



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>French</b>
Level	<b>Advanced Higher</b>

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 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. The Mean Marks for each component were:

- ◆ Reading and Translation = 29.6 (50) – up 2.2
- ◆ Listening and Discursive Writing = 40.3 (70) – up 4.1
- ◆ Folio = 20.1 (30) – up 1.9
- ◆ Speaking = 35.5% (50) – down 0.2

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, shows 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. There were relatively few poor performances (these were 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 (Sunday opening of shops and businesses) 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 (which would result in 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.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Performance in Reading Comprehension was highly satisfactory, with only two phrases consistently troubling candidates: *On craint que la consommation ne se déplace de la semaine vers le week-end* (often given as it does NOT move ...) and *Le repos sera morcelé, donc pas aussi restaurateur* (often failing to get the idea of 'broken up / fragmented').

The inferential question (Q5) was successful in producing a range of performance. 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, but many struggled and lost marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles (*son syndicat*), singular/plural nouns (*ses enfants / les gens* as 'someone') and verb tenses (*elle se bat* as 'she fought'). The most demanding sense units were those containing *baisser le rideau* and *elle est descendue dans la rue*, 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 (**environmental issues**) candidates were familiar with. The clarity and speed of recording were commented on favourably by many centres. There was a good variety of straightforward, factual questions (Part A Q1 and Q2 / Part B Q1 and Q2) and more demanding questions (Part A Q4 / Part B Q3 and Q5), which required more detailed responses. Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the more demanding questions accurately, often understanding part of the information, eg the problem (*l'agriculture intensive*) but without the consequence (*avec pour conséquence un manque d'eau*).

The Discursive Writing task and the Folio were the elements of the exam, which produced the greatest range of performances, from very good to very poor. In the Discursive Writing, all six essay topics were attempted, with the most popular being Topic 4 (*Accepteriez-vous de vivre à côté d'une centrale nucléaire?*) and Topic 5 (*Les jeunes affirment souvent qu'il est plus facile de se passer de la télévision que de l'ordinateur.*) Some candidates struggled to incorporate **relevant**, learned material with the required level of accuracy, while a small but significant 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, a wide range of literary texts and background topics were presented, but only one centre presented a small number of 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 result 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, 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. This should make the context in which the translation section is situated clear.
- ◆ 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 understand.
- ◆ When answering the inferential question, encourage candidates to give a general response to the question asked and to support this statement with specific, **important** information from the text while commenting on any particular stylistic features used by the author.

## Discursive Writing

- ◆ Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully, and to construct a relevant and personal response. They may draw on 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 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).

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	702
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	691
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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	32.6%	32.6%	225	140
B	25.0%	57.6%	173	120
C	22.9%	80.5%	158	100
D	8.8%	89.3%	61	90
No award	10.7%	100.0%	74	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.