



Independent Schools  
Examinations Board

**NOTES FROM FRENCH CPD MEETING AT WESTMINSTER SCHOOL  
25 SEPTEMBER 2008**

There were three workshops which delegates attended in turn: Marking the Speaking Element, Marking the Writing Element and Teaching Materials for Listening and Reading. Afterwards a plenary session offered delegates the opportunity of raising concerns to be taken back to the Board and examination setters.

The concerns are as follows (the Board's responses are in italics):

- Weaker candidates cannot access new papers and are therefore demotivated.

*The Board is concerned about getting the level right. Although it was predicted that weaker candidates would not find the new paper easy, senior schools want the current level of difficulty to be maintained. They cannot see a problem, given that French has always been an optional subject. The Board will continue to seek an acceptable solution.*

- Common Entrance and GCSE Foundation French are close in level of difficulty. Common Entrance should therefore be easier.

*The Board is looking at this very closely.*

- Papers should be relevant to the age group.

*Everyone is in agreement.*

- All rubrics should be in English, not in the target language.

*The examination setters will make a decision at their next joint modern languages meeting.*

- Visuals should not be old fashioned.

*Agreed.*

- In the listening examination, the recordings must be clear, with the ends of words carefully enunciated.

*The Board is in complete agreement. The speakers are carefully coached before the recording session and the producer will continue to encourage native speakers to speak as clearly as possible with the candidates in mind.*

- The recording should indicate when a repetition is about to start and there should be a warning to indicate whether a passage rather than individual questions is to follow.

*Noted.*

- The pauses should be long enough for candidates to be able to read the questions as well as write the answer.

*Noted.*

- There should be no trick questions, e.g. using negatives.

*The setters are well aware of such pitfalls and will endeavour to avoid them.*

- Answers required in the listening component should be clear and in sequence.

*Yes, they should!*

- Senior schools do not give feedback on the oral examinations, nor return tapes/CDs.

*If senior schools fail to return the moderator's report, junior schools should contact them to remind them that the forms are required. Similarly, junior schools should ask senior schools to return tapes/CDs, provided that junior schools have sent a label for their return.*

- All role-play items should be of equal difficulty.

*Examination setters try very hard to achieve parity.*

- The unpredictable role-play question should come at the end of the test.

*Noted.*

- There should be more specimen papers.

*Any volunteers to write them?*

- Copyright restrictions on Common Entrance papers mean that schools have to purchase past papers.

*ISEB has considered selling the papers in an electronic format but it is uncertain whether they will be cost effective.*

- Senior schools will not accept the Certificate of Achievement as evidence of a candidate's ability in French.

*It would be helpful to know which these schools are.*