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FOREIGN LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0520/01 Listening

General comments

The paper was of a similar standard to last year's paper and the overall quality of the candidates' work was good. There was a full spread of marks and a good proportion of the candidates scored over half marks, displaying very competent levels in both specific and general comprehension tasks. Examiners found the paper to be accessible to candidates of all abilities, with weaker candidates scoring the majority of their marks on the opening exercises, as intended. Likewise, the final exercises proved sufficiently demanding for the more able candidates and there were some extremely good performances from such candidates reported by all Examiners.

Most candidates were familiar with the requirements of the paper in terms of rubrics, and they had been well prepared in Centres. A small number, however, ticked more than one box in **Section 1 Exercise 1**, and on **Section 2 Exercise 1** they ticked more than the required six boxes. Candidates should be reminded to cross out incorrect answers which they do not wish the Examiner to consider.

On questions requiring answers in French, the accuracy of the French was not taken into account unless the meaning was obscured. Answers in any language other than French were ignored.

Most candidates attempted all three sections and there was evidence of inappropriate entry for some candidates for whom the final section must have seemed somewhat daunting. Candidates who are likely to score very low marks in the first two sections may be best advised not to attempt **Section 3**, which is intended to test candidates aiming for the highest grades.

Candidates are asked not to use pencil to answer initially and then overwrite in pen as this can make answers difficult to read. Answers should be written in blue/black ink. Incorrect answers should be crossed out clearly as should a cross/tick in a box that a candidate wishes the Examiner not to consider.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1 Questions 1-8

This exercise tested the comprehension of short conversations and was a good opening exercise. The question type used was multiple-choice. Surprisingly, time was not always well known in **Question 1**. In **Question 6**, *fruits de mer* was well known. **Question 8** proved to be tricky: *sur le bureau* caused problems for many weaker candidates. Other questions were answered well.

Exercise 2 Questions 9-16

Candidates generally performed competently on this exercise. They were required to complete notes and tick boxes on the topic of tourist activities in St Omer. **Questions 9** and **10** were usually answered correctly and most candidates recognised *cathédrale* in **Question 11**. However, in **Question 12**, candidates often thought the answer was **C** instead of the correct alternative, **A**. In **Question 13**, the number 2.90 was incorrectly identified as 2.80 by weaker candidates. Many weak candidates attempted to transcribe *tous les jours sauf le dimanche* in **Question 14**, which showed a lack of understanding. In **Question 15**, *verres* and *assiettes* were not well known, but in **Question 16** *le petit train* was correctly identified by most candidates.

Section 2

Exercise 1 Question 17

Candidates heard four young Moroccans talking about their life and ambitions. The requirements of this question were generally well understood (to tick six boxes in total), but a few Centres had not trained candidates to tick six. Some ticked more and a small number ticked fewer than six boxes.

Candidates generally understood the passages well and a pleasing number scored at least 4 or 5 marks. There was no obvious pattern of incorrect answers.

Exercise 2 Questions 18-25

This exercise was based on an interview with a male midwife talking about his work. The exercise required candidates to give short answers in French. Full sentences were not required. True Core candidates found this a demanding exercise. On **Question 18**, few knew *sage femme*, but *infirmier* was equally acceptable. Weaker candidates offered incorrectly *un fermier*. Candidates indicating that he worked in a *clinique de maternité* were awarded the mark. *Hôpital* in **Question 19** was well identified. **Question 20** was more difficult, but there were many correct attempts at the idea of a baby's arrival. **Question 21** needed the concept of the joy/happiness of the parents. **Question 22** was generally well answered, but few could write *elles rient*. There were, however, many successful attempts which expressed the concept of the women's reactions. Many correctly identified that Frédéric was *capable* and *calme* (**Question 23**) and high numbers of candidates identified the difficult work conditions making reference to long and tiring working hours. In **Question 25** the concept of discrimination or tradition was needed to score the mark. Many answered this well, particularly when answers were kept brief.

