was considered easier and scores were higher, though examiners reported very few achieving full marks.

The scoring pattern of candidates in written comprehension was similar to that of other years. It is the most successful part of the examination, where candidates can ensure their grades. Candidates whose final grade falls in the C and D categories are rarely disappointed by this component. The mark per question scored most regularly was 5. Where this was not achieved, it was generally because of inadequate or inaccurate presentation of the

answer, sometimes rendering comprehension doubtful. Such was the case in **Q.1**, 2(b), 4(ii), **Q.2**, 2(b), 4(a), where excess material was added or where doubt appeared about where exactly an answer should begin or end.

The questions for which some candidates lost all marks this year fell into three categories:

- Multiple choice questions, especially the two of this genre set in **Q.2**. Mistakes here showed a poor understanding of ideas/concepts in the passage.
- Other questions requiring global or gist comprehension proved difficult for many candidates. Such was the case in **Q.1**, 1(ii); 3(ii); 4(ii). It is also possible that errors occurred because of candidates' poor vocabulary e.g. lack of understanding of words like 'salir' and 'menacée'.
- Grammar questions, where only the exact grammatical element was rewarded.

Mark loss, in the final, 10-mark question in English in both Comprehension passages, was caused, generally, by failure to distinguish two clearly identifiable points or by supporting a point with irrelevant quotation. As in other questions of comprehension, candidates are advised to clearly think about their responses before putting pen to paper.

A.

B. Section II – Written Production

While many examiners detected a slight improvement in this section, it was, still, the part of the examination which showed greatest weakness and where the widest range of performance was obvious. Reproductions of learned-off material were fewer and less protracted than in the past, giving rise to a more meaningful exercise. Improvement arising from, and associated with, candidates' oral preparation was also welcomed by examiners.

Questions 2(a) and 4(b) were the only questions rarely attempted. When they were, they were answered either very poorly by candidates who did not fully understand the stimulus given, or exceptionally well, with flair, humour and a touch of well-targeted cynicism by those spurred on by the challenge they posed.

All other question choices were made with approximately the same frequency. Twenty to twenty-five per cent of all answers were excellent. These answers focused intelligently and sometimes creatively on the questions asked. They then developed three or four points in simple, correct French. Examiners noted that some of the best answers sprang from

topics prepared for the oral examination e.g. Questions 3(a), 4(a) and to a lesser degree, 3(b). This latter question seemed to have been only half read by many candidates, who responded adequately to the continuing education element but either ignored or fared badly in the part dealing with careers in the trade areas. The obvious advice to be given here is that the stimulus as a whole must be responded to, and that answers which deliberately alter the task cannot expect high marks.

The main disappointment in the written production section was in Q.2 where a considerable number of candidates, in what should have been the most accessible task on the paper, showed how hopelessly very inadequate their vocabulary was to deal with a real-life classroom situation. Asked to write a note of apology for misbehaviour in class, many candidates did not know the word for 'class', 'classroom', and could not, in French, find a way to express behaviour, disruption, apology, responsibility, or a promise of something not happening again. Register was flawed in many cases. The general lack of awareness of such basics produced sentiments such

as ‘Mme. Barret, j’étais
mauvaise dans ta
chambre’! Was that the
reason for concluding, ‘Je
connais que tu ne
voudrais pas me préserver
dans ta chambre’?

Along with such
vocabulary gaps,
examiners pointed to the
need for improvement in

- Verb tenses and endings, especially the present, imperfect and passé composé;
- Pronouns, especially direct object, relative and disjunctive pronouns;
- Gender of common nouns; agreement of adjectives;
- Functions of c’est/c’était; il y/il y avait; beaucoup de; car/parce que/à cause de; de plus en plus/ de moins en moins; en ce moment; le weekend.

A.

B. Listening Comprehension Test

Sections I and V –
information on
orienteering and the news
items – were perceived to
be very accessible and
were accurately answered
on the whole. Elsewhere
in this test, examiners
noted much guesswork,
with weakness in gist
comprehension. In many
instances, candidates
recognised individual
words but were incapable
of deciphering much
peripheral material. Such
poor performance was
more marked in certain
centres than in others and
would appear to indicate
inadequate practice in

listening to authentic spoken French. Even in such centres, however, there were samples of excellence.

