



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	French
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus as indicated by the prescribed themes and topics for Advanced Higher level and was of an appropriate level of difficulty.

Each element of the examination was accessible to candidates but proved demanding and produced a good range of performances. Candidates, on the whole, were well prepared for each component, with very few really poor performances, and overall there was a marked improvement in performance in each component of the exam in comparison to the previous year.

There was a slight decrease in the number of presentations which now stands at 646. The Mean Marks for each component were:

- ◆ Reading and Translation = 34.4 (50) – up 5.2
- ◆ Listening and Discursive Writing = 44.9 (70) – up 4.9
- ◆ Folio = 21.2 (30) – up 0.9
- ◆ Speaking = 35.9% (50) – up 0.4

The mean marks show an encouraging performance in all components of the examination, with a marked improvement in all of the written papers. The mean mark for Paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing, when broken down, indicates that Listening is still the skill most candidates find most difficult, as there was overall an improved performance in the Writing element in Paper 2. However, the performance overall in each component was very encouraging, with some excellent performances in all elements and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in the Folio and Discursive Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

Performance in Reading and Translation was very encouraging with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage accessible and on a topic (Les Apéros Géants: Outdoor gatherings including heavy drinking among young people) to which they could relate.

On the whole, candidates succeeded in responding accurately to the reading comprehension questions, and there was less evidence of 'word for word translation' of the text resulting in the loss of marks through awkward use of English. There were also some excellent performances in Speaking and in Discursive Writing, where very able candidates were able to draw upon the topics they had covered in the Advanced Higher course and produce fluent, accurate and interesting performances that demonstrated all the elements required of a very good performance and contained an excellent range and variety of language structures. It was encouraging to note that there was also a marked improvement in the

response to the listening texts on the topic of advantages/disadvantages of mobile phones with candidates performing very well particularly in Part A.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Performance in Reading Comprehension was highly satisfactory, with only two phrases consistently troubling candidates: 'l'atmosphère est très bon enfant and lutter contre l'image stéréotype de la génération du numérique et d'internet ... à moins que ce ne soit au moyen d'un écran d'ordinateur'.

The inferential question (Q5) was successful in producing a range of performance, though many candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers (commonly two and three pages) in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions rather than address the actual question and highlight the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the author.

Most candidates performed well in the Translation section and managed to demonstrate comprehension of the sense units, but often lacked the accuracy and details required for a fully accurate translation. Many candidates lost marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles (ce/ces as 'the'), singular/plural nouns (des chiffres) and verb tenses (ont été hospitalisés). The most demanding sense units were those containing 's'éloigne de', 'il s'adonne à' and 'liée à une de ces fêtes', with only the more able candidates translating these accurately and with appropriate English expressions.

There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a topic (advantages/disadvantages of mobile phones) with which candidates were very familiar. The clarity and speed of recording were commented on favourably by many centres. There was a good variety of straightforward, factual questions (Part A Q3 and Q4 / Part B Q3 and Q4) and more demanding questions (Part A Q5 / Part B Q2 and Q7), which required more detailed responses. Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer accurately the more demanding questions, often understanding part of the information but lacking sufficient detail, eg 'moins cher' / 'plus rapide', 'le travail scolaire', 'si tu n'es pas à côté d'un téléphone fixe'.

The Discursive Writing task and the Folio were the elements of the exam that produced the greatest range of performances — from very good to poor. In the Discursive Writing, all six essay topics were attempted, with the most popular being Topic 2 (La terre ne nous appartient pas, nous l'empruntons à nos enfants, Discutez) and Topic 5 (Les femmes sacrifient souvent leur carrière pour s'occuper de leur famille. Est-ce bien vrai?) Some candidates struggled to incorporate relevant learned material with the required level of accuracy to achieve a satisfactory performance, while a small number of candidates produced poor and very poor performances, with little or no control of basic grammar and verb formation, and with serious misuse of dictionary.

In the Folio Writing tasks, there was a wide range of literary texts and background topics presented, but no centre presented any Language in Work reports. The weaker

performances, whether literary texts or background topics, were those where candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical, in their discussion. This was often the resulting of a poor choice of essay title. Some candidates were penalised for exceeding the word limit and for failing to include a bibliography. In some background topics, and particularly those related to films, it was not always clear how much of the study had been in French or how far the topic was being approached from a French as distinct from a European or American perspective.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

- ◆ Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation of a particular section of the text with **appropriate** use of English expressions.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to attempt the translation **after** the reading comprehension questions as that should make clear the context in which the translation section is situated.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to answer the **specific** wording of the question, and discourage them from giving a word-for-word translation of the text as a response to the reading comprehension questions, as this often results in English that is difficult to comprehend.
- ◆ Encourage candidates, when answering the inferential question, to give a general response to the question asked and to support this statement with specific, **key** information from the text while commenting on any particular stylistic features used by the author. (Guidance on the inferential question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, has been made available by SQA in the past year).

Discursive Writing

- ◆ Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material — but this must be relevant to the essay title.
- ◆ Advise candidates to use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, genders, etc) **not** to create and invent new sentences.
- ◆ Share with candidates the assessment criteria for Discursive Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Accuracy, Range and Variety.

Folio

- ◆ Ensure that candidates choose an essay title that allows for a critical and analytical response.

- ◆ Encourage candidates to develop an appropriately formal and accurate use of English.
- ◆ Ensure that candidates adhere to the word limit and include a bibliography.
- ◆ Share with candidates the assessment criteria for Folio Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Analytical approach and Structure.

General

- ◆ Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible (particularly when writing in French) or points can be lost.
- ◆ Centres are encouraged to make use of guidance issued by SQA in the form of the materials (marking schemes and Photostat essays) used at the Professional Development Workshop on Advanced Higher (SQA 2006) and Guidance on the Folio of Writing at Advanced Higher (September 2002 and revised in November 2010). In the past year, Guidance on the Inferential Question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, has also been made available by SQA.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	691
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2012	646
------------------------------------	-----

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	41.2%	41.2%	266	143
B	27.1%	68.3%	175	123
C	19.8%	88.1%	128	103
D	6.5%	94.6%	42	93
No award	5.4%	100.0%	35	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.