Section 3

Exercise 1 Questions 26-31

Candidates heard an interview with a young Kenyan boy. The question type used was multiple choice. As last year, this was generally well attempted and many Extended candidates scored at least 4 or 5 marks. There was no obvious pattern of incorrect answers.

Exercise 2 Questions 32-39

This exercise was a fair challenge for the last exercise on the paper. There were some difficult questions, particularly **Question 39**, but good candidates could score well. On **Question 32**, even weaker candidates could score with *tennis*. Many misspelt *danse* as the English 'dance'. A few candidates correctly identified *arts martiaux*. On **Question 33**, the concepts of *passion* or *détermination* scored the mark. On **Question 34**, the incorrect *imagination* was often given. The correct concept of *poser des questions* proved easier to render than the concept of her interrupting lessons or being a distraction. On **Question 35**, the best candidates referred to the need for more time to be given to music. Many found it difficult to render *insuffisant*. **Question 36** was answered well. On **Question 37**, better candidates correctly picked out that it was a normal *jeunesse*, but many others incorrectly deduced that she had lost it – failing to pick up the negative in *je n'ai pas l'impression d'avoir perdu ma jeunesse*. **Question 38** was well answered, but **Question 39** proved to be the most difficult question on the paper. Only the most able were able to identify the concept of not having enough time for people.

Paper 0520/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

The overall performance was good with a pleasing number of candidates scoring full marks on both sections. However, the full range of performance was in evidence.

The majority of candidates completed the three sections of the paper. They were familiar with the test types and had clearly been trained to observe the rubrics, to read questions carefully and answer all tasks. Several Examiners commented on the good level of preparation the candidates had received.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1 Questions 1-5

This was mostly well done. However a surprising number of candidates were unfamiliar with *faire la vaisselle* in **Question 1**: C was the most common wrong answer given. And in **Question 4** candidates often ticked *Guichet* as the place where one would leave one's coat instead of the correct *Vestiaires*.

Exercise 2 Questions 6-10

Most candidates scored highly on this exercise, with full marks being common. The only question to cause any particular problems was **Questions 6**, which some candidates thought was *vrai*. This may have been because they did not understand *déjeuner* or perhaps a result of not reading the question carefully enough.

Exercise 3 Questions 11-15

This exercise did not cause any particular problems and full marks were the norm. A few candidates thought E might be the answer to **Question 14**.

Exercise 4 Question 16

Most candidates were able to address the required points sufficiently clearly to score three marks for Communication. The verbs needed (*être, aller, danser*) were familiar enough to allow many candidates to achieve full marks. Some candidates tried to use past or future tenses (often successfully) when using the present would have been easier and was quite acceptable.

Section 2

Exercise 1 Questions 17-24

Most candidates coped very well with this text about a girl having problems with her best friend. The vast majority of candidates scored in the range of 8 to 10 marks. In **Question 19**, some candidates answered *Amanda est plus âgée* instead of *Amanda a l'air plus âgée*. Wherever possible, Examiners agreed to take a flexible approach to use of pronouns on this Core section of the paper, so, for example, in **Question 24** the mark was awarded for any of *Amanda me/se/le ment*.

Exercise 2 Question 25

Most candidates found the topic of this writing task very accessible and scores for Communication were generally high. It was clear that most candidates had been well trained to tackle all aspects of the question and they did not leave anything out. Candidates seemed well informed and had interesting comments to make about healthy eating habits.

Unfortunately, a small minority of candidates wrote about activities they enjoyed doing, but made no reference to the aspect of *pour être en forme*. This may have been because they did not read the question carefully enough or perhaps they did not understand this element of the question.

Many candidates did not know the word *légumes* and 'végétales' was common.

Section 3

Exercise 1 Questions 26-31

This exercise was found to be slightly more accessible than in previous years, with many good scores. A few candidates appeared to disregard (or maybe did not understand) the rubric and provided a 'corrected' version of a statement, even when they had declared it to be *vrai*. This did not affect their marks. Some candidates only attempted the *vrai/faux* element of the exercise and made no attempt to correct the *faux* statements.

