



Course report 2019

Subject	French
Level	Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading question paper was a text which sampled the context of employability. The topic was on holiday jobs. This proved to be a topic to which candidates related very well.

The question paper was accessible to all candidates and the level was appropriate to Higher. The balance of accessible and more challenging questions, particularly the overall purpose question and the translation, helped differentiate candidate performance in line with expectations.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The directed writing question paper performed in line with expectations. The majority of candidates chose scenario 1, which sampled the context of society. Fewer candidates chose scenario 2 on culture. Both scenarios were of a similar level of difficulty, and the vast majority of candidates were able to attempt all six bullet points. As expected, the paper generated a range of performances.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper sampled the context of learning. The monologue was about studying at a sports academy, and the conversation was an interview with a professional swimmer.

Candidates related well to the topics. Feedback from markers indicated that the paper was accessible to candidates, and of an appropriate level.

The balance of straightforward and more difficult questions in the listening question paper resulted in a good range of marks and differentiated candidate performance, as intended.

Assignment–writing

The new assignment–writing, which is internally generated and externally marked, performed in line with expectations. The majority of candidates performed very well in this element of course assessment, with most candidates gaining 16 out of the 20 marks available.

There were some excellent pieces of writing which exceeded expectations at this level.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

In the performance–talking, candidates are required to interact in a discussion with the interlocutor.

Revised performance–talking marking instructions were published for session 2018–19 onwards. The performance–talking no longer includes a presentation. Candidates must now cover at least two different contexts in the discussion. The recommended duration of the discussion is now between 8–10 minutes

Many recordings verified in this round fell significantly short of these recommended timings and this affected the verification decision for the candidates. A few were unnecessarily prolonged and affected the candidates' performances.

Candidates are required to use detailed and complex language at Higher. There are four aspects to the performance (content, accuracy, language resource, and interaction). The majority of centres sampled this session had encouraged candidates to identify topics (from at least two of the four contexts) which gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their ability against the four aspects. However, the choice of topics for a minority of candidates did not allow them to demonstrate their ability to use detailed and complex language at this level. Teachers, lecturers play an important role prior to the assessment in guiding candidates in the choice of contexts and topics.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

Overall, candidates performed well in the reading question paper, with most candidates gaining more than half of the available marks. Overall, performance was marginally better than the previous year.

Most candidates had a clear understanding of the text and related well to the contemporary, relevant topic of holiday jobs. There were very few 'no responses' to the comprehension questions.

Questions which required less detailed answers or had optionality were tackled well by the majority of candidates.

Questions 1(a), 1(c), 2(a), 2(c)(i), 3(b) and 4(a) were particularly well answered. In the translation, sense unit 5 was done well by most candidates.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

In the directed writing question paper, both scenarios were seen as fair and accessible to candidates, and related to course content. The vast majority of candidates opted for scenario 1 rather than scenario 2. However, performance in both scenarios was similar.

Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points. There were few very poor performances and the majority of candidates scored 12 out of 20.

Most candidates were able to tackle all the bullet points and few omitted bullet points. Some candidates wrote accurately, demonstrating that they could use a wide variety of structures and range of tenses appropriate to Higher.

Question paper 2: Listening

Candidates related well to the topic areas of studying at a sports academy, and the interview with a professional swimmer. Overall, performance in this paper was slightly better than in the previous year.

Candidates performed better in the conversation than the monologue. There were very few instances of candidates failing to answer questions, and most candidates were able to gain at least half of the available marks.

Questions which required little detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well done.

The majority of candidates coped well with questions 1(a), 1(d) and 1(e) in the monologue and questions 2(a), 2(b)(i), 2(b)(ii) and 2(c)(i) in the conversation.

Assignment–writing

Candidates performed very well, with a number of candidates gaining full marks. Candidates were able to write very well on a range of topics and many candidates scored 16 out of the 20 available marks.

Most candidates were able to use detailed and complex language appropriate to Higher, and there were some excellent pieces of writing which exceeded requirements.