As in previous years, it was a cause for concern that, despite very favourable conditions for aural examinations advised by the Department [e.g. reduced numbers in separate classrooms], some candidates continued to be disadvantaged by the use of poor quality tape recorders/sound systems or unsuitable venues. Public address systems are not the most appropriate means of administering this test. Neither are large sports halls ideal venues, especially if they are adjacent to busy roads.

Apart from these practical difficulties (which ought to be eliminated), it was a further cause for concern this year that some candidates, equating inability to comprehend with inability to hear, complained and sought redress for what they concluded was poor tape quality at the most testing part of the examination. It is intrinsic to the nature of the examination that some parts are more difficult – for grade discrimination purposes. Tapes are professionally produced; a second copy is allocated per centre;

superintendents are advised to adjust sound quality / replace machines are required during the introductory part of the tape. Tapes deemed to be faulty are checked in the course of the marking. Rarely have the tapes themselves been found to be faulty.

Superintendents do not have the discretion to replay segments of the tape at the request of either candidates or school personnel. Such an occurrence would breach the integrity of the examination and would be liable to prosecution under the Education Act, 1998.

1. Overall General Comment

The Leaving Certificate Examination 2000 in French Higher level, was deemed accessible by teachers and examiners. Performance of candidates ranged from many samples of excellence to samples of little mastery of basic skills. There was an observable and welcome shift from the regurgitation of learned off material to the production of candidates' own creative efforts. Teachers and candidates are to be complimented on this welcome improvement.

2. Recommendations for Teachers and Students

Arising from the marking of the written paper, the main recommendations of examiners were:

- That French be used as the normal language of classroom management and communication;
- That the focus of teaching and learning be the acquisition of genuine language skills – not an artificial selection of material to be learned by heart, in the hope of slotting it in at all possible points of the examination;

- That candidates maximise their chances by reading the questions carefully, reflecting and planning before writing, indicating clearly the number of the question being attempted, re-reading their work in a critical manner, presenting all answers legibly in ink/ biro – not in lead pencil which can be difficult to decipher on coloured paper.

ORDINARY LEVEL

1. Introduction

The structure of the Leaving Certificate Examination at Ordinary level is as follows:

(a) Oral Examination - 80 marks

This is a common examination for both Ordinary and Higher level candidates.

(b) Written Examination - 220 marks

(i) Reading Comprehension - 160 marks

There are 4 questions for 40 marks each.

All questions are obligatory.

(ii) Written Expression - 60 marks

Candidates attempt two of the three parts, A, B and C.

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(c) Listening Comprehension Test - 100 marks

There are 5 sections in this test, for 20 marks each. All questions are obligatory.

2. Performance of Candidates

The following is a percentage breakdown of the grades awarded in the Leaving Certificate Examination, French, Ordinary Level in 2000.

	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
	0.10	1.10	4.90	9.70	13.30	14.60	14.10	12.60	10.40	7.80	6.50	4.20	0.70	0.00

The final out-turns for this examination in the years 1998, 1999 and 2000 are set out in the Appendix. A study of these statistics shows that there has been a dramatic reduction in the failure rate (Grades E, F and NG combined) from 14% in 1998 to 5% in 2000. Similarly, at the opposite end of the spectrum, what is commonly called the "honours rate" (combined A, B and C grades) has risen from 40% in 1998 to 70% in 2000. This has been brought about a deliberate policy within this Department to pitch the standard at level of competence of candidates presenting for this examination. Most examiners welcomed this development, though some felt it represented a dilution of standards.

3. Analysis of Paper

The Written Examination

SECTION I

There was a marked improvement in overall marks scored here. Candidates tended to complete all questions whereas in former years it was usual to see perhaps one or two questions attempted and the remainder left blank. A lot of concern was expressed about the poor command of English evident in many answers in questions 1 and 2. Assistant Examiners also

frequently mentioned poor spelling in English. Few candidates answered completely in the wrong language.

Question 1:

Candidates scored well in this question.

