

FRENCH (Foreign Language)

Paper 0520/01

Listening

General comments

The Paper proved accessible to candidates. Though it was of a similar level of difficulty to the 2007 examination, it was a little more challenging in **Section 2**. Candidates were generally aware of the requirement to complete all three sections of the test and very few did not attempt the last section. The range of question types used in the test was very similar to that used in 2007. As always there was an incline of difficulty on the Paper. The French heard gradually increased in terms of length and density as candidates worked their way through the exercises and questions moved from the identification of factual information in short items to the need to understand and identify opinions and explanations in narrated accounts in different tenses.

New Centres should note that where questions require a short written response in French, they are prepared in such a way as to minimise the amount of French which candidates have to produce in their answers. This is a test of comprehension and Examiners do not expect candidates to phrase their answers in complete sentences. Inaccurate language is accepted by Examiners provided that the message of the answer remains clear (see published Mark Scheme for details). It is always worth reminding candidates that they should use the pauses on the recordings to read the questions fully and should not add extra details to their responses which are inaccurate and may distort an otherwise correct answer.

The candidature increased yet again this year and a very full range of performance was seen by Examiners. Candidates achieved a good range of marks and many scored above half marks, showing sound levels of attainment in both specific and general comprehension tasks.

Candidates had generally been well prepared in Centres and were aware of the requirements of the examination. Examiners noted, however, that on multiple choice questions requiring one box to be ticked, some candidates had ticked an answer in pencil and then indicated another choice of answer in ink, but had not deleted the original pencil tick. Candidates should be warned not to do this. If they change their mind they must ensure that any answer they do not want the Examiner to consider is clearly crossed out. In **Section 2 Exercise 1** some candidates ticked only 4 of the required 6 boxes or ticked 8 boxes. Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with all question rubrics as these change little from year to year. Familiarity with question rubrics can only aid and reassure candidates in the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1 Questions 1-8

This opening exercise tested the comprehension of short conversations of a factual nature. Areas tested included prices, transport, food, chores around the house, leisure activities and shopping. Candidates generally performed well on the opening questions and the last three questions. **Questions 3, 4 and 5** sometimes caused problems to the weaker candidates, especially **Question 5** as a sizeable number of candidates were led into the incorrect response by the distractor *je vais débarrasser la table*. On **Question 8** *maillots de bain* was less well known than in previous years.

Exercise 2 Questions 9-15

Generally, this section, which focused on tourist office information, was well done by candidates. Candidates were required to tick boxes and write in numbers. Surprisingly, some candidates offered 5 or 2 instead of 6 on **Question 9**. Most scored the 2 marks available on **Question 10**, though a few ticked more than 2 boxes or 1 box only. Virtually all candidates correctly identified *chiens* on **Question 11** but 79 was not so

successfully rendered for **Question 12**, with answers such as 69 and 619 being common. **Question 13** was usually correct, but B instead of A was occasionally selected on **Question 14**. Candidates were able to provide the correct time on **Question 15**.

Section 2

Exercise 1 Question 16

This exercise featured four young people talking about their leisure activities. Candidates were required to tick 6 boxes only from the 12 options offered. The most frequently chosen incorrect option was c. This showed that candidates had clearly not understood the use of *depuis* in the phrase *que je pratique depuis 15 ans* and thought that Sophie started dancing at the age of 15.

Exercise 2 Questions 17-21

In this exercise, candidates heard the first part of an interview with a young girl, Capucine, talking about her life as part of a large family and comparing experiences in Papua New Guinea and Paris. Candidates had to correct one incorrect detail in each of 5 statements. They generally understood well what was required. On **Question 17** there were many correct answers and on **Question 18** most were able to express that Capucine's father had been a doctor, although many found it difficult to write this in correct French. On **Question 19**, many were successful in identifying that the friends were shocked and answers conveying the idea of surprise or embarrassment were also accepted. Candidates generally also did well in identifying the concept of selfishness on **Question 20** and *ambiance* on **Question 21**.

