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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

FRENCH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Papers 8682/01 and 9716/01

Speaking

General comments

This year, there has again been an increase at both A and AS Level in the number of Centres taking the examination. Recordings were generally found to be audible, though there was some variation in quality. Candidates seemed on the whole to be well prepared and to have some idea of what to expect and the majority of Centres had clearly made considerable efforts to provide acceptable recordings, follow the format of the examination, and mark according to the assessment criteria.

Administration

There are a few practical considerations when setting out to record oral examinations: the first requirement is a quiet place in which to conduct and record the orals, where candidates and Examiner are unlikely to be disturbed by noise from a playground, or interruptions. Examiners may need to disconnect telephones in the examination room, and both candidates and Examiners should be reminded of the need to turn off all mobile phones.

The recording set-up needs to be checked before the examination: the position of the microphone should favour the candidate, particularly in the case of the quietly spoken, but the Examiner should also be audible - it is difficult to assess a candidate's level of comprehension and responsiveness when it is impossible to hear what questions he or she is actually responding to.

When beginning a cassette, Examiners should give the name and number of the Centre, details of the syllabus, their own name, and should introduce each candidate by name and number before each examination - this should not be left to the candidates. In the interests of standardisation, Examiners should make every effort to keep to the stipulated time for each section of the examination, and should make it clear to the candidate when they are moving to the next section. The tape should not be stopped between sections, the examination for any one candidate should run continuously, but may be stopped at the end of one examination and started again for the next candidate. In order to minimise disruption to any candidate and the loss of part of the examination, when using a 90 minute cassette a maximum of *two* candidates should be recorded per side, and when using a 60 minute cassette, only *one* candidate per side.

At the end of the examination, cassettes should be checked to make sure that they are audible, and both cassette and box should be clearly labelled with Centre and examination details, and should show which candidates appear on which side of the cassette. A copy of the Working Mark Sheet should accompany the cassette(s), and there should be a mark entered in *each column* of the WMS, not merely a section total. It is difficult to advise on marking pitch when details of marks awarded for each criterion are not available.

Presentation

Candidates need to be advised well before the examination, when they are thinking about choosing a topic for the Presentation, that their chosen topic should be connected in some way with a francophone country or culture, and that this should be referred to in the Presentation. They may need advice on the choice of a suitable topic: the mark for content and Presentation includes a criterion for ideas and opinions, so candidates who choose a very factual topic, for example the life of a pop star, should be aware of the need to broaden their approach in order to allow development of ideas and opinions in both the Presentation and the Topic Conversation.

There were many interesting and appropriate topics, from the Tour de France, last summer's floods in France, fashion, racism, education, cloning, *tabagisme*, and *SIDA*, through to the wearing of headscarves by Moslems. This year, there were more social and fewer environmental and political topics than in past years. Some candidates chose *Le conflit des générations*, but this often proved difficult to relate to francophone culture, and frequently became merely a discussion of the candidate's own family circumstances. This is more appropriate to a discussion at IGCSE Level and also means that a simple lead-in area for the General Conversation section has already been covered. Candidates who choose to talk about generation conflict in the Topic conversation need to think clearly, when preparing their presentation, about the implications for the topic discussion so that an appropriate level of discussion is achieved.

Candidates were generally given time for their Presentations, but some Examiners interrupted them with questions from very early in their speech, making it difficult for them to establish a flow or continuity of ideas. Candidates should be allowed to speak uninterrupted for 3 – 3½ minutes.

The majority of candidates made at least some reference to francophone culture in their Presentation and others were firmly based on some appropriate aspect. Most candidates had clearly carried out a good deal of research on their selected topic and were able to supply further information and opinions in the Topic Conversation.

