



Pearson

# **Examiners' Report**

## Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
In French (6FR03) Paper 1A

## **Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications**

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at [www.edexcel.com](http://www.edexcel.com) or [www.btec.co.uk](http://www.btec.co.uk). Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at [www.edexcel.com/contactus](http://www.edexcel.com/contactus).

## **Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere**

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: [www.pearson.com/uk](http://www.pearson.com/uk)

Summer 2017

Publications Code 6FR03\_1A\_1706\_ER

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Ltd 2017

This is the final report on the last full session of the 2008 specifications for GCE French Unit 3 (6FRO3). There is therefore no need to explain the format of the test but it may still be helpful to review the mark scheme so centres may best understand remarks on student and centre performance. A thorough understanding of this scheme is essential if students are to be helped to achieve their potential.

The report will analyse and comment upon student performance.

### **Test Objectives**

Centres' attention is drawn to **Section A, page 6, of the Specifications** where the Aim of the unit is set out. Students are expected to **interact effectively** with the teacher/examiner, **defend** their views and **sustain discussion** as the teacher/examiner moves the conversation away from the chosen issue. Centres are reminded that the test is an examination of the student's ability to use language spontaneously in largely unpredictable circumstances.

### **Explanatory remarks**

It may be helpful to set out what is understood by some of the terms used in the preceding paragraph.

### **The Issue**

An issue is a topic that generally has a moral or ethical dimension inviting debate.

### **Examples of good issues would be:**

*Je suis pour la légalisation du cannabis / Je suis contre l'IVG / je suis pour la limitation de l'immigration / je suis contre l'euthanasie / je suis pour le mariage homosexuel / je suis contre l'adoption homosexuelle / je suis contre les cartes d'identité / je suis contre la suppression des symboles religieux / je suis pour la peine de mort / je suis contre les concours de beauté / je suis pour la chirurgie esthétique / je suis pour le vote à 16 ans / je suis contre la prison pour les juvéniles / je suis contre la gratuité des frais universitaires / je suis pour le mariage des prêtres catholiques / je suis contre l'expérimentation animale / je suis pour le "don présumé" des organes / je suis contre l'énergie nucléaire / je suis pour la recherche sur les cellules souches / je suis contre les OGM's / je suis pour la prostitution/etc.*

because they raise moral and ethical questions, are weighty and offer avenues for development later

### **Less good ones are:**

*je suis contre l'influence des magazines adressés aux jeunes filles / je suis pour internet / je suis pour la taille minimum / je suis contre*

*la laïcité en France / je suis contre les JO à Londres / je suis pour les mesures plus draconiennes pour protéger la planète / je suis pour le génie génétique / je suis contre les éoliennes*

because, whilst they are arguable – with much ingenuity - they can hardly be described as “issues”, appear poorly thought-out and are not very productive

### **The following are examples of poor choices:**

*Les troubles alimentaires ne sont pas causés par les medias / je suis contre le tabac / je suis contre les mannequins trop maigres / je suis contre l'organisation des competitions de "surf" / je suis contre la pédophilie*

because they are self-evidently un-arguable

### **Effective interaction**

Students are deemed to be **interacting effectively** when they **address directly** comments/remarks/questions/prompts made by the examiner. The same may also be said of the examiner, incidentally. This type of exchange is called “**spontaneous discourse**” in the mark scheme and it is crucial that centres understand what is meant by this term.

**Discourse** describes the exchange of opinion and information on an issue between two or more people. Put simply, it means that students should address the intent of the examiner’s contribution. This will more likely take the form of a question but clearly in a discussion not every utterance is a question, it could be a comment, a remark, a request. In practical terms, this means that students should not be given the impression that saying something vaguely related to the topic will be accepted as discourse. They should be trained to listen closely to what the other person says and respond appropriately, engaging fully with the import of what has been said. It should also be said that the examiner should adopt the same practice, reflecting in her remarks what the student says. Too often sadly, examiners fail to pick up on aspects of their students’ remarks, moving on to the next prepared question and missing an opportunity for them to develop the issue and promote spontaneity, thereby increasing the chances of improving the mark for Response and Comprehension and Development.