Exercise 2 Questions 22-25

The second part of the interview with Capucine was heard and then candidates were required to give short answers in French. On **Question 22** the key concepts were the idea of shared work or help with the work and the fact that there was somebody to listen to you. Some candidates did not score the mark for the first of these concepts as they gave partial replies, e.g. *le travail à la maison*, which did not convey the idea of sharing/helping. On **Question 23**, candidates needed to convey the idea that there were three sources of sound (music, radio and television) or different kinds of music. Candidates who expressed the idea of noise also gained the mark, but surprisingly at this level, many were not familiar with the word *bruit*. On **Question 24**, candidates were sometimes unfamiliar with the word *bureau*. Candidates who wrote *une pièce et le bureau* did not gain the mark as the correct answer was distorted by the addition of the extra material. Generally the idea of having a large family was well rendered on the last question in this exercise.

Section 3

Exercise 1 Questions 26-31

Candidates heard an interview with Paul who talked about a school trip to New Caledonia. The exercise was appropriately challenging for this stage in the paper. No particular question was found to be more or less difficult by candidates and there was no discernible pattern of incorrect answers on this multiple choice exercise.

Exercise 2 Questions 32-39

This final exercise required candidates to write short answers in French and, as intended, was the most demanding on the Paper. The candidates heard a young girl, Hélène, talking about her life in Kirghistan and the questions required them to be able to understand both factual information and opinions expressed in a variety of tenses. Long answers were not required, but candidates often found it difficult to spell accurately although the mark scheme made some allowances for this provided that the message was clear. On **Question 32**, candidates frequently rendered *chevaux* incorrectly as *cheveux*. **Question 33** was well attempted and many were able to say that Hélène was a guide or an interpreter. They also realised that she spoke many languages and that she knew the area/mountain routes well. Some, however, misunderstood and said that she knew the local farmers well. On **Question 34**, *la vie simple* or *le paysage* were sufficient to gain the mark, but, again, spellings of these concepts were often very poor. **Question 35** was perhaps one of the most demanding on the Paper and required candidates to convey the idea that **sometimes** there was no gas or water or that there were **cuts** in these services. Only the very best candidates scored on this question. **Question 36**, however, proved much more accessible and many candidates who did not score well on this Section did manage to gain the mark here. Candidates also fared quite well on **Question 37** and could gain the mark either by referring to the fact that Hélène found it hard – *c'est dur* – or that she preferred

studying with others or that she found it demotivating to study alone. Again, only the best candidates were successful on **Question 38** where they needed to convey the concept of doing what one wanted and not being happy. Finally, **Question 39** was an appropriately difficult last question, but, pleasingly, many candidates were able to express the idea of a **feeling** of liberty or freedom.

FRENCH (Foreign Language)

Paper 0520/02

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

The paper appeared to be of a similar standard to those in other sessions, and candidates appeared to have had enough time, attempting all three sections and scoring marks throughout the paper. However, candidates could profitably have spent any spare time checking through their work to correct inaccuracies, such as mis-copied words from the texts. General areas of weakness seemed to be in the use of negatives, possessive adjectives, and personal pronouns, and sometimes a desire to write as much as possible so as to be sure that the correct answer would be there, somewhere. Candidates would do well to be guided by the length of space allocated for an answer – if there is only one line shown, the answer is expected to fit in that space!

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1 Questions 1-5

Most candidates scored well in this exercise, with **Question 4** presenting the most difficulty.

Exercise 2 Questions 6-10

This exercise was very accessible to the majority of candidates and scores were generally high: the only question causing difficulties was **Question 10**, where the answer was *Vrai*, but many candidates chose *Faux* – perhaps *réduit* in the text was not well-known.

Exercise 3 Questions 11-15

This exercise presented a number of problems, with many candidates being unsure about the meanings of *Le coiffeur*, *Le pompier* and *Le facteur*. **Questions 13** and **14** were generally answered correctly, and **Question 15** was most often incorrectly answered with C (*Le coiffeur*), or E (*Le pompier*).

