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Report on the Units

June 2010

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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GCSE French J730

REPORT ON THE UNITS

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Chief Examiner's Report

Units of the new GCSE French Specification (J730) were available for the first time this year, alongside the final year of the legacy GCSE specification (1925).

It was pleasing to note that there were entries for all four units. Some centres had taken the opportunity to explore the new format of the examination by entering year 10 and even year 9 pupils.

The commentary on the units, the advice and information offered, are intended to benefit teachers in their preparation of candidates for the 2011 examination.

Full, detailed information and documentation for the new specification can be found at the following web address: www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/french.

Teachers are also encouraged to attend one of the training sessions scheduled by OCR to provide guidance regarding the new specification. Information on these can be found at: www.ocr.org.uk/Data/publications/Training/MFL_Training_Programme.pdf.

A701 Listening

General Comments

There was a fairly broad range of marks across both tiers.

Candidates seemed to understand the requirements of the exercises and there were no instances of candidates answering in the wrong language or of rubrics infringements.

It is particularly important that candidates are informed of the importance of making any changes to answers as clearly as possible. Where answers are given by writing a letter from a list of options, candidates should be discouraged from writing one letter over the top of another if they change their mind. It is acceptable for them to write their revised answer alongside the box as long as it is clear which they wish to have marked. Ambiguous answers caused by one letter being superimposed on another are likely to be marked as wrong.

Foundation Tier

Exercise 1: Questions 1- 8

This opening exercise was generally well done. However, in Q4 "*onze heures et demie*" was sometimes taken to be "11 o'clock". In Q6, the testing of "*gauche*" was sometimes confused with "right". In Q8, "*poulet*" was sometimes incorrectly identified as picture B.

Exercise 2: Questions 9 -15

In this exercise, candidates were required to answer in English and the questions were generally well answered. Q9 and Q10 were usually correct, but not Q11.. Although the word "friends" was commonly known, the verb was often guessed, giving answers such as "plays with friends" or "meets friends". In Q12, the topic of school subjects was clearly identified. However, a surprising number of candidates offered the answer "a sandwich" in response to, "At what time....?" in Q13. The phrase "*je nage dans la piscine*" in Q14 was commonly known, as was the opinion in Q15.

Exercise 3: Questions 16-23

A certain amount of guesswork was apparent in this exercise. In Q16, "*regarde la television*" and in Q19, "*je joue a l'ordinateur*" posed few problems to candidates. However, in Q17 "*devoirs*" seemed not to be well known and "*lecture*"/"*lire*" were not readily identified in Q20. In Q22, "*faire le ménage*" and "*chanteuse*"/"*je chante*" in Q23 were also not recognised.

Foundation/Higher Tier

Exercise 4: Questions 24-27 / Exercise 1: Questions 1-4

This exercise was not well answered by candidates. In Q24 most candidates identified correctly "avion" but the word "boat" was often guessed for the second part of the answer or, predictably, "autocar" was rendered as "car". In the first part of Q25, "enorme" was usually identified, but sometimes invalidated with an incorrect addition such as, "4 rooms". In the second part, some assumed that the opposite "very small" would be required and few managed to offer "old". In Q26, "temps" was not well recognised and even fewer correctly gave "les gens". In Q27, a reasonable number of candidates correctly mentioned going to the USA but the verb "rester" was too often given as "to rest". The answer "nothing" in this question was unacceptable.

Exercise 5: Questions 28-31 / Exercise 2: Questions 5-8

This exercise tested gist understanding of places of work and opinions about work. It not always successfully answered. There was no particular pattern of error.

Higher Tier

Exercise 3: Questions 9-16

This gist understanding exercise requiring the comprehension of small extracts of conversations was reasonably well answered. Generally, the correct answers were mainly in the latter part of the exercise. In Q9, "school" was often replaced with the words "meal/books/film" and in Q10 "meal" was given as "books/cars/holidays".

Exercise 4: Questions 17-24

This exercise required careful listening and comprehension as it consisted of a series of multiple-choice questions based on an interview with a pop singer. In order to be successful in this exercise, it was important for candidates to listen for whole phrases rather than individual words of this fairly complex material.

Exercise 5: Questions 25-31 (Item A and B)

Candidates found both parts of this exercise challenging. In Q25, a few understood "*un cirque en Belgique*" and although a few identified "*poulets*" in Q26, vocabulary such as "*endommager la cloture*" was not well understood. In the second extract, many answers were guessed and the idea of giving animals in zoos ways of diverting their attention as a means of improving their welfare was not always understood. Some successfully identified "*peuvent tomber malades*" as the answer for Q30, but the concept of hunting in Q31 was not always understood.

A702 - Speaking

In the first year of the new GCSE specification for French, it is extremely encouraging to see how well prepared the students have been for the introduction of the Controlled Assessment – Speaking.