### **Spontaneity**

This has proved a troublesome notion but it did not need not to be. Clearly, students who have been properly prepared for the speaking test will have a store of ideas and phrases that they can call upon as required. This is not only perfectly reasonable but also very desirable, as without it they would be unable to meet the requirements of the test. What happens in the examination room mimics what goes on in more natural conversation where existing utterances are adapted in response to unexpected, if not completely unpredictable, circumstances. Furthermore, it is the only sensible way to prepare for an examination. Thus, spontaneity does not

equate to novelty. Students do not have to produce wholly new utterances in response to unforeseen questions. Their spontaneous use of language arises from their manipulation of this stock of language in response to the unpredictable nature of the discussion as it unfolds. This unpredictability arises naturally when the rules of discourse are observed properly. Listening to how the other is interpreting one's remarks forces one to adjust and in so doing requires spontaneous manipulation of language.

The implications of this are now clear. Tests in which neither student nor examiner explore the detail of what one or the other has said cannot be accepted as examples of proper discussion and do not qualify as spontaneous discourse. As will be seen when this report comes to discuss the mark scheme, this has serious consequences for the Response mark.

**Sustaining discussion** flows from the proper application of the rules of discourse. If student and examiner are engaged in exploring each other's thoughts on a particular issue, then they are conducting a discussion. The longer this discussion goes on the more it is sustained and, as will be seen later, this has advantages for the student in two other boxes of the mark grid – Reading and Research and Comprehension and Development.

The temptation for centres to prepare students for the test by over-rehearsing the expression of single views on a long list of issues with no enquiry into these views proved to be irresistible as time went by and too many tests of this type were heard, defeating the purpose of the exam somewhat. This is not what the specifications required and was not rewarded..

## **The Mark /Scheme**

This is a criterion referenced document. 4/5 aspects of language are featured and typical performance descriptors are distributed between a number of boxes.

The total mark obtainable is 50.

## **Response**

This box asks the following questions:

- Is this spontaneous discourse or rehearsed response – and to what extent?
- Is the nature of the discussion basically about ideas – i.e. abstract – as opposed to narrative or descriptive?
- How comfortable with this type of discussion is the student?
- What language resources does the student display?

If students engage reasonably in useful discussion of abstract issues, they will score at least in the 9 – 12 box.

## **Quality of Language**

This box asks the question:

- Is this student communicating without loss of message?

If there is no loss of message the student will score at least 4 unless the incidence of basic error is so intrusive as to be a distraction.

## **Reading and Research**

This box assesses the student's level of detailed knowledge and understanding of the issue to be defended in the debate section and her general awareness of the further issues.

Whilst detail is an important element when assessing how well the student has prepared for the debate, it is clearly unreasonable to expect students to produce as much detail when discussing subsequent unpredictable issues. In this case, what is sought is evidence that the student has read widely and in some depth on issues that an informed young person aspiring to University might be expected to have thought about.

## **Comprehension and Development**

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that this box substitutes in part for the absence of a listening test in this specification. Students are rewarded for their ability to demonstrate understanding of spoken French – both the form and the content.

This box asks the questions:

- Can the student decipher the sounds of the language?
- Can the student decode the meaning?
- Can the student exploit the issue under discussion and develop it independently?

The mark scheme refers to the term "complex question forms". Questions generally become complex and challenging by the responses they require and not the way they are phrased. Therefore the word "form" is misleading and centres should concentrate on the level of degree of difficulty rather than any specific interrogatory structure. This will avoid situations such as:-

Q: *"Si vous aviez été sélectionné pour participer à un épisode de « l'Île au Trésor » et que vous eûtes à choisir quelqu'un pour vous accompagner dans cette aventure, qui auriez-vous choisi?"*  
A: *Mon ami."*

Students can do well in this area. If they display no problems understanding they will obviously be awarded a high mark for that element, which may or may not be maintained depending on how well they are able to develop the discussion.