Exercise 4 Question 16

For the note, candidates were asked to communicate three items of information: that they were going to a shop or a market (any food shop was accepted), that they were going to buy some cheese, and that they were going to return at half past eleven. To score the communication mark for **(a)**, candidates had to use *à*, *au* or *à la* with a food shop; for **(b)**, they had to produce a recognisable attempt either at the word *fromage* or a 'francophone' cheese, and for **(c)** the correct time as shown – some candidates lost the mark because of confusion over *demi(e)* and *midi*. To gain the two available language marks, candidates needed to use two verbs correctly – a past tense was acceptable for **(a)**, but for **(b)** and **(c)**, Examiners expected some form of the present, future, or immediate future. Many candidates were able to score both the language marks, some with a brief but elegant sentence such as *je vais au marché pour acheter du fromage*.

Section 2

Exercise 1 Questions 17-26

Candidates generally showed a good level of comprehension in this exercise, and Examiners took a liberal view on the use of possessive adjectives and personal pronouns, provided that the resulting response was not ambiguous or confusing. For **Question 17** there were several acceptable answers; either that Cécile was writing to talk about the summer holidays, or to change their plans for the summer holidays, or to invite

Justine to go with her and her family to Corsica. Most candidates were able to provide an answer for some of these lines, though those who said *elle s'écrit...* could not score. **Question 18** was frequently answered with *Paris* – possibly some candidates did not recognise the word *Corse*, and seized on something they did know, without giving it enough thought. **Questions 19 to 21** presented few difficulties, though some thought for **Question 21** that it was *le bateau* or *la journée* which was *magnifique*, rather than the idea of what they would be doing. **Question 22** required *Ile de Beauté* as an answer and candidates who merely wrote *Beauté*, or who lifted *découvrir les petites plages sauvages de 'l'île de Beauté'* did not score. **Question 24** was generally well answered, as was **Question 25**, with very few candidates failing to mention the essential information that the walk was to be *en montagne*. The last question, about what work Cécile was to do on the boat, was very straightforward – she was to do the cooking/prepare the meals – and most candidates scored the mark. However, those who went on to add *nager en pleine mer...* invalidated their original answer. Many of the questions in this exercise could be answered very briefly, often with one or two words, and additional elements offered by candidates often added nothing, and sometimes contradicted what was a correct first answer.

Exercise 2 Question 27

For this question, candidates were asked to write between 80 and 90 words on their school life. There were three required elements:

- where their school was and how they travelled to it;
- what they liked and disliked when they were there;
- what they thought about discipline in their school.

Most candidates were able to deal very well with this question, though it was clear that some were not comfortable with the expression *se trouve*, and a number did not say how they got to school. Where candidates said they were boarders and so did not really travel to school, appropriate credit was given. Some candidates included material about starting and finishing times, and length of lessons and breaks, but as this information was not requested in the rubric, unless it was provided in the context of an aspect of school life that they either liked or disliked, it could not score. The third part, about discipline, gave candidates some problems – some merely said it was *bien* and some tried to use *discipline* as an adjective, but a number were able to express what the rules were – *on ne doit pas...*, *il faut porter l'uniforme...*, *on ne peut pas...*. The majority of candidates scored well for accuracy, though there was often a lot of repetition of *j'aime.../je n'aime pas...* and simple structures, but some candidates managed to score the maximum language marks with clear, accurate language and a range of structures.

Section 3

Exercise 1 Questions 28-33

As in previous years, a few candidates ticked the *Vrai/Faux* boxes, but made no attempt to write any justifications. Candidates need to be aware that if they decide the correct answer is *Vrai*, and tick that box, then they do not need to write anything, and there are no further marks available for a justification.

For **Question 28**, which was *Faux*, candidates could select from the text either that *Amélie regardait (fascinée) les énormes vagues* or that it was *Impossible d'aller nager car la mer est trop forte*, but without the *Mais...* at the beginning of the sentence. **Question 29** was *Vrai* and needed no correction. Candidates sometimes found it difficult to manipulate the language required to answer **Question 30** and often offered *elle a été tout de suite le bonheur* or lifted from the text using *moi/je* instead of simply *c'est/ça a été tout de suite le bonheur*. **Question 31** was *Vrai*. **Question 32** could be corrected in two ways, either by saying *Non, elle perd un temps fou dans les aéroports*, or by offering instead something which was genuinely one of the pleasures of the sport – *Non, c'est la sensation de vitesse intense*. **Question 33** was quite often answered as *Vrai*; candidates seemed to have missed the reference in the text to *à peine assez d'argent* – without that element, the correction did not score.