Conversation sections

What is looked for is spontaneous conversation: time should not be spent rehearsing questions and answers ahead of the examination. The Topic and Topic Conversation are the only sections where candidates know what will be discussed. Given that the General Conversation section is intended to be rather more unpredictable in nature for the candidate, Examiners should not begin it by asking what the candidate would like to talk about. They should look for a reasonably simple starting point and try to develop the section to deal with matters of interest at an appropriate level for the examination. Candidates would be wise to think about areas of topical interest beforehand, but this does not mean that the General Conversation section should consist of a series of leading prompts ("tell me about drugs in sport/the environment/the position of women in society...") followed by a pre-prepared statement by the candidate, and an immediate switch by the Examiner to another on a list of prepared topics. There should be some interaction between candidate and Examiner, the candidate is expected to respond to what the Examiner asks and the Examiner should be equally prepared to follow up what the candidate says. Candidates should not be content with the simplest possible reply to any question from the Examiner, but should try to develop and expand on this, so that real conversation and an exchange of views may take place.

Teacher/Examiners should make sure that all candidates are aware that they are expected to ask questions in both conversation sections. Where they do not, they are automatically depriving themselves of a possible 10 marks, 5 in each conversation section. Most candidates were prepared to ask questions, though it is often difficult for a candidate to find an opening to do so, and it is encouraging to find many Examiners prompting them. However, it still seems to come as a surprise to some candidates that they are expected to ask questions at all, and some Examiners fail to prompt them to do so, yet still award marks where no questions have been asked. Where a candidate does not ask a question in one or other of the conversation sections, a zero should be recorded in the final column for that section on the working mark sheet (WMS).

It was often the case that questions asked in the Topic Conversation were relevant to the material under discussion, but candidates found it harder to invent questions on the spur of the moment in General Conversation, and sometimes produced questions prepared beforehand on entirely different topics. The aim of the Examiner should be to initiate as natural a conversation as possible in the circumstances, and to encourage questions as an integral part of the conversation process, rather than something added to the end of a section for form's sake. However, if no questions arise naturally, candidates *must* be given the opportunity to score some of the marks available for this element of the examination.

Where candidates do ask questions, Examiners must be wary of allowing their contribution to outweigh that of the candidate. Their role must be to encourage the candidate to express him or herself and show his or her knowledge and ability in the best possible light. The candidate should be given the opportunity to play the major part in any conversation, and Examiners should be aware that they may need to restrict their own contributions and responses in order to allow this.

Overall

The majority of Centres are to be congratulated on their conduct of the examination, generally showing a sympathetic approach to their candidates and giving them the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. There was no overall trend to assessment being either too generous or too severe, and the Centres showed sufficient consistency in their marking to allow appropriate moderation.

Papers 8682/02 and 9716/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

The performance of the candidates on this paper was satisfactory overall on a paper which proved to be more demanding than the previous year's. Candidates found the texts accessible but in some cases difficult to re-phrase or manipulate. As a result the quality of the written French was less than fluent and accurate.

Copying wholesale from the text was a much more common feature this year. Where this does not show comprehension, no marks can be awarded.

In **Questions 3 and 4** where candidates are required to answer in French, the rubric quite clearly states that candidates should answer "*sans copier mot à mot des phrases entières du texte.*" They may use material from the passage but they must answer in such a way as to demonstrate understanding of the text. Candidates should try to express relevant ideas using different vocabulary or structures. Even small changes to the original show that the candidates can handle the ideas and the language. Examples of manipulation of the language and content are given under the comments on specific questions.

It was encouraging to note that fewer candidates copied out the question as part of their answer thereby saving a great deal of time.

Some candidates failed to complete all of the questions on the paper. It is extremely important that candidates learn to manage their time well. **Question 5** is worth 20 marks and failure to start and/or to complete this can affect the overall mark on the paper quite dramatically.

In **Question 5** the rubric states that both parts of the question should be answered in no more than 140 words. Candidates should observe the word limit because only limited latitude is allowed beyond this figure. No introductory remarks about the subject are needed. They will gain no marks and only use up valuable words out of the 140 maximum.

In general candidates should aim to use 90 to 100 words for the résumé and 40 to 50 words for the personal response. This relates closely to the content marks available for each part.

