



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2016

FRENCH

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Syllabus Structure.....	3
1.2 Assessment Specification	3
1.3 Participation Trends.....	5
2. Performance of candidates.....	7
2.1 Higher Level Statistics.....	7
2.2 Ordinary Level Statistics	8
3. Analysis of Candidate Performance.....	10
3.1 Engagement and Performance	100
3.2 Attainment of Key Syllabus Objectives	122
4. Conclusions.....	300
5. Recommendations to Teachers and Students.....	32
5.1 Preparing for the examination	322
5.2 In the examination	34

1. Introduction

1.1 Syllabus Structure

The current Leaving Certificate French syllabus was introduced in 1995 and first examined in 1997. The syllabus shares a common structure, including common aims and objectives, with those of the other modern European language syllabuses.

There are three broad components to the behavioural objectives given in the syllabus: Basic Communicative Proficiency; Language Awareness; Cultural Awareness. The syllabus content is organised in units of *General Activities/Themes*. Within each of these, there are performance targets to illustrate how the objectives are realised in practice, along with details of the linguistic skills, and the structures and grammar that are required in order to achieve those targets.

The syllabus aims to cater for a wide range of pupil ability. Assessment is at two levels: Ordinary and Higher. While the syllabus is the same for both levels, the performance targets involve language use of varying degrees of complexity. Differentiation between the levels is therefore achieved through differing levels of difficulty and complexity of the tasks set on the examination, along with different relative weightings between productive and receptive language skills.

This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers, the published marking schemes and the syllabus for this subject. The examination papers and marking schemes are available on the State Examination Commission's website www.examinations.ie and the syllabuses are available at www.curriculumonline.ie.

1.2 Assessment Specification

The core assessment objectives reflect the four areas of language use that arise from the productive and receptive use of the oral and written language. These are: understanding the spoken language; understanding the written language; communicating in the spoken language; communicating in the written language. They are often summarised for convenience as listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The assessment objectives are specified more fully in the syllabus as follows:

All candidates will be assessed on their ability to:

- (a) demonstrate an understanding of the spoken target language in brief and more extended forms in a variety of registers and situations
- (b) demonstrate an understanding of the written target language in brief and more extended forms in a variety of registers
- (c) express themselves with relative fluency and correctness in the target language both in speech and in writing in order to describe, obtain and convey information, offer explanations, and express ideas, opinions and feelings

The relative weightings assigned to the four areas is also specified in the syllabus. These weightings differ for the two levels, in recognition of the fact that, in the ongoing process of acquiring a language, the receptive skills develop earlier and to a greater degree than do the productive skills. The weightings are as follows:

	Higher level	Ordinary level
Speaking	25%	20%
Listening comprehension	20%	25%
Reading comprehension	30%	40%
Writing	25%	15%

Table 1: mark weightings by level for areas of language use

The examination at each level comprises three components: an oral examination, which is taken at a common level and tests the candidate's ability to communicate in the spoken language, a listening comprehension test (understand the spoken language), and a written paper containing both a reading comprehension section (understand the written language) and a written production section (communicate in the written language). The marks for these components and sections are allocated according to the above table.

1.3 Participation Trends

Table 2 gives the overall participation rates of candidates in Leaving Certificate French for the last five years.

Year	French candidature	Total Leaving Certificate candidature*	French as % of total
2012	25,977	52,589	49.4%
2013	25,515	52,767	48.4%
2014	26,496	54,025	49.0%
2015	26,798	55,044	48.7%
2016	25,758	55,708	46.2%

*Total Leaving Certificate candidature excludes Leaving Certificate Applied candidates.

Table 2: participation in Leaving Certificate French, 2012 to 2016

The breakdown in terms of participation at Higher and Ordinary levels over the last five years is given in **Table 3**. The breakdown in terms of gender at Higher level and at Ordinary level over the last five years is given in **Table 4** and **Table 5** respectively.

Year	Total French candidature	Number at Ordinary level	Number at Higher level	% Ordinary level	% Higher level
2012	25,977	12,257	13,720	47.2%	52.8%
2013	25,515	11,329	14,186	44.4%	55.5%
2014	26,496	11,482	15,014	43.3%	56.7%
2015	26,798	11,390	15,408	42.5%	57.5%
2016	25,758	10,505	15,253	40.8%	59.2%

Table 3: number and percentage of candidates at each level, 2012 to 2016

Year	Total Higher level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2012	13,720	8,391	5,329	61.2%	38.8%
2013	14,186	8,609	5,577	60.7%	39.3%
2014	15,014	9,222	5,792	61.4%	38.6%
2015	15,408	9,596	5,812	62.3%	37.7%
2016	15,253	9,274	5,979	60.8%	39.2%

Table 4: gender composition of Higher level cohort, 2012 to 2016

Year	Total Ordinary level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2012	12,257	6,328	5,929	51.6%	48.4%
2013	11,329	5,790	5,539	51.1%	48.9%
2014	11,482	5,867	5,615	51.1%	48.9%
2015	11,390	5,838	5,552	51.3%	48.7%
2016	10,505	5,326	5,179	50.7%	49.3%

Table 5: gender composition of Ordinary level cohort, 2012 to 2016

2. Performance of candidates

2.1 Higher Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is given in **Table 6** (lettered grades) and **Table 7** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	A, B, C	D	E	F	NG	E, F, NG
2012	13.7	28.1	33.6	75.5	21.5	2.9	0.2	0	3.1
2013	13.2	28.4	33.0	74.6	22.9	2.3	0.1	0	2.4
2014	12.0	27.8	34.9	74.7	23.1	2.2	0.1	0	2.3
2015	13.2	26.2	32.6	72	24.1	3.5	0.1	0	3.6
2016	13.0	28.2	32.4	73.6	23.4	2.9	0.2	0	3.1

Table 6 Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Higher Level French, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	6.7	7.0	8.5	9.5	10.1	11.5	11.2	10.9	9.3	6.6	5.6	2.9	0.2	0
2013	6.4	6.8	8.5	9.3	10.6	11.0	10.9	11.1	9.5	7.7	5.7	2.3	0.1	0
2014	5.2	6.8	8.2	9.2	10.4	11.4	11.6	11.9	9.9	7.5	5.7	2.2	0.1	0
2015	6.5	6.7	7.7	8.7	9.8	11.0	11.0	10.6	9.4	7.8	6.9	3.5	0.1	0
2016	5.8	7.2	8.5	9.5	10.2	10.8	11.5	10.1	9.8	7.2	6.4	2.9	0.2	0

Table 7 Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level French, 2012 – 2016

The distribution of sub-grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Table 8** (female candidates) and **Table 9** (male candidates).

