



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	French
Level	Intermediate 2

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 Intermediate 2 and was of an appropriate level of difficulty. Each component of the examination was accessible to all candidates but proved demanding and produced a good range of performances.

Candidates on the whole had been well prepared by centres for each component and there were few really poor performances. The Mean Marks for each component were as follows:

Reading = 23.5 (30) –down 0.5

Listening = 11.2 (20) – down 3.0

Writing = 13.5 (20) – no change

Speaking = 23.3 (30) – no change

The mean marks indicate a good level of performance in all four language skills with the average performance in each skill in excess of half of the available marks. There was, however, a significant drop in the performance in Listening in comparison with the improvement of the previous year, and the mean mark indicates that this is still the skill most candidates find most difficult. Overall, the performance of candidates was very encouraging and of a high level, with some excellent performances (particularly in Reading and Writing) and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in Listening and Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

The majority of candidates seemed well prepared for the examination and had been presented at the level in the National Qualifications Framework appropriate to their level of ability. In the Reading Paper candidates seemed to identify with the topics of the texts (school competition / stay in Strasbourg / living away from home). There was good progression in the level of demand through the shorter to the longer fourth reading text with most candidates scoring well in the shorter texts and with an increasing number managing to sustain this level of performance throughout the longer and more demanding final text. In Listening, candidates performed well in Question 1 where the content focused on the details of studying in an international school and in general most candidates were well prepared to identify correctly the more predictable items such as numbers, times, weather phrases and common areas of vocabulary (e.g. clothes and leisure activities). There was less incidence of the need to apply the extraneous rule in the marking of reading and listening answers, which suggests that candidates have been trained well to heed the required amount of information indicated in the questions. In the Writing task there were many excellent performances where candidates had been prepared well by their centre and were able to write at considerable length and with a high level of accuracy, range and variety of structures. Such candidates are well placed to do well at Higher level should they decide to proceed with their study of French.

Areas which candidates found demanding

With the exception of a few candidates in the Writing and Listening, there were few really poor performances, which indicates that there is a satisfactory progression from the level of performance demanded in the internal unit assessments for each skill to the level demanded in the external assessment.

Most candidates coped well with the Reading texts but some lost points through not providing sufficiently detailed answers: **on a plus de liberté** (more freedom) / **il m'appelle une fois par semaine** (once a week) / **des drapeaux** (flags) / **on a chanté dans toutes les langues** (in all languages).

The performance in Listening was disappointing in comparison to performance in the other skills and many candidates still find it difficult to retain the specific details while listening to the three relatively long texts. To compensate for this there is a mix of straightforward as well as more demanding questions and it is disappointing that many candidates failed to gain these 'easier' points owing to the inability to recognise numbers (**15 jours** and the phone numbers **54 – 16**), time phrases (**3 heures du matin**), weather expressions (**du brouillard**) and to link the correct colour to the correct article of clothing (**un pull noir /des baskets**

blanches). Passage 2 in the Listening was least well done with many candidates understanding part of the answer but unable to give sufficient details: **un de mes amis avait oublié son passeport** (friend forgot passport), **à cause du brouillard** (because of fog not bad weather), **je me suis cassé la jambe** (broke leg not was injured).

The Writing task, in spite of its predictable nature, was again the element, which produced the greatest range of performances from very good to very poor. Weaker candidates struggled to incorporate learned material with the required level of accuracy to achieve a satisfactory performance. Very few candidates failed to address the compulsory bullet points but the weaker candidates were not well prepared to give reasons for their application nor to deal with requesting information about the job and were unable to form comprehensible questions. A few candidates seemed unaware of the formal tone required when writing a job application and poor handwriting, poor layout, poor spelling and the lack of the appropriate use of accents created a negative impression.

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, should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood but **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’**.

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.

In preparing candidates for the Reading, centres need to ensure that candidates have had sufficient practice at reading longer texts similar in length and complexity to that set in Question 4

Writing:

Centres should ensure that candidates read carefully the information regarding the job for which they are applying, **are discouraged from writing long lists of school subjects** (and then repeating the list with a past or future verb tense) and are trained to:

- complete successfully the opening sentence with which they are provided so that they are able to indicate the nature of the correct job for which they are applying.
- **ask specific questions** regarding the job rather than provide a general statement such as “Envoyez-moi des renseignements
- use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, accents, genders etc.) **not** to create new sentences
- be aware of the extended criteria to be used in assessing performances in Writing, so that they are aware of what is required in terms of content, accuracy and range and variety of language to achieve the good and very good categories.

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 high level of performance overall at Intermediate 2 level indicates that most centres are making effective use of 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 2 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	3512
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	4000
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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	59.2%	59.2%	2369	69
B	20.0%	79.2%	798	59
C	12.4%	91.6%	495	49
D	3.4%	94.9%	135	44
No award	5.1%	100.0%	203	-

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.