1. Very well answered with the majority of candidates scoring the full 4 + 4 marks. "Professors" seldom appeared.

2. Generally well answered. All correct possibilities suggested in the Marking Scheme were offered. "Exam classes" and "Junior Certs" were the most frequently given incorrect answers.

3. (a) Very well answered with many candidates listing more than one or all

correct languages.

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4. Reasonably well answered. Many candidates were awarded only partial marks, as the full correct answer was not presented. Words like "conseils", "équipe" and "études" proved difficult

for the candidates.
"Revision" was a frequent answer. "Counsellor" was also offered.

5. Very well answered.
Some candidates gave "questions in physics and chemistry" or "physics and chemistry teachers".
Very few if any understood "des logiciels".

6. Generally well answered but some gave "students" in the plural or "a student who is finished school". "Lafosse" was given by some, with a minority misinterpreting "fr" in the text and answering "Fr Lafosse"! Another recurring answer was "Leaving Cert consultant".

Question 2:

This text proved more difficult and challenging for candidates.

1. Reasonably well answered. Many candidates were awarded partial marks as they failed to give "an advance", "credit" or "loan".

2. Well answered.
"Minitel" was misinterpreted by many with "computer", "internet", "fax", "e-mail" and "pager" being offered.
"Courrier" frequently followed "post" thus incurring a 2 mark penalty.

3. Well answered. "Practical" (frequently misspelt) and "useful" were the most popular answers. "A present you fall in love with" was rarely if ever given. Frequent incorrect answers included "utensils" and "decorations".

4. Well answered. A surprising number of candidates gave "robe" for dress. "Coiffeur" became "chauffeur" and "maquillage" became "manicure".

5. Fairly well answered. Candidates rarely got 3 fully correct advantages here. Many gave "parking" without "free". "Impression" was rarely known, "livraisons" was not known. Many made reference to books in this context. "Presents are guaranteed for one year" was a frequent incorrect answer.

Question 3:

A major difficulty here was the inability or unwillingness of the candidates to distinguish between "mots", "expression" and "phrase". Penalties were incurred for inclusion of extraneous material.

1. Very well answered. Extraneous material penalty applied here.

2. Very well answered. A recurring incorrect answer was "avant de l'embrasser chaleureusement".

3. Reasonably well answered. There was much confusion over "avant" and "après" with many quoting a chunk of the text including the correct answer.

4. Very well answered.

5. Fairly well answered. Weaker candidates had difficulty here, with many quoting "s'ils ne touchaient pas respectivement 600,000 francs par épisode".

6. Very well answered. The subject pronoun was generally included. Some incorrect answers were "entre", "d'injecter" and "crever".

7. Generally well answered. The candidates gave answers relevant to the text. Weaker candidates relied on guesswork or quoted in French without making the point in English. One candidate said "they seem to get on better than most real families I know"!!.

Question 4:

1. (i) Well answered. All variations in ticking etc as presented in the

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(ii) Very well answered.

2. (i) Very well answered – "avec un grand sourire" and "Cher ami" being

offered.

i. Well answered but poor manipulation in evidence. "J'ai dormi" was

frequently given as were
"Il dormit" and indeed
"elle a dormi".

3. (i) Reasonably well answered. (a) and (c) were given by some.

i. Fairly well answered. Much extraneous material offered here and

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4. Well answered. Many omitted "chez moi".

5. Reasonably well answered. There was a certain amount of confusion about the sex of Uchikawa and about which professor said what! A lack of cultural awareness was evident in

some answers where candidates thought that "la rive gauche" was a river and "l'Hôtel de Ville" a town hotel! Many mentioned that "he had been to France many times".

SECTION II

Expression Ecrite

The overall standard in written production showed an improvement this year. Many candidates are still attempting extra questions.

Sections A and B were the most popular choices, with C (b) being the least popular.

Section A:

A (a) This question was very well answered with many candidates scoring

full marks.

No's 1 and 9 were most often incorrect and "français" was misspelt because of Capital F or omission of cedilla.

A (b) Fairly well answered and a popular choice as extra question.

