UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
ADVANCED LEVEL

FRENCH

MAY 2009

EXAMINERS’ REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD
AM Examiners’ Report – May 2009

AM FRENCH
MAY 2009 SESSION
EXAMINERS’ REPORT

One hundred and eight candidates sat for the examination, two were absent. The following table gives the overall performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of candidates</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paper I

Most candidates understood the text well. In fact, 13 candidates obtained 80% of the mark or over. However, 19 candidates failed in this exercise. Some candidates tended to be rather superficial, as they merely mentioned the presence of certain words, punctuation, tenses etc. without commenting on their stylistic or discursive effect. When commenting on the vocabulary of the text, candidates should try to go beyond simply giving a list of concrete and abstract terms and expressions. When giving the main idea, some candidates opted to copy a phrase taken directly from the text, for example, *Le “gratuit” est une redoutable arme de marketing*, and made no attempt at trying to reformulate it in their own words. Some candidates also had difficulty in distinguishing the *passé composé* from the *participe passé* used as an adjective, as in *bénéfices assurés*. Candidates are advised against rushing to start writing before they have made sure that they have understood the passage by reading it intelligently as many times as is necessary. Such a reading will help them to detect the underlying aim of the author. For instance, some candidates overlooked the ironic overtones of the given text and when they commented on lines 16-17, in which the direct speech was intended to be hypothetical and unlikely, they interpreted it as the direct speech of Philippe Breton. Moreover, it is important for candidates to keep in mind that they should express themselves in simple, but correct French and avoid gross grammatical errors at all costs.

Paper II

Question 1: Essay

Over a quarter of the candidates (26.8%) failed in the essay, while 7.5% obtained 80% or over. The most popular title was 1a, « *La vie est belle!* » *Quelles sont vos réflexions à partir de cette phrase?*, since it gave rise to a debate young candidates enjoyed writing about. The argumentative essay 1b was the least popular as opposed to title 1d which was chosen by a good number of candidates who diligently highlighted how recently the world witnessed an example of tolerance with the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. The few candidates, who opted for 1c deviated from the title and fell into the trap of writing about violent episodes without proposing solutions to the problem of youth aggressiveness. Exaggerated ideas, lack of expressions and poor vocabulary were also noted. For instance, when dealing with title 1e, *La société moderne se caractérise par une forte mobilité […]*, one candidate concocted the idea of « *un nouveau type de transport et lequel spatiale* ». Candidates sometimes resorted too quickly to overused clichés. Each year, candidates tend to repeat the same grammatical errors. While some improvement has been noticed in some scripts, the fact that over a quarter of the candidates failed this exercise is an indicator that basic grammar rules are simply ignored. The most common errors concerned the agreement of the adjective and article with the noun, the direct and indirect object, the use of prepositions, the conjugation of verbs, the use of the correct tenses, and
the negative form of verbs. « Je ne peux dire pas que la vie c’est ne pas belle » is a typical phrase with two wrong negative structures. Sentence structure is also often problematic as most candidates translate their ideas from English or from Maltese. Moreover, there is a general lack of vocabulary, and one very rarely comes across expressions candidates of this level should be familiar with through their reading. Spelling was also poor in some 30% of the scripts, with certain common words and expressions such as « parce-que » which should not be hyphenated, and « même » written with the wrong accent. Finally, one needs to repeat that instructions are meant to be adhered to; in this case, candidates must not write less than 350 words and not more than 400. Candidates who ignore these instructions are penalised.

Question 2: Comprehension

34% of the candidates failed in this exercise, while less than 7% obtained 75% or over. All the candidates attempted all the questions.

No candidate was rewarded full marks for Question 1 where candidates were asked to justify the title. Most candidates did not know the meaning of gare in the context of “Gare aux envahisseurs”. Many of them interpreted it as competition - this was clearly a case of interference with Italian (gara); a few others connected it with the other meaning of gare, station. With regard to question 2, some candidates did not understand the author’s intention of putting the question : “Vous croyez à la bande-annonce d’un mauvais film catastrophe?” Most of them stated that the author asked that question so as to trigger suspense amongst the readers; they failed to link the tragic element within a film with the calamity that was happening in reality. The general performance in question 3 was poor as the candidates’ vocabulary is extremely limited. Many candidates lost marks in questions 4 and 5 as they did not pay enough attention to what the question required of them. Question 4 was only partly answered by some candidates who just gave the reason why Alain Laralde did not let his grand-children go on their own on the mountain and completely ignored the first part of the question. As for question 5, candidates should know better than copy the answer from the text. Question 6 (i) required candidates to find in the text a preposition, a reflexive verb, and a past participle, yet this proved too difficult for them, especially the last mentioned for which so many of them gave a verb in the Passé Composé. Some answers to question 7 were anomalous, with some candidates writing that Marseille was the name of an old lady who was attacked by a seagull! Some answers to question 8 showed lack of creativity as candidates were unable to give a reason in their own words. In question 9, most candidates gave a simple statement about whether the text was interesting enough or not and did not give their personal opinion of it.

