



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	French
Level(s)	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 appropriately 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. There was a slight drop in the number of presentations (136), which now stands at 4352. The mean marks for each component were:

Reading = 21.9 (30) – up 1.0

Listening = 14.3 (20) – up 1.3

Writing = 14.3 (20) – down 0.2

Speaking = 24.4 (30) – up 0.4

The mean marks indicate a good level of performance in all four language skills, with the average performance in each skill well in excess of half of the available marks. There was an encouraging improvement in Listening. 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

With the exception of a few candidates in the Writing and Listening, there were few really poor performances, which indicates that candidates are being presented at the correct level and 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.

As in previous years, most candidates coped well with the three short Reading texts (**Working holidays in France / Annual music festival**), but there was also a marked improvement in performance in the longer fourth passage, where candidates clearly related well to the topic of '**Balance between study and work**'

As was indicated by the mean marks, the most difficult component for many candidates remains Listening. However, this was the third year that candidates were allowed to hear each text three times, and it was encouraging that there was a significant improvement in the mean mark, which suggests that centres are training candidates to make use of the third playing to check and confirm the specific details of their answers.

The Writing task, because of its predictable nature, again produced a large number of excellent performances, which demonstrated the range, variety and grammatical accuracy required for the top mark of 20. It was encouraging to note that, instead of giving long lists of school subjects that they are studying/have studied, many candidates gave the reasons for or benefits of their subject choice and how this equipped them for the job advertised.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading

Most candidates coped well with the Reading texts, although more lost marks in the three shorter passages than in previous years.

- ◆ In text 1 many candidates failed to give sufficient detail in expressing **des étudiants étrangers / vivre** dans un nouveau pays.
- ◆ In text 2 many candidates had difficulty with **nettoyer le champ / les feux d'artifice** and **des villageois**.
- ◆ In text 3 the main problem centred around **pour tous les goûts / une soirée amusante**, and a surprising number of candidates failed to translate correctly **le vingt et un juin**.
- ◆ In the final longer text, many candidates lost points through not providing sufficiently detailed answers particularly in Q4h): un **premier** emploi / l'université **de son choix**. Only the more able candidates were able to give a sufficiently accurate response to Q 4g) by demonstrating comprehension of '**On devrait profiter de sa jeunesse avant de passer sa vie à travailler / comme il y a tant de chômeurs, il est injuste de donner un emploi à un étudiant.**'

Listening

Listening remains the most difficult component for many candidates. This was the third year that candidates were allowed to hear each text three times and it was encouraging that there was an improvement in the mean mark. However, 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 (**au 30 juillet/j'avais 9 ans**), time phrases (**tous les mercredis matins/ à 18 heures**) and familiar vocabulary, including '**l'équipe nationale / promener mon chien / je me suis cassé le bras / la lumière / cuisiner**'.

Passage 3 proved the most difficult, with many candidates understanding part of the answer but unable to give sufficient details (eg assis **devant l'ordinateur / ils ne mangent pas à des heures régulières**) and some mistaking the 'false friend' **la journée** in the phrases '**ils grignotent toute la journée / une journée active**'.

Writing

The Writing task, in spite of its predictable nature, was again the element that produced the greatest range of performances, from very good to poor. Less able 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 less able 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. Poor handwriting, poor layout, poor spelling and the lack of the appropriate use of accents also 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 and 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 eg '**Mention 2 things**'.

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.

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), candidates should be encouraged to make use of the third listening to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers.

Writing

Centres should ensure that candidates carefully read 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:

- ◆ successfully complete the opening sentence with which they are provided so that they are able to indicate the nature of the job they are applying for
- ◆ **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 (particularly when writing in French) 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 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 2 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 2**

Number of resulted entries in 2012	4532
---	------

Number of resulted entries in 2013	4489
---	------

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	62.2%	62.2%	2790	71
B	20.6%	82.7%	924	60
C	11.2%	94.0%	504	50
D	2.7%	96.6%	120	45
No award	3.4%	100.0%	151	-

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.