Ques. 1-4 Well done. Some candidates still had problems with "Nom" and

"Prénom".

Ques. 5 Not very well done. It was obvious that many did not know the

meaning of "Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture" and thought they were to apply to work there.

They did not understand "inscrire". Many gave a description of their own house.

Ques. 6 Very well answered with the majority detailing more than one pastime.

Ques. 7 Not well answered. "Jours" was unknown to many and they merely

mentioned activities.

Ques. 8 Very well answered but a disappointingly large number of candidates

gave the wrong gender and/or misspelt "musique" showing a carelessness on their part, since the word was printed on the paper.

Language: in 5-8 was fair. Present Tense was used but no great variety in vocabulary was offered. "J'aime", "je joue", "je suis" mainly used. Use of Possessive Adjective was inaccurate – "mon passetemps sont", "mon musique préféré". "Beaucoup" was very frequently misspelt as "beacoup".

Candidates who attempted both A (a) and A (b) tended to fare better in A (a).

Section B:

a. Message:

Those who chose it coped reasonably well.

Communication:

C1 "Retrouver/Rejoindre" rarely known. Many candidates simply used "avec mes

amis".

C2 3 p.m. often given as "3 h p.m."

C3 "Bring money" and "later" caused problems.

Language:

Language was reasonably good. Use of Imperative was poor. Vocabulary was fair. "Faire des cours" made several appearances, as did "recontrer". Examples of good expressions were "Juste un petit mot pour te dire que" and "Il faut apporter de l'argent".

b. Postcard:

This was by far the most popular choice, with candidates scoring high marks.

Communication:

C1 "Weather conditions" proved difficult.

C2 Most candidates acquitted themselves well.

C3 "Ask if he can join you" caused problems. "A few days" became "une semaine".

Language:

Use of the Present Tense was good, e.g. "J'adore", "J'aime", "Je suis". Spelling mistakes were frequent, e.g. "la nation" (for "swimming"), and "vacannec". There was some confusion between "la mer" and "le mère". Register caused problems.

Section C:

(a) Diary:

There was an improvement in the standard of answering this year. Many candidates attempted this, presumably as an extra question and scored high marks in it.

Communication:

C1 "Weak at Maths" was a problem, which many sidestepped by use of "je déteste les maths".

C2 "Homework" sometimes took the form of "travail maison". "Very tired" was well handled (perhaps thanks to 4 (2) (ii)).

C3 Here we discovered that the favourite programme of most candidates was "Friends"! But many did not give "émission". "Parents will not allow it" proved difficult for most. Some candidates made commendable use of their strategic skills to paraphrase e.g. "mes parents sont stricts" or "mes parents disent non".

Language:

Language was fair. Present Tense was used correctly, e.g. "J'ai beaucoup de" and "je suis très fatigué". Spellings/Vocabulary errors included "matamatics/mata".

a. Formal Letter:

This was the least popular choice among candidates and the lowest scoring question. Pockets of candidates in certain centres tended to do well.

Layout:

Yet again very few candidates scored full marks for Layout. At the top of the page, marks were lost for omission of "Irlande" and "2000". In closing formula marks were lost for spelling mistakes and omission of accents and even words.

Communication:

C1 "A place at the campsite" caused problems.

C2 Most candidates coped satisfactorily.

C3 Not well done. "Request information as soon as possible" was ignored by most and

badly attempted by the rest.

Language:

Language was fair. Learnt off irrelevant material appeared in this question. Some confused "je" and "j'ai", e.g. "j'ai voudrais réserver". Present tense was good – "Il y a cinq dans ma famille". Vocabulary was a problem in the following cases: "site" for "place", "intendé" for "intend", "camp" for "campsite".

Listening Comprehension

Candidates presenting Ordinary level usually score high marks in listening comprehension and the "cru" of 2000 was no exception. This year, the candidates coped quite well with the overall structure of the question-paper : mostly multiple choice questions, targeting, in turn, global comprehension and comprehension of detail. All five sections of the paper were well answered, with most candidates scoring full marks in Section III. Sections I and II caused few problems. Even in Sections IV and V candidates acquitted themselves well. Overall then, congratulations to candidates and teachers.