Question 26 This was usually correctly answered. Many candidates could offer an understandable correction, for example, *Non, très peu y arrivent*.

Question 27 A large majority correctly identified this as *vrai*.

Question 28 Nearly all candidates correctly identified this as *vrai*.

Question 29 Often correctly ticked as *faux*, but there were a large number of unsuccessful attempts to correct the statement. Something along the lines of *Il doit abandonner* or *Il doit descendre* was enough for Examiners to award the mark.

Question 30 Many candidates incorrectly ticked *vrai*.

Question 31 Most candidates correctly ticked *faux*, but could not then go on to correct the statement. Some just lifted the last sentence of the text, *il a interdit aux moins de 16 ans l'ascension de l'Everest*, which was judged by Examiners not to make sense in the context of the question. *Le gouvernement (népalais) a interdit aux moins de 16 ans l'ascension de l'Everest* was enough to score the mark.

Exercise 2 Questions 32-39

This was clearly the exercise candidates found most difficult, but even so there were some very good performances, and few really weak ones from candidates who had been correctly entered for the Extended section of the paper.

Question 32 Generally successfully answered.

Question 33 Many correct answers, but some candidates merely copied *pour oublier cette période horrible*, which did not score the mark.

Question 35 Candidates found this question quite difficult. Examiners were looking for something along the lines of *elle propose au directeur d'un journal de faire un reportage*.

Question 36 A large majority of candidates answered this question successfully.

Question 37 In answer to (a) many candidates simply lifted the sentence *qui voyageait le plus souvent habillée en homme* from the text, which did not answer the question (*Qu'est-ce qui était difficile à l'époque où voyageait Hélène?*). Examiners were looking for something along the lines of *pour une femme seule de voyager/voyager seule*. (b) was well answered.

Question 38 Generally successfully answered.

Question 39 Many candidates made a pleasing attempt to answer this question in their own words (usually involving *rêver/imaginer/imagination*) and a large majority scored the mark.

Paper 0520/03**Speaking****General comments**

This paper was common to all candidates, both those that had followed a Core and those that had followed an Extended Curriculum course. The full range of marks was available to all candidates and, as in 2003, a wide range of performance was heard by Moderators.

Generally, the candidature displayed a pleasing level of communication skills and the standard heard was very similar to that heard last year.

Administration

It was reported by Moderators that the number of clerical errors increased this year. The following problems were encountered:

- Missing or incomplete MS1 mark sheets.
- MS1 mark sheets showing completely different marks from those recorded on the working mark sheet. Centres are reminded of their responsibility to check the correct transcription of marks from the working mark sheet to the MS1.
- Arithmetical errors on working mark sheets. It is essential that all clerical work is checked very thoroughly and Centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to submit correct totals.
- Half marks were used in some Centres.
- Some Centres did not indicate the name of the examining teacher.

Quality of recording

Examiners should ensure that all samples are audible. This year Moderators reported that sometimes microphones were poorly positioned or that there was a lot of background noise on tapes. Cassette recorders should be checked before the examination, in the room where the test will take place. Also, the Examiner should announce each candidate's name and number, *not* the candidate. Once the recording of each candidate has started, the tape should not be stopped – the recording of each candidate should be continuous and should last for approximately fifteen minutes.

Centres should ensure that cassettes are clearly labelled with the Centre name and number as well as the name and number of the sample candidates. It is helpful if candidates included in the sample are also identified, with an asterisk, on the working mark sheet.

Duration of tests/missing elements

Regrettably, some Examiners missed out elements of the test and this disadvantaged candidates, who cannot be awarded marks for parts of the test which they do not complete. Each candidate should attempt two **Role plays**, a **Topic/Discussion** section (approximately five minutes) and a **General conversation** section (approximately five minutes). (See **Comments on specific questions**.)

