

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**  
**SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE**  
**SEC**

**FRENCH**

**May 2007**

**EXAMINERS' REPORT**

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE**  
**EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

**SEC FRENCH  
MAY 2007 SESSION  
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

**1. General**

**1.1 Registration for Examination**

1237 candidates registered for Paper A and 852 candidates registered for Paper B.

**1.2 Attendance for Examination**

In Paper A , 19 (out of 1237) candidates failed to attend for all or part of the examination, whereas for Paper B: the number of candidates was 71 (out of 852). More often than not, the candidate attended an initial phase of the examination (orals) and did not turn up for the subsequent phases.

**1.3 Punctuality**

A worrying trend is the lack of punctuality being shown by candidates, with a considerable number arriving late for a host of differing reasons, most of which could have been avoided if the candidate had prepared everything and left home well ahead of time. As things stand, a number of candidates invariably turn up without their identification, or they turn up late because they were caught up in traffic, or even because they misread the time of the examination. The situation becomes a problem for the administration of the Dictée and Listening Comprehension when candidates are not already seated at the stipulated time. It is also unfair on candidates who take the trouble to ensure their punctuality to be disturbed at this delicate moment, to lose their concentration because of the late entry of a breathless candidate into the examination room.

It should be made clear to candidates that late arrival forfeits the automatic right to access to the examination, especially during Dictation and Listening Comprehension, where corridor supervisors and examiners are expressly instructed not to interrupt the examination for any reason whatsoever once the reading has started.

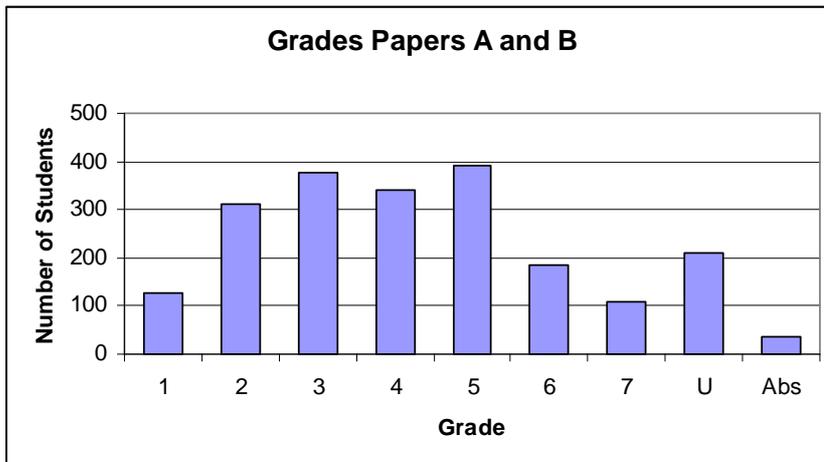
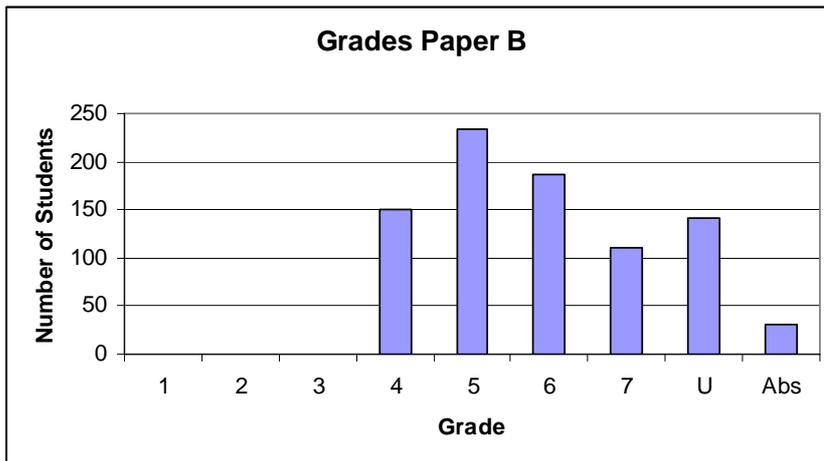
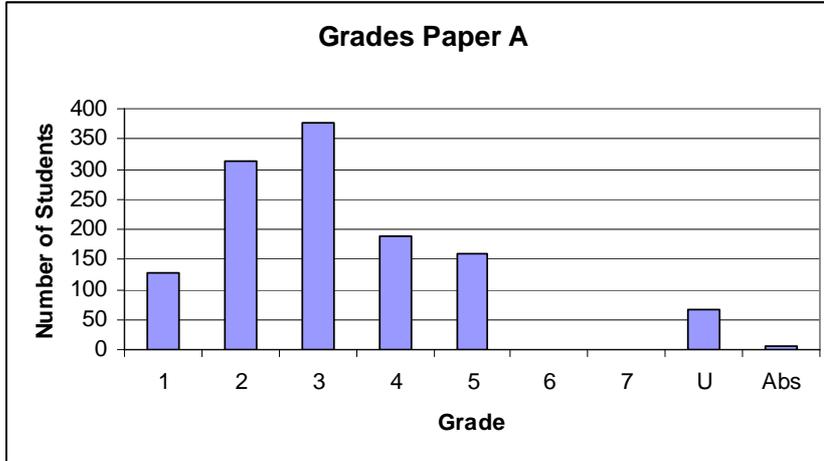
**1.4 Overall Performance**