The same five point language grid is used for assessing quality of language in each of **Questions 3, 4 and 5**. This means that candidates must maintain a good level of accuracy throughout the paper if they are to score high marks overall.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates had little difficulty matching up the correct alternatives and were able to distinguish between infinitives, nouns, plurals, adjectives and past participles. Both the correct number and/or definition were accepted as the answer. Minor copying errors were also tolerated.

- (a)(b) These were well done.
- (c) *La percée* was not well known and created some difficulty. Some candidates realised that they were looking for a noun and occasionally chose *conviction* wrongly.
- (d) *Bouleverser* was often rendered by the infinitive *contourner* instead of *perturber*.
- (e) This was well done.

Question 2

This task proved to be quite difficult and required the candidates to manipulate the grammar of the sentence. Minor spelling mistakes were not penalised but grammatical mistakes were.

- (a) This question was quite well done although a number of candidates omitted "l'" in "*l'emporter sur*".
- (b) Many different approaches to this answer were accepted. They all required a subject to be used after "*malgré la percée triomphale des filles*" such as "*celles-ci/elles/elle/ or ça*."
- (c) This question was generally well answered although some candidates failed to notice that *moins* needed to be changed into *plus*.
- (d) This question proved to be too difficult for a lot of candidates who failed to make accurate use of the present participle.
- (e) This was generally well answered but some candidates did not understand the use of *quasi* and many overlooked the need for feminine agreement.

Question 3

Candidates who copy whole sentences and even paragraphs from the text are not demonstrating comprehension of the text even if they include the correct information within the answer. The candidate must show some ability to alter the text: without doing so they will score no marks. More copying from the text was observed this year than in previous years. As a result the marks for the comprehension questions were lower than last year.

- (a) This was a case in point. Most candidates found the relevant information. However, instead of making small changes they merely copied it and gained no marks. If they had made even minor changes, marks could have been awarded e.g. if *elles obtiennent des résultats* had been altered or changed to *elles reçoivent des résultats* a mark would have been awarded. Most candidates found information about better results, more girls going through primary school in the allotted time and fewer going to apprenticeships. Some referred equally correctly to more girls going on to higher education as well as the fact that there were more girls in the *lycées*.
- (b) This produced a great deal of lifting from the text. Most candidates managed a statement about women and that it affected the whole of society. The idea of major change as indicated by *transformation profonde* was often omitted. Phrases such as "*modifications, ségrégations*" and "*dispositions juridiques*" were used without understanding and failed to explain that they were related to changes in curriculum and single sex education.
- (c) This was generally well answered with candidates stating that social class and educational performance are linked. Most candidates successfully included the fact that social class has less of an effect on girls than boys. A further mark could have been obtained for the fact that girls' success has not changed the effect of social class or that girls' progress is seen in all social classes.
- (d) This was well answered. The question sought the fact that most educated women work and that unemployment had failed to halt the flow of women on to the job market. Some candidates successfully re-phrased the original "*freiné to arrêté*" or *ralenti*.

Question 4

- (a) This question was well answered. Nearly all candidates managed to say that women did most of the housework. A third mark was available for some rendering of *ces évolutions n'ont pas supprimé l'existence du travail domestique ni beaucoup modifié sa répartition entre les sexes*. Where candidates did attempt this part they merely copied the phrases or stated incorrectly that there had been no change.
- (b) This was generally well done.
- (c) This was generally well handled with 2 marks being awarded for the tasks that could be done by men or women and for an example of a task. Many failed to define what was meant by *négociables*.

- (d) This was well answered. The idea of men being more prepared to do housework was the most common answer among most candidates. However, there was some misunderstanding in the candidates' reading of the sentence *son plein chez les agriculteurs, artisans et commerçants* without taking into account the sentence which includes *ce modèle inégalitaire*. As a result the wrong impression was given. It is important that candidates read the whole of the text in determining their answers.
- (e) This was well answered. Candidates quickly realised that the higher the level of education in the family the more work the man does including "feminine" tasks. Many failed to point out that a diploma of any kind would lead to more work being done by the man.
- (f) This turned out to be an extremely difficult question which required candidates to make deductions from the first line of the text having read the whole of the text. Most candidates concentrated on the changing relationships between men and women in modern homes. However, "*les évolutions récentes*" here refer to labour saving devices which technology has given us such as washing machines and microwave ovens. These have reduced the jobs that need to be done in the house and therefore have reduced the amount of time taken on housework. Another development could have been ready made meals.

