



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	French
Level(s)	Standard Grade

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

In this, the final year of Standard Grade, there was again a decrease in candidate presentation (around 3.8%). The overall standard of performance of candidates in this year's examination was highly satisfactory. There was a noticeable improvement in performance at Grades 1–3 overall, and particularly at the Credit level. There was a significant increase in the percentage of awards gained at Grade 1 (19%, compared to 16.5% in 2012).

The papers were generally well received, and feedback from markers and centres has been positive.

In **Reading**, performance at all levels was better than the previous year.

The distribution of **Speaking** grades showed a slight improvement at Grades 1–3.

Listening performance was slightly better at Grade 1 than in 2012 (but not as good as the previous two years), and performance at Grades 2 and 3 was not as good as the previous three years.

Performance in **Writing** was very pleasing indeed, with a best-ever performance at Grades 1 and 2, including 4.3% more awards at Grade 1 than in 2012.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking performance continues to show a gradual improvement at all levels as candidates gain confidence in active language communication. External verification provided positive feedback on good preparation and good classroom practice.

In **Writing**, candidates were very well prepared, and many produced work of outstanding quality. This year saw a greater percentage of Credit awards than ever before. There was also ample evidence of idiomatic, complex language at Credit level. There are still a number of centres, however, where it is clear that pieces of work have been over-prepared and where candidates are not engaging with the Writing development process. However, this should not detract from the successes of candidates this year.

In **Reading**, at Foundation level, candidates coped well with virtually all questions. At General level, Questions 1, 3, 4c), 5b), 7 and 10 met with the greatest degree of success by both F/G and G/C cohorts. In the Credit paper, Questions 1a), 1c), 1d), 4a), 4c), and 4d) stood out as being particularly well answered

In **Listening**, at Foundation level, almost all questions were answered well. At General level, candidates scored particularly well in Questions 1, 2b), 4b) and 12b). At Credit level, performance was (as in the past two years) more mixed, with few questions standing out as being particularly well answered by the majority.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In **Writing**, some clearly able candidates are still being disadvantaged by mundane topics that do not allow them to exhibit their repertoire of language to the full.

In **Reading**, at Foundation level, there were no problems of any note.

At General level, a number of marks were again lost by poor use of English and/or insufficient detail in answers. Also, a number of candidates 'guessed' answers based on looking at a few individual words rather than analysing the required text. Words/expressions that candidates found demanding: 'mauvaises notes' (Q3), 'véritables oeuvres d'art' (Q5), 'toutes les trois heures' (Q6), 'sans me demander' (Q8), 'Demande à tes parents de lui parler' (Q9). Lack of detail, particularly in Question 10, lost pupils a number of marks.

At Credit level, although performance was overall very good, lack of detail in answers was again the most likely reason for candidates losing marks. Comparatives and superlatives were also tricky for some. The contexts were all very accessible to young people and the texts were interesting, but dictionary skills also let some candidates down. Language difficulties experienced included: 'des émotions vécues par les autres' (Q1), 'selon les exigences de l'entreprise' and 'bien t'entendre' (Q2), 'plus de trois cents fois', 'avant de le jeter' and 'garde son charme' (Q3), 'améliorer mes notes' (Q4), 'on dort à plusieurs' and 'tout partager' (Q5). But again, lack of attention to detail, poor English expression, insufficient dictionary skills and not being aware of *faux amis* cost a number of candidates valuable marks.

In **Listening**, there were very few issues at Foundation level. Individual words/expressions found to be more demanding were 'maillot de bain' (Q3), 'portable' (Q4), 'vêtements' (Q 11), 'bavarde' (Q 12) and 'bon anniversaire' (Q 14).

At General level, a number of expressions caused varying degrees of difficulty: 'au bord du lac' (Q2), 'ma meilleure copine' (Q3), 'bruyant' (Q6), 'à dix minutes à pied' (Q7), 'affreux' and 'mauvaises notes' (Q8), 'les moins de 18 ans' and 'boissons' (Q9), 'planche à voile' (Q11), 'une excursion en car' (Q12).

Performance at Credit level was very mixed. The contexts were varied and included many familiar topics and sub-topics. The paper was challenging, but no more so than in previous years. Not giving sufficient detail in answers is still the major reason for candidates not gaining marks. Many answers **contained insufficient detail** to gain marks. Question 6 was found to be the most challenging question (eating habits of Scottish people). Expressions which caused specific difficulties: 'faire la connaissance de' (Q1), 'une compagnie d'énergie' (Q2), 'l'histoire de votre pays' (Q3), 'quand ils quitteront l'école pour trouver du travail' (Q4), 'moins de choix' (Q5), 'trop de matières grasses' and 'grignoter entre les repas' (Q6), 'en plein air' (Q7), 'une de mes copines' (Q10), 'lentement' (Q11), 'choisir du parfum' (Q13).

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The advice to centres is the same as recent years:

- ◆ At Credit level in particular (but also at other levels), candidates must ensure that answers include detail — in both Reading and Listening. Longer chunks of language need to be analysed carefully, rather than focusing on individual words. Read/listen to the **whole** message.
- ◆ Choosing the correct meaning from a list of meanings in the dictionary is important.
- ◆ Beware pitfalls of 'faux amis'.

Statistical information: update on Courses

STANDARD GRADE

Number of resulted entries in 2012	22022
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	21144
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Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of overall awards

Grade 1	19.1%
Grade 2	24.0%
Grade 3	25.5%
Grade 4	20.1%
Grade 5	8.6%
Grade 6	1.5%
Grade 7	0.0%
No award	1.1%

Grade boundaries for each assessable element in the subject included in the report

Assessable Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Foundation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6
R	26	17	12	32	18	12	33	20	13
L	25	14	9	26	14	9	27	15	11

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.