**1.4.1** Grades awarded were distributed as follows:

<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>Abs</b>	<b>Total</b>
Paper A	<b>128</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>159</b>	-	-	<b>67</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1237</b>
% of 1237	10.3	25.2	30.5	15.3	12.9	-	-	5.4	0.4	
Paper B	-	-	-	<b>150</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>852</b>
% of 852	-	-	-	17.6	27.3	21.8	12.9	16.7	3.6	
Total	<b>128</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2089</b>
% of 2089	6.1	14.9	18.0	16.2	18.8	8.9	5.3	10.0	1.7	

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1.4.2 The following graphs illustrate the data given above:



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1.4.3 The table below shows the mean scores of candidates in the different exercises proposed by the examination.

	ORAL LECT & JDR /15	DICTEE /10	COMPR. DE L'ORAL /10	CULTURE ET CIV. /15	DOCUMENT AUTH. /10	COMPR. DE L'ECRIT /20	TACHE /20	TOTAL
PAPER A	10.1	7.7	7.8	11.2	7.9	10.6	10.3	65
PAPER B	7.9	5.0	6.5	7.4	6.6	10.0	7.2	48

## 2. Specific Comments

### 2.1 Dictation

Although 4 different texts were available an effort was made by paper setters to ensure that the items asked of students were equivalent in difficulty. Each of the texts therefore represents a cross section of items over which a student at this level is expected to have a good degree of mastery.

An examination of the words that the candidates were asked to use in order to complete the text should show that the emphasis is not on memorised spelling but on a reasoned understanding of the text, of the syntactic relationships between words, on the recognition of important sounds which determine meaning and grammar (such as the difference between *ce / ces*), as well as a good knowledge of grammatical principles.

In view of the above, it follows that the most common flaw which one deduces from analysis of marked scripts is an inability to perceive how words influence each other when used in language: the agreement of the adjective with the noun, (examples of simple mistakes abound such as “*terrible*” for “*terribles*”, “*mauvais*” or “*mauvaise*” for “*mauvaises*”, ). Candidates who do not make the distinction between “*le*” and “*les*” at the oral level, and then continue to ignore the correct version indicated by the noun in the text are simply throwing marks away. The same goes for distinctions at both oral and / or grammatical levels such as *de* and *des*, *ça* and *sa*. One notices the usual loss of marks which a little more attention would have avoided, as for example in the incorrect conjugation of verbs, when it is obvious the candidate actually knows the conjugation but is applying the wrong person: “*arrivera*” or “*arriverais*” instead of “*arriverait*”, “*veut*” for “*veux*”, “*devait*” or “*devais*” for “*devaient*”.

Of course, there are certain words which are fairly common in French which the candidate simply has to know: *tellement*, *lorsque*, *fin*, *quel* (as opposed to *qu'elle*), *tous* (as the plural of *tout*). Candidates can also choose to examine any given text in French in order to understand the importance of mastering certain issues, like the use of the infinitive as opposed to the use of the past participle. In these cases, it is not a matter of minor grammatical points but one of broad, recurring concepts which will inevitably crop up in one dictation after another.

One particular grammatical point which candidates failed most regularly to master in this session was the past tense of the reflexive verb: *s'est mis*.

In conclusion, teachers may do well to convince their students that, in spite of the “bad” reputation that this exercise has always had, candidates are in fact doing quite well. Not only so, this is a domain where, if reasoning and logic are applied consistently, the candidate's mark will rise even higher.

## 2.2 Listening Comprehension

The listening comprehensions, although different in each case, were structured symmetrically both in format, in the type of question, as well as the allocation of marks. In each case there were two sections asking objective type questions as well as a third section where open-ended questions were asked.

Feedback from markers indicates that most candidates coped easily with the first and second sections of the listening comprehensions. Not so, however, the third section where candidates ran into difficulty.