Exercise 2 Questions 34-41

For this exercise, it is not sufficient for candidates to merely identify the correct part of the text for their answer, they must also be selective about exactly what information is required to answer the question. It was often the case that where candidates chose to copy a chunk of text with the correct answer buried within it, the extra details they included rendered their answer invalid.

For example, for **Question 34**, candidates often gave the correct answer that *Alex n'avait pas* but then added the rest of the first sentence, which in fact referred to his life when he was older and in fact did not score. Many candidates answered **Question 35** by lifting *Dans ce Centre, les conditions de vie sont dures* but did not explain to which Centre they were referring – the extra information needed was that it was a *Centre d'Éducation*. With regard to **Question 36** the two most straightforward answers were (*la chance de* aider les autres and (*accepter de*) *prendre des risques*. Equally acceptable were answers beginning *Si/Quand on lui donne... et...*. Some candidates had difficulty with the construction needed, and tried unsuccessfully to use some form of *il faut*. **Question 37** was relatively straightforward and the majority of candidates were able to offer an acceptable answer – Examiners were looking for *amener les médicaments* plus any one of three other possible elements: to Russia / to a hospital / for abandoned children. **Question 38** was also well done, though both elements (*deux camions* plus *quatre voitures*) were needed to score the mark, and candidates who lifted the whole sentence *Ils arrivent aussi à convaincre des entreprises... etc* did not score. **Question 39** also tended to be well done, though some candidates gave *ils se disputent* and *ils ont des difficultés à vivre en groupe* as two separate answers, but these only scored one of the available marks – mention of the temperature/the cold was required for the other mark. Those who lifted car les jeunes ont des difficultés à vivre en groupe, ils se disputent did not show that they had really understood. **Question 40** was quite well done, most candidates understood that the young people felt a degree of responsibility towards the hospital and the children, and answers were only marred by a reference to *les autres* (from the text), or use of *ils ont besoin des médicaments* without explaining the identity of the 'ils'. For the final question, Examiners were looking for something along the lines of *les jeunes peuvent rejoindre la vie normale* or *ils ont appris à travailler en équipe*, but without reference to *Ces jeunes sont transformés...*

FRENCH (Foreign Language)

Paper 0520/03

Speaking

General comments

This Paper was common to all candidates. The full range of marks was available to all candidates and as in 2007 a very wide range of performance was sampled by the Moderators. Overall, the standard of work heard was similar to that heard last year.

In most Centres, examining was carried out in a professional and sympathetic manner, with candidates being put at their ease and given plenty of opportunities to show what they knew and could do. There were examples of very good work from candidates of all abilities and, as in the past, the best performances were heard in Centres where it was clear that speaking had been practised on a regular basis in the classroom and had been a central learning activity. The role played by the Examiner was essential: the best examining gave candidates the chance to talk in a variety of tenses in response to open questions which invited them to respond in a spontaneous way. Such conversations did not sound prelearnt. While it is acknowledged that weaker candidates may find it difficult to sustain work in different tenses, it was clear that with skilful examining, where the pitch of questions was adjusted according to the level of ability and simpler factual questions were put, such candidates were able to show what they could do.

Examiners must prepare prior to the test and be familiar with the Role plays and mark schemes so as to be fair to all candidates. It is, regrettable to have to report that some Examiners were clearly unfamiliar with the requirements of the examination and as a result disadvantaged candidates. It is essential that all Centres familiarise themselves thoroughly with the requirements of the Speaking test well in advance of the examination. In particular, the following should be borne in mind:

- When examining the Role plays, Examiners must keep to the set tasks as printed in the Teachers' Notes Booklet for the examination session and must ensure that all parts of the set tasks are attempted by candidates. Marks cannot be awarded for tasks which are not attempted or for alternative tasks created by the Examiner. A mark of 3 can only be awarded if the message is clearly conveyed and the language is accurate. Half marks must never be awarded. Thorough preparation of the Role plays is crucial and the Examiner may have access to the Teacher's Notes Booklet and Role Play Cards four working days before the Centre's tests are due to take place in order to prepare for the examination. (These materials must remain in the Centre in secure conditions and the contents must not be divulged to candidates in advance of the test.)
- All sections of the Speaking test must be conducted and marks must not be awarded for any section that is omitted. Marks will be reduced in Centres where they have been awarded for sections not attempted.
- Examiners must keep to the stipulated timings: Centres are reminded that the whole examination should last for approximately 15 minutes. Each of the two conversation sections must last for approximately 5 minutes in order that candidates are given the opportunity to develop their answers sufficiently to attract the mark they deserve.
- Candidates must be asked questions to elicit past and future tenses in both of the conversation sections. Marks of more than 6 cannot be awarded for Quality of Language (Scale (b)) if past and future meaning cannot be conveyed.

Clerical work

Moderators reported an increase in clerical errors in certain Centres. Centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to check all additions carefully and to transcribe all marks to the MS1 mark sheet (or CAMEO for Centres submitting marks electronically) accurately. Candidates can be greatly disadvantaged when

clerical errors are made in Centres. Half marks should never be used and marks must only be awarded according to the criteria in the Mark scheme.

Quality of recording

This was usually satisfactory and in some cases very good. There were, however, quite a few cases of inaudible tapes. It is essential that before the test the recording equipment is tested in the room in which the test will take. It is unacceptable to submit a sample which cannot be checked. If digital recording systems are used, an external microphone should be used and work saved in standard audio format (e.g. mp3). Microphones should always be placed to favour the candidate rather than the Examiner. The recordings submitted on CD were usually very clear. Centres should also ensure that all tapes and CDs are clearly labelled with candidate names and numbers.

Sample size and range

Centres usually submitted the correct sample size, but sometimes the full mark range was not covered. Please ensure that the full mark range at the Centre is covered on the samples as detailed in the instructions. In the interests of fairness to candidates, it is essential that where a Centre's marks need adjusting to bring them into line with the agreed standard, Moderators are able to check the marking at the Centre across the full range.

Application of the marking scheme

Most Centres were consistent in their application of the mark scheme. Disappointingly, however, a larger number of Centres than usual had large adjustments to their marks due to the following:

- Failure to complete all the Role play tasks
- Short Topic/Discussion and/or General conversation sections
- Lack of questions to elicit past and future meaning in the conversation sections.

Centres with more than one Examiner are reminded that it is essential that Examiners work together to ensure a common approach to the conduct of the Speaking test and a consistent application of the mark scheme.

Comments on specific questions

Role Plays

Centres are reminded to encourage candidates to attempt all parts of each task. Examiners should ensure that they do not miss out or change any tasks, nor should they add extra tasks which can confuse candidates. Marks can only be awarded for completing the tasks presented on the Role play cards. If only one part of a task is completed, only one mark should be awarded. Short answers, if appropriate, can gain 3 marks. In longer responses requiring conjugation of a verb, this must be correct for a mark of 3 to be awarded.

Role Plays A

As in 2007, the **A** Role plays were perceived to be of equal difficulty and a fair test at this level. They are designed to be easier than **B** Role plays and are set using vocabulary and topics from the Defined Content (Areas A, B and C). Candidates generally found them to be accessible and even the weaker candidates were able to score at least one mark on each task.

At the restaurant

Candidates coped well with this Role play. Weaker candidates could not always offer a main course but were usually well prompted by Examiners. Most were able to give two types of vegetables and drinks. It was also pleasing to hear that nearly all candidates could ask an appropriate question on the last task.

At the bus station

There were some mispronunciations of Montpellier, but usually tasks were attempted well. Sympathetic examining ensured that candidates gave both a day and time on the second task. As ever, weaker candidates gave *six* for *seize* on the fourth task. The last task was done well.

At the post office

Some Examiners failed to realise that they were in France and did not respond to the price task in the appropriate currency, but this did not affect the candidate's response or marks awarded. Candidates could usually give their nationality and the destination of the letters, but often mispronounced *timbres*. Nearly all were successful in asking a question on the last task.