The few problem areas are listed below:

Section I: Question 1: "card" offered for "carte".

Section IV: Question 4: numbers caused problems.

Section V: "chômeurs" Q1, and "grève" Q2(ii) not always known.

4. Overall General Comment

Candidates and their teachers are to be congratulated on the excellent results achieved at this year's examination. It may however be prudent to guard against complacency. The very noticeable improvement in the percentages for higher grades does not necessarily signify a dramatic improvement in the language competence of the candidates. One feature of the answering which continues to give cause for concern is the inability of many candidates to cope with the

vocabulary for life at school or for communication during the French class, for example : confusion of "cours" and "course"; "jour" often unknown; "devoirs" for "homework" unavailable; failure to understand "mot", "expression" and "phrase"; "le Francais" instead of "le français", for the French language.

The cultural awareness dimension of the syllabus had not impinged on the consciousness of some candidates : for example, the problems with "Hôtel de Ville" and the timing of "déjeuner" for seven o'clock in the evening.

5. Recommendations for Teachers and Students

1. That French be used as the language of communication during French classes.
2. That in the choice of course-books and/or other texts, preference be given to material that facilitates the development of cultural awareness.
3. That candidates avoid writing answers in pencil. Marks can be lost if answers are indecipherable.
4. That candidates use the full width of the page for their answers in Section I, Questions 1 and 2 of the written paper.

APPENDIX

The table below gives the percentage breakdown of grades awarded at Leaving Certificate, Higher level, French in the years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F
1998	3.00	4.30	6.10	7.90	10.50	11.20	12.50	12.90	11.10	9.00	7.70	3.50	0.20
1999	5.30	5.10	6.40	8.10	9.70	10.60	11.70	11.70	10.50	9.40	7.50	3.90	0.20
2000	4.40	4.60	5.60	7.60	9.60	11.10	12.80	12.90	11.90	8.90	7.10	3.30	0.20

The table below gives the percentage breakdown of grades awarded at Leaving Certificate, Ordinary level, French in the years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F
1998	0.0	0.10	0.70	2.10	4.90	8.10	11.10	13.70	15.30	13.70	15.80	12.40	2.0

1999	0.10	0.70	2.10	5.20	9.20	12.60	14.40	15.30	13.10	10.40	9.10	6.70	1.1
2000	0.10	1.10	4.90	9.70	13.30	14.60	14.10	12.60	10.40	7.80	6.50	4.20	0.7

ORAL EXAMINATION

Introduction

As in previous years, the oral examination took the form of a conversation lasting approximately 13-15 minutes. Candidates had the option of discussing a document of their choice: a project, a piece of literature, an article or photograph. As in other aspects of the oral examination, candidates were assessed on their ability to communicate in French and not on their knowledge of or opinions on a particular topic.

At Higher Level, 25% of the total marks were allocated to the oral component; at Ordinary level, 20%. There was no differentiation between higher and ordinary level candidates at the time of the oral examination. All candidates were marked out of a total of 100 marks as follows:-

Pronunciation / Intonation: 20 marks

Vocabulary: 20 marks

Structures: 30 marks

Communication: 30 marks.

Marks were later adjusted in the case of candidates who took the written examination at Ordinary Level.

Some procedural refinements were introduced in 2000. Assistant Examiners were supplied with four formatted pages for their reports. A considerable improvement was noted in both the number and quality of reports received. Examiners were supplied with a summary / checklist of the procedures to be followed at all stages of the examining, since this has become quite detailed and complex.

Good questioning technique was demonstrated on video at the pre-examination conferences. Most importantly, examiners were made aware, in theory and in practice of the evaluation criteria to be applied for uniformity of standard.

PerformANCE Analysis

As usual, candidates ranged in ability from the practically flawless who communicated comfortably on a range of topics to those who were almost incapable of saying anything in French beyond the most basic information. Concerning more competent performance, it was remarked that 'A' standard candidates have excellent

discussion skills, whereas 'B' candidates needed to move beyond the "Je" form of verbs and show an ability to use a greater range of verb forms. Candidates in general showed evidence of talent, good humour, good preparation and good teaching. On average, about half of all candidates presented a document.

