

**GCSE**

**French**

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J730**

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course) **J030 J130**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2015**

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

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

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# A701 Listening

**General:** Candidates performed well for the most part on this year's French Listening paper. A generally good standard of comprehension was displayed though FT Exercise 5 (HT Exercise 2) and HT Exercise 5 in which candidates had to give answers in English (rather than giving objective-test answers) proved to be challenging and marks scored were rather low.

In some cases candidates' handwriting was very poor and sometimes very small and they must be reminded to make their answers as clear as possible, especially if they change their mind on a particular answer. They should also be reminded to read questions carefully and ensure that they have understood the question words – they would be well-advised to make good use of the five-minute reading time by underlining or highlighting such words.

Candidates had for the most part been entered for the appropriate tier and centres are to be commended for obviously preparing their candidates well for the examination. Although there were a few cases in which candidates did not attempt answers on the above-mentioned exercises, answers were usually given for the majority of questions and in the appropriate language and the rubrics appear to have been well understood.

## Foundation Tier

**Exercise 1:** this introductory exercise, designed to be fairly straightforward and delivered at a steady pace, was well handled by the majority. There were occasional errors on Q.3 (*un appartement*), Q.4 (*un bain de soleil*) and Q.7 (*une boîte de nuit*) but marks were usually high on this exercise.

**Exercise 2:** candidates usually seem to answer exercises based on food with confidence and again marks were high here. The only items which occasionally caused confusion and error were *yaourt* (Q.10), *fruits de mer* (Q.12) and *crêpes* (Q.12).

**Exercise 3:** this exercise proved to be a little more demanding and the material was more dense than in the opening two exercises, but candidates generally answered well. There were occasional errors on Q.13 ("Belgian" selected for *allemande*), Q.16 "castle" selected for *église* (candidates were perhaps led astray by the inclusion of the adjective *ancienne*, feeling that this was more appropriate for a castle than a church), Q.18 on which perhaps surprisingly not all identified *jaune(s)* as "yellow" and occasionally "in front of" was selected for *derrière* on Q.19. Finally, not all correctly identified *arbres* on Q.20.

## Foundation/Higher Tier

**FT Ex. 4/HT Ex. 1:** this exercise, based on understanding of free-time activities, was generally well-handled by candidates at both tiers. HT candidates often scored all 8 marks. Candidates did not appear to be unduly confused by some of the more complex vocabulary such as *arroser*, *cueillir*, *bricolage* and *papier peint* but at FT the word *alpinisme* was not generally known. The items which were usually correctly identified were A,H,K,G and J. In Q.21/1, E (gardening) was sometimes wrong as was M in Q.23/3 and D in Q.24/4.

**HT Ex. 5/HT Ex.2:** candidates at both tiers encountered difficulties with this exercise. Answers often lacked sufficient detail or candidates were led astray by negatives. On Q.25 most picked out *un mois* but many failed to give the full answer required by rendering *et demi*. Some simply translated *c'était long* which did not answer the question "how long did he work for?". On Q.26 it was common for candidates to give the answer to where Samuel lived (*centre-ville*) rather than

where the restaurant was situated (*en banlieue*). Q.27 tested candidates' powers of listening discrimination, and many gave the forms of transport that Samuel did NOT use, not listening closely enough to *il n'y avait pas d'autobus* and *c'était trop loin pour y aller à vélo*. Centres would be well-advised to give candidates practice in picking out the correct answers in texts which include negatives, different tenses etc. On Q.28 *pourboires* was not well known, with attempts such as "free drinks" or "not bad" (on hearing *j'ai reçu pas mal en pourboires*). Q.29 was found easier with *plats délicieux* readily understood. It should be noted that for *plats*, acceptable renderings included "dishes", "food", or "meals" and a number of renderings of *délicieux* were acceptable such as "tasty". Q.30 gave rise to a number of guesses such as "cleaning" or "washing-up", only the best correctly rendering *clients impolis*. On Q.31, the word *maçon* was not well known and in the final question *Pâques* caused problems for some with guesses such as "next year" or soon. Some offered "park" which illustrates the failure mentioned in the preamble for some to read the question, especially the question word, carefully.