Role Plays B

The **B** Role plays were more demanding than the A Role plays in that they required the ability to use different tenses and to explain and to react as appropriate. As last year, these Role plays differentiated well across the candidature, but it was not beyond even the weakest candidates to score some marks when the examining was sympathetic. The Moderators again reported that the cards were well balanced in terms of difficulty.

At the French frontier

Most tasks were approached well by candidates. The easiest task was the description of the present in Task 4. In Tasks 2 and 3, candidates needed to convey future meaning and there were some very good attempts at the third task as to intended future activities. The first part of the last task was well attempted, but only the more able were able to offer to open the case.

Reporting your lost sister

Again, this was usually attempted well and candidates were usually successful in describing the sister and what she was wearing. The more able used the imperfect tense well in Tasks 2 and 3. However, some could not explain when they had last seen her in Task 4. The hardest concept to convey was the idea of being worried (even though the key vocabulary was given) and only the best candidates clearly asked what they could do to help.

Enquiring about presents left in the restaurant

Most were well able to say they had left presents in the restaurant. In Task 2, only the best candidates understood the use of *assis* in the Examiner's cue, but rephrasing by Examiners usually helped and the rest of the task was very easy (the giving of a name). Some found it hard to phrase a question as to opening times and others failed to thank the employee. It is worth reminding candidates to remember to include thanks where this is a requirement of the task. The last task required candidates to convey future meaning and though challenging for less able candidates, was well attempted by most.

Topic Presentation and Topic Conversation

A good range of topics was covered in this section of the examination. Generally, the conduct of this section was correct, although, unfortunately, some Examiners did not allow candidates to make an initial presentation of about 1-2 minutes before asking questions. Regrettably, a few candidates had not prepared a topic, which affected their marks for this section. Usually, however, there was an initial presentation which gave candidates the opportunity to go into depth on a topic of their choice. Many had prepared their material thoroughly and were able to talk well and spontaneously when discussing their topic. There were some interesting discussions in which sympathetic examining, with questions pitched at a suitable level, ensured that candidates had the opportunity to convey past and future meaning and give opinions and justifications. Most candidates had chosen topics which were appropriate to their linguistic ability and they were consequently able to talk about them confidently and in an interesting way. Pleasingly, very few candidates chose to talk about 'Myself' (this topic should be avoided as it can leave little for discussion in the General Conversation). As last year, there were accounts of life in other countries, trips, school life and what it means to experience school and daily life in different cultures. It was heartening, as ever, to hear the aspirations of many of these candidates. At the top end of the range there were some very fluent and confident conversations featuring a wide range of accurate tenses and more complex structures. It was helpful to both candidates and Moderators when Examiners indicated that this section of the test was finished and that they were passing onto the General Conversation.

General Conversation

In the majority of Centres a good range of topics was covered, as specified in the Teacher's Notes. Most Examiners pitched their questions at an appropriate level and asked questions on at least three topics, giving candidates the opportunity to show that they could cover a range of subjects. Many candidates spoke confidently about their daily lives, school, leisure activities and holidays. Many also talked about their future plans and the importance of education – Moderators were pleased to hear candidates say that languages played an important role in their education. Many candidates were also able to impress Moderators with their ability to convey meaning in a variety of tenses. Regrettably, some candidates were not given the opportunity to show what they could do by Examiners who restricted their questioning to two or three unrelated questions in one tense only. As a result of this poor examining, such candidates, could not be awarded marks above a certain point in the mark scheme.

FRENCH (Foreign Language)

Paper 0520/04
Continuous Writing

General comments

Examiners were again favourably impressed by the standard of work presented for this paper. Candidates tackled the topics with enthusiasm and the more able seized the opportunity to 'show off' their French and to put together a coherent piece of continuous writing in the language. Those of more modest capability were usually able to express some ideas at a more basic level. Few were inappropriately entered and nearly all scored marks for both Language and Communication.

Understanding of the rubric was good and the incidence of unrelated material was quite rare. Candidates usually had plenty to say in response to the required tasks and rarely resorted to verbiage to pad out their answers. The importance of writing within the word limit seems to have been grasped and the number of over long pieces is smaller each year. However, some could not resist going into unnecessary detail in the early tasks and failed to score for Communication on the last task as it fell outside the word count. Answers which fell well short of 140 words were few and far between.