It may be helpful for teachers and students to highlight the main features of candidates' performance in the four areas where it was assessed: -

Pronunciation / Intonation

There were many examples of candidates with very good or excellent pronunciation, which was evidence of the competence and hard work of all those involved. It was obvious, however, that some students' exposure to good spoken French was more limited than that of others.

Unfamiliarity with the sound of many common words and expressions, including those which refer to classroom and school life, was not uncommon.

Some of the most frequent errors, to which future candidates' attention might usefully be drawn, included the following:-

- pronunciation of the final 's' in nouns and verbs
- '-tion, -sion, -tient' pronounced 'à l'anglaise';
- confusion between *métier/matière, cours/courses, cadet/cadeau, année/aîné, aime/ami, études/étudie*, etc.;
- confusion between nouns and adjectives: 'anglais/Angleterre', etc.;
- pronunciation of silent verb endings: 'ils donnent', etc.

Vocabulary

In general, vocabulary has perceptibly improved, with most candidates able to reproduce at least a basic vocabulary covering the range of topics that arise in the course of the interview. As usual, however, there was often an over-reliance on a limited number of well-worn expressions such as '*bien/bon, j'aime, ça va, d'accord, j'adore, ennuyeux*,' etc. In a surprising number of cases, candidates lacked vocabulary relevant to their own situations – home, family, school, and pastimes. This may be due to their underestimating the amount of vocabulary necessary to maintain a conversation of this duration on even a limited number of topics, or a failure to learn it properly. To achieve high marks, candidates should avoid introducing a topic for which they are inadequately prepared, while being willing and able to display the vocabulary necessary for a brief discussion of a range of topics.

Structures

The more able and better-prepared candidates could speak in well-constructed sentences with accurate verb formation and subordinate clauses. In many cases, this gave them the ability to formulate appropriate responses to questions posed by the examiner on topics or in areas related to those with which the candidates were familiar, and their ability to respond spontaneously was impressive. At a lower level, candidates could converse satisfactorily in the three main tenses and develop their

responses to a limited extent. There was, however, an over-dependence on a limited number of verbs, often misused in the infinitive: '*j'aller, j'aimer, je jouer, je regarder*'.

The most common errors were:

- confusion of tenses
- incorrect auxiliary verb in '*passé composé*'
- incorrect possessive adjectives: '*mon mère, ma parents*'
- poorly formed negatives
- 'echo response' to '*vous*' questions: '*Vous aimez...? J'aimez...*' Drill exercises might help to avoid this.
- '*j'ai*' correctly used for age, but followed by '*il est.../ma soeur est...*'. This is very common, and may indicate over-reliance on notes, lack of classroom French or lack of drill exercises.
- lack of basic conjunctions; greater use of '*car, parce que, donc,*' etc. would enable more candidates to communicate above a basic level.
- failure to distinguish '*prochain*' from '*dernier*' in questions, leading to the incorrect tense in the response.

Candidates who scored highly in this section generally avoided colourless adjectives, used adverbs accurately, varied their verbs and expressions, and tended to avoid the impressive but awkward.

Communication

The range of marks awarded in this section indicated the great diversity of ability and preparation shown by candidates in the areas assessed: fluency, spontaneity, authenticity as well as understanding of the questions asked and a willingness to answer at reasonable length. Many candidates lacked practice, perhaps indicating a belief that it would be 'alright on the night', but this generally resulted in poor marks for Communication. Candidates who had prepared a certain amount on and around a range of topics which interested them generally had the ability and – most importantly – the confidence to do well in this section.

Well-prepared candidates showed an ability and a willingness to discuss a range of topics, not simply and not necessarily those defined as 'abstract'. Such subjects as parents, place in the family, pastimes, school life, friends, etc. lend themselves to interesting and individual discussions, as do certain topics of local, national or global importance which may be of interest to young people. It should be borne in mind by students and teachers that candidates are assessed solely on their ability to express what they know, and are not expected to provide ready-made solutions to the world's problems. Many candidates, not always the more able, showed an ability to focus the conversation on a topic of interest to them or deliberately introduced it by means of their document.