Question 5

It is essential that candidates manage their time correctly so that they answer all the questions on the paper. Some very good candidates failed to respond to this question because they ran out of time thereby losing 20 of the 70 marks available.

Candidates should be alert to the word limit. Part of the exercise is to get the candidates to focus on a summary of the main issues of the two texts. It would be unfair to candidates who do find ways of summarising succinctly if lengthy essays in excess of 200 words were given full marks. Similarly, if candidates write significantly less than 140 words, they cannot be expected to be awarded the full language mark.

No introduction to the answer is required and, given the amount of information to be summarised, they should not waste words on general reflections.

It is vital to recognise the importance of the rubric defining the task. There are two clear questions to answer:

- 1: a summary of the texts
- 2: a personal response to the subject.

140 words is the aim for the two sections and only a limited number of words beyond that figure is allowed - usually the completion of the sentence. Candidates should plan to write a summary consisting of 90 to 100 words is marked out of 10 for content and a personal response of 40 to 50 words marked out of 5 for content.

There were two clear areas indicated for the summary: *résumez la situation actuelle des filles et des femmes dans le système éducatif et à la maison*. The mark scheme is constructed to take account of this dual task. The question also states "*telle qu'elle est présentée dans ces deux textes*" so candidates can only gain marks by making reference to specific details in the texts. No marks can be gained by writing a general essay. In the first text about the education of girls, the candidate could have scored marks by referring to *les filles l'emportent sur les garçons* or *l'effet de l'origine est moins accentué chez les filles* or *les programmes scolaires ont été modifiés* or *le diplôme donne accès au travail* or *malgré le chômage qui monte, de plus en plus de femmes travaillent*. In the second text on women in the home, candidates could have made the following points: *les femmes consacrent autant de temps au travail domestique qu'à leur activité professionnelle* or *les hommes font plus de tâches à la maison* or *la femme fait toujours la plupart du travail domestique* or *le travail est partagé selon le niveau d'éducation* or an example of *une tâche faite par les femmes*.

The remaining 5 marks for content require candidates to give a brief personal response to the topic, which is marked as a mini essay taking account of ideas, personal point of view and interest of response.

Language is marked on a global assessment out of 5.

Papers 8682/03 and 9716/03

Essay

General comments

The overall standard of performance was very similar to that of previous years from the point of view of quality of language, and slightly lower as far as content was concerned. The rubric and instructions were generally understood and adhered to, there being relatively few candidates who greatly exceeded the number of words stipulated.

Candidates towards the top of the range produced scripts characterised by wide vocabulary, the ambitious use of complex structures and sentence patterns, and a high level of accuracy. Answers were relevant to the question and contained well chosen examples, statistics and references. Essays were generally well structured and paragraphed, with a clear argument leading to a conclusion. There follows an example of the level of language produced by candidates in this category: *L'égalité des chances, c'est une formule belle mais irréalisable dans un monde où règnent l'injustice, l'oppression, aussi bien que le racisme et le sexisme, pour ne nommer que quatre des obstacles auxquels on doit faire face dans notre société contemporaine. Heureusement, il nous est permis de rêver.*

Scripts of candidates in the middle of the range showed a fair level of accuracy and understanding of grammar, but with a tendency to be inconsistent and somewhat patchy. There was evidence of ability to use quite complex structures. The content of answers was not always relevant, quite a number of candidates attempting to manipulate the question to suit pre-learned material relating, for example to previously set questions rather than to the one in hand. However, essays tended to be competently paragraphed. Areas of inconsistency included the use of some prepositions, various types of pronouns, some irregular verbs, more difficult tenses. Examples of work in this category follow: (a) *Dans ma famille on s'entends (sic) et on respecte pour la plupart ce dont les autres font.* (b) *Dans les pays développés tel que la France les gens peuvent se nourrir de ce qui leurs plaisent.* (c) *L'influence la plus forte sur la manière dans laquelle nous nous nourrissons est la publicité que nous voyons sur la télévision.*

