

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Modern Languages

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

French Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	4,614
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	4,515
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

At the pass mark stage there was a drop of 159 in the number of presentations. This drop at Higher level may be in part explained by the increased number of S5 presentations at Intermediate 2 level and this would seem to indicate that centres are now better able to advise candidates on the most appropriate level of study to ensure successful progression from S4. The composition of the cohort at this level has remained fairly constant and consists predominantly of S5 candidates (76.9%).

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	44.8	44.8	2,022	70
B	19.5	64.3	880	60
C	17.3	81.6	780	50
D	6.7	88.2	302	45
No award	11.8	100.0	531	-

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

There was a very encouraging increase in the number of A passes (5.6%) which means that 43.5% of candidates at this level achieved an A pass. The pass rate dropped slightly by 0.2% which means that 18.1% of candidates received No Award. This would suggest an able cohort of candidates at the top end of the ability range, who are being better prepared for the examination and centres are to be congratulated on this. No significant problems were identified in any element of the examination and the level of demand of the examination was comparable to previous years. Therefore the cut-off scores were restored to the a-priori levels of 85 (Upper A), 70 (A), 60 (B) and 50 (C), whereas in the previous year they had been reduced by two marks to take account of problems experienced by candidates in the Listening element.

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 Higher level and was of an appropriate level of difficulty. Each element of the examination was accessible to all candidates but proved demanding and produced a good range of performances. Candidates on the whole were well prepared for each element with very few really poor performances. The Mean Marks for each element were as follows:

Reading/Directed Writing = 29.6 (45) – up 3.2

Listening/Writing = 16.1 (30) – up 1.0

Speaking = 20.1 (25) - up 0.4

The mean marks show an encouraging improvement in all elements of the examination with a particularly strong improvement in Paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

This would again suggest that this year's cohort was more able and/or better prepared for the examination. The mean mark for Paper 2: Listening/Writing indicates that Listening is the skill most candidates find most difficult and, in spite of a slight improvement, it is only just above half of the available marks. However, the performance overall was very encouraging with some excellent performances (particularly in Reading) and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in Listening and Translation).

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Performance in Reading was again very encouraging with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage **Mendiants d'Internet** accessible and on a topic with 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 the loss of marks through awkward use of English. There were also some excellent performances in both of the writing tasks, 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 of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Many candidates found the Listening passage difficult, although it was on a topic (Home area, sport and health) with which all candidates were familiar and the quality and speed of recording were good.

Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer accurately the questions, particularly those worth 3 marks, and often ended with 'near misses' e.g. Q4b: she wanted to win at squash (but missed out brother); Q7: Annick and fiancé had nice meal (but missed out that he cooked it). In Q3b: She mentions several important features of this diet. Give any three of them. Many candidates listed all they knew about healthy diets and ended up invalidating any correct information by including a lot of extraneous information that was not in the recording.

Many candidates were unable to recognise the pronunciation of items of vocabulary (many similar to English) that they would clearly have identified when reading (**l'entraînement physique / la concentration mentale**).

While more surprisingly, many candidates failed to gain the points for recognising the number in **seize ans** and for the items of vocabulary: **infirmière ou professeur** and **louer** une video.

The passage for translation was demanding and many candidates were able to achieve the 'satisfactory' mark for each sense unit but were unable to give the level of accuracy required in terms of tenses, articles and use of English, to achieve the 'good' mark.

The Writing tasks were again the element of the exam which produced the greatest range of performances from very good to very poor. Many candidates struggled to incorporate learned material with the required level of accuracy and relevance to achieve a satisfactory performance, while a relatively small number of candidates produced poor and very poor performances with little or no control of basic grammar and verb formation. Both of the Writing tasks proved challenging but accessible for most candidates, although many candidates were unable to select, manipulate and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks. This was particularly noticeable in the Directed Writing task, where many candidates reproduced accurately relevant learned material for the predictable bullet points but struggled to find any relevant learned material for the less predictable bullet points and often resorted to misuse of dictionary and 'unidiomatic translation from English'. The final bullet point required candidates to indicate how the exchange will benefit them **and their school** and many were unable to adapt their learned material to include the benefit to the school/college. Consequently they were deemed not to have addressed fully the bullet point and were penalised accordingly. Otherwise in the Directed Writing relatively few candidates were penalised for failing to address fully a bullet point. The topic of the personal response essay (Paper 2) was one with which all candidates should have been familiar and there were fewer instances of candidates struggling for ideas and therefore misusing the dictionary to produce what they considered to be the French equivalent of suitable English expressions. It was also encouraging to find fewer instances of candidates reproducing learned essays, which were irrelevant to the questions, and most candidates were able to address in some detail at least two of the three stimulus questions.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Reading and Translation:

- Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing an accurate and precise translation of a particular section of the text
- Encourage candidates to answer the specific wording of the question and discourage candidates from giving a word for word translation of the text as a response to the reading comprehension questions, as this 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 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 carefully the wording of each bullet point and to ensure that they incorporate learned material that is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.

Listening/Writing:

- In the Listening 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, which **is relevant to the stimulus**.

General:

- Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible or points can be lost.
- Although the internal Writing Task (Personal record of Achievement) is no longer mandatory as part of the 80 hour unit assessment, centres should 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 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 as such it still has a valuable role to play in this.