Attention should be drawn to the importance of verbs. To express ideas and narratives successfully candidates must employ correct verb forms in appropriate tenses. This is particularly important in **Question 2** where a narrative is required, to be related in past tenses.

Poor presentation was as usual a feature of a number of scripts. Microscopic handwriting is not welcome and the incidence of ill formed letters creates ambiguity. Examiners cannot always give the benefit of the doubt to bad presentation and cannot award marks for work they cannot read.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) The house exchange

This question attracted the majority of candidates and inspired many interesting responses. The areas covered by the required tasks included their homes and holidays both in France and in their own country in the realistic setting of a letter to a French family. All these topics seemed to be familiar to most candidates and the concept of an exchange of houses for the coming holiday was well understood. Only a small minority thought they should write about why they liked the house in France and not their own, presumably confusing *notre maison* and *votre maison*.

The style of letter etiquette employed varied quite widely. Some addressed the French recipient of the letter as *Monsieur* or *Madame* and concluded with a formal ending such as *Veillez agréer l'expression de mes salutations distinguées*. Others chose to write to their pen friend and began and ended the letter with more familiar *politesses*. Both styles were acceptable, but Examiners withheld marks for inconsistency such as the mixing of *tu* and *vous* and for using *tutoiement* when addressing *Monsieur* or the family as a whole.

Many candidates began their letter justifiably by explaining to the French family what was entailed in an *échange de maison* i.e. living in each other's homes during the holiday. Communication marks were awarded for expressing successfully one or more reasons for wanting to do this. Many sensible reasons were offered. Some had always wanted to stay in France (usually Paris) and they longed to see the sights. Others had relatives there and wished to visit them. Many were drawn by the cultural experience on offer or wished to meet people and improve their spoken French. The more practical stressed the financial advantages of exchanging houses and the expenses incurred by staying in hotels. Reasons were usually successfully expressed, but *je voudrais* with an infinitive was often overused when *nous* would have been better. Future and Conditional tenses were generally known and well expressed. A number went to such

length to explain what a house exchange involved that they failed to give a reason and a Communication mark.

Reasons for why they liked their homes tended to be rather prosaic and many simply said it was a big house. Examiners rewarded any sensible reason such as the beauty or situation of the house or the access to a pool or a pleasant garden or proximity to the town Centre or the beach. A number failed to score a Communication mark by omitting to say or imply they liked it and merely listing the various rooms, often at some length and including frequent errors of spelling and gender. Some confused *salles* with *chambres* and a surprising number failed to come up with correct versions of *cuisine* or *salon*.

All candidates seemed to understand what *sorties* were. Examiners accepted almost any activity or attraction outside the home such as visits to the seaside, the country, shopping Centres, museums, sporting venues, parks, cinemas and activities such as games, swimming, cycling, fishing and walking. Language was usually well handled in expressing these concepts. One found *on peut* or *vous pourrez* with infinitives. Just as acceptable was the use of *il y a* as in *près de chez nous il y a une piscine/un stade* etc. Some, thoughtfully recommended visits suitable for parents such as shopping and tourism and those more suitable for adolescents (discos) or smaller children (*parcs d'attractions* etc.).

Unfortunately, many candidates had reached the word limit by the time they tackled the final task, asking about the house in France, and no Communication mark could be given. No marks were given when the question did not relate to the house. Questions such as *Quel temps fait-il en France?* were not rewarded for content. Finding a correct interrogative form was too difficult for some and failed attempts such as *Comment de salles avez-vous?* or *Est-ce que votre maison dans la ville?* were not uncommon. Successful candidates enquired about the number of bedrooms, the proximity to shops etc. or the access to a garden or a garage. Some successfully avoided problems by putting *je voudrais savoir si...*

Letter endings were usually appropriate, but a minority used informal language when the rest of the letter had been formal: *bonnes bisex* was not appropriate to someone earlier addressed as *Monsieur*.