Towards the bottom of the ability range, the level of language produced was, typically, persistently inaccurate, with many gaps in the grasp of basic grammar. Irregular verbs were not known, adjectival agreements and common genders were faulty. Candidates displayed a narrow range of vocabulary with frequent repetition of common words, often wrongly misspelled. It was unusual for essays scoring low marks for quality of language to have a much higher content mark, as lack of fluency and accuracy were an obstacle to communication of ideas. The following examples are typical of work that by no means reached the standard of accuracy and control required at this level: (a) *Je ne suis pas d'accord avec ce fraze parce-que à mon avi le paix n'est pas seul un chose pour après un guerre.* (b) *Les gouvernements des pays devrieant que venir ensembles et parler de tous ses problems.* (c) *Tout au long histoire it y a eu beaucoup des guerre et beaucoup des gens sont soufferts et sont mortes ou ont perdu leurs famille.* Common misspellings included: *reigner, le reigne, problem, problemme, tendence, sociétée, les droights, le conflict, le respet, agraver, aggrandir, nourir, mourrir.* Common anglicisms included: *expérierer, restricter, publiciser, préventer, achever la paix, être discriminer contre, invader, remouver le président, être permis à, matérialistique.* Candidates would benefit from assembling a collection of topic-specific vocabulary as they prepare for the examination, and from learning it thoroughly. (Words from which accents are missing, or in which they have been misused are reproduced here as they appeared in scripts.)

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

Very few candidates answered this question. The tendency was to interpret 'la francophonie' as France and to discuss the rise of M. Le Pen's party in recent elections.

Question 2

This was one of the four most popular questions and one that candidates related to well. The most common approach was to analyse what separates generations with little discussion of whether there is a deterioration in the situation now. Most candidates felt that a generation gap is inevitable, factors often blamed for the problem included: both parents at work, giving them less time to spend with their children; grandparents no longer living in the same home as their grandchildren, which leads to a loss of stability and cultural links; a decrease in religious observance leading to less morality. Many candidates illustrated their ideas with references to their own lives and society. References to other countries and cultures tended to include rather inaccurate information. On the other hand quite a common theme was that some parents are closer to their children than to their own parents, having grown up in a modern world, able to access the Internet, and influenced by various aspects of western culture. In many of the answers, the weak area was the conclusion, which failed to address the *de plus en plus* part of the question.

Question 3

This was also a popular question, attempted by candidates across the ability range. Relatively few disagreed with the statement, those who did pointing out that there is freedom of choice for many people and that one can eat healthily if one takes the trouble, due to a greater choice, year-round availability and more widespread information on balanced diets. Most took the other view, however, using as arguments the growing popularity and convenience of fast-food outlets offering unhealthy food; the pace of contemporary life which makes those outlets more and more attractive; more working mothers have less time to prepare meals using fresh ingredients; genetically modified food may have its dangers; the increasing use of pesticides and fertilisers may be producing raw materials that could pose a health risk.

A small minority of stronger candidates looked at the arguments for and against the statement and made an evaluation before writing their conclusion.

Question 4

Another popular question, with most essays agreeing with the statement. A small minority focused solely on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and were therefore obliged to disagree with the whole statement. Most candidates did not make a clear link between the two parts of the question, but many relevant ideas were explored nevertheless. Those who agreed that *les gens ne naissent pas égaux* used race, gender, colour, wealth and country of birth, either solely, or in combination, as the theme of their argument. Many equated equality with equal opportunity, Free education for all as a road to a brighter future for those born into poor families was a frequently developed idea suffused with optimism, as was the view that with determination one can reach ones goals in life, regardless of obstacles. Nelson Mandela was often referred to as a role-model in this respect.