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	7.1	7.7	9.1	10.2	10.4	11.7	11.0	10.7	8.8	5.7	5.0	2.5	0.1	0
2013	7.0	7.2	8.9	9.9	11.2	11.2	10.5	10.9	9.0	7.1	4.9	2.0	0.1	0
2014	5.5	7.6	8.7	9.7	10.5	11.3	11.6	11.6	9.5	7.0	5.0	1.9	0.1	0
2015	6.9	7.0	8.3	9.0	10.0	11.3	11.1	10.2	9.1	7.2	6.5	3.2	0.2	0
2016	6.6	7.6	9.2	9.9	10.6	10.8	11.3	9.8	9.5	6.7	5.5	2.3	0.2	0

Table 8: Percentage of female candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level French, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	5.9	6.0	7.6	8.3	9.5	11.4	11.4	11.2	10.2	8.0	6.5	3.7	0.3	0
2013	5.6	6.2	7.8	8.4	9.7	10.7	11.7	11.4	10.3	8.6	6.8	2.8	0.2	0
2014	4.7	5.6	7.3	8.3	10.3	11.6	11.6	12.4	10.5	8.1	6.8	2.6	0.1	0
2015	5.9	6.2	6.7	8.3	9.5	10.6	10.8	11.2	9.9	8.9	7.6	4.0	0.2	0
2016	4.6	6.5	7.6	8.8	9.5	10.7	11.8	10.6	10.3	8.0	7.6	3.8	0.2	0

Table 9: Percentage of male candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level French, 2012 – 2016

2.2 Ordinary Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is given in **Table 10** (lettered grades) and **Table 11** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	A, B, C	D	E	F	NG	E, F, NG
2012	1.7	24.5	39.3	65.5	27.7	5.7	1.2	0	6.9
2013	1.3	22.5	40.6	64.4	27.4	6.7	1.4	0.1	8.2
2014	1.0	17.0	42.4	60.4	31.6	6.7	1.3	0.1	8.1
2015	1.9	23.5	37.7	63.1	27.7	7.4	1.6	0.1	9.1
2016	1.1	20.1	41.3	62.5	30.0	6.2	1.3	0.1	7.6

Table 10: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Ordinary Level French, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.3	1.4	4.1	8.4	12.0	13.5	13.4	12.4	11.0	8.6	8.1	5.7	1.2	0
2013	0.2	1.1	3.5	7.4	11.6	14.3	13.8	12.5	10.9	8.6	7.9	6.7	1.4	0.1
2014	0.2	0.8	2.7	5.3	9.0	13.1	14.2	15.1	12.4	9.9	9.3	6.7	1.3	0.1
2015	0.3	1.6	4.4	7.6	11.5	13.2	12.7	11.8	10.3	8.4	9.0	7.4	1.6	0.1
2016	0.1	1.0	3.1	6.4	10.6	13.2	14.3	13.8	12.2	9.1	8.7	6.2	1.3	0.1

Table 11 Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level French, 2012 – 2016

The distribution of sub-grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Table 12** (female candidates) and **Table 13** (male candidates).

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.3	1.6	4.5	9.2	12.8	14.2	13.3	12.0	10.9	7.8	7.8	4.8	0.9	0
2013	0.2	1.5	4.1	8.4	12.9	14.6	13.5	12.0	10.8	8.4	7.3	5.5	0.9	0
2014	0.2	1.0	3.2	5.9	10.2	13.9	14.6	14.8	12.0	9.2	8.4	5.4	1.1	0
2015	0.4	2.2	5.0	8.7	12.4	13.8	13.3	11.6	10.0	7.9	8.3	5.4	0.9	0
2016	0.2	1.0	3.5	7.4	12.1	14.4	14.7	12.6	12.3	8.5	7.4	4.9	0.8	0.1

Table 12 Percentage of female candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level French, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.2	1.3	3.8	7.4	11.1	12.8	13.5	12.8	11.1	9.3	8.4	6.7	1.6	0.1
2013	0.2	0.7	2.9	6.2	10.2	14.0	14.1	13.0	11.1	8.8	8.6	8.1	1.9	0.2
2014	0.1	0.5	2.2	4.5	7.7	12.2	13.7	15.4	12.9	10.7	10.2	8.0	1.6	0.2
2015	0.3	1.1	3.7	6.4	10.6	12.6	12.1	12.0	10.5	9.0	9.7	9.5	2.3	0.2
2016	0.1	0.9	2.7	5.3	8.9	11.9	13.9	14.9	12.1	9.6	10.0	7.5	1.9	0.2

Table 13 Percentage of male candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level French, 2012 – 2016.

3. Analysis of Candidate Performance

3.1 Engagement and Performance

Statistical information on engagement with and performance on the various questions in the written and aural components is presented below. Data on performance in the various aspects of the oral component are not captured centrally in a manner that allows for similar analysis.

Higher Level

Table 14 is a summary based on an analysis of a random selection of 940 scripts (approximately 6.2% of all scripts).

Section	Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
I	1.	N/A	N/A	45 (75%)	1	Newspaper: Working in London
	2.	N/A	N/A	36 (60%)	2	Novel: Internet dating
II	1(a)	94%	1	21 (52%)	6	Languages v. Maths/Science
	1(b)	5.5%	8	24 (61%)	2	Story (response to an e-mail)
	2(a)	70%	2	16.5 (55%)	3, 4	Diary about camping holiday
	2(b)	10.5%	7	13.5 (45%)	8	Letter of application for a job
	3(a)	43%	4	16.5 (55%)	3, 4	Only child / siblings
	3(b)	12%	5, 6	16 (53%)	5	1916 commemorations
	4(a)	12%	5, 6	14 (47%)	7	Ireland & multiculturalism
	4(b)	52%	3	18.5 (62%)	1	Causes of obesity
Aural	I	N/A	N/A	8.5 (71%)	1	Young people & freedom
	II	N/A	N/A	12 (57%)	2	Sportsperson interview
	III	N/A	N/A	9.5 (52%)	4	Dialogue about festival trip
	IV	N/A	N/A	10.5 (50%)	5	Helping the environment
	V	N/A	N/A	4.5 (56%)	3	Three short news items

Table 14: popularity of and average mark for each question, Higher Level French

Ordinary Level

Table 15 is a summary based on an analysis of a random selection of 680 scripts (approximately 6.5% of all scripts).

Section	Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
I	1.	N/A	N/A	25 (62.5%)	2, 3	Paris attractions
	2.	N/A	N/A	27 (67.5%)	2	Film summaries
	3.	N/A	N/A	25 (62.5%)	2, 3	Interview with singer
	4.	N/A	N/A	24 (60%)	4	Literary text - school theme
II	A(a)	70%	1	24 (80%)	1	Cloze test
	A(b)	37.5%	3	18 (60%)	2	Form filling
	B(a)	57.5%	2	17 (56.6%)	3	Message
	B(b)	27.5%	4	15 (50%)	5	Postcard
	C(a)	10%	5	16 (53.3%)	4	Diary
	C(b)	2.5%	6	11 (36.6%)	6	Formal Letter
Aural	I	N/A	N/A	13 (65%)	3	Young people & freedom
	II	N/A	N/A	16 (80%)	1	Sportsperson interview
	III	N/A	N/A	12 (60%)	4	Dialogue about festival trip
	IV	N/A	N/A	8 (40%)	5	Helping the environment
	V	N/A	N/A	14 (70%)	2	Three short news items

Table 15: popularity of and average mark for each question, Ordinary Level French

3.2 Attainment of Key Syllabus Objectives

Communicating in the spoken language (oral examination)

The oral examination is common to both Higher and Ordinary Level. It consists of a conversation of approximately twelve minutes duration. Candidates have the option of bringing in a *Document* of their choice, which may be a picture, a newspaper or magazine article, a literary text or a project in French. Marks are awarded for Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structures, and Communication.

Elements from all the three strands of the Behavioural Objectives on the Syllabus may be included in the Oral Examination. The main emphasis is generally on the Performance Objectives set out under *Strand I: Basic Communicative Proficiency*. Thus, in the 2016 examination, candidates would have been asked many of the topics contained in General Activity/Theme I.1 (Meeting and getting to know people), e.g. giving personal details, discussing family and home, describing your region or locality, describing studies or work, stating which languages you speak. In addition, candidates may have been asked about I.2 (Future Plans), I.3 (Weather), I.4 (Travel), I.5 (Shopping), and I.6 (Past Events). Other relevant General Activities/Themes were I.8 (Expressing feelings and attitudes), I.9 (Managing a conversation), and I.10 (Engaging in discussion).