## Higher Tier

**Exercise 3:** this exercise was a gist-comprehension test based on extracts from radio broadcasts. It was well answered, questions 13, 14, 15, 18, 19 and 20 usually answered correctly. Questions 16 and 17 caused some problems, particularly "film review" being offered for Q.17 – on this question some of the weather vocabulary such as *orages*, *chutes de grêle* and *rafales de vent* probably caused problems. The inclusion in the text of Q.16 of the word *voiture* may have led some to select "traffic report" as the answer. Generally, however, there was a pleasing performance on this exercise.

**Exercise 4:** candidates also performed well on this multiple-choice exercise based on youth hostels in Canada. A good proportion demonstrated commendable understanding of the descriptions of the hostels, many scoring maximum or near maximum marks. The most frequent errors occurred in Q.24 where A ("meet the staff") was selected instead of "relax" (C), Q.25 (C instead of B - confusion of the nouns *marché* and *marche*) and Q.28 (C instead of A). On Q.22 candidates did well to understand the sense of *casier* (a test of unfamiliar vocabulary in which the meaning had to be surmised by understanding the accompanying material).

**Exercise 5:** this exercise, designed to test Grade A\*, proved to be very demanding. It was a test in which answers could not be easily guessed. Most however started well by scoring the mark on Q.29 (the best team in France/ the champions). Very few indeed, however, scored the mark on Q.30 which required understanding of *me fait beaucoup rire* – here there were frequent guesses such as "amazed", "overwhelmed" etc. Some were successful in their rendering of *un contrat pour le reste de ma carrière* on Q.31. The simple answer "proud" was required on Q.32 but only the best managed to pick out the key word. Q.33 was fairly well answered, many understanding that Émilie attributed her success to the whole team and not simply herself. On Q.34 most realised that eating was involved but the concept of a balanced diet was only perceived by the best candidates, most simply offering "eating healthily". On Q.35 *horaire personnel* led many to answer incorrectly by giving "personal trainer". It should be noted that those offering a rendering of *je me lève et me couche toujours de bonne heure* had to translate both parts and that "at a good time" was not an acceptable rendering of *de bonne heure*. The final question was demanding and required a close translation of *jouir de la vie*. Guesses such as "do what makes you happy" were common and there was frequent evidence of confusion of *jouir* with *jouer* or *jour*.

## A702 Speaking

It is pleasing to see that in general more centres are becoming adept at conducting the Controlled Assessments and as a result their candidates are better prepared for the tasks and are able to demonstrate effectively what they know and can do. These Centres are also able to apply the marking criteria well and are therefore accurate in the marks they have awarded, there is also evidence that internal moderation has taken place within the Centre. However for the moderation process to run smoothly all Centres should follow the guidelines given as to how to conduct the tests, choose appropriate tasks and assess accurately and consistently. Before the moderation process can begin all Centres are reminded of the need to send the necessary paper work and recordings to the moderator promptly to avoid any delays.

### Administration

Centres this year seemed more efficient in submitting marks to meet the deadline and most do submit the correct paper work. However there are still quite a few cases where the MS1 and Centre of Authentication are missing. Also more care needs to be taken over transferring the marks from the Working Mark Sheets to the MS1s and there were some cases where marks for task 1 were put as marks for task 2 on the MS1 and vice versa. Also arithmetic needs to be checked carefully to avoid arithmetical errors. All of these issues result in a delay in the moderation process. Please also send only the sample required and not the work of all the candidates.

Regarding the Candidates' Notes Forms, please ensure that the candidates only write 40 words. If the candidate chooses not to write anything on the Notes Forms that is their decision but please still submit the form which should be signed by the candidates.

