



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	French
Level	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 general consensus of the Markers this year was that the examination as a whole was quite accessible. It was felt that, as last year, there were many good and satisfactory performances, but not so many very good. There were also, it was felt, fewer very poor performances, but still a number of candidates who struggle with the level of achievement needed.

The Markers commented again on the poor level of English in several performances. Candidates' answers were often spoiled and occasionally incomprehensible because of poor English, as was the case last year. In both **Reading and Listening** elements, candidates performed better than in previous years in the comprehension questions. This was perhaps mainly due to the questions leading the candidates to the answers more clearly. However, the translation passage was not well done, nor were the Discursive Essays.

The **Folios** were very average, though it was heartening to see some new books being studied.

The use of films on their own without an accompanying text has continued to increase, penalising the candidates from the centres that do this.

As always in **Speaking**, the Visiting Examiners praised the efforts of candidates in this most rewarding of exercises. Candidates are, for the most part, well prepared and willing to speak, and it is always a pleasure to hear what they have to say. Occasionally, rooms allocated for the speaking are not the most suitable, but this never seems to throw the candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Reading and Translation

As mentioned previously, candidates managed to answer the comprehension questions better this year. The passage was very accessible. Answers were, in general, quite detailed and generally related to the question and not just wholesale translation of the text. Good questions led to good answers.

Listening and Discursive Writing

The Listening questions this year were answered well for the most part: Section A better than Section B.

Folio

There were some very good folio essays showing good preparation.

Speaking

Generally, candidates were very willing to speak, and often perform very well in this element.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading and Translation

Question 5, the inferencing question, again proved very testing, despite the leads given. Many candidates simply retold the content of the passage; others gave their own opinions, which were at odds with what the author had inferred.

Time is obviously still a serious factor, as some candidates only managed to write a line or two. This is despite the increase in time allocation of ten minutes for this paper.

Performance in the translation was variable. Careless translation and unrecognisable English spoiled some performances. And it is obvious that candidates sometimes neglect to revisit or look over what they have written in some performances.

Listening and Discursive Essay

The essays were probably the part of the examination which were least well done. Candidates sometimes did not read the essay titles carefully enough, and thus wrote essays that were largely irrelevant. This was especially obvious in the environment essay where, once again, a prepared and memorised essay found its way onto the page in some instances. Candidates can be encouraged to use learned material, but this needs to be adapted for the requirements of the task as set.

The essay on technology was also poorly done, as candidates tended to write about simply the advantages of the internet and their mobile phones.

There were more competent essays on the value of going to university, and some quite moving essays on *Les Jeunes*. *Les Artistes* was difficult for many candidates who attempted this question.

Once again, a number of essays were marred by some very poor French. Wrong genders, wrong tenses, no accents, non-existent agreements of both verb and adjectives, and poor use of the dictionary all led to some disappointing performances.

Folio

Again this year, some titles were far beyond the scope of candidates and the word limit. Advice made available at the professional development workshop in November 2006, and also previously published exemplifications, continue to provide effective guidance. Centres should encourage students to devise realistic and effective questions and approaches that are well matched to the task.

Markers again commented on the use of films without a text.

The omission of bibliographies was noted by some Markers.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible.

More practice is needed for the inferencing question. Personal comment is appropriate, as long as reference to the text is made, and answers centre on evidence from this.

More practice is needed in translation. Candidates should be aware that if the translation does not read or sound like English, then they are likely to lose marks for inaccuracy and poor rendering of expression in English.

Listening and Discursive Writing

Read the essay titles carefully. Rehearsed essays may not fit what is asked and are likely to be irrelevant to a degree.

Use of dictionary should be practised.

Grammatical accuracy is also important.

Folio

Read the folio guidelines very carefully.

Extended Reading and Viewing

Choose essay titles with great care and thought, and ensure that they can be undertaken realistically and are within the capacity of candidates. There is also a word limit of 750.

It is very important that, for Extended Reading and Viewing, candidates do not penalise themselves by including only reference to a film and no evidence of a literary text source.

Studies of films are acceptable as a cinema background topic.

Make sure there is a bibliography and that it conforms with the guidelines sent to centres.

Language in Work

Once again, a number of reports did not display an appropriate level of critical evaluation and analysis relating to a particular vocational area or experience. It is crucial that candidates evaluate in such a way.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	710
Number of resulted entries in 2010	702

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	25.1%	25.1%	176	139
B	23.2%	48.3%	163	118
C	24.6%	72.9%	173	98
D	10.3%	83.2%	72	88
No award	16.8%	100.0%	118	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.