The conversation may also have included elements from *Strand II: Language Awareness*, e.g. II.4. (Talking about your experience of French), and from *Strand III: Cultural Awareness*, e.g. III.1 (Learning about the present-day culture associated with French), III.3 (Describing similarities and contrasts between everyday life in Ireland and in France), and III.5 (Describing and discussing issues that transcend cultural divisions).

Pronunciation: The standard varied widely. Many candidates, even those who had never visited France, achieved an impressive level in pronunciation, intonation and rhythm. However, very many had difficulty with correct French sounds, and concentrated on the amount they could say, rather than on the clarity of their pronunciation. In particular, some candidates who had memorised long passages from notes were unfortunately unable to pronounce many words correctly. At times, such candidates were almost unintelligible.

The most common errors were:

- Pronouncing the last consonant or syllable, e.g. *poulet, anglais, ils*, and the silent *-e* or *-ent* endings in the Present tense, e.g. *je regarde, elles jouent*;
- Not making the correct liaison, e.g. *mes amis, je suis irlandais, les étudiants*;
- Difficulty in pronouncing the French [r], and nasal sounds, e.g. *jardin, blanc, vingt, bon*, and also in distinguishing the [u] and [y] sounds, e.g. *vu/vous*;
- Not distinguishing the difference in pronunciation between *je/j'ai, il/elle*, or *un/une*, as well as in words such as *aîné/âne, deux/douze, cours/courses*, and *matière/métier*;
- Mispronouncing school subjects, especially *français, histoire, biologie, chimie*;
- Difficulty with the *-ille* sound, e.g. *famille, ville, fille*, and with words ending in *-ion*, e.g. *émission, natation, récréation, solution*.

Vocabulary: Most candidates had sufficient vocabulary to communicate at a basic level on topics concerning their daily lives, e.g. personal details, family, home, school, holidays, part-time job, sport, music, and were at ease with these topics. Many candidates were able to use a rich and varied vocabulary on a wide range of subjects, particularly those who presented a well-chosen *Document*. Others had prepared the vocabulary necessary to discuss abstract topics or social problems, e.g. alcohol, unemployment, homelessness, or emigration, and were able and willing to give their viewpoint on these topics. The less able candidates had difficulty with basic interrogative words (e.g. *qui, quand, comment, combien, où, pourquoi*) and with phrases denoting a time period such as *l'été prochain, après le bac, pendant les vacances*. Other areas of difficulty included basic vocabulary such as numbers, times, dates, school subjects, food, and clothing. Adjectives were often limited to *super, sympa, difficile, facile* and *intéressant*. Some candidates were unable to use obvious conversational phrases, e.g. *je ne comprends pas*, or *pouvez-vous répéter la question, s'il vous plaît*.

Structures: As with other areas of performance, candidates' ability to express themselves accurately and grammatically varied widely. Many candidates had a good grasp of the main tenses, i.e. Present, Passé Composé, and Future. More able candidates were able to use complex tenses, such as the Imperfect, the Conditional and the Subjunctive, along with subordinate clauses and idiomatic phrases. However, certain candidates were unable to differentiate between the tenses, pronouncing all verb endings the same, thus making it impossible for the examiner to determine which tense was being attempted. Negatives proved difficult for many candidates, particularly in the Passé Composé, e.g. *je n'ai jamais visité / je ne suis pas allé*.

The verbs *c'est* and *il y a*, as well as *avoir* and *être*, were sometimes confused, especially when discussing age, e.g. *je suis 18 ans*. Questions posed in the Future Tense were often not recognised by candidates. The rules for agreement of adjectives, even in words where the gender was obvious, e.g. *elle est sportive, il est beau, ma sœur*, were regularly not respected. Expressions of quantity, e.g. *beaucoup de / trop de* were often incorrect, and basic errors, such as *à le* instead of *au*, and *de les* instead of *des*, regularly occurred. In many cases, grammatical errors impeded communication.

Communication: The more able candidates were able to sustain a natural conversation in French, dealing with topics ranging from their everyday life to more abstract topics requiring some discussion. These candidates understood virtually all questions. They did not reject any topic proffered by the examiner, and were willing and able to respond in a spontaneous and authentic manner. They expressed their opinions freely, and had the ability to develop a subject without needing constant prompting. However, other candidates were hesitant to venture beyond the comfort zone of their prepared material, and instead relied on long sections of learned-off material, often poorly pronounced. If the examiner intervened gently, in order to try to elicit a more authentic response, many candidates persisted with their prepared paragraphs, rather than genuinely trying to take part in a conversation. They did not appear to have the necessary strategies to overcome any gaps in vocabulary or lack of opinions on a particular subject.

Examiners commented on a lack of authenticity in some class groups, e.g. where every candidate expressed a liking for the same TV programme, the same school subject, or the same film or book, and all repeated the same few lines about their school tour, how they spent the previous weekend, or what they did during the Easter holidays. At times, they all presented a document on the same theme. In such cases, candidates appeared to view the oral examination as a test of memory, rather than as a personal, individual conversation where the examiner gets to know the candidate and their opinions, and thus is able to determine his/her level of oral proficiency

Less able candidates often misunderstood the questions, or needed these to be reformulated. Often, they focused on one word instead of on the whole sentence, and therefore their answers were often inappropriate. However, examiners noted a great willingness to try and converse, even from candidates who struggled with comprehension and who lacked the necessary basic

vocabulary and knowledge of structures to construct full answers, and these candidates were rewarded for their efforts.

Document: About 50% of candidates availed of the *Document* option. In some schools, every candidate had a document, mostly a photograph or a collage of images, whereas in other schools no candidate at all presented a document. As in previous years, there were not many projects or literary texts. There were a small number of candidates who brought in a solid object in the guise of a document, e.g. a medal or a piece of sculpture, whereas they should have brought in a photograph of the object instead.

There was a wide variety of documents. Very many were based on the themes of holidays, school tours, or sport, but others dealt with topical issues such as the terrorist attacks in Paris, criminal gangs in Dublin, binge-drinking, and homelessness. Some were quite personal, e.g. a photo of a lamb being bottle-fed, a description of a family christening, or celebrating Hogmanay in Edinburgh. At times, however, the topic chosen exceeded the candidate's level of French, e.g. a less able candidate choosing to talk about Marie Curie and her scientific work. In many cases, candidates appeared to feel that all that was required was a series of learned-off paragraphs which they should be allowed to recite without interruption. They appeared frustrated when the examiner intervened with a question, and persisted in attempting to recite their prepared material.

However, as in previous years, examiners reported that a carefully-chosen and well-prepared document was generally an asset. It allowed less able candidates to feel more confident, as they knew they had at least one topic which they could talk about. It also allowed more able candidates to select a topic which allowed them demonstrate the breadth of their vocabulary, their knowledge of complex structures, and their ability to enter into discussion.

Understanding the spoken language (listening comprehension)

Higher level

The aural examination was divided into five sections, consisting of interviews, reports, or dialogues on a variety of topics, as well as short news items. The main Performance Targets came from *Strand II: Language Awareness*, in particular II.2 (Exploring meaning), and II:3 (Relating language to attitude). These required candidates to abstract the main points from a spoken language text, recognise the general "tone", and identify the attitudes of the speakers.

Candidates were expected also to be able to work out the implicit inferences of statements, and guess intelligently at the meaning of words on the basis of related forms either in French or in other languages. The vocabulary in the various texts was generally based on the themes outlined in *Strand I: Basic Communicative Proficiency*, with some references to *Strand III: Cultural Awareness* also included.

