NQ Verification 2016–17 Key Messages Round 2

01 Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	French
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	June 2017

National Courses/Units verified:

H276 74   National 4   Assignment (Added Value Unit)
H7Y2 77   Advanced Higher   Specialist Study
C730 75   National 5   Performance–talking (IACCA)
C730 76   Higher   Performance–talking (IACCA)

* Internally-assessed component of course assessment

02 Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

Added value unit

It was pleasing to note that the approaches to assessment used by centres that were selected for verification were all 'accepted'. This demonstrates that centres have followed guidelines and made use of the feedback and support provided by SQA in publication updates, the verification key messages and at events (for nominees and practitioners). This should be reassuring for practitioners and is to be commended.

Some centres used centre-devised assessments to assess their candidates reflecting the approach set out in the published added value unit assessment support pack.

Centres are reminded to refer to the most up to date version of the unit specification *Modern Languages Assignment (National 4) Added Value Unit* available from the SQA website.

Assessment standard 1.2 (selecting relevant information from the texts) has been removed. In the updated unit specification, the three assessment standards are:

♦ Understanding straightforward written texts in the modern language
♦ Giving an oral presentation, in the modern language, on the topic investigated
♦ Responding orally to oral questions in the modern language, relevant to the chosen topic

Centres should refer to the judging evidence table in the National 4 added value unit assessment support pack as assessment standard 1.3 requires candidates to respond to at least four questions.

Specialist study unit
It was encouraging to see that candidates worked through the process to meet assessment standards 1.1 and 1.2 in preparation for their portfolio.
There was clear indication of independent research by candidates for the specialist study unit.

The focus title of the specialist study (unit assessment) should allow candidates to produce an analytical piece in the portfolio (course assessment), rather than a comparative or descriptive piece.

National 5 and Higher performance–talking (IACCA)
All the centres verified in this round used the SQA's task for the internally assessed component of course assessment — National 5/Higher performance–talking.

In line with the National 5/Higher Modern Languages performance–talking assessment task, centres are reminded that the presentation and follow-up conversation must be carried out in a single assessment event, ie the presentation must be followed by the conversation during the single recording of the performance. There should also be no interruption in recordings.

Candidates must use detailed language at National 5 and detailed and complex language at Higher in most parts of the performance in order to be considered for the top range of pegged marks. At these levels, long lists of more than two or three items (eg places in town, school subjects) or repetition of straightforward descriptions (eg hair and eyes) are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary.

Specifics in relation to the presentation
In the presentation, a very small number of candidates seemed to struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen. Centres should provide advice to candidates as to what level of language they should be able to cope with and should ensure comprehension of their presentation in preparation for delivering it.

A few presentations were significantly long or short and affected the candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of National 5/Higher as provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance–talking: General assessment information.*

Specifics in relation to the conversation
Interlocutors should try to avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able candidates. Questions such as '*qu'est-ce que tu préfères, la physique ou la biologie?*' are likely to invite very short answers and prevent candidates from demonstrating their full ability. Alternatively, these questions could be immediately followed by '*Pourquoi*?' to elicit fuller answers.

For the most part, interlocutors were supportive, especially with nervous candidates. Where interlocutors were aware of candidates' interests, this helped more natural/spontaneous conversations.

Many conversations were unnecessarily prolonged or significantly short and affected the candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the latest information on the SQA's website regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of National 5/Higher as provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance–talking: General assessment information.*

The majority of centres asked questions in the conversation, which followed on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates as recommended in the National 5 Modern Languages performance–talking assessment task document.

Many assessors went on to refer to other contexts, which allowed for personalisation and choice. Naturally moving on to other contexts or topics also allows the candidates to demonstrate a variety of language. On occasions, where candidates were asked questions about the same topic/context as in their presentation, candidates were often limited to repeating parts of their presentation in their answers. Centres should therefore try to avoid asking questions about items that candidates have already addressed in the presentation.

At Higher, centres are reminded that the conversation must lead into at least one other context. This was not the case in all of the centres verified in this round.

Centres should ensure that questions are chosen so that the conversation flows naturally and gives further opportunity for personalisation and choice.
Some centres were overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation.

Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible for the level assessed. A number of conversations appeared to be excessively rehearsed. It is

recommended that centres ask a range of questions adapted to the responses of each candidate rather than asking the same questions to the whole cohort. A wider variety of questions in the conversation can aid candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected (in line with *Modern Languages Performance–talking: General assessment information* which is available from SQA's website).

Assessment judgements

Added value unit

Again, it is pleasing to report that all the assessment judgements made by assessors in centres have been 'accepted' as they were in line with national standards. Several judgements were however accompanied with some recommendations as detailed here:

♦ If assessing candidates using a centre-devised assessment, centres should include an adapted judging evidence table (in column 4) or equivalent which includes a range of possible answers referenced to each assessment standard.
♦ Centres should merge 'in-house' information on judging evidence with judging evidence tables to create one document to demonstrate how assessment judgements are made.

The majority of centres included a brief commentary for each candidate using candidate assessment records to demonstrate how each assessment standard was met. This is very good practice.

Most centres have clearly justified how they made their assessment judgements. This is to be commended. This is good practice as it is very useful and appropriate for internal and external verification purposes.

Detailed commentaries about each candidate's performance are very useful for internal and external verification purposes; however, it is acknowledged that this approach can be time-consuming. Therefore, a detailed checklist for each candidate's performance can be just as useful for the verifier, and more practical for the centre. This could also be used as effective feedback to candidates.