(b) Customs and traditions

Only a minority of the entry attempted this question. A small number of able candidates wrote fluently and with enthusiasm of the feasts and traditions of their country and were able to describe dances, religious festivals, traditional cooking and dress and to give their own views, invariably supportive, of the value of these customs which gave their country its character and individuality. Such subject matter required a good range of language and the ability to express abstract thoughts. Many of the responses received did not contain much of either. Candidates relied on *il y a* followed by lists of cultural activities, and used many foreign words which could not score marks for language. In such cases, attempts to explain or describe these activities were not usually very successful.

Question 2 The birthday

Virtually all candidates understood the task and were able to provide a plausible continuation to the stimulus. They understood it was their birthday and that the house was in darkness and apparently empty. Wisely most candidates did not waste time copying out the stimulus. There is no credit for this and such copied material is ignored in the word count.

Most interpreted the situation as setting up a surprise party. A minority went in another direction and wrote about a burglary or a family crisis or something unrelated to a birthday. Such interpretations were equally valid, but often led into obscure and complicated narratives which stretched the candidate's inventiveness beyond its limits. Those whose linguistic competence is average to moderate would probably do better to stick to the obvious story line.

Birthday parties and the elements of secrecy and surprise seem to be familiar the world over. Most candidates wrote how they explored the house, gloomily assuming everyone had forgotten the birthday, unsuspecting that their friends and family were crouching behind the furniture waiting to spring out and cry *Bon anniversaire!* This was followed in most cases by astonishment on the part of the narrator, giving way to joy when they discovered the subterfuge which was carried out by their parents and siblings. These emotions gave most candidates plenty of scope to include the *réactions* required by the rubric.

Predictably there was usually a special dinner, including the narrator's favourite dishes, followed by much dancing and singing. Many managed to say *tout le monde s'est amusé* although plural verb forms were problematic. Unfortunately, some felt the need to pad out the narrative with long lists of family members and

items of food and drink. These tactics tend to spoil the final piece and rarely generate marks for language. Candidates would do well to follow the rubric literally and say what happened – *au passé*. Communication marks were easily accessible to those who could use perfect tenses. Sentences such as *j'ai dansé avec papa/maman* or *nous avons mangé le gâteau* were sufficient to fulfil the task. Reactions could be simply expressed by *j'étais* and a suitable adjective.

The climax of the evening was usually the birthday presents, culminating in the *grand cadeau* from mother and father. Wishful thinking was evident, one suspected, when the present turned out to be a car or a puppy. It was disappointing how many candidates had difficulty with object pronouns. *Papa a donné moi...* and similar un-French expressions were rife on weaker scripts. *Cadeau* was frequently thought to be a parcel. Eventually, guests departed (the verb forms again proving to be elusive on many scripts) and the narrator fell into bed, exhausted, particularly as the party had followed *une longue journée à l'école*.

Many accounts ended solemnly with a homily on how important love is in the family and how much the candidate appreciated their parents and friends. The memory of the expensive new car in the garage was no doubt fresh in their mind!

Not all had the conventional celebration. Some played quietly on the computer with friends or watched a video. Others went out for a meal or to the cinema or played football. These were of course perfectly acceptable ways of continuing the story. The question set offered a wealth of different avenues the narrator could follow and many candidates were able to write an entertaining piece in response.

Some of the same linguistic problems occur every year. Spelling and gender were as usual a frequent source of error. The use of partitives was not generally good and many substituted definite articles. The gender of the narrator varied constantly on some scripts as *j'étais contente* was followed by *je suis allé* or some other masculine agreement. Common lexical items were not always well known. Candidates continue to mistake *crier* for *pleurer*, *écouter* for *entendre*, *voir* for *regarder*, *parler* for *dire* and *nuit* for *soir* or *soirée*. This year there was a very common assumption that *joli* meant happy. Past tenses were not always well handled and many used a perfect tense when a pluperfect was required as in *maman avait invité tous mes amis* or *elle avait préparé un grand repas*.

Despite the shortcomings of some answers the general standard of work presented for **Question 2** remains quite high and many candidates deserve credit for writing a lively and amusing anecdote. It is a pity that a number would have scored more highly for language if they had spent more time revising their work in search of careless and unnecessary errors.