Section I: Candidates coped well with the theme of young people and freedom, as the vocabulary proved familiar to them, based as it was on Performance Targets in I.1 (Getting to know people) and I.8 (Understanding feelings and attitudes). In Q.1, some candidates failed to notice the plural form in *de longues promenades* while others omitted to mention “in the country/mountains” for full marks. In Q.2, a small number of candidates wrote “work” instead of “homework” for *devoirs*. In Q.3, some less able candidates resorted to guesswork, e.g. writing “he had a dream” or “he was free”.

Section II: This interview with a French biathlon champion was based on the Performance Targets in I.1 (Getting to know people). In Q.1, most candidates correctly identified one country, with “Germany” being the most common answer. In Q.2, however, the pre-competition preparations proved more problematic. Candidates did not always provide full detail of when the athlete ate (*trois heures à l’avance*), or else incorrectly wrote “three times a day”. In addition, although informed that shooting was one of the two biathlon sports, most candidates failed to identify *fusil*, and instead gave more generic terms such as “equipment / kit / gear”. Many confused the word *fusil* with *physique*, and referred to a “body”. In Q.3, the word *suivent* was not always understood, although most candidates correctly translated the words “social media”. However, wishing the athlete luck was straightforward, although some candidates omitted the detail “on the street”. Q.4 required candidates to understand cause and reason, with the Performance Targets based on I.2 (Making plans and discussing future action). Many candidates appeared to have difficulty with the precise period of time, and in Q.4(i) failed to translate *début* and *fin*. Some gave only a single month, and less able candidates translated *décembre* as “September”. For the final question, several candidates resorted to guesswork, often referring to a “training programme”, and did not understand *naissance de sa petite fille*. Others confused *petite fille* with *petite amie*, and wrote “girlfriend”. A minority incorrectly used the future tense, saying that “his daughter will be born”.

Section III: There was an element of *Strand III: Cultural Awareness* in this section, with a reference to the *Festival de Nîmes*. The text contained several of the main themes from *Strand I: Basic Communicative Proficiency*, with vocabulary based on the Performance Targets in I.2 (Making plans and discussing future action), I.4 (Coping with travel and transport), I.5 (Buying goods and services), I.7 (Facilitating, encouraging or impeding a course of action), I.8 (Understanding feelings and attitudes), and I.10 (Engaging in discussion).

Q.1(i) of this section tested the 24 hour clock, and was generally well answered. Only the less able candidates had difficulty here, often confusing *quarante* with *quart*, and *treize* with *trois*, thus offering 3.15 p.m. instead of 1.40 p.m. Q.1(ii) was very poorly answered, as many candidates did not understand the word *stationnement*, and wrongly translated it as “train station” instead of “parking”. Q.2 was quite well answered, but sometimes the word *chambres* was omitted, and the more vague answer of “it’s dirty” was given. *Climatisation* was not always understood. Q.3(i) was very well answered, but Q.3(ii) was poorly answered, with many candidates focusing on the information given in the preceding sentence, and writing “they will enjoy the festival”. Some candidates confused *hébergement* with *auberge*, and referred to staying in a hostel the next time.

Section IV: This section dealt with the theme of helping the environment, and thus would have been familiar to candidates from their study of *Strand III, Cultural Awareness, III.5* (Understanding issues that transcend cultural divisions). Q.1 also dealt with travel (I.4), while Q.2 and Q.3 were based on the structures required for one of the Performance Targets in I.6, (Giving an account or a description of events in the past).

In Q.1, most candidates understood at least one of the advantages, although *détendu* proved problematic for the less able. Q.2 was generally well answered. However, the word *devant* was sometimes incorrectly translated as “behind”. Q.3 was well answered, with most candidates giving an acceptable synonym for *frapper à toutes les portes*. In Q.3, not many candidates got both answers fully correct. Basic vocabulary was not understood, e.g. the word *écran*, or *four à micro-ondes*. In addition, *voisin* was sometimes wrongly translated as “cousin”. Q.4, however, was very well answered, with most candidates understanding the reference to organising a rubbish collection on the beach.

Section V: There were some elements of cultural awareness (Strand III) in these three short news items, with references to *Provence*, the *Château de Versailles*, *Falaise* and a *hôtel de*

ville. In addition, vocabulary based on the Performance Targets in I.3 (Understanding information about climate and weather) and I.6 (Dealing with emergencies) was introduced in Q.1 and in Q.3. Since these three short news items were repeated twice only, and not three times as in the previous sections, they caused some problems. The high number (“28,000”) in Q.1 was most often misunderstood. Many candidates wrote “20” or “28”. Q.2 was very well answered, as was Q.3(i). However, Q.3(ii) showed a lack of very basic vocabulary, as *derrière* was not always understood, and the phrase *hôtel de ville* was often incorrectly translated as “town hotel”.

Ordinary level

As the CD was common to both levels, references to the Behavioural Objectives in the Syllabus, set out at the beginning of the Higher Level section above, are also valid at Ordinary Level. Thirteen of the twenty questions on the Ordinary Level paper were multiple choice. In general, candidates tended to score well in these questions, whereas the seven questions which required a specific written answer were often poorly answered.

Section I: This section was quite well answered, with most candidates achieving between ten and fifteen marks out of twenty. Q.1 was very well answered. However, for Q.2(i), most candidates did not give the full amount of information required, or else answered incorrectly “playing music”. The word *batterie* in Q.2(ii) was not always recognised. The majority of candidates answered Q.3 correctly.

Section II: Most candidates fared well at this section. For Q.1, “Germany” was the most common correct answer offered. Some candidates listed more than one country, which was not advisable, as one incorrect answer added to a correct answer resulted in zero marks. Q.2, 3 and 4 were generally well answered.

Section III: Very few candidates scored full marks in this section. Q.1(i) was usually incorrect, as candidates had difficulty with the 24 hour clock. The incorrect times “3:40” or “13:15” were common. The two multiple choice questions, Q.1(ii) and Q.2, were well answered. However, Q.3 was usually incorrect, and candidates appeared to revert to guesswork, with answers such as “he promises the festival will be great”.

Section IV: This was the most challenging section for candidates. Two of the multiple choice questions, Q.1 and Q.3, were generally well answered. However, Q.2 proved problematic,

since candidates who understood the reference to “house” often did not recognise the plural form, or else did not translate *devant* correctly. In Q.4, most candidates did not recognise the word *gants*, despite the fact that it is a basic vocabulary word.

Section V: The majority of candidates performed well in this section. In particular, Q.2 and Q.3(i) were very well answered, and Q.1 and Q.3(ii) were quite well answered.

Understanding the written language (reading comprehension)

Higher level

There were two Reading Comprehension passages, one journalistic and one literary. Ten questions were asked on each, the first eight in French and the final two in Irish or English. The Performance Targets were principally based on *Strand II: Language Awareness*, i.e. II.2 (Abstracting the main points / working out the implicit inferences of statements made / guessing intelligently at the meaning from a written text) and II.3 (Identifying attitudes on the basis of a writer’s use of language). Candidates were also required to meet the Performance Targets in *Strand III: Cultural Awareness*, particularly III.1 (Understanding the main elements of newspaper articles on contemporary aspects of French life) for Comprehension I, and III.2 (Understanding the main elements of a modern literary text) for Comprehension 2.

Comprehension 1: Most candidates found the article and the questions very manageable, and their answers to Question 6 showed that they had a good, global understanding of the text. It included several of the Performance Targets in III.3 (How people are educated / what they work at / how they spend their leisure hours, etc.), as it described the large French population of London, the difficulties for a French-speaking person in doing a work-placement, and the differences in work practices between France and England.