The Examiner must choose the role play card for each candidate and stick closely to the tasks. A few Examiners changed tasks or did not help candidates to achieve all parts of the tasks. It is essential for Examiners to prepare their roles and to be familiar with the context. It also puts candidates at ease if a *brief* introduction to each section of the examination is given. This also enables Examiners to check that the correct card is being used. A handful of Centres submitted very long tests of 20/25 minutes duration. At the other extreme some were very short. All candidates should receive similar treatment in terms of timing (approximately 15 minutes per candidate).

Preparation

Most Examiners had prepared the role plays well but there was evidence that some Examiners had over-prepared candidates for the **Topic/Discussion** section of the test. Centres are reminded that candidates must *not* know in advance the questions they are to be asked in their test and *no* written notes/questions are allowed in the examination room. Questioning on the topic should be spontaneous. Should candidates choose similar topics please do *not* use the same questions with each candidate.

Application of the mark scheme

Generally, marking in Centres was close to the agreed standard and where adjustments were necessary, they were usually small. Centres requiring larger adjustments usually fell into one of the following categories:

- Short **Topic** and or **Conversation** sections.
- Failure to complete all the tasks in the role plays.
- Failure to give candidates the opportunity to use past, present and future time frames in both the **Topic/Discussion** and **General conversation** sections. Candidates who do not show they can do this cannot score more than 6 marks for linguistic content.

In Centres where more than one Examiner was used, the marking was usually consistent across Examiners, but in a few Centres there was not a consistent standard between Examiners. Centres are reminded that where more than one Examiner is to be used, permission must be sought from the Product Manager prior to each examination session. In Centres of two or more Examiners, internal moderation must take place and a common standard of marking should be applied to all candidates. The sample submitted for moderation needs to cover the work of all Examiners.

Comments on specific questions

Role plays

Section A

Candidates should be encouraged to attempt all parts of each set task and if only one part of a task is completed by the candidate, only 1 mark can be awarded. Examiners should not introduce changes to the set tasks. These are carefully worded and where changes to the wording were introduced by Examiners, this often resulted in them giving away the task to the candidate, who could not then score the marks available for that task.

As last year, 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 the vocabulary and topics from the Defined Content, Topic Areas A, B and C. Generally, candidates found them accessible and even the weakest candidates were often able to score at least 1 mark per task. Candidates should be reminded to greet and thank as instructed as these are often part-tasks for which marks are available. If a task is not fully completed, a maximum mark of 1 only can be scored.

In the restaurant

Candidates coped well with these tasks. The most challenging was **Task 4** in which they had to explain a problem such as a missing fork or cold food. All candidates were able to order food and drink with ease.

Seeing the doctor

Candidates again performed well on this role play and were usually able to say they were ill and describe their symptoms. **Task 3** required only a short answer e.g. *depuis hier*. A long utterance is not always required for a mark of 3 to be awarded. If, however, a candidate offers a verb, it needs to be accurate and appropriate for a mark of 3 to be awarded. **Task 4** (asking a question about the chemist's) was well done.

At the railway station

This was generally well done, but some Examiners did not offer the times specified in prompt 3, or only gave one time, which changed the nature of the task. *Aller-retour* was better known this year. Some candidates did not ask the price in **Task 5**.

Section B

The **B Role plays** were more demanding in that they required the ability to use different time frames and to explain and justify where necessary. Regrettably, a few Examiners had not prepared their own roles adequately and as a result they sometimes prevented candidates from fulfilling the tasks. Longer tasks can be split by Examiners – this is quite acceptable. There were, pleasingly, some good natural performances from candidates who confidently assumed their own roles.

Telephoning the hotel

Weaker candidates did not realise that they were confirming a reservation and instead tried to make a reservation. Most were able to explain that there was a problem with the car, but could not always conjugate *tomber en panne* in **Task 2**. **Task 3** was well done and many used future tenses with little difficulty in both **Tasks 3** and **4**. Surprisingly, some candidates found it difficult to ask a question about the closing time of the restaurant.

Phoning a French friend

Generally this role play was done well, but weaker performances resulted when candidates could not use possessive adjectives correctly. It was pleasing to hear that candidates were able to insist politely in **Task 2** and to ask for an opinion in **Task 4**. The last task was done well, with, as ever, most candidates wanting to visit the Eiffel Tower!