### Recordings

On the whole recordings were very clear and easy to access, however for postal moderation if the Centre could identify candidates by their name and candidate number on the CD and on the sleeve that would be helpful. There were a few cases of mislabelled CDs with candidates in the wrong order or omitted from the label but recorded on the CD. It is important to record the candidate's name and candidate number before the examination starts. Also it must be Task 1 that is sent to be moderated, not Task 2. Therefore it is advisable to check the correct recording has been sent. However when this did occur Centres were quick to rectify the situation. If a task fails to record then this situation must be addressed by submitting another task from the two year GCSE course.

On the whole recordings were very clear and the sound quality was generally good. However it is important that the candidate is positioned near to the microphone so their voice is clear.

### Style of Tasks and Timing

In most Centres the examination was conducted well and efficiently. However regarding the timing of the tasks, it should be remembered that the Controlled Assessment should last between 4-6 minutes. Most centres adhered to these times; however there were examples of tasks that took less than a minute this year and some that were overlong. Whilst it is understandable that a weaker candidate should not speak for 6 minutes, it is very difficult to apply the marking criteria when it is exceptionally short, equally the candidates are disadvantaged when it exceeds the time limit as they become tired and will make more mistakes. The introduction by the Teacher/Examiner is not included in the timing.

Most Centres chose to do either an interview, conversation or a presentation followed by discussion. There were fewer cases of role plays or narrative role plays as used in the legacy examination.

Centres need to ensure that they submit tasks of different purposes. If a candidate chooses to do a presentation it should only last for a maximum of 3 minutes followed by a discussion. There were examples this year where the Presentation lasted for most of the examination and became a monologue, so little time was left for questions. This does mean there is little interaction between the Examiner and the candidate, which needs to take place for the candidate to access the full range of marks. On the other hand if a Presentation lasts for only 20 seconds, the task becomes more of a conversation.

This year there were excellent examples of interviews on the environment and role play situations such as an interview with a celebrity. One Centre produced some very interesting role plays at the Tourist Office in which the candidate was responding as someone who worked at the office to the teacher playing the part of the tourist. In each case every candidate worked at a tourist office in a different town and had obviously carried out research on the area/town where they worked, which they then used to respond to the tourist.

However, on the whole, there seemed to be less variety of types of tasks and topics chosen and most Centres seemed to choose School, Holidays, Healthy Lifestyles, Work/Job interview. Yet it was noticeable that candidates produced better work when presented with a topic that interested them. It is a good idea to submit a variety of topics chosen from the two years as there were a small number of Centres who submitted the same topic for all candidates and asked the same questions. This does question the degree of unpredictability and prevents the candidates from accessing the top band. The questions should be appropriate for the ability range i.e. a less able candidate will struggle with questions on the environment and global warming. Also it is advisable for the Examiner to ask more open ended questions especially for more able candidates in order to prompt more sequences of information. Candidates were well drilled in to giving opinions and reasons and were encouraged by the examiner to give a range of tenses. However some topics do not lend themselves to this range and the examiner does have to extend the task in order to widen the range of tenses to avoid a lot of responses in the present tense.

There was a lot of evidence of candidates who were able to produce an excellent level of accuracy, a range of tenses, complex structures and idiomatic language. There were many candidates who spoke fluently and confidently as they made a great deal of effort to prepare and many coped well with the spontaneous questions asked by some Centres even if their language was not at the same level as their prepared responses.

Questioning was sympathetic and it is evident that Teachers/Examiners are becoming more aware of the marking criteria. However the candidates should not be over prepared and should be asked ‘unpredictable’ questions so they are able to produce information spontaneously. There should not be examples where a Teacher/Examiner is prompting a Candidate as if they are following a script.

## Assessment

To access the higher bands for Communication the candidates should be encouraged to respond fully to the questions and be able to respond spontaneously. Even though a candidate may be the strongest in that particular Centre, it does not mean that they should be awarded marks from the top band. The mark given should also take into account the amount of information given by the candidate and also if there was hesitancy or ambiguity in their delivery. In terms of Quality of Language for the upper band evidence of a range of complex structures

and tenses need to be shown. For the 7-8 band the candidates must be in control of the language and have produced some complex structures successfully. Some Centres are awarding marks in this band for candidates who are accurate but do not show a variety of tenses and are not successful with complex structures. There were a number of Centres this year where the delivery of the material was affected by poor pronunciation due to first language interference and yet they were credited as if they were communicating ‘competently’. This cannot be the case if there are ambiguities caused by poor pronunciation. Marking still seems, in a number of Centres, to be over generous, and there appears to be some inconsistencies between teachers in the same Centre which should not happen if internal moderation is taking place. When deciding which task to submit for task 1, ideally it should be their highest mark so the moderator can assess the candidate’s best work.