Paper III

Most candidates performed well in this paper: 33% obtained 80% or over and only 3 candidates failed. It was a pleasure as well as a relief to see that memorisation and regurgitation of notes were far less noticeable than in previous years. Better use of quotations was also registered. However there was still a sizeable number of candidates who opted to answer questions in English when their mastery of this language is definitely inadequate. Once candidates decide on a language (either French, English or Maltese) the onus of communicating their ideas perfectly in that language is on them. This time round, the Board noted that, in some cases, time management presents a problem. In one particular case a candidate presented his/her answers in point form and his/her writing was hardly legible. A few others did well in the first two essays, but only wrote one or two dislocated paragraphs in their last answer. By far, the vast majority answered questions on Molière, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and François Mauriac (100%, 100% and 85.7% respectively). Nine candidates or 8.3% tackled questions on Hiroshima mon amour by Marguerite Duras, six or 5.6% answered questions on Au Café by Mohammed Dib. Nobody attempted question 5 on Jean Giraudoux’ La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu. The literature questions on L’Avare touched on comic devices, plot, characters as well as mœurs; those on Le Petit Prince focused on mysticism, symbolism, the didactic message of the book and the voyage theme. As regards Thérèse Desqueyroux questions centred on the protagonist’s character and psyche, her stature as a woman and the break-down of communications on the level of human relations; those on Hiroshima mon amour, on
the tide cycle effect, the catastrophic events of the war, general pessimism and the female theme. And finally, those on Au Café underlined the misery of the average Algerian in the days of colonialism, the author’s social doctrine, and the broadening of his message over space and time.

**Paper IV**

All candidates passed the dictation test. One candidate obtained full marks as he/she had no mistakes. The most common mistakes were either due to negligence or associated with grammar rules. Candidates should make the effort of understanding the passage well. This should prevent careless mistakes such as confusion between the demonstrative adjective *ces* and the possessive adjective *ses*, or between *c'est* and *cette* in the phrase *c'est un excellent moyen*. Candidates should pay attention to the articulation of sounds by the reader, this should make them avoid mistakes such as writing *ces qui partent* for *ceux qui partent* or *étudiantes* for *étudiants*. Vocabulary which presented some difficulty was *renseigner*, *différemment* and *absolument*, the two adverbs should not have presented any difficulty had the candidates applied the grammar rules. It is unacceptable that at this level candidates lose marks for mistakes in the conjugation of common verbs, for example, *vous devait*, or *où se rencontrent les étudiants*, or for mistaking object pronouns for personal pronouns, for example, *pour mieux vous adaptez*. Accents were also a source of mistakes; they were either left out, as in *différent* or *général*, given wrongly, as in *préfèrent*; or written in a horizontal position. Moreover, candidates should write clearly and legibly.

**The Oral examination**

Only 2 candidates failed the oral examination, while 28% of the candidates obtained 80% or over.

**Reading**

The most common mistakes in the reading exercise were in the pronunciation of the last syllable, especially where there was an accent (*sélectionnées*), a nasal consonant (*ayant, selon*), or an –*eux* (*dangereux*) or an –*er* (*manger*) ending. Numbers still give some difficulty to a few candidates. Intonation and articulation are the weakest points.

**Free Conversation**

Candidates often find it difficult to give an opinion or to talk freely about a topic without having recourse to some memorised material that they try to link with the topic of their choice. During preparation time, candidates should not try to write a paragraph or two on the subject they are asked to prepare; they should train themselves in jotting down points and expressions that will make the conversation natural and flowing.

**Dialogue**

With regard to the dialogue on the set text candidates were generally well prepared.

Chairperson  
Board of Examiners  
August 2009