The questions in all four versions of the listening comprehension were graded in ascending difficulty from the first section to the third. The problems encountered by students could therefore simply be the result of not having understood the text, and being unable to answer the questions in Section C, because these were more difficult. After all, this is what the Listening Comprehension is mainly going for: testing what the student has understood.

A second and thornier possibility, if one tries to account for the difficulty students encounter, is one of expression, with markers stating that candidates were incapable of expressing themselves correctly even if they had understood the situation and the question. This is not the place to enter into a debate of how far lack of competence in expression should inhibit a candidate's ability to show understanding. The pros and cons of multiple choice objective type marking are known and the introduction of an element of open-ended answering was meant to introduce variety in the means of testing. It should also be said that the primary objective of the exercise is to test listening comprehension, but this does not preclude testing to a certain measure the candidate's expression of what he/she has understood, especially in view of the progressive grading of the questions, and also because sometimes what is being termed "expression" here is simply a question of repeating what one has heard.

One such example is the case of Comprehension B. Question 9: « *Pourquoi est-ce qu'il faut interdire le travail des enfants ? Donnez deux raisons* ». In this case, the two reasons could be picked up literally from the text without any need for reformulation whatsoever. « *Les produits chimiques (...) empoisonnent l'organisme (...) de l'enfant. Les enfants travaillent dans des lieux sans lumière et sans air, et ça fait mal à leurs yeux et à leurs poumons.* » Markers were obviously not expecting this length of answer, or the exact formulation. Simpler versions like « *les produits empoisonnent l'enfant / le travail fait mal aux enfants (à la santé des enfants / aux yeux des enfants / etc)* » would have done just as well. A common feeling among markers is, however, that during classroom praxis students are not being asked, on a regular basis, to pick up snippets of conversation and to express / repeat what they have heard (as they would during a lesson where they hear a recorded dialogue) and even less to reformulate. Needless to say, students will not perform on examination day if they have not been prepared to do so.

Another justification for the inclusion of this open-ended testing is that otherwise one risks relying exclusively on objective type true/false or MCQ formats which, considering that only a maximum of three to four questions are asked in each case, do not preclude an element of luck. If, for example, in an MCQ exercise of three questions with four options each, a student who understood absolutely nothing of the passage and simply ticked off answer (a) in each case would stand a very good chance of getting at least one answer right. The odds do not start becoming reliable, therefore showing that the student is not relying on chance, until the number of questions rises.

### 2.3 Culture et civilisation

As in previous years, the reasoning behind the setting of the paper were a) to represent fairly the textbook set for study, b) to diminish reliance on useless memorisation and indeed c) to support candidates who are familiar with materials but for some reason or other cannot remember the correct answer.

The format retained was in all ways exactly the format adopted for previous years, with minor modifications where students have been found to be misled by some aspect of the presentation of the question.

All in all, the paper included 45 questions each carrying 1/3 of a mark. The relatively elevated number of questions ensures that a candidate only fares badly in this paper because he/she was really not prepared for it. Going back to the mean scores given in 1.4.3, one can see that for Paper A this was 11.2 (out of 15) and for Paper B this was 7.4 (out of 15).

Remarks about students' performance:

Section I : a number of markers noted that Questions 1 and 4 presented difficulty for a considerable number of candidates; with Questions 5 and 7 coming next in difficulty.

Section II: The questions indicated as presenting difficulty in this exercise were 2, 4, and 5. It needs to be said that the markers were indeed shocked that so many students got Questions 2 and 5 wrong. Considering the content of at least one of these questions (the capture of the Bastille) one feels further convinced (and troubled by the fact) that candidates are simply memorising facts which, although of extreme importance in the civilisation they are trying to understand, do not have any meaning whatsoever for the candidates themselves. If students are memorising facts with the sole purpose of acquiring a further one third or two thirds of a mark in their examination, instead of trying to complete their vision of the context where the language they are studying exists, this is defeating the whole purpose not only of the Culture and Civilisation paper, but of the presence itself of a cultural component in the teaching of the language.

Section III: This was definitely the worst performance in the whole of the civilisation paper. The questions which were most usually correct were 1, 5, 8 and 9. Some observations by markers need to be quoted, starting from an unsurprising: *"candidates simply did not study"* to *"many students failed miserably in this exercise"* and the remark that there were *"a sizeable percentage of students who did not have even one correct answer"*.

Section IV: In this exercise students simply had to complete the crossword. Most common stumbling blocks: *"chouette"* *"rhume"* with different versions being presented; the word *"laique"* which many candidates simply did not know and gave instead as *"laigue/laitue"* and, again surprisingly, *"sapin"* which many candidates rendered as *"satin"*.