Centres will receive a report from the moderator who assessed their Centre, which will provide useful feedback on their Centre’s sample submitted. It will also give guidance if needed as to how to ensure their Candidates achieve their full potential.

# A703 Reading

## General Comments

A wide range of marks was seen at both Tiers of this examination, suggesting that candidates had, for the most part, been entered for the appropriate Tier. There was, however, a small number, who struggled at Higher Tier, and may have seen greater success had they been entered for the Foundation Tier.

Examiners reported very few instances of blank responses on multiple choice sections, but there is scope for some improvement in the way that candidates cope with unknown items. Having said that, many did make intelligent attempts to render unknown vocabulary, using a variety of coping strategies.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Foundation Tier

#### Exercise 1: Questions 1 – 8

Examiners were disappointed by the responses to some of the items in this section. Knowledge of items of fruit and places in town was often not secure. Most recognised '*poires*' as a food item, but '*peas*' and '*potatoes*' were frequently seen answers. '*Gare*' was confused with '*garage*' by many, while, in Q.3 a significant number did not appear to read the whole phrase, selecting '*venue*' from '*bienvenue*' and not finding '*école*'. '*Coiffeur*' was rarely rendered correctly. Conversely, most knew right from left, and '*vélo*' and '*espagnol*' caused few problems.

#### Exercise 2: Questions 9 – 16

This multiple choice section was generally handled very well. The major difficulty was with Q. 15 and 16, where the topic of employment caused issues for some. To a lesser extent there appeared to be some confusion over the meaning of '*équitation*'.

#### Exercise 3: Questions 17 – 23

This exercise was well answered by many, presumably as most candidates will have thought quite a bit about this topic in preparation for writing tasks. Where candidates failed to gain marks, it was often due to an incomplete reading of the text. Hence '*healthy*' was sometimes not given with '*eating*' and '*too much*' did not always precede '*cheese*'. While there were a few blank responses, most used the context to produce sensible answers for unknown items. '*Randonnées*' was the least known vocabulary item, although the majority recognised that it should be a form of exercise. Those who didn't, usually assumed it to be connected with '*random*'. Examiners would like to remind Centres to encourage candidates to read questions carefully, as some lost marks on Q. 21, reading '*what*' instead of '*when*'.

### Foundation/Higher Tier

#### Exercise 4/1: Questions 24 – 31/ Exercise 1: Questions 1 – 8

Candidates at both Tiers were able to achieve a reasonable level of success in this section. Q. 28/5, 29/6 and 30/7 were particularly well answered. On Q. 26, there was evidence that

candidates did not recognise the two ways of rendering ‘outside/outdoors’, while on Q. 27 ‘me baigner’ was often not recognised.

### **Exercise 5/2: Questions 32 – 39 / Exercise 2: Questions 9 – 16**

A wide range of marks was seen on this exercise, which discriminated well. Candidates at both Tiers were able to access the task, and, even where answers were incorrect, a level of gist understanding of the text could often be discerned. Once again, many marks were lost through incomplete reading of the text as many candidates recognised ‘million’ but missed the ‘more than’. This led some to write ‘millions’ or even ‘thousands’. Q. 34/11, 38/15 and 39/16 were the most successfully completed. The most difficult were Q. 33/10, because of ‘SIDA’ and ‘tiers’, and 36/13, where candidates often appeared to stop reading at ‘terrorisme’, and, therefore, missed the correct answer. Q. 37/14 received a mixture of responses as candidates found it difficult at times to select the pertinent phrases from the text. ‘Terrorism’, ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ were the most frequently seen incorrect answers, again showing that the text had been understood as a whole, if not in detail. Examiners were pleased to note that blank responses to these tasks were rare.

