



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	French
Level	Intermediate 1

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 level of demand of the examination has been held constant over the years, while the composition of the cohort attempting the examination continues to develop and settle down. At this level, the guidance given to setters concerning the length and type of text for each component is very prescriptive and consequently, the examination was again appropriate in terms of content, which related clearly to the prescribed themes and topics for this level, and in terms of the level of difficulty which was appropriate and in line with previous years. The overall level of performance by candidates, although slightly down, was in line with the performance of the previous year.

The Mean Marks for each element were as follows:

Reading = 20.2 (35) – down 0.2

Listening = 10.4 (20) – down 1.8

Writing = 8.0 (15) – down 0.2

Speaking = 24.3 (30) – down 0.3

The mean marks indicate an encouraging performance in all four language skills with Listening and Writing still remaining the most difficult components with mean marks that are still only just above half of the available marks. The mean marks and the distribution of grades would suggest, however, that the majority of this year's cohort were presented at the correct level in the National Qualifications Framework and had been well prepared for the examination. There were some excellent performances (particularly in Writing) and relatively few poor performances (mainly in Listening and Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

Although there was a decrease in the mean mark, the performance of candidates in the Reading Paper was still encouraging, as relatively few candidates compared to previous years were unable to attempt with some success the longer third and fourth texts. The four texts provided good progression in terms of the level of difficulty and demand and the vast majority of candidates related well to the content of the reading texts. Although overall the performance in Listening is variable, most candidates had been well prepared to cope with predictable items including numbers, times, colours and high frequency vocabulary (e.g. household tasks / countries / places in town). There was less incidence of the need to apply the extraneous rule in the marking of both the Reading and Listening answers, which suggests that candidates are being trained well not to exceed the required amount of information indicated in the question.

Although the mean mark for the Writing task is still low, there were still some excellent performances where candidates had been prepared well and were able to write at some length and with a high level of accuracy to show what can be produced by good candidates within the confines of the task.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In the Reading Paper many candidates lost points through failing to provide sufficiently detailed answers (e.g. rendering plural nouns as singular: **les musées et les marchés**) and many lost points in the first two shorter texts and in the supported questions (**un livre pour mon frère** was often given as a book for my father). Question 3 h: **What two problems can the teachers help with?** caused problems for many (**les petites maladies** - minor illnesses and **les difficultés de langue** - language difficulties), while the accuracy of comprehension required to answer the final question 4i: **Why does she want to come back?** was beyond the ability of all but the very good candidates, who realised she wishes to see the Western Isles (**les îles de l'ouest**). Throughout the Reading paper many candidates continued to have problems with 'false friends' and translated **travailler** as travel and **journée** as journey.

As was indicated by the mean marks, the most difficult components for candidates remain Listening and Writing. Some candidates continue to find the Listening element difficult owing in part to the inability to give

sufficient details in their answers, often managing to recognise part of the answer (**l'aéroport**) but not the precise details (**à l'entrée**). More surprising was the inability of candidates to perform well in the supported questions (3 a and b) and to recognise common vocabulary (**la natation / allemand / sud-est**) including numbers (**13 ans / 15 jours**), time phrases and dates (**vers 7 heures et demie / Samedi 4 juillet**), weather phrases (**il fait du soleil**), colours (**grise/noire**) and prepositions and places (**au bord de la mer**). Many candidates also had difficulty with the phrase **je me suis fait beaucoup d'amis** and in demonstrating comprehension of the following two questions in French: **Est-ce que vous habitez près de l'aéroport** and **Quel temps fait-il en ce moment?**

Many candidates again had considerable difficulty with the Writing element, which produced the greatest range of performances from very good to very poor. There were still a few candidates for whom the task was clearly beyond their ability and who failed to provide the required number of pieces of information for each of the areas. In preparing candidates for this component, many centres need to give further guidance on what constitutes 3 sentences, the accuracy required in terms of spelling, genders and use of accents and how candidates can go beyond a minimal response.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading/Listening:

In responding to the questions in the reading and listening papers, candidates should be guided by the number of points awarded for each question and **should be discouraged from giving extraneous information** as this is likely to be penalised. Indeed to avoid candidates falling foul of the extraneous rule, the question itself now usually indicates the amount of information the candidate is required to give by stating in bold e.g. **'Mention 2 of them'**.

In preparation for the Reading Paper, centres should ensure candidates are familiar with the common areas of vocabulary indicated in the prescribed themes and topics for Intermediate 1 Level and should continue to give candidates sufficient practice with longer texts in preparation for texts 3 and 4.

Particularly in the Listening Paper, centres should ensure that candidates are able to give **accurate** answers through confident knowledge of numbers, common adjectives, weather expressions, prepositions and question words, so that some of the 'easier' points of information are not lost through lack of sufficiently accurate details.

In preparing candidates for the Listening, centres need to ensure that candidates have had sufficient practice at noting information from texts after only **two hearings**. It is important to stress to centres and to candidates that they will hear the text only **two times** as opposed to three times for the internal unit assessment and for Standard Grade.

Writing:

Centres need to give further guidance to candidates on what constitutes an adequate amount of information (3 sentences) in each section of the Writing task and need to encourage candidates to take greater care in how they present this information particularly in the formation of verb tenses. The expanded version of the pegged mark descriptors gives a good indication of what is required of candidates in this task **and these criteria should be shared with candidates**. The exemplification of candidates' performances, which accompanied the new descriptors, also provides centres with examples of good and very good performances in this writing task in order to show how it is possible to prepare candidates to produce more than a 'minimalist' response under each of the sections.

General:

Centres should encourage candidates to ensure that handwriting is legible and to distinguish clearly between rough notes and what they wish to be considered as final answers.

The overall performance at Intermediate 1 level indicates that most centres, which are moving from Standard Grade to the National Qualifications Framework, are now aware that Intermediate 1 represents **progression**

from Foundation level and is benchmarked against General level. However, the number of poor performances in Writing suggests that some centres may still be having difficulty in presenting candidates at the correct level relative to their ability. Centres are encouraged to make effective use of the guidance issued by SQA in the form of the materials (marking schemes and Photostat essays) used at the Professional Development Workshop on Intermediate 1 and 2 (December 2005) and the Professional Development Workshop on Writing at SCQF Levels 4 and 5 (December 2007). Further exemplification of the standards to be expected in Writing at Intermediate 1 level has also been issued to accompany the new extended pegged mark descriptors and it is hoped that this will also prove useful to centres in improving the performance of their candidates in Writing.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	1691
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	1966
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	33.4%	33.4%	657	70
B	24.5%	57.9%	481	60
C	18.2%	76.0%	357	50
D	6.5%	82.5%	127	45
No award	17.5%	100.0%	344	-

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.