Q.1(i) and (ii) were generally correct. Q.2(i) caused problems, as many candidates found it difficult to combine the two key elements of *bourse* and *logement* correctly. Q.2(ii) was generally well answered, but a common wrong answer was *reconnâit*. Q.3(i) was also well answered, with the most common error being the addition of *bien sûr*. Q.3(ii) was frequently correct, but a number of candidates ignored the word *pourquoi*, and simply repeated the line *le jeune homme ordinateur*. Q.4(i) presented few difficulties for the more able candidates, but was challenging for the less able, who nearly always included the incorrect *il faut* or *c’est hallucinant* in their answer. Q.4(ii) proved quite accessible as a multiple-choice question, as

most candidates understood *reconnaissant* and *colocataires*. The most common incorrect answers were (b) and (c). Q.5(i) proved difficult for many candidates, as they either misunderstood the question or else failed to manipulate the verb *rentrer* into the Future Tense. Q.5(ii) was reasonably well answered, although a minority incorrectly included *en même temps*. Less able candidates clearly had difficulty in understanding that the negative aspect involved losing a job very easily, and failed to include *on peut très vite le perdre*. Q.6 was very well answered, and most candidates showed near perfect comprehension, generally agreeing with the statement given and providing evidence to back up their point of view. Common correct answers referred to Jonathan making new friends, improving his English, and how London was more exciting and vibrant. There was very little confusion, except perhaps sometimes incorrectly stating that Jonathan received many job offers.

Comprehension 2: This literary text proved slightly more demanding for candidates, although the themes (celebrities, using social media, setting up a blind date) were topical, and the language of the text was very much based on I.2 (Making plans and discussing future actions), I.6 (Describing an event in the past and sequencing events), and I.8 (Understanding feelings and attitudes). Aspects of cultural awareness were included, with references to famous places in Paris, i.e. Montmartre and its art galleries, and the Sacré-Coeur church.

Q.1(i): Most candidates gained full marks here. In rare cases, less able candidates incorrectly gave the first sentence instead. Q.2(ii) was also well answered, although a minority of candidates included the words *la regarda* in their answer, thus losing a mark. For Q.2(i), most answers were at least partially correct, with an understanding that Mia had cut her hair or had changed her hair colour. There were a lot of grammar errors when trying to rephrase the sentence, and many candidates simply wrote the full sentence, without attempting the necessary manipulation. Q.2(ii) was straightforward, with the most common answer being the direct quote from the text. Some candidates were penalised for including the excess element of *puis s'installa devant l'ordinateur de Daisy*. Q.3(i) was not often fully correct. Most candidates recognised that the answer involved the *site de rencontres* and gained partial marks. The most common incorrect answer was *Elle accéda professionnelles*. Q.3(ii) was generally well answered, although a minority of candidates included excess material, i.e. *mais passionnée par son métier*. Q.4(i) was one of the most challenging questions, with only the better able candidates achieving full marks. Many candidates simply wrote *elle découvrit un courriel de son agent*, without referring to the lack of contact. Q.4(ii) was generally well answered, although some candidates lost a mark for a failure to

manipulate the verb or else by including the word *donc*. Q.5(i) was generally poorly answered. Candidates did not seem to understand that *mot* meant that a single-word answer only was required, and often gave two or three words in their answer, e.g. *La jeune femme*. Many others answered incorrectly with *Paul* or *courrier*. Q.5(ii) was less well answered, as it required a close reading of the text. The most common incorrect answers were (c) and (d). Q.6 was very well answered in general, with candidates equally divided as to whether Mia was cautious or not, and finding references to back up both sides of the argument. However, a number of candidates lost marks by giving a valid point, but following it by an incorrect quotation.

Ordinary level

Candidates were required to answer four Reading Comprehension questions in Section I. Questions 1 and 2 were to be answered in Irish or English, and Questions 3 and 4 to be answered mostly in French. The Performance Targets were principally based on *Strand II: Language Awareness*, i.e. II.2 (Abstracting the main points / working out the implicit inferences of statements made / guessing intelligently at the meaning from a written text). Candidates also were required to meet the Performance Targets in *Strand III: Cultural Awareness*, particularly III.1 (Understanding the main elements of newspaper articles on contemporary aspects of French life), and III.2 (Understanding the main elements of a modern literary text).

Question 1: This question on activities for young people in Paris introduced many elements of cultural awareness. Q.1 and Q.2 were well answered. For Q.3, the majority of candidates generally offered “big” and “three storeys”. A small number confused *batiment* with the word “basement”. *Assez* was rarely understood. Q.4 was quite well answered. The two most common mistakes were translating *magasin* as “magazine”, or saying that the shop was open for 22 hours 30 minutes, or until 11.30 a.m. Most candidates were able to give one correct answer to Q.5, i.e. that the guides speak English, but had difficulty with the second answer. The most common incorrect answers were “it’s comfortable”, “it’s amusing”, and “it’s a small tricycle from Asia”. Many candidates only got partial marks for Q.6, as they understood *gratuit*, but not *moins de*. Quite a few simply put “it’s free”, with or without a wrong age group, or thought that “26” referred to a price. For Q.7, the word *mois* was quite often misunderstood. Few candidates gave two correct answers for Q.8. Most understood the

reference to the Military School, but not *immeubles* or *feu d'artifice*. Most frequently, the second answer was “Parisiens eating a sandwich”, “tourists taking photos”, or “big green spaces in Paris”.

Question 2: Candidates scored well here, particularly in Q.1 (a) to (d), where they had to recognise specific vocabulary in the film summaries. The most common mistake in this question was in (b) and (c). Q.2 was very well answered, with candidates recognising the word *miroir*. Q.3 was not well answered, as the verb *louer* was often not known. Q.4 was often only partially correct. Many candidates omitted to specify *tout de suite/ en moins de 24 heures*, or wrote that her passport was invalid. Many did not understand the meaning of *Maroc*. Q.5: Many achieved only partial marks in this question, as they did not grasp that the two boys wanted to spend the summer away from their parents. Very few understood *n'ont aucune envie*. Q.6: Usually only partially correct, as the phrase *petite amie* was rarely understood, and most candidates wrote “friends” instead. Q.7: Many achieved only partial marks here. Some struggled with the word *boum* and translated it incorrectly as “film” or “event”. The words *ami d'enfance* were generally misunderstood as “friend’s child”.

Question 3: In this interview with a French singer, Q.1 was generally correct, the most common mistake being the inclusion of *du* or *de la*. Occasionally the incorrect instruments *piano* or *guitare* were given. Q.2 was generally well answered, with the occasional loss of a mark for manipulation or for omitting to give *après le bac*. Q.3 was usually partially correct. There were many variations of answers here, the most frequent being *elle avait un cheval* or *un cheval*. Very few used *équitation*, and where it was used, it was generally misspelled. Q.4 was often misunderstood, and many candidates chose a sentence from the text which included the word *soeur*, probably because it appeared in the question, e.g. *c'est pourquoi je rends tres souvent visite à mes sœurs*. Where the question was understood, manipulation was quite often a problem, i.e. *mon* not being changed to *son*. Q.5: was also quite often misunderstood, with candidates looking for a sentence which included the verb *chanter*. *J'ai eu peur* was not widely understood. Q.6 was very poorly answered. Most candidates gave the reaction of the producer, instead of the customers. Q.7, the multiple-choice, was generally correct. Candidates did very well in Q.8, which had to be answered in Irish or English. Most understood the notion of Camille’s family being supportive and encouraging, and were able to give fairly detailed illustrations of this. Quite a few candidates were not specific enough, however, and did not refer to the text, as required.

Comprehension 4: Candidates found this the most difficult of all four comprehensions, although the theme of a new student arriving into a classroom should have been familiar.

