



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	French
Level	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, 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, although many candidates found the listening text particularly challenging. The Mean Marks for each component were:

- ◆ Reading/Directed Writing = 27.9 (45) – down 1.7
- ◆ Listening/Writing = 15.6 (30) – down 1.7
- ◆ Speaking = 21.0% (25) – no change

The mean marks show a slight drop in performance in both Paper 1 and Paper 2. The drop in Paper 1 can be attributed to some weaker performances in the Directed Writing element. In Paper 2 it reflects some weak performances in the Listening comprehension element.

The mean mark for Paper 2: Listening and Writing, at just over half marks, 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. There were some excellent performances (particularly in Reading and Writing) and relatively few poor performances (mainly in the two Writing tasks, owing to the misuse of dictionary by some candidates).

Areas in which candidates performed well

In spite of the drop in the mean mark, performance in Reading and Translation was again very encouraging, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage '*Hugo Girard prend sa retraite des compétitions d'hommes forts*' accessible and on a topic 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 resulting in loss of marks through awkward English.

Again this year there were some excellent performances in both of the writing tasks but particularly in Paper 2, where very able candidates demonstrated all the elements required of a very good performance and produced a well-structured and accurate piece of writing containing 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 m'a permis de prendre un congé sans solde* (often

given as 'lots of holidays') and *tout en étant quelqu'un de bien ordinaire* (often given as 'you can be extraordinary').

Most candidates performed well in the Translation section of Paper 1, but many continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles (*mon fils*), subject pronouns (*je/on*), singular/plural nouns (*des choses* as 'something') and verb tenses (imperfect as present tense). The final sense unit (*mais mon fils me l'a fait réalisé pleinement*) was the most demanding, with only the more able candidates translating the object pronouns successfully.

There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a topic (*final year at school and future plans*) that candidates were familiar with. There was a good variety of straightforward and more demanding questions, which allowed most candidates to gain points in questions 1 (a)/(b), 4 (a)/(b), 6 and 7 (a), while the more able candidates continued to cope well with questions 2 (b), 3 (a)/(b) and 5, which required more detailed responses.

It was disappointing, however, that some candidates failed to demonstrate comprehension of the 'easier' points by recognising the more factual information, including the number *300 euros*; the time phrase: *tous les mois*; the verbs *se promener*, *rentrer à la maison* and *payer les transports*; and vocabulary including *demandeur un rendez-vous / prendre une année sabbatique / l'essence*. Many candidates were also unable to retain sufficient details required to answer Question 5 accurately, often understanding part of the information, eg the danger but not the consequence (*qui font la fête > on est trop fatigué*).

The Writing tasks were again the element that produced the greatest range of performances, from very good to very poor. Some candidates struggled to incorporate learned material with the required level of accuracy and relevance, 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.

Both of the Writing tasks proved challenging but accessible for most candidates. They required the candidates to select, manipulate and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks. It is worrying that a number of candidates did not approach the tasks in this way, relying instead on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences, with predictably dire consequences.

In the Directed Writing task, the vast majority of candidates managed to address all six bullet points, but only the most able were able to really develop bullet points 2 (how you found out about the job) and 4 (what you thought of sharing accommodation). In general, therefore, relatively few candidates were penalised for avoiding a bullet point, although some candidates were penalised for failing to address both parts of bullet point 1 fully. Some recurring errors included the confusion between *rester* and *loger* and between *voyage* and *journée*.

The topic of the personal response essay (Paper 2) was one all candidates should have been familiar with, and there were few instances of candidates struggling for ideas to express. The candidates seemed well prepared to deal with both parts of the stimulus (*Expériences au lycée / des problèmes des jeunes*). Indeed the second part of the stimulus

was sufficiently open to allow candidates to introduce most topics of their choice eg parents, school exams, work, future career and health issues.

Although the essay was on a topic accessible to all candidates, many did less well than might have been expected because of poor grammatical knowledge of genders and verb tenses, and through poor spelling and the lack of accents — which could have been checked through appropriate use of the dictionary.

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.
- ◆ 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, which often results in incomprehensible use of English.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to look closely at each word in each section of the translation passage, and to pay particular attention to the articles and tenses used.

Directed Writing

- ◆ Encourage candidates to write to the context that is set, and to be prepared in some part of their writing **to explain the reason** for the visit to or from France.
- ◆ Advise candidates to consider the wording of each bullet point carefully, and to ensure that they incorporate learned material that is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.
- ◆ 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 expanded assessment criteria for Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of content, accuracy, range and variety.

Listening/Writing

- ◆ In the Listening Comprehension task, encourage candidates to make use of the questions as a means of anticipating the sort of information they will need to extract from the text.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to give as much detail as possible in their answers and not to lose marks by inaccurate rendering of numbers, prepositions and question words.
- ◆ In the Writing task, ensure candidates read the stimulus and incorporate and adapt learned material that **is relevant to the aspects contained in the stimulus**.

General

- ◆ Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible so that points are not lost.

- ◆ Although the internal Writing Task (Personal Record of Achievement) is no longer mandatory as part of the 80-hour unit assessment, centres might consider continuing to use the task **as part of their teaching syllabus**. The task of writing a Personal Record of Achievement was designed to help candidates develop grammatical accuracy in handling present, past and future tenses, and to focus on the accuracy that is required in terms of spelling, genders, accents and agreements, when you move from the spoken to the written mode. The task was intended to help candidates develop their writing skills in a supported manner so that they would be better prepared for the external Writing tasks, and it still has a valuable role to play in this.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	4,595
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	4,352
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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	43.3%	43.3%	1,885	68
B	22.7%	66.0%	987	58
C	18.1%	84.1%	789	48
D	6.3%	90.4%	272	43
No award	9.6%	100.0%	419	-

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.