



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	French
Level(s)	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 vary from year to year. At this level, the guidance given to setters concerning the length and type of text for each component is very prescriptive. 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. There was this year a drop (of 314) in the number of candidates, which now stands at 1791.

The mean marks for each element were:

Reading = 20.7 (35) – up 1.9
Listening = 9.8 (20) – up 0.6
Writing = 7.8 (15) – up 0.2
Speaking = 24.3 (30) – up 0.3

The mean marks indicate an improvement in all four language skills in comparison with the previous year, and there was a particularly encouraging improvement in reading. The mean marks and the distribution of grades do suggest that the majority of this year's cohort were presented at the correct level and had been well prepared for the examination. However, there were also a significant number of candidates who failed to complete the writing task and to answer several of the questions in listening and reading. These candidates might have been more suitably presented for Access 3, or have concentrated solely on the unit awards at Intermediate 1 level. Nevertheless, there were also some excellent performances (particularly in Reading and Writing) and relatively few very poor performances (mainly in Listening and Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

There was an encouraging increase in the mean mark for Reading, where the performance of candidates in the two shorter Reading Passages (**Representing your school at a day which celebrates life in French-speaking countries**) was generally good, and a greater number of candidates proceeded to cope well with the longer third text, which continued the same topic, and with the longer fourth text (**trip around world with parents**). The four texts provided good progression in terms of the level of difficulty and demand, and the majority of candidates related well to the content of these reading texts.

Although overall the performance in Listening was variable, the majority of candidates had been well prepared to cope with predictable items including numbers, times, seasons and high-frequency vocabulary (eg **buildings and rooms / food and drink / leisure activities**). 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 relatively 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.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In the Reading Paper there was a significant number of candidates who were unable to attempt or complete the two longer texts. It was disappointing that many candidates failed to gain the easier points of information through basic lack of knowledge of numbers (**depuis neuf ans / la vingtaine / deux mois / cent cinquante**), days (**samedi**) and months (**mars / janvier**). However, in general, candidates continue to lose points mainly through failing to provide sufficiently detailed answers as in text 3 (parle **de sa vie et des paysages**) and in text 4 (une piscine **en plein air**). Only the more able candidates demonstrated the accuracy of comprehension required to answer questions 3f) and 4j), with the following details proving too difficult for many candidates: Ecrivez de **brèves phrases simples / nous étions bloqués dans la neige**. Some vocabulary proved difficult for candidates (**une affiche / fabriquez / ont vendu / en faisant des courses / est tombée en panne**), and many candidates had problems with false friends (**la journée, travailler/travail, magasin/magazine, gare/garage**).

As indicated by the mean marks, the most difficult component for many candidates remains Listening. This was the third year that candidates were allowed to hear each text three times, but this has not as yet led to a significant improvement in the mean mark. Many 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 (**midi**) but not the precise details (**et quart**). Perhaps centres should encourage candidates to use the third playing of the text as the opportunity to check the specific details of their answers. More surprising was the inability of candidates to perform well in the supported questions 1 and 3 and to recognise common vocabulary (**des céréales / au troisième étage / bibliothèque / près de la mer**) including numbers (**salle 35 / une demi-heure**) and colours (**jaune / rouge**).

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 three 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 eg **'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, and should continue to give candidates sufficient practice in working with longer texts in preparation for texts 3 and 4. Many candidates would benefit from more focused practice of dictionary skills.

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.

Now that candidates hear each of the Listening texts three times (making it the same as for the internal unit assessment) they should be encouraged to make use of the third listening to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers.

Writing

Centres need to give further guidance to candidates on what constitutes an adequate amount of information (three 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 and in the spelling and genders of high frequency vocabulary, eg family, school subjects and leisure activities. 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 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 (particularly when writing in French) and to distinguish clearly between rough notes and what they wish to be considered as final answers.

The continuing number of poor performances in Writing suggests that some centres may still be having difficulty in presenting candidates at the correct level for their ability. Centres are encouraged to make effective use of the guidance issued by SQA in the form of the materials used at the Professional Development Workshop on Intermediate 1 and 2 (December 2005) and the Professional Development Workshop on Writing at NQF 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 extended pegged mark descriptors, and this will also prove useful to centres in improving the performance of their candidates in Writing.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2012	2156
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	1872
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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	34.4%	34.4%	644	70
B	25.2%	59.6%	472	60
C	20.3%	79.9%	380	50
D	6.8%	86.8%	128	45
No award	13.2%	100.0%	248	-

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.