Enquiring about a job

This role play was approached well by candidates. **Tasks 1** and **2** were well done, but some did not say when they could start and how long they could work. It was quite acceptable for Examiners to nudge for full details by asking a further question. The last task which required questions about the salary and the possibility of lodging at the hotel was less well done.

Topic/Discussion

As in 2003, an interesting range of topics was heard. Regrettably, a few Centres still allow candidates to choose *Moi-même* as a topic. This must be avoided as it can pre-empt the **General conversation** section. The poorest performances were, occasionally and regrettably, due to very short discussion follow-ups. Candidates should be allowed to talk for a minute or so on their chosen topic and then Examiners need to discuss the same topic for a further 3-4 minutes. The discussion must *not* be prelearnt – it is vital that as natural a performance as possible is elicited from candidates. It is also important that questions to test past and future time frames are asked so as to give candidates access to a mark of 7 or more for linguistic content (Scale (b)).

Candidates generally chose appropriate topics, such as Holidays, Free time, Family, Festivals, School, Life in another country. There was a wide range of performance from basic, straightforward topics and discussions to the very fluent. Most candidates were given good opportunities to perform at a level appropriate to their ability – it should be noted that short examining time in this section can disadvantage candidates. It is also helpful if Examiners can indicate to candidates when this section of the test is finished and that they are moving on to the **General conversation** section.

General (unprepared) conversation

As in the **Topic/Discussion**, a wide range of performance was heard. Again, the best performances featured a variety of tenses and a range of structures. It was pleasing to hear candidates talking for the full 5 minutes that should be accorded to this section and on at least two or three topics. There were some pleasing, natural conversations at all levels of candidate ability. Frequently the question/invitation to respond *parle-moi de...* elicited good responses from candidates. It was also pleasing to hear candidates able to give and justify their opinions.

As last year, Moderators commented on the rich variety of life experiences talked about by the candidature. It is a pleasure to listen to these candidates and in many cases, the work heard on tape bears witness to much worthwhile work which has taken place in IGCSE classrooms prior to the examination. Candidates had usually been well prepared for the **General conversation**, but Centres are reminded not to exceed 5 minutes in this part of the test – 5 minutes is adequate to assess a candidate's strengths.

Paper 0520/04
Continuous Writing

General comments

As in recent years, Examiners commend candidates for their positive and enthusiastic response to the questions set on this paper. While the best scripts, as ever, displayed a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and structure and an ability to write fluently with only a minimal incidence of error, candidates of more limited scope were also able to attempt each of the questions in the right spirit and to accrue marks both for Communication and Language.

Most candidates seemed to have heeded advice and did not present over long pieces. Those who did so were liable to lose Communication marks as Examiners are directed not to assess any work beyond 140 words. On the other hand, a minority of candidates (some quite able) wrote only very short pieces. Such responses may include the required elements, but there is a risk they will miss out on potential marks for Language.

Examiners this year noted an increased tendency to lose marks for the misuse of tenses. The rubric indicates the tense appropriate to each individual task. In **Question 2**, for instance, candidates were asked to say what happened and how people reacted at a particular fête or celebration. The present tense was clearly not appropriate, yet a number of candidates persisted in its use. Others ignored the specific tasks set out on the question paper and wrote instead in present tenses about, say, Christmas or birthday parties in general or the joys of family life. This resulted in a serious loss of marks.

Regrettably, there were again signs that haste was resulting in careless errors, even by able candidates. Examiners would like to remind candidates that the time allowed for the paper is usually ample and that careful attention to details such as genders, spelling and agreement is always of benefit. The time allowed should be exploited fully, not only to write out answers, but also to plan and arrange ideas beforehand and to revise and correct where necessary when the piece is finished.

Presentation was clear and legible on the majority of scripts, but some work was rendered in minutely small handwriting, which was at times barely readable. Other scripts contained much crossing out and untidiness, resulting in ambiguity. Candidates should be reminded that Examiners can only reward that which is legible.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) School rules

This question was less popular than **(b)**. One suspected that a number of candidates opted for this more formal question, while lacking the command of the appropriate formal register.

