

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/01

Reading

General comments

Most candidates responded very positively to the themes of gender equality and the discrepancy of the roles of father and mother within the family and society. Most candidates could relate to these topics and showed engagement in their replies to **Question 2**. The vast majority of candidates clearly understood the two texts well and felt they could relate to the problems presented, regardless of their own cultural background.

It was particularly pleasing to see that all candidates, with no exceptions, completed the paper. Many candidates had time to write a plan or a rough draft, indicating that they had been well prepared in the techniques and requirements of the examination, as well as guided on how to manage the time allotted in the examination. The word limit was also better respected than in previous years, and there were only a few candidates who ignored the guidelines on this.

The quality and accuracy of the language used in answers varied greatly, from scripts where there were no errors to others containing a significant number of quite basic mistakes, such as repeated confusion between *se* and *ce*, *ces/ses/c'est*, *on/ont*, *peu/peut*, *leur/ leurs*, *les/leur*, *a/à*, *public* and *publique*. The Examiner found a considerable number of *anglicismes*, such as *hazard*, *reliance*, and *balance* (meaning *équilibre*), reflecting the context in which most candidates find themselves, being educated through English or living in an English-speaking environment. Generally speaking, however, the accuracy of the language used has improved further compared with last year, something that was also helped by the fact that most of the vocabulary and phrasing the candidates had to use in **Question 1** in particular were to be found in some form in the source texts. It was particularly heartening to see the majority of candidates make better use of the language of the source texts and most candidates managed to rephrase as required and avoid direct lifting. It is important to stress that candidates must read the sub-questions in **Question 1** very carefully and make sure that they answer in the format required by the question. The number of marks by the side of each question serves as a clear indicator of how many ideas need to be included in order to gain full marks.

The general neatness of the answers and the quality of the handwriting were very high, and it was pleasing to see how many candidates took real pride in their work done for the examination.

Candidates are advised to answer the questions on **Question 1** in the order they are asked on the question paper. Where candidates change the order in which they answer the questions, there is a risk that one or more questions may be missed out.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

The sub-questions in **Question 1** ranged in degree of difficulty from relatively easy – **(e), (g), (k)** – to more challenging except for truly first language candidates – **(b), (d), (j)**. The remaining questions presented no difficulty so long as the text was well understood. There were therefore opportunities for all candidates to perform according to their ability.

Content

- (a) This question was well answered and candidates clearly understood why the author had been criticised in the article with quotes from interviewees.
- (b) This question tested candidates' knowledge of French as a First language and the idiom – *à la pelle* – was either recognised by candidates or not. Candidates could not guess the right answer here.
- (c) A small number of candidates overlooked the word *contradiction* in the question and simply described French fathers' view that spending time with their family was how to be a good father without mentioning that in practice they tended not to do this. Most candidates, however, did recognise and explain the contradiction.
- (d) A number of candidates misread this question. Like (b) it aimed to test the candidates' knowledge of French idioms, in this instance the phrase: *avoir la peau dure*, related to stereotypes. Some candidates, however, took the reference to *peau* to refer to the fathers being thick-skinned and unfeeling: *les hommes sont forts, ils ont la peau dure*. As the question was worth two marks, most candidates were able to gain one mark by explaining the first part of the phrase relating to stereotypes even if they had misunderstood the second part.
- (e) All candidates answered this question well.
- (f) Candidates needed to read between the lines in order to answer this question satisfactorily. Private sector workers were relatively reluctant to take paternity leave as they did not want to create a bad impression with their employer. Public sector workers on the other hand felt more able to exercise their right under the law and take paternity leave. One mark was given for a statement about the difference in the behaviour of employees in the two sectors and another for an explanation as to why this was so.
- (g) Candidates could find the answer easily in the text. The challenge here was to avoid lifting and most candidates managed to do this.
- (h) Some candidates took the word *hiérarchie* to mean place in society or in the family rather than at work even though it was clear from the position of the relevant phrase in the text that the context was the work situation. Where the first part of this question was correctly understood, the second part tended also to score a mark.
- (i) Most candidates understood that the expression *briser le plafond de verre* referred to something that needed to be broken down or fought against, but only the better candidates managed a clear explanation of the link to the hierarchy in the workplace. This is another example of a question which differentiated clearly between candidates.
- (j) One out of the two marks available was awarded to candidates who could express their opinion about the title: *Papa, boulot a temps plein*. The second mark was awarded to candidates who were able to explain the play on words.
- (k) It was pleasing to see some really creative ideas for a sub-title for the article in response to this question.

