

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Modern Languages

Qualification area

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

French Intermediate 1

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	989
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	1,136
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

At the pass mark stage there was an increase of 188 candidates. Although this represents a significant increase, it is not so dramatic as the increase in the previous two years and suggests that the number of entries at this level is beginning to stabilise. However, this increase does continue to reflect the decision by some centres to enter candidates in S3/4 for this examination in preference for the Standard Grade General examination. S3/4 candidates now account for 93.4% of all presentations at this level and within this cohort the percentage of S3 presentations has risen from 0.4% in 2004 to 11.6% in 2005.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	28.4	28.4	323	70
B	20.2	48.6	229	60
C	21.9	70.5	249	50
D	7.2	77.7	82	45
No award	22.3	100.0	253	-

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

It appears that the cohort at this level is now beginning to stabilise and improve in performance. The distribution of awards indicates a significant improvement in the performance of this year's cohort with an increase of 6.5% in candidates achieving an A pass and an increase of 5.7% in the pass rate. This would suggest that candidates are being better prepared for the examination and centres are to be congratulated on this. The increased number of presentations from S3 may also have contributed to this increase in performance. As the level of demand of the examination was comparable to previous years and there was evidence of a more stable and more able cohort, the grade boundaries were set at the a priori settings of 85 (Upper A), 70 (A), 60 (B) and 50 (C).

Although the number of no awards continues to drop, it is still disappointingly high at 26.3% and indicates that there are still many candidates being presented for whom this examination is not appropriate. This can

probably be attributed to the fact that among the number of candidates from S4 (now 81.8% of the cohort) there are some candidates who would in previous years have been entered for S Grade Foundation level. It is again important to draw to the attention of centres, which are moving from S Grade to the National Qualifications Framework, that Intermediate 1 represents **progression from** Foundation level and is benchmarked against General level. If centres wish to use the levels within the NQ Framework as an alternative to S Grade, they must be aware that there are more appropriate targets for ‘foundation level pupils’, namely Access 3 or the internally assessed unit awards at Intermediate1 level. Centres should be discouraged from presenting candidates for the external exam if it is clearly beyond the ability of the candidate.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The examination was 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.

The Mean Marks for each element were as follows:

Reading = 20.1 (35) – up 1.9

Listening = 8.8 (20) – up 1.1

Writing = 7.1 (15) – up 0.8

Speaking = 22.8 (30) – up 0.5

The mean marks show an encouraging improvement in all four language skills with a particularly strong improvement in Reading. This would again suggest that this year's cohort was more able and/or better prepared for the examination. This can be illustrated by the increase in performance in Writing, where the task does not vary from year to year and therefore acts as a benchmark indicator of the overall level of ability of the cohort from one year to the next. The mean marks for Listening and Writing are still disappointingly low being well below half of the available marks.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The performance of candidates in the Reading Paper was very encouraging. The four texts provided good progression in terms of the level of difficulty and demand and the vast majority of candidates related well to the content of the reading texts. Most candidates scored well in the shorter texts but it was in the longer and more demanding, final text that improvement was most noticeable and relatively few candidates compared to previous years were unable to attempt with some success the final questions. 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 was 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 to show what can be produced by good candidates within the confines of the task.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

As was indicated by the mean marks, the performance in Listening and in Writing is still disappointing. Most candidates found the Listening element difficult owing in part to the inability to give sufficient details in their answers, often managing to recognise the noun but not the action that went with it (**discuter** du sport / **travailler** dans mon petit jardin). More worrying was the inability of many candidates to perform well in the supported questions (1 and 6a/b) and to recognise common vocabulary including numbers, dates and times (la chambre **27** / **Mardi le quinze mai** / **onze heures et quart**). Many candidates failed to recognise **au rez-de-chaussée** / **l'ascenseur** / **des machines à laver** / **le sud-est** and **j'étais étudiante**. The majority of candidates again had considerable difficulty with the Writing element, which produced the greatest range of performances from very good to very poor. However, there were fewer 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 element, many centres need to be given still further guidance on what constitutes 3 sentences and how candidates can go beyond a minimal response.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Writing:

Centres need to be given further guidance on what constitutes an adequate amount of information (3 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. The new 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 the candidates. The forthcoming exemplification of candidates' performances will also provide centres with examples of good and very good performances in this writing task in order to show how it is possible to prepare candidates to produce more than a 'minimalist' response under each of the sections.

Reading and 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 often indicates the amount of information the candidate is required to give by stating in bold '**Mention 2 of them**'. Particularly in the listening, 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. In preparation for the Reading Paper, centres should continue to give candidates sufficient practice of longer texts in preparation for the more demanding fourth text.

General:

Centres should encourage candidates to ensure that handwriting is legible and to distinguish clearly between rough notes and what they wish to be considered as their final answers.

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There is clear evidence this year that candidates are better prepared for the examination. However it is important to remind centres of the differences between Intermediate levels and Standard Grade particularly in the assessment of Listening, where candidates at Intermediate level hear the text only twice as opposed to three times at Standard Grade.