The question required a contribution to a debate so a lengthy preamble addressed to the editor of the magazine could not score well, especially if it was expressed informally and included familiar forms of address, to and from. Better answers got on with the issue of school rules straightaway, with specific examples drawn from practice in the candidates' own schools. Some wrote approvingly of anti smoking rules and regulations about proper behaviour in school. Less well regarded were rules concerning long hair, jewellery, mobile phones, permits to go out of school, silence on the premises and, especially, dress code.

Most said they agreed with some rules and disagreed with others, although few used the correct *certain règlements*, opting instead for *quelques*. Explaining why they agreed or disagreed was not always easy. Some gave involved answers in support of rules. They wrote of personal safety, the need for discipline, school morale and school preparing one for adult life. These abstract concepts tended to lead the writer into philosophical areas which s/he was not equipped linguistically to handle. Saying why they disagreed was marginally easier. Some expressed personal grievances and wrote of the perceived injustice or triviality of rules which seemed to be unnecessary, such as the forbidding of ear piercing.

Most candidates said they wore uniforms and a surprising number were in favour of there being compulsory dress in school. The majority understood the purpose of the uniform being to unite and represent the school's image. Many actually liked the uniform, especially as it removed the fashion crisis of choosing what to wear and concealed any differences of class or affluence among pupils. The description of individual items of uniform was not only irrelevant, but also revealed gaps in vocabulary and a failure to make adjectives agree (*une chemise bleu, des chaussures noir* etc.).

A minority, finding they did not have much to say about rules, padded out their answers with irrelevant details relating to school routine (daily timetables, subjects studied, meal times etc.). This practice of deflecting the topic into other areas is not recommended as it gains little reward from the Examiner. These candidates should perhaps have spent a little longer selecting which topic to write about. **Question 1 (a)** could be answered using only present tenses, which might at first seem easy, but its discursive nature and the need to write about abstract issues made it a more suitable option for the more able candidate. Those with a more limited linguistic range would probably have fared better with the informal letter to a pen friend offered in **Question 1 (b)**, even though a variety of tenses was involved.

(b) *Letter to a friend to rearrange a visit*

This was the more popular choice. Most candidates understood the rubric and attempted to answer each element. A variety of tenses was required and some were careless in their choice of tense and lost relatively easy marks. Some employed a mixture of the formal and informal terms of address (*tu* and *vous*) and they too lost marks unnecessarily.

Asking to change the dates of the visit was quite straightforward, although some thoughtlessly copied *sa visite* from the rubric. Others, through careless reading, understood that they and not their correspondent were due to travel, and put *ma visite*, thereby losing out for Communication.

Descriptions of the accident were often disappointing. The mark for Communication was not given for *j'ai eu un accident* with no further comment, as the question was *décrivez l'accident*. However, some went to excessive lengths to relate the accident in all its gory detail and had little scope left to tackle the remainder of the tasks. Many had had road accidents, but were unable to say 'had a crash/collision' or 'ran over'. Others fell downstairs, fell off bicycles or horses or incurred sporting injuries. Many broke limbs, but were unable to say *je me suis cassé le bras*. Equally elusive were *je me suis fait mal au genou* and *j'ai mal à la tête*. *Mal, bien* and *meilleur* were wrongly used with *être*, and *mal* was mistaken for *malade*. Some read *accident* as *incident* and failed to secure a mark for Communication. Stays in hospital regularly revealed a poor grasp of vocabulary and spelling. Doctors were *médicins* and patients needed *reste* instead of *repos*. Better candidates were able to relate succinctly the circumstances of the accident, the hospital stay, the nature of the injuries and the resulting incapacity, which required the postponement of the visit. They also followed the time honoured advice 'if you do not know it, do not try to say it'.