There was a good range of topics and a range of purposes. In the majority of cases, candidates were encouraged to use familiar methods of assessment for the Controlled Assessment and the most common were:

- Presentation on a theme followed by a discussion
- An interview (usually with the candidate playing the part of somebody famous)
- A General Conversation with the candidate.

The teacher/examiners were skilful in opening up the questioning after the initial Presentation, using their experience from the previous specification. Their knowledge of their own candidates allowed them to use appropriate questioning, starting with some more “closed” questions and leading up to a more open style of questioning. It is important to remember this sort of progression, as access to the higher mark bands, requires the candidate to respond to unpredictable questions.

Centres may wish to use a bank of questions as they have done for previous specifications. However, it is important to remember not to have exactly the same set of questions for all candidates, but the questions should show some differentiation. It would be inappropriate to ask the same questions of the potential “F” candidate as had just been asked of the previous potential “A” candidate.

If Centres chose to submit a Presentation and Discussion, it is important to balance the two sections of the task. If the Presentation is too long, then there is little time for progression to the questioning style mentioned in the previous paragraph. There is a risk that candidates will not be able to fulfil their potential within the maximum six minutes of the task.

The recording quality in nearly all cases was excellent, although it is still worth remembering that if the candidate is sat too far away from the recording device, it will be difficult for the Moderator to review the assessment. The recordings followed the guidelines in the specification and there were no difficulties with the format provided by the Centres.

The labelling of the CDs was superb and the menu on the CD provided all the details necessary for identification of the candidate. In many cases the Centre had provided the Moderator with Centre Number, candidate Name and Candidate Number. In one case, the Centre had included the title of the Controlled Assessment in the file name, which was extremely useful for the Moderator to see on screen as well as in the paperwork. Even though CDs are more robust than cassettes in the post, it is still important that they are carefully packed and protected.

In the majority of Centres there was clear evidence of internal moderation across the teacher/examiners conducting the Controlled Assessments. However, it is extremely important that all teacher/examiners are marking their candidates’ work to the same standard, so that the moderation process can be effective and equitable to all candidates.

Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

As this speaking assessment is now a moderated unit, the majority of the Centres submitted their marks before the specified deadline. In a minority of cases, the marks were not made available by the deadline and this could affect the efficiency of the moderation process for all involved. It is extremely important, if candidates' results are not to be delayed, that the deadline is respected for the submission of marks to OCR.

UCLES

A703 Reading

A range of performance was observed across both tiers. Candidates coped well with the new style of tasks and scripts were generally legibly presented and complete.

Foundation Tier

Exercise 1: Questions 1-8

There was a high degree of success for candidates with this task of matching short signs or notices to statements in English. Some candidates confused “station” with “*Défense de Stationner*”, by wrongly choosing option ‘F’ as a response to Q3. Therefore, this led some candidates to search for another response to Q7. As may be expected, terms such as “*Office de Tourisme*”, “*Pharmacie*”, “*Hôtel du Centre*” and “*Salon de Coiffure*” were familiar to most candidates and, therefore, most candidates had no difficulty in scoring full marks in this exercise.

Exercise 2: Questions 9-16

Overall, this exercise which required the matching of sentences in French to a variety of illustrations was well done. Only Q15 proved to be problematic, probably because of a lack of familiarity with *lire/journal*.

Exercise 3: Questions 17-20

Candidates found this exercise to be generally difficult and full marks were not always achieved. In Q17, many candidates overlooked, misinterpreted or did not understand “*près du..*”, often simply answering with, “Canada” which was not accepted. The second part of Q17 required the understanding of “*quatre mille kilometres*” and candidates sometimes added noughts or subtracted them. The distance to Paris was given as anything between a “quarter of a kilometre” and “400 million kilometres”. Q18 allowed for a much greater rate of success, with many candidates identifying both similarities. Question 19 was generally well answered. Question 20 proved to be difficult as the topic of weather appeared to be challenging and candidates did not always get full marks. Sometimes candidates correctly identified “sunny” for Q20(c) but then invalidated their answer by adding incorrect information, e.g. “every day”.

Foundation/Higher Tier

Exercise 4: Questions 21-28 / Exercise 1: Questions 1-8

Candidates who read and compared the texts carefully were rewarded with good marks in this exercise. Q24/Q4 and Q26/Q6 proved to be most challenging to candidates.

Exercise 5: Questions 29-36 / Exercise 2: Questions 9-16

Performance on this exercise was varied as it was a challenging task with the appearance of simplicity. For some candidates, the length and complexity of the text may have been off-putting but, for others, the temptation to complete the sentences without due regard to the sense of the text may have been too strong. Candidates who read the text carefully and weighed up the choice of words got full or nearly full marks. However, Q33/13 was the question most frequently answered incorrectly with “anything” as the preferred choice of answer. The unwary answered Q29/9 with “Liverpool” recognising it as a place in the text and Q31/11 with “film”. Q15/35 was the most often answered incorrectly.

Higher Tier

Exercise 3: Questions 17-24

Many candidates scored well on this exercise.