Q.1: Very few got full marks here. Where the right class was given, it was often accompanied by extraneous material or else included the word *notre*. The most common incorrect answer was *il est suivi d'un garçon que nous ne connaissons pas*, indicating that candidates simply wrote the next sentence after the word *salle* in the text. Q.2 was usually correct, although some candidates gave the full sentence, and thus lost marks for excess material. Q.3 was frequently incorrect, with *apprendra* and *davantage* the most common wrong answers. *Parler* was the most recognised correct answer, although a minority of candidates offered *dossier*, apparently misled by the *-er* ending. Q.4 was generally correct or partially correct. A lack of manipulation was common here, as was extraneous information. A typical answer was *Vous vous rendez compte langues?*

In Q.5, most candidates easily identified both items of clothing. Sometimes, an answer was given in English, e.g. “a grey sweatshirt”, or else the item of clothing was given without the adjective, resulting in partial marks. Occasionally, *aux pieds* was given as an answer. Q.6 was reasonably well answered. The most frequent incorrect answer was *Sa mère est française et son père est américain*. Q.7: This multiple-choice question was usually correct.

Q.8: Most candidates understood that Jérémie’s nationality, clothes, lack of a school bag, and arrogance all made him different from other students.

Communicate in the written language (written production)

Higher level

Candidates were required to answer three out of four questions. Q.1 was compulsory, but candidates could select any two questions out of Q.2, 3 and 4. For each question, there was a choice of (a) or (b). In general, the Performance Targets were based on *Strand I: Basic Communicative Proficiency*, and *Strand III: Cultural Awareness*, III.5 (Describing and discussing issues that transcend cultural divisions).

Q.1(a): The theme of this question was based on Performance Targets I.1 (Stating what languages you speak and describing studies), I.8 (Expressing feelings and attitudes), and I.10 (Engaging in discussion). This was a popular option, as candidates were generally familiar with the vocabulary and held strong opinions on the topic. The more able candidates coped extremely well with the challenge of comparing and contrasting attitudes to both subjects.

Most candidates mentioned the allocation of bonus points and the timetabling of extra classes for maths in many schools as being unfair, and discussed the importance of languages for employment, while having due regard for the need for science and technology in the Irish economy. They often brought in a personal element, i.e. their own struggle with maths. However, many candidates failed to read the question properly. They had obviously prepared material on the theme of learning foreign languages, but failed to see that the question also concerned maths and science. Their answers therefore were not fully relevant and they lost marks as a result. Others failed to say whether or not they agreed with the statement, and their argument therefore was not fully clear. A basic language error in many of the answers was beginning sentences with *Aux langues* or *Aux mathématiques*, i.e. lifting the incorrect word from the stimulus material. Not knowing the words for “higher level” was common, and this proved problematic when candidates tried to discuss the bonus points for maths.

Q.1(b): This was not a popular question this year. Candidates were required to imagine that they had received an interesting e-mail, and then to write an account of what happened subsequently. The format was a *récit*, and the Linguistic Skills needed were those from I.6 (Giving an account or description of an event in the past and sequencing events), requiring the use of Passé Composé, imperfect and pluperfect tenses. The *récit* format should have been familiar to all candidates, as this type of question occurs in either part (a) or part (b) of Q.1 in most years. However, some candidates simply focused on the words *mail* and *courriel*, and did not notice the words *Racontez* and *récit*. As a result, their answers were written in the form of an e-mail. Many of the candidates who chose this question put together an interesting and imaginative story, which was relevant and clearly expressed. Examples included winning a ticket to a concert, being invited to spend time in France, being offered a job, or even dealing with a crime. In other cases, however, the actual story being told lacked coherence and the different elements did not hold together well. In addition, a lot of candidates struggled with the format of the various past tenses, or had difficulty distinguishing between the use of the Passé Composé and the imperfect tenses.

Q.2(a): This diary entry was very popular. Candidates were generally familiar with the vocabulary, and appeared to identify well with the topic. Various Performance Targets were met in their answers, i.e. I.1 (Discussing family / describing a region or locality), I.3 (Describing weather and particular activities), I.4 (Coping with travel and transport), I.8 (Expressing feelings and attitudes), and sometimes I.2 (Making plans and discussing future action). Candidates coped well with describing their emotions of shock, disgust, and anger,

and with contrasting their expectations before the holiday with the horrible reality of the event itself. In general, the tone and register of a diary were well respected, and the accounts were very personal, with descriptions of family quarrels, appalling food, no internet, heavy rain and poor facilities. However, there was sometimes a lack of clarity in the stories told, and poor control of the past tenses. Some candidates put a lot of work into writing down several prepared, generic diary-type phrases at the beginning and the end, but did not devote much space to the stimulus material itself, so lost marks. Others failed to read the question properly, and didn't realise that the diary entry was to be written after their return, i.e. in the past tense. Instead, they wrote in the present tense, as though in the middle of the holiday itself. Others incorrectly wrote about a holiday with friends, instead of a family holiday. Many candidates did not possess basic camping vocabulary, e.g. *terrain de camping*, and many also found it difficult to explain the bad weather, writing for example *il faisait pleu* or *il plui*. The range of descriptive adjectives used was small, with an over-use of the adjectives *mauvais* / *affreux*.

Q.2(b): This question was not a popular option, perhaps due to the fact that a formal letter had not appeared on the examination paper for a few years. The Performance Targets which candidates were required to meet came from I.1 (Giving personal details / enquiring about and describing work / developing an awareness of appropriateness of register), I.2 (Making plans and discussing future action), and I.4 (Enquiring about facilities / relaying concise information). Those candidates who chose this question were mostly among the less able, who were possibly drawn to the instructions in English. Unfortunately, they were not familiar with the necessary opening and closing formulae, nor with the register of language needed, and generally gained very few marks for Format. Very informal sign-offs, e.g. *Bon weekend* or *À bientôt* were regularly offered, and *tutoiement* often occurred. Most candidates made an effort to complete the five tasks set. However, many struggled with asking about pay and conditions, proving that formulation of questions continues to be difficult at this level. Some candidates also had difficulty specifying the period during which they would be available to work, and the Future Tense was often incorrect.

Q.3(a): This family theme was a very popular choice, and was generally very well handled. The Performance Targets were based on I.1 (Discussing family and home), I.8 (Expressing feelings and attitudes), and I.10 (Engaging in discussion). Most candidates, who would have prepared this topic for their oral examination, opted for a very personal approach, with many showing great insight. However, less able candidates often failed to notice the phrase *dans*

les deux cas in the question, and thus focused solely on one aspect. A few candidates inadvisably tried to write about a social problem they had prepared, e.g. mentioning a brother who took drugs and then devoting a large part of their answer to the dangers of drugs, and hence lost marks for irrelevance.

Q.3(b): This question was not as popular as the previous question. Able candidates acquitted themselves very well here, with interesting personal approaches about how they celebrated 1916 in their own schools, communities and families. Many candidates had excellent phrases, e.g. *hisser le drapeau, l'emblème national*. However, less able candidates struggled to use vocabulary which they had obviously prepared, but could not reproduce accurately. Some candidates did not focus on the actual question asked, i.e. commemorating the 1916 Rising, but instead wrote about commemorations in general, or else delivered an essay they had prepared on the theme of violence. They thus lost marks for relevance.

Q.4(a): This question was not at all popular this year. Generally, those who did attempt it had something interesting to say and stuck to personal experience, relating how their own town or school had been enriched by multiculturalism. A good example was one candidate who wrote about the 'Africa Day' held in their school. However, a number of candidates failed to focus on the question asked, and strayed instead into areas such as the refugee crisis, racism and immigration.

