

## Principal Assessor Report 2005

**Assessment Panel:**

**Modern Languages**

**Qualification area**

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

**French Intermediate 2**

## Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	2,144
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	2,245
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### General comments re resulted entry numbers

At the pass mark stage there was a very slight increase of 13 candidates, which would seem to suggest that the number of entries at this level is now stabilising after the dramatic increases of the previous two years. The high number of presentations at this level continues to reflect the decision by some centres to enter candidates in S4 for this examination in preference to the Standard Grade Credit examination. Candidates from S4 now account for 49.9% of the total number of presentations at this level and the profile of the cohort which seems to be emerging at Intermediate 2 level now consists of two roughly equal groups:

- S5/6 candidates from the school sector continuing the study of French and adult candidates from the college sector
- S4 candidates from the school sector being presented for Int. 2 as an alternative to S Grade Credit.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	54.8	54.8	1,230	70
B	23.8	78.6	534	60
C	13.6	92.2	305	50
D	2.9	95.1	65	45
No award	4.9	100.0	111	-

### 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 is a very encouraging increase both in the number of A passes (9.1%) and in the pass rate (8.2%), which means that 54.8% of candidates at this level achieved an A pass while less than 6% received No Award. This would suggest an able cohort of candidates, particularly from S4, 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, the level of demand of which has remained relatively constant, and the improvement in the performance of candidates was attributable to a more able and better-prepared cohort. Therefore the cut-off scores were set at the a-priori levels of 85 (Upper A), 70 (A), 60 (B) and 50 (C).

## 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 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 = 24.3 (30) – up 2.0

Listening = 10.2 (20) – up 0.5

Writing = 12.5 (20) – up 1.1

Speaking = 21.7 (30) – up 0.5

The mean marks show an encouraging improvement in all four language skills with a particularly strong improvement in Reading and to a lesser extent in Writing. This would again suggest that this year's cohort was more able and/or better prepared for the examination. The mean mark for Listening indicates that this 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 Writing) and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in Listening and Writing).

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The majority of candidates seemed well prepared for the examination and had been presented at the level in the National Qualifications Framework appropriate to their level of ability. In the Reading Paper there was good progression in the level of demand through the shorter to the longer texts with most candidates scoring highly in the shorter texts and managing to sustain this level of performance throughout the longer and more demanding texts. There was less incidence of the need to apply the extraneous rule in the marking of the reading answers, which suggests that candidates have been trained well to heed the required amount of information indicated in the questions. There was a noticeable improvement in the overall performance in the Writing task and there were many excellent performances where candidates had been prepared well by their centre and were able to write at considerable length and with a high level of accuracy. Such candidates are well placed to do well at Higher level should they decide to proceed with their study of French.

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

With the exception of a few candidates in the Writing and Listening, there were very few really poor performances, which indicates 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.

Most candidates did least well in the Listening element where they 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 (**trois ans / mille euros / deux heures et demie / à sept heures ce matin**) and weather expressions (**il fait souvent trop chaud / le brouillard**). There was also a surprisingly large number of candidates who failed to recognise fairly common vocabulary, including **des bureaux / le logement / de nouvelles banlieues / beaucoup de circulation / vêtements chauds/ un bras cassé**.

The Writing task, in spite of its predictable nature, was again the element which produced the greatest range of performances from very good to very poor. Weaker 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 weaker 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.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

#### 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 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 e.g. ‘**Mention 2 of them**’.

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.

In preparing candidates for the Listening, centres need to ensure that candidates have had sufficient practice at recording information from texts after only **two hearings**. It is important to stress to centres and to candidates that they will hear the text only **two times** as opposed to three times for the internal unit assessment and at Standard Grade.

#### Writing:

Centres should ensure that candidates read carefully the information regarding the job for which they are applying and are:

- trained to complete successfully the opening sentence with which they are provided so that they are able to indicate the nature of the job for which they are applying.
- prepared to ask specific questions regarding the job rather than provide a general statement such as “Envoyez-moi des renseignements .....

#### 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 final answers.

Further exemplification of the standards to be expected at Intermediate 2 level would be beneficial to centres in order to make clear the level of demand of this examination (particularly in Listening) if centres are considering moving from Standard Grade. The marking schemes for Reading and Listening would ensure centres are aware of how the extraneous information rule is applied and would also show the level of detail and accuracy required when answering comprehension questions.

Further examples of performances in the Writing task (particularly of what Good and Very Good candidates can achieve within the limits of the task), accompanied by comments from the marking team, would be useful guidance for centres both in assessing their own candidates and in preparing them for this element of the examination. This might be accompanied by a reworking of the pegged mark descriptors to allow a clearer focus on the importance of good presentation, spelling, accuracy and how the various bullet points are developed.

The forthcoming Professional Development Workshop planned for December 2005 will hopefully address these issues.