The enforced change of plans was well handled by many, but weaker candidates got in a muddle with tenses in their attempts to say 'what they would have done if...' and 'what they will do when...'. The use of future, conditional and conditional perfect was faulty on many scripts. Examiners were, however, generous in accepting all of: *on peut*, *on pourra*, and *on pourrait* to refer to the anticipated visit. The use of dates was problematic and attempts to say *du 13 au 27 juin* for instance seemed to be almost uniformly wrong. Equally common were *le moins prochain* for *le mois prochain* and *la prochaine semaine* for *la semaine prochaine*. Sadly, a number of candidates forgot the final task and omitted to apologise for the change of plan. *Je m'excuse* or *je suis désolé* would have been enough.

A recurring problem for female candidates is the problem of feminine agreement of adjectives and past participles with the first person. Examiners will assume that the writer is masculine (whatever the name of the candidate on the script) if all the adjectives and past participles are masculine, but inconsistency in agreements with the first person will incur a minor loss of marks for Accuracy.

One pleasing aspect of **Question 1 (b)** was the realism of many answers. This was a genuinely authentic task, one which could occur naturally within one's own personal experience and this had a beneficial effect on many scripts. Planning to entertain a French visitor may not be something all candidates had enjoyed, but it was something most could imagine quite easily and which many had the linguistic skills to describe in an interesting way.

Question 2

An account of a celebration

The quality of many answers was quite high. Most had a clear understanding of what was expected and set about the tasks accordingly.

Most wrote about a celebration, a birthday surprise party or a religious festival such as Christmas or Eid. Preparations were of course carried out in secret in the case of surprise parties. It was curious that even though the correct word, *préparatifs*, was provided in the rubric, many candidates chose to substitute *préparations*. Party planning seemed to be the same all over the world. Mothers and daughters did the cooking and invitations and fathers and sons looked after the music and the games. The verb 'to cook' presented a few problems and *cuisiner* was seldom used. *Boissons* and *nourriture* were frequently misspelled.

Levels of sophistication varied. The more mature wrote of champagne, discos and socialising, while younger candidates wrote of games, swimming parties, plays and singing. Most wrote enthusiastically of shared enjoyment at the *fête* although the verb *s'amuser* was frequently wrong. Successful renderings of *toute la famille s'est bien amusée* were quite rare.

Some overlooked the requirement to refer to the reaction of the family and lost a Communication mark. Others had difficulty in saying why they liked or disliked the event. Errors of vocabulary and spelling regularly included *joli* for *joyeux*, and *malhereusement* for *malheureusement*. Most rounded the day off with reference to the joys of family bonding. The large family gathering was much enjoyed, but it was clear that this was sadly a rare event.

A surprising number of weaker candidates did not recognise the necessity for the past tense in this exercise and wrote in the present tense throughout, or in a mixture of tenses. Little credit is given for Communication in such cases and no credit is given for incorrect verb usage. Some chose to include lengthy lists of family members (*mon Père, ma mère, mon oncle, mes tantes, mon grand-père*) or food and drink items (*du poulet, de la viande, des fruits* etc.) thereby using up many words and incurring few grammatical errors. This practice is not well regarded by Examiners and gains only minimal reward in the long run. To achieve high marks candidates needed to relate in the perfect tense a series of events both in anticipation of and during the *fête* and to describe how people reacted to events, employing perfect or imperfect tenses.

In a minority of cases, the celebration turned out to be a disaster due to accidents or misunderstandings. Sometimes such accounts were delivered with humour and invention, although candidates often seemed to be making life unnecessarily complicated for themselves. The more successful tended to keep their narrative relatively simple and wrote in a positive way of the excitement before the event, the climax as the guest of honour is welcomed with *Joyeux Anniversaire*, a joyful account of the festivities, and ended with an enthusiastic response by the family and the narrator.

Whether the final piece of work received high marks or not, it was gratifying for Examiners to find so many candidates who entered into the spirit of the examination with enthusiasm and good humour. The quality of French varied, but large numbers are to be congratulated on their linguistic skills and on their attempts to use this examination as a means to display their knowledge and ability.