Language

There was much evidence of an improvement in candidates' use of French in this question compared with previous years, with good candidates often succeeding in re-wording ideas from the text. There were many opportunities to build in more complex clauses: *Il me semble que*, and examples of the subjunctive: *bien que les femmes soient considérés*. Candidates appeared well-prepared to meet the demands of the examination.

Question 2Content

Most candidates showed themselves capable of comparing the respective roles of men and women in Europe and in India as described in the two articles.

It was relatively easy for candidates to achieve a high mark for content as the two texts described contrasting situations, for both men and women.

The best candidates began their comparison with a brief introduction, continued with two paragraphs, setting out the points the two texts had in common, the other covering points of difference. There followed a clear conclusion, possibly referring briefly to the candidate's own opinion.

Candidates who achieved an average score were able to list points of similarity and difference. However, their argument was less structured than in the case of better candidates, and as a result some ideas were repeated or missed out altogether.

Some weaker candidates misread or misunderstood the rubric completely and either wrote a summary of one of the texts without any comparison to the other at all or, in a handful of cases, presented a discussion about gender equality or roles within the family with scarcely any reference to either of the texts.

Language

Most candidates were able to complete their essay comparing the two articles in the correct amount of words, around 200. Good use was made of vocabulary from the texts as well as of the candidates' own vocabulary. The better candidates used specific comparison phrases to structure their work: *par contre, ainsi que, en ce qui concerne les Français* etc.). Vocabulary relating to the roles of men and women in the family and the workplace/society was generally well known and effectively used by candidates.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02

Writing

General Comments

It was pleasing to see that all candidates submitted two essays, one from each section, as required in the rubric. While many candidates performed equally well on both essays, some showed greater strength on either the discursive essay or on the creative one.

In order to maximise their chances of success, it is important for candidates to organise the time allocated to the two essays efficiently. Candidates should read all the titles carefully before choosing the ones on which they wish to write. When selecting their discursive essay title candidates should consider what they know about the issue involved, as well as their capacity to tackle it linguistically. It was frustrating at times to see that candidates had chosen a topic which was of interest to them but for which they did not have the necessary vocabulary to communicate a clear message.

Time should be spent on planning the essay prior to writing it. There should be evidence of an introduction, well-structured paragraphs and a conclusion. A number of essays lacked clearly defined paragraphs. Some candidates considered only one side of the argument in their discursive essay, resulting in essays that were rather one-sided. Candidates are advised to explore different strategies to help them give a better structured response, avoiding repetition. Those who did produce a plan were able to map out the structure of their argument and produced more coherent essays.

Candidates are likewise advised to allocate time to the accuracy of their language. Often, there was little evidence of checking after the essay had been completed. This resulted in many technical errors in, for example: agreements of nouns, adjectives and past participles; use of tenses, including using the past historic and perfect tenses alongside each other in creative essays.

Candidates' time should be divided equally between the two essays. There was evidence in some cases of the second essay having been rushed as too much time had been spent on the first one. This resulted in short essays which contained inaccuracies and, in some instances, came to an abrupt close.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Argumentative/Discursive tasks

Question 1

(a) *“L'éducation est ce dont les pays en voie de développement ont le plus besoin”. Commentez.*

This was a very popular topic. There were many well-structured essays in which candidates explored both sides of the question and came to a logical conclusion. It was gratifying to see that many candidates were well aware of the numerous problems faced by developing countries and were able to look objectively at a range of problems and their solution.