This overview of the mark scheme has shown that it embodies the features outlined in the discussion of the specifications. It rewards students who have something to say about topical issues, can communicate their thoughts spontaneously in a variety of ways, under close examination, with no real loss of meaning.

## **Student performance**

The great majority of students were able to do this.

It is pleasing to report that tests were conducted correctly in the main with the one caveat regarding over-rehearsed performances. Students displayed real ability to present and defend an argument.

Likewise, where tests were conducted correctly, students could engage in productive discussion of issues other than their chosen one.

However, the outcome for many will reflect the fact that tests were conducted in a manner that did not meet the requirements of the specifications either in respect of spontaneous discourse or demonstrating awareness of an issue through sustained discussion – or both.

## **Response**

Nearly all students were able to provide an appropriate initial response to the examiner's question or comment. Many were able to expand upon their opening remarks independently of encouragement from the examiner but fewer of them were able to "dominate" the exchanges by developing the discussion on their own.

Students should have been encouraged to structure the contributions they make along the lines of the following example, taken from the 2010 Final Report – as far as is possible.

- declare understanding of the examiner's remark, acknowledge any truth in it, indicate where any perceived weaknesses may lie, state one's own position, substantiate this with examples or evidence, recognise that one's view may not be shared by all but reaffirm one's belief and raise a hypothetical scenario for the examiner to respond to.

For example:

- *Je vois ce que vous voulez dire et je suis d'accord avec vous quand vous dites que ... mais là où je ne suis pas d'accord c'est quand vous dites que ... car à mon sens ... et à titre d'exemple je vous renverrais au livre de ..... où il dit que ... j'accepte qu'il n'a peut-être pas toutes les réponses mais ... et, d'ailleurs, que se passerait-il si ....?*

Admittedly, this is a somewhat fanciful example, as not all issues or approaches to issues will allow a response of this nature to be made. The point is that students need to learn to think in 2, at least, or preferably 3 phase responses, rather than just the one. In this way they will be seen to be using the language of discussion and debate in a spontaneous, capable and sustained manner. This will be reflected in the marks for both Response and Comprehension.



## **Range of lexis and structures**

It is difficult to talk about this without touching upon Accuracy too.

Nearly all students understand the notion of:

- gender and number
- personal pronouns
- finite verbs
- word order relating to adjectives

although some do still produce “sentences” containing no verb at all.

Most understand the notion of:

- agreement – article / noun : noun / adjective : personal pronoun / verb
- tense – predominantly the Present and the Conditional with infrequent excursions into the Perfect, Imperfect and Future as the dictates of the discussion require
- negation
- comparison
- object pronouns – although these are not attempted very often and frequently trigger error

when used in simple sentences

In 2010 we wrote:-

“Subordination is frequently a step too far for many of them. The notion that phrases / clauses have to be linked in French and cannot be merely collocated as in English is still not fully appreciated by many students.”

It is satisfying to report that this is no longer true. Utterances such as the one quoted in 2010:

***Je pense il a raison dire cela***

are not anywhere near as common, although they have not disappeared altogether. In stock opening phrases such as “je pense que ... / je crois que ... / il faudrait que ... the relative is almost invariably present but when the same phrase appears in the middle of a sentence, it frequently disappears. Creating two clauses dependent on the same main verb will almost always result in the second relative being omitted.

In 2010 the following report was made

"**Qui** and **que** are frequently mixed up, whilst only the best use **ce qui** and **ce que**. Examples of **dont, le quel etc** can be counted on the fingers of one hand"

The first part of that statement is no longer true although instances of it will still be heard. More students now use **ce qui /ce que** but **dont/lequel** etc. remain the preserve of the best.

**Verbs in subordinate clauses** are usually in an approximate form, although tense somewhere between the finite and the infinitive can still be heard.

**Dependent infinitives** are generally acknowledged although it is often a lottery as to the use of a preposition and, in the event, which one; and there is still a high probability that the noun rather than the verb will be used:-

- *Ils n'ont pas envie de travail plus de 35 heures*

**Reflexive verbs** are generally only used correctly in stock phrases such as *il s'appelle ...* or *je m'entends bien avec mes parents ....* Attempts to use them in the past or with a negative usually flounder.