Exercise 4: Questions 25-30

This was a good test for good candidates. Attention to detail in reading a text of this length and complexity is required to demonstrate comprehension at this level. Equally important to this exercise is close reading of the questions and precise responses in English. In Q25, many candidates could provide the correct information with regard to the number of floors in the building but missed the fact that Robert lived there.

In Q26 the idea of proving his bravery was missed by some candidates.

The seemingly straightforward Q27, which required as an answer the idea that his choice of job needed to give him the time to climb, defeated many candidates. Some answers were clearly guessed at, for example, “so he could find buildings to climb”.

Q28, Q29 and Q30 challenged all but the best candidates and there were many incomplete or guessed answers.

Exercise 5: Questions 31-38

As the last exercise of the Higher tier, this was an appropriately searching exercise. At this level, candidates are expected to be able to cope with longer and quite complex sequences of text and to understand difficult vocabulary. They should also be able to work out meaning from the context.

Q31, Q32, Q35 and Q37 were generally accessible and Q34 and Q38 were challenging. In Q34, “*se plaindre*” and “*se renseigner*” may have been the vocabulary items which defeated candidates. Q38 was a summary question and perhaps a failure to understand, “*peuvent intervenir*” made a number of candidates opt for the more obvious “*problème*” and select option A or C instead of the correct response of option B.

A704 Writing

In this first year of the new GCSE examination there were relatively few candidates taking this unit and, therefore, judgments on performance are consequently rather limited in terms of performance as there was a fairly narrow range of ability

The Centres which entered candidates had clearly embraced the challenge of Controlled Assessment and appeared to have managed well the process laid down in the specification. However it was also clear that there was a measure of caution in the approach, which led to the feeling that candidates had been over prepared. This tended to produce numerous responses structured in identical format and exploring identical details and ideas. As a consequence, the language patterns were also very similar and often rather limited in scope. This was particularly the case when the task set focused on the topic of school. It is important therefore to devise tasks that will allow candidates to develop a more personal response. Nonetheless there was evidence of some spirited and engaging writing that reflected the aims of the specification.

The descriptor for Grade A states that ' Candidates give information and narrate events both factually and imaginatively. ' In order to allow candidates to meet this requirement, it would be advisable to avoid tasks which lay heavy emphasis on descriptive information which can so easily be offered using simple structures such as ' il y a ... / il y avait ... ; c'est ... / c'était ... '. Language of this order can be effective but it is more characteristic of the lower grade range.

There was no evidence to suggest that candidates had difficulty in producing pieces of an appropriate length in the time available. Some indeed wrote more than was required. It is perhaps comparatively more difficult for the candidates with less confidence and more limited linguistic skills to produce work of the required length, especially considering what previous specifications have expected for the award of grades up to Grade C. It is therefore even more important to devise tasks that will allow such candidates to produce pieces, which, though simple in style, are coherent and reasonably accurate.

Even in this early series, there was evidence of the use of the subjunctive. It is worth remembering that this is outside the scope of the specification. For the award of marks at the top of the range, candidates must show that they can use the language required by the specification i.e. accurate and appropriate use of tenses and verb forms as identified in the grammar list. If Centres wish to stretch their candidates by introducing the use of the subjunctive into their active grammar, they should bear in mind that it will not compensate for deficiencies in what is expected.

There was also some evidence of colourful idiomatic language. Whilst not wishing to discourage a wide range of vocabulary and structure, the use of 'idiom' in the specification refers to idiomatic grammar, for example the appropriate use of ' avoir / faire ' in expressions which might use a different verb in English, the correct tense with 'depuis ' , the use of 'venir de ... ' , etc

Conclusions

Centres should ensure that able candidates have the opportunity to produce language that meets the criteria at the top of the mark range.

Candidates must demonstrate that they can sustain the level of control and variety of language structures throughout their work in order to achieve marks from the top bands, especially in respect of Quality of Language.

Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

The ability to express and justify ideas is crucial. Each of the mark bands for Communication makes reference to this skill. Candidates must include these and must show that they can express them in a variety of ways. Simple comments such as ' j'aime ... / je n'aime pas ... ; c'est ... / c'était ... ' may be appropriate at the lower mark bands but such expressions are not sufficient for the award of marks from the upper bands.

The essence of the new specification resides in the freedom it gives to candidates to produce written evidence of their language skills in a personal, individualistic way on the topics chosen. Centres should therefore guard against over-preparation that might lead to each candidate producing similarly structured, detailed responses which each rely on identical language patterns.

For candidates aiming at the upper grades, it is enough to produce 300 words per piece; for candidates aiming at the lower grades, 150 words per piece are sufficient.

The Guidance Booklet contains suggested tasks that may be used in that format or may be adapted. In the early stages it may be advisable to use these to ensure that differentiation is achieved and that candidates may be offered appropriate challenge. Centres are reminded of the rigorous procedures laid down in the specification on how to proceed towards the final draft, which is to be done under strict conditions.

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