Q.4(b): This question was extremely popular, as the vocabulary dealing with obesity would have been familiar to most candidates. For the most part, candidates stuck to the point, i.e. the causes of obesity, and discussed issues such as sedentary lifestyles, lack of time in modern lifestyles, fast-food, advertising, etc. However, some did not focus on the question asked, and tried to use essays they had memorised on obesity in general, e.g. writing about the solutions to this problem, the role of the government, or simply giving a general essay about the dangers of obesity or other health issues. All such answers lost marks for relevancy.

Ordinary level

In Section II, Written Production, candidates were required to answer two questions from Sections A, B and C, which each offered a choice of parts (a) or (b). The majority of candidates attempted more than the required number of questions, in general Section A(a) and (b), along with one other question. Some candidates attempted all six questions. Marks

awarded for Section A were generally higher than for Sections B and C. Examiners noted that some of the less able candidates answered only Section A, and left the remaining questions blank.

Section A (a) – Cloze Test: The Performance Target for this question was from *Strand II: Language Awareness*, II.2, which required candidates to make short pieces of meaningful and coherent text out of gapped sentences. This question was attempted by most candidates, but was not always well answered. Marks were sometimes lost due to careless transcription, particularly when writing *espère*, where the accent was often omitted. The words which presented the most difficulty were *sortais* and *suis*, which were often confused with each other, and the word *beau* also caused some difficulty. The most common correct words were *pas* and *humeur*.

Section A (b) – Form-filling: Candidates generally performed well in this question, which was based on *Strand I: Basic Communicative Proficiency*, in particular I.1 (Giving personal details), and I.8 (Expressing preferences). There was also an element of cultural awareness (III.1) with the reference to signing up for activities in a *Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture* and the opportunity for candidates to write about a visit to France. Questions 1-5 were well answered. The longer questions were based on work that candidates had prepared for the oral examination, so they scored well in Communication and in Language. In Questions 1 to 5, incorrect answers were due to the words *Prénom* and *Nom* being confused, and to candidates omitting to put the year for *Date de naissance*, or writing the name of a country rather than an adjective for *Nationalité*. Q.6 was very well answered by the majority of candidates, as they were generally able to give a correct verb and two or more adjectives to describe their personality. Q.7 was also well answered, but sometimes the name of a singer or group was given, rather than the type of music liked. Candidates found it difficult to use the correct verb form, often writing *préférer* or *préférée* instead of *préfère*. Q.8 was fairly well answered. Most candidates made some attempt to answer, even if just mentioning names of places or monuments that they had visited. But verbs were generally in the incorrect tense, there was a poor range of vocabulary, and expressions of time were often incorrect. Q.9 was not well answered. Many candidates did not understand *jours*, and appeared to see only the word *Maison* in the phrase *Maison des Jeunes*, and thus referred to their own home. Many listed household chores or even hobbies in an attempt to answer.

Section B (a) - Message: This was a popular option, and was reasonably well answered. The question was based specifically on Performance Targets in Strand I, i.e. I.11 (Passing on a message), and the necessary vocabulary included weather (I.3), as well as transport and clock times (I.4). Candidates were required to show knowledge of the three main tenses, i.e. Present, Passé Composé (I.6), and Future (I.2). Communication marks for this question were generally quite good. Language marks were reasonably good, with the majority of candidates falling into the middle category.

In Point 1, *je suis allé au cinéma* was often given, but sometimes omitting the accents, resulting in partial marks. Other common attempts were *je vais* or *je suis au cinéma*. The phrase *avec mes amis* was usually correct. In Point 2, the verb *prendre* was usually not known, with the most common answer being *je vais en bus*. The translation of “it is raining” proved difficult for candidates. Although many knew the verb *pleuvoir*, few knew how to use it correctly, and commonly wrote *il fait pleut*. In Point 3, the verb *retourner* was often known but spelling mistakes were common, e.g. *je returne*. A small number of candidates gave excellent answers such as *je serai de retour à neuf heures*.

Section B (b) - Postcard: Many candidates chose the Postcard in addition to the Message. The Performance Targets required were similar, i.e. the three main tenses, but also included expressions of time (I.11). There was an element of cultural awareness in the reference to the famous Bridge of Avignon. Some parts were well communicated, while others were very poor. Language marks awarded were generally average. In Point 1, many candidates gave *avec ma classe* with ease, but others wrote *avec mon école* or *en voyage scolaire*. In Point 2, most candidates did not know *faire du cyclisme*. The gender of *le week-end dernier* was often incorrect, as was the masculine adjective agreement. Many candidates were unable to spell *à la campagne* correctly, often omitting the accent on *à*. In Point 3, most candidates were unable to give the correct future tense of *visiter*. The phrase *le pont célèbre* was rarely given. Most candidates knew *demain*, but *matin* was sometimes not known.

Section C (a) – Diary: Most candidates attempted this question. The Performance Targets required were similar to those of the Message and Postcard, i.e. the three main tenses, as well as I.8 (Expressing feelings). However, the three points were usually poorly communicated. Language marks awarded were generally average or low.

In Point 1, *je suis fatigué* was generally known, but with the accent frequently omitted. Most candidates used *journée* instead of *voyage* for the English word “journey”. In Point 2, *mon*

équipe was usually not known, nor was the adverb *facilement*. The verb *gagner* was usually in the incorrect tense. Most candidates, however, knew *hier*. In Point 3, *retourner* was frequently spelled incorrectly and used in the incorrect tense. Some candidates wrote *le stadium* instead of *le stade*. Most candidates were able to express “next year” but spellings were often poor.

Section C (b) – Formal Letter: Very few candidates attempted this question. The required layout and opening and closing formulae were generally incorrect, and the formal language register (i.e. the use of *vous*) was not generally used. All three points were poorly communicated. Language marks were very poor and generally fell into the bottom category.

The most common errors in the opening formula included omission of the date or of the word *Irlande*. The incorrect salutation *Cher Monsieur/Madame* was often used. Most candidates did not attempt the closing formula, but used informal endings instead, e.g: *À bientôt* or *Au revoir*. In Point 1, many candidates could say *je voudrais* but were unable to attempt “apply for” or “job”. Some candidates knew the word *serveur*, but many did not. The correct phrase *votre hôtel* was fairly rare, and a typical attempt was *dans un / ton hôtel*. In Point 2, the verb *travailler* was well known, but the *passé composé* form was not. The present tense was more generally used instead. The phrase *en Irlande* was generally known, but often misspelled, as was the phrase *l’été dernier*. In Point 3, *je pourrai commencer* was rarely known, and the word *juillet* was sometimes misspelled. Sentence structures were generally poor.

4. Conclusions

Oral examination: The performance of candidates in the 2016 examination spanned the full range of abilities. The majority of candidates were well-prepared, and showed a great willingness to communicate. Many had achieved a high degree of proficiency and fluency. However, at the other end of the scale, there were those who had difficulty in answering even simple questions.

Higher Level: For the Listening Comprehension, Sections IV and V proved most difficult this year. Sections I and III were the most accessible. In many cases, marks were lost because Junior Certificate level vocabulary was not known, and candidates performed less well than expected when confronted with basic words or phrases. However, the more able candidates coped well with the material, and were able to give detailed, comprehensive answers, showing that they understood the concept, and not just individual words.

Examiners reported that candidates liked both Reading Comprehension texts this year and thus engaged well with them. Candidates found the journalistic passage marginally easier. Quite a few had difficulty with the two grammar questions, and also struggled when manipulation was needed, making basic errors in tenses or agreements. Many did not recognise where direct quotation was required. The less able candidates often did not recognise exactly where the answer was to be found in the text, or added excess material to a correct answer. In general, they showed a good global understanding of the two texts, as shown by their answers to Question 6 in each case.