A significant number of candidates had learned off large amounts of material from books, notes or handouts, expecting to be able to deliver it uninterrupted. These candidates often failed to achieve high marks in Communication because, when questioned by examiners wishing to ascertain the true picture of their ability to communicate, they proved unable to adapt or develop the material so as to be able to carry on an authentic conversation. Candidates with lesser amounts of prepared material who were more familiar with the structures of language and its possibilities generally did better. The fine sentiments of "*Je trouve que l'apprentissage du français est quelque chose de stimulant et d'enrichissant qui ouvre mon esprit*" are rather undermined by the robotic monotone in which it was delivered.

Lack of exposure to French in the classroom may explain the failure of a significant number of candidates to respond to the particular question asked: '*Où...?, Quand...?, Comment...?, Pourquoi...?*' etc. Too many candidates just hear a word in the question and set off on an irrelevant topic.

Document

The number of candidates presenting a document continues to increase, though it still stands at only about half of the total. The most common type of document is a photo of the family, of a holiday or of stars from the worlds of sport or entertainment. The best documents are those which lend themselves to some discussion and which result from personal engagement or interest on the part of the candidate. Many seem to have been chosen without much thought, and did little to enhance the interest or scope of the conversation.

The document is intended as a '*point de départ*', not a '*fait accompli*'. Some candidates learn off large tracts of material which does not lend itself to discussion, whereas a photo of a soccer player could lead to a discussion of the local or national team, players' salaries, their lifestyles, the media, role models, being a fan, rivalry, etc. Newspaper articles or pieces of literature are quite rare, but can have great potential for a discussion in which a candidate can excel. Ideally, projects should be the result of some personal engagement, rather than the result of a received package or a few sessions at the computer. Able candidates ought to be encouraged to choose more stimulating documents.

Examiners are unanimously of the opinion that a carefully chosen and well-prepared document is of great benefit to candidates of all levels of ability. It is a way of ensuring that the candidate's chosen topic is discussed (which increases confidence), it gives weaker students stamina and helps more able ones to excel. The support and guidance of teachers in the choice and preparation of documents is considered essential if their students are to derive real benefits in this area.

General

Encouragingly for all teachers and students, there were plenty of fluent, confident and authentic-sounding candidates who had never spent time in France. Unfortunately there were also those whose five years of study had yielded very little reward in terms of spoken French. The oral component is probably the area where students take most responsibility for their own learning. To avoid artificiality or the risk of freezing-up in

the examination, candidates must have a personal vocabulary and take responsibility for its accuracy, following appropriate advice and correction. A good starting point for this preparation might be to ask themselves "What do I want to say about myself, my life, my interests in this interview?"

Recommendations

1. To make the Oral examination less of a departure from the norm and less of an ordeal

for all concerned, it would be helpful if simple discussion in French could take place in the classroom as early as possible and continue as increasingly complex language is acquired.

2. All candidates should seriously consider preparing a document – ideally one which has personal relevance and which lends itself to discussion. Photos of a holiday/outing, family event, own team, a group of friends, etc. can all make excellent documents. Candidates should be prepared to discuss the related issues which may arise and be able to respond to the examiner's questions.
3. Drill exercises can be useful for pronunciation and to address specific areas of weakness, such as responding correctly to the person and/or tense of the verb in the question.
4. Practising in pairs can greatly increase a student's experience of responding to oral-type questions.
5. An integrated approach to teaching the four language skills can greatly facilitate the acquisition of oral competence.

Other relevant material

Arising from examiners' experience, there are several aspects of the organisation of the oral examinations in schools which could usefully be examined in the interests of the best performance of their students.

1. It is essential that all candidates attend the briefing meeting with the examiner, both

for the information conveyed and to hear the examiner speaking French. This often reassures nervous candidates and reduces tension and stress.

2. Poor quality sound on recorded interviews is becoming increasingly common. It

would help if schools verified the quality of the tape recorder to be used.

3. Candidates are easily disconcerted by bells, intercoms and external noises. It can also be very off-putting to have a group of students talking, reacting and carrying out post-mortems just outside the room.