Markers wish to draw attention to the fact that candidates must respect the format demanded of them: some simply wrote their answers in the crossword when they were expressly asked to write their answers in a grid. Some students did not write in capitals (although they were not penalised for this). The performance for this section was rated as good although there were still cases (quoting remarks by examiners) of *"letters thrown at random"* and *"approximate answers"*.

## 2.4 Document Authentique

The same document was proposed for Papers A and B, with more rigorous questioning for the former paper. In Paper 2A, candidates answered a MCQ exercise and an open-ended question and answer exercise whereas for Paper 2B only the MCQ was retained.

The mean scores: 7.9 (out of 10) for Paper 2A and 6.6 (out of 10) for Paper 2B, attest to a good performance for this exercise throughout the cohort.

For Paper 2A, markers remarked that candidates "*coped easily*", that performance in the MCQ exercise was "*good*" as was the performance in the second exercise.

Candidates must ensure that they read the questions carefully. In Question B5, some candidates seem not to have understood that the question was asking them to formulate an opinion and an evaluation with the formulation: "*Pour vous ... le plus important*". On the positive side it must be said that there were "*wide-ranging*", "*correct, very plausible*" answers to this question with a very good number obtaining the full 2 marks. A little more polish on the grammatical aspect of the answer is still an objective to work for.

Markers commented that candidates "*coped*" with the exercise and that the overall performance was good. A number of candidates ticked Question 6 as Non Mentionné, showing an inadequate reading of the text. Another point which deserves mention is that terminology relating to payment cannot be ignored when students are being prepared to interpret an authentic document. It was obvious that a good number of candidates did not understand the word "*gratuit*" in the document, as they were unable to evaluate the statement "*On peut téléphoner à STS sans payer*".

The final remark about the *document authentique* again concerns the way students read the instructions, or rather how they misread or misinterpret what is expected of them. A number of candidates filled in their own personal details into the document. Not only was this not requested, but it shows that candidates are not being taught that they must in no way whatsoever reveal their identity on the examination script.

## 2.5 Compréhension de l'écrit

Two texts of the prescribed length were set for this exercise, both dealing with children's rights and both taken from sites specific to this topic. The sites in question are expressly designed for consultation by children.

The mean score for Paper 2A was 10.6 (out of 20) and the mean score for candidates taking Paper 2B was 10 (out of 20). The interpretation of these scores depends on how one chooses to look at them. One may argue that the scores are relatively low considering that they are both just about the half-way mark of the exercise. On the other hand, the scores indicate that candidates are managing to show a fair to good degree of understanding of an authentic text discussing a current situation. The shift from conventional, purely narrative texts, to this type of argumentative on a modern theme has definitely been achieved.

Markers' opinion was that candidates "*coped*", that their performance in the MCQ questions was "*good*" to "*average*", and that the performance in open-ended questions was "*average*" with some an occasional evaluation of "*weak*".

### 2.5.1 Compréhension de l'écrit : Paper 2A

Candidates are showing a regular familiarity with this exercise, and the formats adopted seem to have presented no problems in themselves.

Question 3A: Very few candidates actually managed to score full marks in this exercise. A good number of candidates are still showing a degree of insecurity, and therefore ruining their mark, because they copy out a whole sentence or quite a long phrase, instead of the word requested. For example, students were asked to find a word equivalent to *"un acte hors la loi"* and quite a number answered *"... est victime ou responsable d'un délit"*. Although the word *"délit"* is contained in the phrase, the candidate has not indicated it as the answer. The best preparation teachers can provide for this kind of exercise is get their students used to understanding and formulating definitions of new vocabulary in French, overriding the initial inevitable uneasiness and convincing students that the process pays in the long term.

Question 3C: This question tests the candidate's understanding of the function of pronouns. Question ii (*"Tes parents en sont responsables"*) seems to have been the most difficult, but a good number of candidates also failed to identify what *"le"* in *"Tu peux le contacter"* was referring to.

Question 3D: Candidates' resistance to reformulating in simple terms was manifest in answers to this question. Answers like *"La loi dit que ce n'est pas possible"*, *"Ce n'est pas accepté"*, *"On ne peut pas faire cela"* *"La loi dit non"* *"Vous ne devez pas faire cela"* would have been perfectly acceptable. The same comment applies to Question 3F.

