



External Assessment Report 2013

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 some excellent performances and with very few really poor performances in each component. There was a slight increase in the number of presentations which now stands at 673. The Mean Marks for each component were as follows:

Reading and Translation = 34.4 (50) – down 0.6

Listening and Discursive Writing = 44.9 (70) – up 0.8

Folio = 18.9 (30) – down 2.3

Speaking = 37.0% (50) – up 1.1

The mean marks show an encouraging performance in all components of the examination in spite of a drop in performance in the Folio, which may have been influenced by the introduction of the new 'Poor' category in the pegged mark descriptors. Although the mean mark for Paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing shows a welcome increase, it indicates that Listening is still the skill most candidates find most difficult, as there was overall a satisfactory 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 Listening/Discursive Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

Reading and Translation

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 and concepts they could relate to (**Research into environmental issues**). 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 (with the exception of the phrase; **l'exposition extérieur**).

Speaking and Discursive Writing

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 loneliness in modern society, with candidates performing well particularly in the discussion in Part B.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading comprehension

Performance in Reading Comprehension was highly satisfactory, with only the following phrases consistently troubling candidates: **l'exposition extérieur, nos salles de reunion, d'une ancienne caserne** and **la ville compte sur ses quartiers tout neufs**. 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, such as the use of statistics, sub-headings, quotes and the ending.

Translation

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 (**le choix** as 'a' choice), singular/plural nouns (**ces efforts** as 'this' effort) and verb tenses (**on pourrait** as 'you' can). The most demanding sense units were those containing '**ces efforts lui ont valu**', '**du développement durable**', '**les espaces verts jalonnent**' and '**elle a longtemps misé**', with only the more able candidates translating these accurately and with appropriate English expressions.

Listening comprehension

There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a topic (**loneliness in our modern society linked to changing family patterns and the use of technology**) 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 Q2 and Q3 / Part B Q1, Q2 and Q4) and more demanding questions (Part A Q1 / Part B Q3b) and Q5) that required more detailed responses. Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer the more demanding questions accurately, often understanding part of the information but lacking sufficient detail particularly with the statistics: **un Français sur trois / quatre millions n'ont que trois vraies conversations par an** and the activities; **les vieux jouent aux cartes et les jeunes au baby foot/ apprécier celle du juke-box**.

Discursive Writing and Folio

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, although candidates seemed better prepared in terms of structuring their responses and by referring throughout to the actual essay title.

In the Discursive Writing, all six essay topics were attempted, with the most popular being Topic 3 (**À travail égal, salaire égal. Est-ce toujours le cas à votre avis?**) and Topic 1

(Doit-on avoir peur de son téléphone portable?) Some candidates struggled to incorporate **relevant**, learned material with the level of accuracy required to achieve a satisfactory performance, while only a small number of candidates produced poor performances with little or no control of basic grammar and verb formation and with serious misuse of dictionary.

In the Folio Writing tasks, a wide range of literary texts and background topics were presented, and only one centre presented a Language in Work report. Weaker performances, whether literary texts or background topics, were those where candidates were descriptive rather than critical and analytical in their discussion, often resulting from 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 plan their time management carefully to ensure they attempt the translation after the reading comprehension questions. This should make the context for the translation clear, and ensure that they do not write excessively long answers to the inferential question and thereby leave themselves little time to complete the translation.
- ◆ 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 hard to understand.
- ◆ 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 writer. (Guidance on the inferential question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, has recently been made available on SQA's website).

Discursive Writing

- ◆ Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully, and to construct a relevant and personal response. They may draw upon learned material in this, but it 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 the assessment criteria for Discursive Writing with candidates 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 the assessment criteria for Folio Writing with candidates 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 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 Nov 2010 & Sept 2012). In 2012, Guidance on the Inferential Question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, was also made available by SQA, and there is some evidence that this is leading to an improved performance by candidates.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	646
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	673
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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 200				
A	40.3%	40.3%	271	143
B	24.8%	65.1%	167	123
C	19.9%	85.0%	134	103
D	5.9%	90.9%	40	93
No award	9.1%	100.0%	61	-

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.