Question 5

Though few candidates chose this question, its wording made it more easy for them to maintain relevance and focus. Most gave increasingly universal tastes in visual entertainment, attire, pop music, food, and the concept of the global village as reasons for the growing loss of national cultural identity. Little reference was made to religion or politics.

Question 6

This was one of the four most popular questions, but was not particularly well answered. Numerous candidates restricted their discussion to an outline of the horrors of war with the conclusion that peace is a better state of affairs, with inevitable passages of irrelevance. Stronger candidates identified cases in which only war could bring democracy and stability to situations that could not realistically be described as peaceful. The Second World War was used by many candidates as an example of peace being an outcome of a justifiable war, whilst many used the recent war in Iraq to argue that in this case so far, war certainly has not brought peace and stability to that country. As in previous questions on this topic, some candidates equated war with violence in general, be it in society or even within a family or in the form of domestic violence.

Papers 8670/04 and 9716/04**Texts****General comments**

The overall standard was somewhat disappointing, with honourable exceptions. Particular weaknesses were inconsistency, i.e. candidates failing to answer all three questions with a comparable level of competence, and a tendency to paraphrase the content of a passage rather than answering the questions. A number of candidates appeared to be completely out of their depth, both in terms of their ability to deal with the material and to express themselves coherently in French. In some cases, candidates scored respectable marks on two questions and a low mark on the third, because it was insubstantial. In a few cases, candidates failed to observe the rubric by answering two questions on each text.

Most candidates made a conscious and welcome effort to respect the word limit for each essay. The majority of scripts were legible and well presented. There was less evidence than usual of irrelevant pre-learned material, and it was generally limited to the opening paragraph of the answer. It is worth repeating that the introduction tends to communicate to the Examiner whether or not the candidate intends to address the question or follow his/her own agenda.

Candidates who attempted the commentary questions did not always show where one section ended and another began, and should be instructed to do so.

With regard to the use of texts for quotation, candidates could be reminded that no credit is awarded for copying out lengthy extracts from the text (let alone from the examination paper), whereas credit *is* given for the appropriate use of brief, relevant quotations in order to illustrate a point.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

Gide: *La Porte étroite*

A substantial number of candidates answered on this new text. They mostly showed a good knowledge of the narrative, and the best essays managed to convey an understanding of the characters. Weaker candidates, however, found the moral dilemma and psychological issues difficult to analyse.

- (a) Almost all answers correctly identified the reasons for the absence of Juliette and Robert, although there was some uncertainty about the latter's academic activities. The second and third questions produced answers of varying quality. The better attempts focused on Alissa's anxiety about allowing Jérôme near her for fear of physical temptation, whereas weaker candidates were content to accept her explanation at face value, thereby missing the essential irony implied by the author. The question invited candidates to expand on the general theme of Alissa's perpetual inability to decide whether she wanted to see Jérôme or not, and the best answers referred to her diary, from which the reader can see her personal struggle between the need for this relationship and her fear of the consequences in terms of spiritual purity.
- (b) Answers to the essay question were mostly disappointing. Many who attempted this question did not seem to understand the concept of 'trap of virtue' and thus failed to comment on the author's scepticism about the negative influence of the pastor's sermon. The most significant weakness, however, lay in the responses to the second part of the quotation. Few candidates gave a satisfactory commentary on the passivity of Jérôme in a situation which called for initiative as well as a mature understanding of Alissa's problem. It was not possible to award much credit to those who wrote mainly about Alissa and avoided the issue of Jérôme's inability to do more than lament her decline.