**The subjunctive** is often used correctly but again mostly in stock phrases such as *je ne crois pas que ... / il est important que*. Most students who observe the rule in these circumstances would fail to do so when using *"je voudrais que ... / je n'aime pas que ... il est possible que ...* However, it is now not rare to come across students who correctly use the subjunctive whenever circumstances require it.

**The passive voice** is not required in the productive mode, which is perhaps just as well.

It is clear that over the years, the ability of students to speak French convincingly and accurately has improved and centres are to be applauded for paying heed to reports such as this. The synopsis of structures known and used, however imperfectly, emerges from analysis of what appears in the performances. The fact that the Present and Conditional tenses are the most commonly used should come as no surprise since they allow students to say what they think, how they judge things around them and what they think should happen in order to bring about any necessary change or improvement. This is after all what the examination requires of them. If they show little knowledge of other tenses, it may be that examining technique is at fault in that opportunities to use these tenses are not offered to them.

## **Quality of Language**

Most students score 4/5. Weight of intrusive error means that some still fall into the 2-3 box but the instances of a 2 are rare. Many achieve 6 and not a few 7.

## **Reading and Research**

This is generally well done with students consistently scoring 5/7. They are well prepared in the Debate section showing that they have covered all the arguments both For and Against their stance and many but by no means all provide good detail in the form of statistics or reference to authoritative sources. Where the test is conducted in the spirit of the Specifications, some highly entertaining and informative debates have been heard. Regrettably this is too often not the case and the test becomes a means of rehearsing prepared material in a pre-determined sequence. Whilst it is understandable that centres should want to achieve the best possible outcome for their students, it is sad that this should be at the expense of the principles embodied in the test.

Similar comments can be made concerning the Discussion. The level of general awareness of issues is high in the main but too often the exchanges take the form of a "Question and Answer" session with examiners hurrying students through the range of issues worked on during the year rather than attempting to dwell on one issue and explore it in some depth allowing the student to demonstrate greater knowledge and understanding. This is a shame as the whilst the first method is a safety-first approach precluding possible catastrophe, it only attracts "safety-first" marks. Strangely, the "high-wire" approach is more productive as it allows students to register responses for more of the features in the mark scheme.

## **Comprehension and Development**

The Comprehension part of this box palliates the absence of a dedicated Listening Comprehension.

It is rare for students not to understand what the examiner's question requires of them. They generally show good understanding of both the language and the meaning. As this element attracts a sizeable amount of marks, it is perhaps worth reminding teacher/examiners that the language used should at times be more demanding so that it can be seen as a challenge for the student rather than an invitation to move on to the next section. Questions that rarely rise above an invitation to give an opinion or talk about an aspect of an issue cannot be said to constitute a sufficient challenge to the student's ability to understand complex ideas and language.

Development is an area that needs explanation. A student is assessed on her ability to go deeper into the issue under discussion by offering avenues for further investigation. For examiners this means probing for more information or opinion: for students, it means volunteering this information, thereby being seen to develop the issue and taking the initiative, which will also be rewarded in the Response box. Not surprisingly, it is not easy for students to appreciate that an oral test is not like a "normal" exam. Giving the correct answer is only part of the exercise. Demonstrating one's range and command of the language is probably a more important aspect. Sitting back and waiting for the next question is not the way to reach the top boxes.

## **Conclusions**

Over the life of this specification, there have clearly been notable improvements in student performance. This is borne out by the statistics showing that some 50% of students achieve Grades A\* to B and that the overall pass-rate is around 98%.

Centres are producing students who are very able communicators and are to be congratulated on this achievement.

This report has attempted to show where progress has been made and identify areas where improvements could be made. Of course, a new specification involves a new approach to the Oral test and a new mark scheme that will inevitably reward different skills – eg the ability to summarise – and change the emphasis laid on some of the traditional ones. Nevertheless, the basic nature of the language will not change and students will still have to show mastery of this, so perhaps the comments in this report may yet have some usefulness. That at least is the writer's hope.