It was, however, disappointing that some candidates consistently misspelt the words *éducation* and *développement*.

Weaker candidates often failed to relate education to developing countries and concentrated on the importance of qualifications and degrees as a means to a better career or to becoming a more cultivated person.

- (b) *Pensez-vous qu'il soit possible d'avoir de l'estime pour quelqu'un qui n'a pas la même éthique de vivre ou de penser que vous? Justifiez votre opinion en vous servant d'exemples concrets et de faits courants.*

This was the least popular of the four discursive essays. Those who attempted it often failed to include examples of everyday life as required in the title. On the whole, essays were rather superficial with candidates struggling to present a coherent argument and often failing to bring their essay to an effective conclusion.

- (c) *Un grand nombre de personnes préfèrent visiter des pays à l'autre bout du monde que d'explorer leur propre pays. Pourquoi, à votre avis? Est-ce une bonne chose?*

This was a popular title. Many candidates were able to consider the pros and cons of travelling to far away countries in comparison to holidaying in one's own country. There were many references to discovering new cultures and interesting sights. It was also pleasing to see the pride with which many candidates regarded their own country and the many attractions it offered.

- (d) *"L'homme ne respecte pas suffisamment l'animal." Commentez.*

This was a very popular essay. Many candidates expressed strong views about the lack of respect shown to animals and provided many examples to support their argument. Better candidates were also able to show that all is not doom and gloom and that more is being done to improve the situation.

Section 2

Descriptive and Narrative tasks

Question 2

- (a) Décrivez une action bénévole qui vous a impressionné(e).

This was the least popular of the four titles. Candidates often wrote about their own involvement in a charity event but lacked clarity regarding their contribution or about the purpose of the event. There were several irrelevant essays as candidates told a story that was only loosely related to the topic rather than engaging with the task title.

- (b) *Décrivez une journée d'automne.*

There were many successful descriptions of an autumn day. Better candidates offered a good selection of interesting ideas and images. They were able to convey very effectively their love for the warm and colourful appearance of nature on a beautiful autumn day.

Weaker candidates often failed to refer to the outside world and contented themselves with writing about everyday events and giving descriptions of objects and/or people.

- (c) *Un bateau à l'horizon! Enfin! ... Racontez les événements qui ont précédé ce cri de soulagement.*

This was by far the most popular essay. The title fired the imagination of many candidates who gave vivid descriptions of their ordeal. However, even though the different sections of the story were carefully balanced, the climax was not always managed completely effectively.

Weaker candidates often accorded too much importance to the preparations prior to their ordeal. Their essays consisted mainly of simple, everyday happenings which did not really engage the reader.

- (d) *Vous êtes dans un bus et regardez par la fenêtre de façon distraite. Soudain vous voyez quelque chose d'incroyable. Faites de cet incident une partie importante d'une histoire.*

This was also a very popular topic which appealed to many candidates. What they saw from the bus window ranged from the incredible, as indicated in the title, to something quite ordinary. In a number of instances the section leading up to the looking out of the window was over-long and

rather pedestrian. What was witnessed through the bus window was supposed to be part of the essay, rather than the short paragraph it became for some.

Conclusion

There were many pleasing pieces of work. At the same time, it was evident how important sustained practice in writing a successful, well-structured essay is for candidates. As part of their preparation candidates can focus on considering different ideas and developing them through their various logical stages. Given the importance of introductions and conclusions these need particular attention to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

A well structured essay cannot, of course, be credited with very high marks if the language used is so erratic that it interferes with the message the candidate is trying to convey. It is essential that candidates master the basic rules of spelling and grammar to provide a sound language base from which to build their own style and to write essays that reflect their true potential.