Question 2Molière: *Tartuffe*

- (a) Candidates had no difficulty in identifying Mme Pernelle as the subject of Cléante's remark. Many gave a detailed account of her opinions of the family and of Tartuffe. The best answers pointed out that these were laughable, in that she was, like her son, unable to see the very obvious truth about Tartuffe's character – an essential element in any commentary on the phrase 'pour rien'. Very few identified her as an object of ridicule, let alone pointing out that she was originally played by a man to emphasise the grotesque element. Observations about Dorine's speech were, by and large, less than satisfactory. There was excessive paraphrase and quotation from the printed text, when what was sought was an analysis of the comic discrepancy between Orgon's reverential attitude towards Tartuffe and the latter's inappropriate behaviour. Once again, some candidates chose to imply a homosexual inclination on Orgon's part, whereas the question invited a response to Molière's satirical portrait of the fanatic who abandons all his common sense and sees virtue where there is only vulgarity. The third part of the question saw little in the way of new material. Whilst candidates understood Tartuffe's motives, few answers offered examples of his absurd posturing in his attempts to appear pious.
- (b) Most candidates who attempted this question showed a limited understanding of its terms of reference. The notion of farce was generally treated as though it was a vehicle for random comments about the characters' behaviour. There were a few appropriate references to the scene in which Orgon is under the table, but in general it was difficult to see why candidates opted for this question rather than the commentary. The notion of tragedy is a good test of candidates' appreciation of Molière's style. The undercurrent of pathos is clear. It should not be overstated at the expense of the overriding intention to satirise false pretence and Orgon's gullibility. Candidates should not be afraid of challenging the premise stated in the question. Credit was duly given to those (few) who saw this as a relatively inadequate description of the play, given an appreciation of the element of satire which predominates.

Question 3Sartre: *Les Mouches*

- (a) There was an improvement this time in the quality of responses. Candidates showed a greater depth of understanding of the text than has been evident in recent sessions. Almost all answers correctly identified the reasons for Électre's anxiety, and the best commentaries succeeded in linking this with her dependency on the negative emotions displayed when she first appears on the stage. Oreste's convictions were similarly well analysed in relation to his desire for *engagement* and his rejection of 'conventional' moral terms of reference. Most candidates were more reticent on the subject of the imagery of weight. Due credit was awarded to those who related this to his earlier complaints of a sense of weightlessness brought about by his dilettante life-style under the Pédagogue's régime of avoiding commitment. Électre's fate at the end of the extract was clearly understood, and there was appropriate reference in the best answers to her ultimate surrender to Jupiter.
- (b) Essays on the subject of Égisthe were less secure. Candidates tended to describe the way of life of the people of Argos under his régime more fully than his own side of the story. The essay title required an understanding of his situation, trapped in an immutable image of the tyrant by his subservience to Jupiter and thus unable to evolve, and few candidates explored this crucial aspect of the character.

Question 4Balzac: *Le Père Goriot*

- (a) Not many candidates attempted this question, and of those who did, few were able to produce satisfactory answers to all three parts. Better candidates identified Eugène's struggle with his conscience, but there was considerable confusion about his whereabouts when he saw himself in the mirror, despite the clear reference to 'son appartement' in the text. Most were able to justify his optimism with regard to his relationship with Delphine, but not to broaden the debate to consider his prospects in Parisian society. Delphine's delight at receiving the invitation was explained by few candidates in terms of her own social aspirations, and little was offered by way of personal comment on her scale of values.

- (b) Character studies of Vautrin tended to concentrate on his criminal activities. In general, candidates showed a detailed knowledge of this, but in few did the answer give sufficient weight to the understandable reasons for Sylvie's comment, namely his behaviour towards Mme and the other lodgers. There was too much focus on his dealings with Rastignac and not enough on his personality. Candidates again tended to be judgmental, whereas what was wanted was a balanced argument.