#### **Higher Tier**

### **Exercise 3: Questions 17 – 24**

Examiners reported a high level of success on this task. The most demanding tasks were Q. 21 and 24, where, in both instances, C proved to be a popular choice, in the latter possibly due to a lack of familiarity with ‘réussi’ and ‘fidèle’.

### **Exercise 4: Questions 25 – 31**

Inevitably, this section, which required candidates to write answers, resulted in more able candidates succeeding in producing coherent answers, while allowing weaker candidates to provide an answer. There were, however, many blank responses on this section. Examiners are concerned that some candidates, who are correctly entered at this Tier, do not try to use clues of context, similarity and grammar, to make a sensible attempt at a response.

The task discriminated well throughout. Q. 25 was often answered correctly and encouraged candidates to understand the context. Most other tasks required a mixture of close reading of the text, and a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic. Confusion around Q. 26 often centred on a change of route rather than transport, while on Q. 30, too many candidates failed to read ‘un de mes collègues’ and answered in the plural. The English ‘colleague’ was widely misspelt. ‘Soulagé’ and ‘récupérer’ proved to be the most obscure vocabulary items. While some candidates misinterpreted ‘commun’ on Q. 29, the majority recognised it as referring to ‘public’ transport.

### **Exercise 5: Questions 32 – 39**

The final exercise turned out to be suitably demanding, Q. 32 – 34 being the least well answered, ‘banlieu’, ‘se promenait’ and ‘freiné’ presumably being the difficult points. Q. 36, 38 and 39 were the most accessible answers.

As a final comment, Examiners are becoming increasingly concerned about standards of handwriting.

## A704 Writing

### General Comments

Examiners reported having noted a similar standard to the work from last year.

In a few Centres this year, a more interesting range of topics was observed, some based around current affairs, which offered more able candidates the opportunity to use language more creatively. In these Centres, there also tended to be greater differentiation of task, as it was clear that more moderate candidates would not have been able to cope with the level of language required for the more complex topics. Centres should be aware, however, that there is a fine line between encouraging candidates to make use of pertinent structures and vocabulary, and allowing them to copy verbatim from an article. Teachers must be vigilant, as Examiners check to ensure that rules of plagiarism are not being breached.

If candidates are restricted to a small number of topics, and exhaustively prepare them in class, it does not lead to the best outcomes.. It was, for example, disappointing to read very promising beginnings, such as book or film reviews, which were curtailed as the candidate felt constrained to follow the outline set, with the narrative abruptly changing to a shopping trip. Similarly, ideas such as a ‘disastrous holiday’ or environmental issues were usually just an adjunct to a wider ranging piece, which did not allow candidates to explore ideas and comment ‘extensively’ and ‘convincingly’ on a topic. For more able candidates, Centres would be advised to consider the use of a more open-ended task, which would have genuine suggestions for development, rather than insisting that all students follow the set plan. This would afford them the opportunity to use a wider range of structures more naturally, rather than trying to force complex language into rather banal vocabulary.

The lack of differentiation also has a negative effect on weaker candidates, as they attempt to produce language, which is beyond their capabilities. This frequently results in a significant level of incoherence, thus limiting the marks that may be awarded. There is a related problem, in that Centres often see the word count as a minimum target for all candidates. This has the tendency to result in lengthy lists of nouns, especially in terms of school subjects, items of clothing, parts of a house and places in a town. The latter topic sometimes also produces repetitive lists of activities introduced by ‘*on peut...*’ or ‘*il faut*’. Such lists cannot be rewarded with many marks, but can, on the other hand, produce a negative effect, as candidates go on to make an increasing number of errors, rather than concentrating on using one or two nouns, correctly spelt and with correct gender. The choice of ‘film review’ or ‘environment’ often leads to a very high incidence of error and lack of clarity at this level.