Question 3H: Considering what elements candidates are being asked to identify in the text, it is still surprising to find that a number do not distinguish between a full *parfait* (passé composé) and a participle. Asked to identify a *verbe pronominal*, some candidates gave *"te pèse"* or *"t'offrent"*, obviously being misled by the presence of the Object Pronoun, when options like *"se construire"*, *"se porter"* and *"se trouver"* were present in the text.

Question 3I: Markers commented that most candidates resorted to *"Les droits des enfants"* and *"Les droits des enfants et des adolescents"*. There were some creative, although imperfect, titles like: *"Les droits des enfants – respectez-les!"*, and *"Une protection qui défend les enfants"*.

On the other hand, reproducing the first line of the text: *"Défense des Enfants International"*, or picking out a part of it *"La Défense"* were of course completely inadequate.

### 2.5.2 Compréhension de l'écrit: Paper 2B

Question 3A: Candidates are to read the indications correctly. A number of candidates gave the word *"autorisation"* which was on line 18 whereas they were asked to look for their answer in lines 7 – 16.

Question 3C: the answer requested was actually quite simple, with some candidates complicating their answer needlessly and losing marks. One notes at this point, although this remark is valid for other answers, that candidates need to pay more attention when they are copying out from the text: *"le parents / les parent; la marie / la maire"*.

Question 3D: Most candidates found the first answer easy and the second more difficult.

Question 3E: A very good response to this question, with nearly all candidates giving correct answers.

Question 3F: Perhaps this was the most difficult question encountered, with the absolute majority of candidates giving only 1 correct answer (*the school*).

Question 3H: Another positive response overall.

Question 3I: the majority of students included the word “*droits*” in their title, with “*Les droits des enfants*” once again being the most popular. A good number also seem to have contented themselves with “*Défenseur des enfants*”.

Good titles one notes: “*Les droits des enfants sont importants*”, “*Les droits et les devoirs des enfants*”, “*Les droits des jeunes*” . Titles which were unacceptable : « *L’obligation d’aller à L’école* » « *Le jeune et le présent* » « *Les enfants à écoute bien les parents* » .

## 2.6 Tâche à accomplir

As usual, two titles were proposed, almost identical for Papers 2A and 2B, except that the titles in Paper 2B were accompanied by hints and suggestions to aid the candidate to better understand the task and to formulate his/her work.

The productions were corrected along strict marking criteria, broadly divided into two major aspects of the writing task: the communicative aspect (marked out of 8) and the linguistic aspect (marked out of 12).

Mean scores were as follows:

	COMMUNICATIVE ( /8)	LINGUISTIC ( /12)	TOTAL ( /20)
Paper 2 A	4.5	5.9	10.3
Paper 2 B	3.5	4.2	7.2

### Comments:

Candidates showed no difficulty in understanding the titles which were quite straight forward. Some ignored the requested length. As a rule candidates fared better in the communicative aspect than in the grammatical one, but this should probably be considered a normal trend especially considering that this is a first basic level. The situation should be expected to change for those who go to more advanced levels.

Some ignored paragraphing, bunching up all their different ideas in one whole paragraph. The same can be said for the formatting of letters: few candidates who chose the e-mail showed evidence of actually having seen or sent real e-mails and just treated this form of writing as if it were a paragraph or in some rare cases a letter.

A very essential remark is that candidates who sat for Paper B showed a very limited use of vocabulary – very basic vocabulary (the different rooms of the house) – which should have been mastered by Form II.

A comment on the grammatical performance is also called for: the candidates are not showing lack of knowledge of complicated issues but of the very basics, such as the present tense. One still finds examples of “*je suis habiter*”, “*je suis écrire*”, “*je suis un fauteuil*”, “*je suis deux chats*”. This kind of mistake actually throws a lot of doubt on how much opportunity these candidates are having to practice, and therefore to eradicate these errors.

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Inevitably, there are cases of interference with other languages especially Maltese and Italian. Examples abound: *“molte furniture”*, *“sfortunatament”*, *“che”* (instead of *que*), *“un salot”*, *“j’attends un nouveau collège”*, *“mon père et ma mère ont comprere un maison molte belle”*. The pity is that these mistakes are not original: they are repeated year in, year out. Candidates may benefit from a discussion of precisely these mistakes, understanding why these words cannot be used, and where the mistake has originated.

Another disappointing issue is the abundance of elementary errors in accents, especially where this changes the meaning of the word: “a” for “à”, not to mention the usual variety in choosing the incorrect accent!

It is regrettable to have to note that candidates do not seem to be getting enough opportunity to practice their writing skills in the quantity and the variety that they need in order to be able to tackle this exercise.

Chairman  
Board of Examiners

September 2007