Section B

Question 5

Camus: *La Peste*

- (a) Examiners have often found that a text which is new to the syllabus produces increasingly competent answers in later sessions. It is to be hoped that this will be the case here, as the majority of answers on the character of Rieux were lacking in detail and focus. There was certainly an awareness of his dedication as a doctor and his determination to fight the plague to the best of his ability, but this line of argument often led to little beyond the level of narrative. Candidates could have drawn inferences from his relationships with the other main characters, from the crucial scene involving the death of the judge's son, or commented on his anti-clerical attitude and his humanist approach to life. There was also potential mileage in the contrast between his deliberate detachment as narrator and the warmth of his true character, but no answer explored this aspect.
- (b) Those who tackled the theme of solitude fared little better. Answers did succeed in identifying the issues of separation and exile, but few went on to explore the fragmentation of the community which resulted from most people's lack of communal engagement. The key to this was that what Camus calls the three scourges, servitude, untruth and terror, 'font régner le silence entre les hommes, les obscurcissent les uns aux autres', preventing them from doing anything positive. This idea could have been explored in relation to a number of individuals, and above all to the ordinary citizens. Some candidates embarked on lengthy discussion of the allegorical interpretation – Nazi occupation – and future candidates should be warned that this idea should be used sparingly, not as a possible focus of any essay on this text.

Question 6

Joffo: *Un Sac de billes*

- (a) Conversely, this text has been on the syllabus for some time, and there is little to add to what past reports have said. There was, nevertheless, a substantial contrast between the general quality of answers to the two essay titles, the balance being heavily in favour of the second question. Discussions of Joffo's portrayal of the enemy tended to run out of steam after an initial description of the Nazi officers. Many candidates then padded out the essay by claiming that the enemy was seen in the guise of... and there followed the candidate's own agenda, such as the loss of youth, the theme of separation, and so on. Whilst some did comment on the behaviour of the Italian soldiers in contrast to the Germans, this was not really enough to convey a coherent portrait of the inhumanity of the occupying forces.
- (b) Candidates were on safer ground here, as they could show their knowledge of the manifestations of this inhumanity and also of the many examples of kindness and willingness to help those in difficulties. This well-rehearsed material tended to take up perhaps more than its fair share of the essays. Candidates found it more difficult to comment on the theme of absurdity, and even more so to draw a clear distinction between that and cruelty, thus confusing the general situation created by Nazi prejudice with specific instances of cruelty. Some candidates were too quick to see a green light in the title: 'the essay we have already done', and should be advised that Examiners do not set exactly the same question twice! Those who addressed the Examiner's agenda were given appropriate credit.

Question 7

de Beauvoir: *Les Belles Images*

- (a) Not many candidates attempted this question. Those who did seemed ill at ease with the material. There was some understanding of Laurence's character and that of her mother, but little when it came to the issues of materialism, social ambition and submission to male domination. Some candidates tried to bring in the ideas of existentialism, but their use of philosophical jargon showed that it was poorly understood and of uncertain relevance to the question. It was difficult to provide a good answer without an appreciation of the author's feminist agenda.
- (b) The question as to whether or not the novel has a happy ending did not require the answer yes or no. Candidates were perhaps too keen to focus on the element of Laurence's attempt at self-assertion in order to demonstrate that she was now emancipated alongside her daughter. Their confidence in a happy outcome was reinforced by the idea that Laurence's parents were reunited. Candidates did not, however, point out the negative implications of the ending: Laurence's illness, the total lack of change in their social milieu in general or in individuals such as Jean-Charles in particular.

Question 8

Duras: *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*

- (a) Answers on the relative importance of the author's political message were competent insofar as they described the iniquitous behaviour of the *cadastre* against the background of colonial administration. Some essays showed substantial historical knowledge of this subject, in one or two cases at the expense of textual examples. Relatively few essays provided a good level of detail, whilst the general and unspecific prevailed. The question invited either a survey of the author's other possible main intentions leading to a demonstration that the political theme prevailed, or to an analysis of the political message followed by a demonstration that another theme was more significant. Either of these approaches would have been preferable to a random selection of themes more or less related to the political issue. Lack of direction was a widespread defect in these answers.
- (b) Not surprisingly, candidates found no difficulty in identifying aspects of the novel which lent themselves to the description used in the essay title. Again, many essays lacked detail and/or structure. A thematic approach – poverty, oppression, corruption, repeated failure, the cruelty of nature and of fate – was generally not adopted, and would have given more shape to answers than a random sequence of extracts from the narrative.