For Written Production, examiners noted that the candidates who performed best were those who had read the questions carefully, stuck closely to the tasks set, and gave clear, well-structured answers, using accurate and idiomatic French. Apart from the quality of the French, these candidates conveyed a strong sense of personal involvement or interest in the topic. However, many other candidates relied heavily on learned-off material, using generic statements, clichés or proverbs – normally inaccurately written – in the belief that these would enhance their argument. They often strayed into irrelevancy, and had numerous errors in tenses, agreements and spelling. Examiners reported that quite a few candidates attempted one or more extra questions this year, probably because they found the range of topics appealing. This, however, was often counter-productive, as it rarely gained them extra marks, and the time spent on an additional question would have been better spent re-reading and refining the three required answers.

Ordinary Level: In the Listening Comprehension paper, the majority of candidates attempted every question, and generally performed better in this component than in the written paper. Candidates tended to score well in the multiple-choice type questions, but those requiring written answers were less well answered. Section 5 caused the most difficulty.

For the written paper, the standard of answering varied enormously, with the more able candidates showing their strengths in their knowledge of vocabulary, their understanding of key question words, and the presentation of clear concise answers with no extraneous material. In Section I (Reading Comprehension), candidates tended to score well in the two information retrieval questions (Q.1 and Q.2). For Q.3 and Q.4, most candidates made a good attempt, particularly in Q.8 of both passages, where a more global understanding of the text was necessary. However, candidates displayed weaknesses in comprehension questions which required manipulation of the text. A large number of candidates relied on direct quotation and lost marks in this way.

Section II (Written Expression) proved more challenging to candidates. The more detail required in the answer, the more difficulties the candidates had. A knowledge of basic verb construction and everyday vocabulary was often lacking, and accuracy in spelling was a real problem for the less able candidates. Some candidates opted only to complete Section A of the written exercise (Cloze-test and Form-filling) and left the remaining questions blank. However, the more able candidates coped extremely well with the written production questions, and were able to respond to the stimulus material effectively and accurately.

5. Recommendations to Teachers and Students

The comments below refer to both levels unless otherwise specified. The depth of understanding and level of mastery required of candidates at Ordinary level is obviously less than that expected at Higher level.

5.1 Preparing for the examination

Teachers should:

- use French as the language of communication in the classroom as much as possible, in order to attune the student's ear to the language
- impress on students the importance of good pronunciation, and teach it systematically from 1st Year onwards
- ensure that students are able to manage a conversation, and able to express incomprehension, and ask for repetition or clarification, if necessary
- practice question words (who, where, when, how many, etc.) so that students become accustomed to hearing them
- remind students that they should be prepared to enter into conversation and to give their own, personal response to the oral examiner's questions
- encourage students to strive for authenticity, rather than relying on long paragraphs memorised from notes, which they may struggle to reproduce accurately
- practice the Present, Passé Composé and Future tenses as often as possible, and ensure that students are accustomed to respond to questions in at least these three basic tenses
- revise Junior Certificate vocabulary regularly, rather than focusing mainly on abstract concepts or topical issues
- encourage students to prepare a *Document* for their oral examination, and help them select one which is suitable to their level of French, on a topic which interests them
- encourage students to read French literature, so as to become accustomed to following a story line in the Reading Comprehensions in the written paper
- ensure that students are familiar with key words such as *trouvez*, *relevez*, *citez*, *mot*, *phrase*, and *expression*, which will often occur in the Reading Comprehension passages
- emphasise the need to read the comprehension questions carefully, and to avoid writing excess material in their answers

- ensure students are familiar with the main grammatical terms, and thus able to pick out specific grammar elements within a sentence
- constantly revise basic grammar, including the main verb tenses, agreement of adjectives, plurals, and negative and interrogative forms
- encourage students to strive for accuracy in both grammar and spelling in their written work
- help students become aware of the different registers of language, i.e. colloquial (for a diary or when writing to a pen pal), and formal (when writing to adults or responding to a discussion question)
- ensure that students are familiar with the different types of stimuli that might appear on the examination paper, including the format needed for both informal and formal letters
- practice creative writing with students, so they will be able to deal with a *récit*, i.e. able to write a clear, logical story, using the different past tenses
- train students in how to look for key words in a written question, and to focus carefully on writing an answer that is fully relevant
- advise students not to try to memorise paragraphs or essays from textbooks or sets of notes, but instead to write a personal response, adapting vocabulary and phrases that they already know.

Students should:

- remember that pronunciation and intonation are important, and that the oral examiner may not understand poorly-pronounced words
- ensure that they can understand the main question words and recognise which tense the oral examiner has used
- avoid memorising long paragraphs from textbooks or sets of notes, as these can sound artificial and may not be fully relevant to the question asked
- learn the necessary vocabulary to talk about themselves, their friends and family, and their main interests
- choose a *Document* on a topic which interests them, and with which they are comfortable from a language point of view
- prepare their *Document* well, and try to anticipate the type of questions which the oral examiner may ask

- make time to read French short stories or novels, in order to get used to following a story-line and to understand implicit meanings
- practice answering comprehension questions, understanding whether manipulation or direct quotation from the text is required
- ensure they are familiar with key grammatical terms, and can identify the different elements in a sentence
- strive for accuracy in written work, constantly practicing basic tenses, verb endings, agreement of adjectives, and correct genders
- become familiar with the requirements of different types of written production, e.g. cloze-tests, form-filling, narrative writing, diary entries, messages, e-mails, letters, personal accounts, and questions which require some discussion.

5.2 In the examination

Candidates should:

- remember that the oral examiner is there to assist them perform as well as they can
- treat the oral examination as a normal conversation, and be willing to respond to all questions
- ask the examiner to repeat or clarify a question if necessary, or say if they don't understand it
- correct an error straight away if they become aware of it, for example, a wrong tense or gender
- listen carefully to the full question, and note the tense used (looking out for key words such as *dernier* or *prochain*), rather than focusing on a single word
- understand that the examiner may intervene gently if they are reciting a memorised passage, to try and elicit a more authentic response
- show a willingness to communicate, even if a question appears difficult, and try and develop their answers, rather than sticking to *oui / non*
- read the Comprehension texts carefully several times before starting to write their answers
- note whether a Reading Comprehension question requires direct quotation (e.g. *Citez, Relevez, Trouvez*) or whether reformulation is needed
- be careful of transcription errors when copying an answer directly from the text

- remember that answers must make complete sense, so be careful where to begin and end a quotation
- ensure that they refer closely and relevantly to the text when answering the final Reading Comprehensions questions (Q.8 on the Ordinary Level paper or Q.6 on the Higher Level paper)
- read the written production questions carefully and note exactly what they are being asked to do, by underlining the key words
- plan the structure of their answer before they start writing, jotting down the key points they will need for each paragraph
- avoid writing out a complete rough-work answer first, and then copying it out in full, as this wastes time
- answer only the required number of written questions, and spend any additional time reviewing and refining their answers, rather than attempting an extra question
- write their answer in their own personal style, expressing their own point of view, and avoid including proverbs, clichés, or ‘showy’ pre-prepared phrases for their own sake
- focus on accuracy, and carefully check their verbs, agreements, and spellings (including accents) when they give a final read-through
- read the instructions for the listening test carefully in the five minutes allowed before the CD is played
- listen for the idea or concept in the whole sentence, rather than for single words
- write their answers only during the second or third hearing, as they will have a better grasp at that stage of the detail required
- make sure that the letter *a*, *b* *c* or *d* which they select for a multiple-choice answer is clearly written, and that any crossing-out does not make it ambiguous for the examiner
- avoid using pencil, as it will fade and may be difficult for an examiner to read.