Specialist study unit

The centre in the sample verified in this round of verification was accepted as the judgements were in line with national standards.

National 5 and Higher performance–talking (IACCA)

It is pleasing to report that a large majority of centres have applied the marking instructions for the performance in talking accurately and in line with national standards.

It is important that assessors only use the most up-to-date marking instructions for the talking performance at National 5/Higher, in conjunction with the National 5/Higher Productive grammar grid to make their assessment judgements. Referring to previous talking performance assessment terminology (eg 'good, satisfactory, etc') is not necessarily beneficial since the marking instructions have changed. For example, some centres did not take into account the addition of 'pegged mark 1' in the sustaining the conversation section.

Overall candidate performance was high. Pronunciation was the main issue for many of the candidates who did not perform well. Nominee verifiers — sympathetic (native or non-native) speakers of French — must be able to understand candidates, no matter how good the content of their presentation/conversation is. It was felt that, on occasions, assessors had been lenient regarding pronunciation, possibly because they already had an inclination as to what candidates were going to say.

Other candidates did not perform well because of the choice of topic or the questions did not allow candidates to respond using language at the corresponding level.

In general, centres provided brief but clear commentaries to demonstrate how they made the assessment judgement, which was very useful for the nominee verifiers. This is also useful for internal verifiers and promotes constructive professional dialogue. Centres are therefore encouraged to provide brief information about how they made the assessment judgement for all candidates submitted in the sample. Evidence of 'dialogue' between the assessor and the internal verifier in the form of checklists, respective notes in two different colours of pen or fuller commentaries were very useful. It is however essential for the centre to provide a final mark.

Specifics in relation to the sustaining the conversation element
There was some inconsistency in approach and in marking. Some centres were too severe and others too lenient in awarding some of their marks.

Candidates do not necessarily have to ask a question in the conversation to gain marks for this element. Some centre incorrectly justified not awarding pegged mark 5 when candidates did not ask any questions.

In some cases, candidates paused — briefly — during the conversation to think about their answers; this is a natural part of a conversation. Assessors should give candidates appropriate time to think and respond. However, if candidates struggle to answer certain questions, assessors should try to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic.

Some conversations sounded more natural as candidates answered with a mixture of longer and shorter answers and it was clear it was not scripted. Using scripted conversations may not allow candidates to meet the criteria for the top pegged marks in the performance, but, above all, it does not prepare candidates for the demands at Higher/Advanced Higher or of real-life situations. Instead, candidates could prepare for their conversation thinking about the type of

questions the assessor is likely to ask on their chosen topic and thinking about what key words the interlocutor is likely to use in his/her questions.

Examples of how candidates could demonstrate their ability to sustain the conversation include the following:

♦ a mixture of extended and shorter answers (ie not a suite of short presentations/monologues)
♦ appropriate thinking time
♦ natural interjections ('*euh/ bah/ ben/ alors*')
♦ acknowledgement that they have understood the question ('*oui, je suis d'accord/non, pas du tout*'). Some centres included a brief commentary to describe how the candidate showed how they had understood through non-verbal means the question/response from the interlocutor
♦ asking questions that are relevant to the conversation and at relevant times
♦ sustaining the conversation, asking for repetition or clarification (eg '*pardon?*')

This is not an exhaustive list and one example from the above list on its own is unlikely to be sufficient to be awarded full marks.

03 ► Section 3: General comments

Added value unit

Overall candidate performance was appropriate for this level and in some cases candidates went beyond what is expected at National 4.

For the assessment of talking in the added value unit assessment standards 1.2 and 1.3, there is no requirement to submit an audio recording of candidate work. However, audio-recordings allow verifiers to provide more detailed and useful feedback to centres.

If no audio recording is submitted, centres must submit a detailed checklist or commentary with some examples of what each candidate says referenced against each assessment standard for the outcome. In this round, centres that did not include audio recordings for the added value unit included detailed commentaries to demonstrate how candidates met the assessment standards, which was good practice.

It is recommended that centres use a range of open-ended questions to allow candidates to meet assessment standard 1.3. This will allow candidates to demonstrate that they can handle straightforward language and use a reasonable range of vocabulary appropriate to National 4. Candidates should also be encouraged to answer unexpected questions. Performances should not be scripted in advance and should allow for personalisation and choice, although candidates should be made aware of the type of questions they could be asked on the selected topic.

Some centres prepared and supported candidates by asking the same questions, but they should also include some unexpected questions to facilitate a more natural conversation.

Centres should avoid asking questions in the follow-up conversation where the information has already been addressed in the presentation.

Specialist study unit

All candidates are encouraged to make clear links between the analysis and the focus of their specialist study as specified in assessment standard 1.2.

National 5 and Higher performance–talking (IACCA)

Centres submitted candidates' performances on CDs and memory sticks. It is recommended that centres check the sound quality of the CDs, and MP3/4 files that are submitted for verification.

In the case of CDs, it is essential that they can be played on a range of devices and not solely on the device used for making the recordings. These should also be clearly labelled.

We recommend that USB keys are put into a separate envelope within the large brown envelope and that this is sealed and clearly labelled. Clearly labelled candidate evidence is necessary for the verification team to proceed with the verification process.

Centres must include a breakdown of the marks (presentation + conversation + sustaining the conversation) for each candidate and the total mark must be entered on the Verification Sample Form.