Excessive word count remains a problem in a few Centres, where candidates are writing in excess of 600 words for each item. Again, this often means that structures and vocabulary are being used repetitively, and as the piece progresses, the incidence of error and incoherence is likely to increase. Work which is in the range of 250 – 400 words gives the best opportunity for high marks.

There is an increasing tendency to see work which is evidently based on a series of questions, producing paragraphs beginning with ‘*oui*; or ‘*non*’, or changing subject abruptly with no attempt at linkage. This reduces the opportunity for Examiners to consider that the work is ‘fluent’ or ‘coherent’, even where the writing is accurate. This is also where candidates are more likely to contradict themselves, beginning a piece, for example, by saying that they prefer to go on holiday with parents, but by the end they hate this, and prefer to be with friends. Contradictions in justifications were also noted: ‘*je n'aime pas l'avion parce que c'est pratique*’.

Examiners continue to report striking similarities between the work of candidates in some Centres. This is often observed in topics such as ‘school’ or ‘town’, where candidates will all

write essentially the same first paragraph with some minor differences. Where this occurs, it is usually the more able candidates who lose out as they are unable to produce language at a level of which they are clearly capable. Examiners will always be concerned when almost all candidates begin the same paragraph with phrases such as '*mon hero (sic) sportif est...*'. Punctuation is becoming an issue with some candidates, as inappropriately placed full stops in the middle of a sentence suggest a lack of understanding of what has been written. Sentences such as '*Je vais à la plage. Ou (sic) je me bronze. Tout (sic) la journée*' and '*je trouve les maths difficile (sic) plus tard je veux me marier*' were not uncommon.

Centres should be wary of excessive dictionary use. A lack of understanding leads to nonsensical phrases such as: '*je vais au college à pied et c'est coffre-fort*', '*ça boîte être*', '*nous prefere de porter des chaussures comme des formateurs*', and '*je prefere aller en mon proper*'. Despite the messages included in previous reports, the issues of idioms and the subjunctive remain a concern. Idioms, for the purpose of this specification, refer to common phrases which do not translate directly between languages. Examiners are looking, for example, for correct formation of weather related expressions, and those which use '*avoir*' to express '*be*' in English. The liberal sprinkling of pre-learnt, exotic idioms is unlikely to impress Examiners, especially where the candidate then routinely struggles to use simple tenses accurately, or to use correct genders and adjectival and past participle agreements. In terms of the subjunctive, the majority of examples found are incorrectly used, as the subject of the verb is the same in both parts of the sentence. In such cases, the use of the infinitive would be the expected usage.

Many candidates are, nevertheless, able to produce work commensurate with their ability. In terms of more able candidates, this is seen in thoughtful items, which encourage the exploration of a range of points of view, and may look at both sides of an argument. Titles such as '*vaut-il mieux passer les vacances en Angleterre ou à l'étranger ?*' open up such opportunities. The best responses branch out from formulaic constraints and produce a coherent and interesting discussion. Opinion, point of view and justification are likely to dominate the narrative. A range of tenses stems naturally from such a topic and these become intermeshed in a varied piece of writing, which avoids the one paragraph, one tense formula. Examiners are looking to reward longer sequences of language, which include complexity, and which display consistent use of tenses, along with correct gender and adjectival and past participle agreements. Candidates, who concentrate on getting these basics correct, within an open framework, are likely to gain the highest marks.

These basics of verb constructions, gender and adjectival agreements are also the staple elements of successful communication lower down the cohort. Where these are not sufficiently targeted, the resulting piece of writing will inevitably lack clarity. This has been especially noticeable where candidates are confused over the difference between the use of the future and conditional, the perfect and the imperfect, and the imperfect and the conditional tenses, the latter mainly in '*si*' clauses: '*si je gagnerais la lotterie, je voudrais aller en Espagnol (sic)*'.

Centres are reminded that word processed work should be double line spaced and clear margins left. Conversely, Examiners reported with pleasure that a number of Centres have started to use paper especially prepared for the unit, with clear margins on both sides.

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