Performance–talking

In the sample submitted, most candidates were awarded pegged mark 18. Some candidates were awarded pegged marks 21 or 24, and a few did very well and were awarded pegged marks 27 or 30.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, some candidates failed to achieve full marks in a number of questions as they did not write enough detail in their answers.

Question 1(b): many candidates failed to write sufficient detail in their answers, which resulted in them failing to gain all the marks available for this question. A number of candidates failed to recognise *salariés* and translated it as 'salarieswages' rather than 'employeesworkers'.

Question 2(b): several candidates lost marks as they did not understand *souhaitez-vous juste gagner de l'argent ...?* as 'do you just wish/want to earn money?' and rendered it as 'do you want a fair wage...?'. Despite this, most candidates did manage to gain at least 1 mark as the question had a degree of optionality.

Question 2(c)(ii): a number of candidates lost marks for choosing to write 'diving' for *faire la plonge* and for rendering *les pays du sud* as 'in the south of the country'.

Question 3(a): many candidates recognised *ma meilleure amie* as 'her best friend', but lost the mark for omitting the detail of *qui y travaillait*.

Question 4(b): several candidates failed to understand *vous expliquez comment un job d'été va vous servir dans le futur* with many choosing to write 'a summer job will serve you in the future'.

Question 5: the overall purpose question was not particularly well done by a large majority of candidates. Few candidates gained full marks for this question and a significant number achieved no marks. Many candidates are continuing to answer this question by merely reiterating details from the comprehension questions, without making an assertion and justifying why they are making that assertion. Other candidates simply quoted parts of the text in French, resulting in them gaining no marks.

A large number of candidates did attempt to make an assertion but failed to justify it, for example writing 'the writer is positive about young people finding jobs' but giving no justification as to why they thought this. However, several candidates were able to make an assertion and justify it, for example stating 'the writer is positive about young people finding jobs because the passage talks about the range of jobs available' and then going on to give relevant details about these jobs from the passage.

The majority of candidates did the translation poorly, but this was balanced by the very good performance in the comprehension questions.

In sense unit 1, many candidates lost both marks for translating *en revanche* as 'in return/vengeance'. Several also lost the marks for writing 'infants/teenagers/young people' for *les enfants*.

In sense unit 2, very few candidates were able to translate *Originaires de région parisienne* and therefore lost both marks. Many candidates also had difficulty translating *il fallait parfois*

les reconforter as they failed to recognise the imperfect tense of *falloir* or lost a mark by omitting to translate *parfois*.

In sense unit 3, many candidates lost both marks by translating *parce que leur famille leur manquait* as 'their family missed them'.

In sense unit 4, many failed to recognise the negative expression *ne que* and translated it as 'the youngest ones were not five years old' or failed to spot the superlative.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

In the directed writing question paper, there was a good range of performances and candidates coped well with the increase from four to six bullet points.

In scenario 1, bullet point 4, where candidates were asked to describe what they did in the evenings, the language was often very basic and not of the level expected at Higher. This was also the case in scenario 2, bullet point 3, which asked candidates to describe other things they could see and do in the town.

Lack of accuracy continues to be a problem for candidates, with spelling, genders, plurals, accents, and adjectival agreement all posing problems. Some candidates also do not appear to have a sound knowledge of tenses. The formation of the past tense is often inconsistent with the infinitive being used, or the auxiliary verb being omitted in the perfect tense. Some candidates also have difficulty distinguishing the difference between the imperfect and conditional tense.

Many candidates failed to maintain accuracy in the less predictable bullet points. These were often characterised by dictionary misuse and mother tongue interference. Candidates often had good ideas but did not have the language necessary to express them. This resulted in over-reliance on a dictionary, which led to serious mistranslations in some cases. Mother tongue interference continues to be a problem with some candidates translating directly from English. Spanish interference also caused a problem for a number of candidates.

Question paper 2: Listening

Overall the listening question paper was done well, but many candidates guessed answers to the questions rather than focusing on what was being said in the text. Many candidates lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers.

Question 1(b): many candidates missed out the detail of 'they also do sport(s) at a higher level'.

Question 1(c): many candidates lost marks by omitting the details of 'he gets up early/at 6am', and failing to write 'he goes running before breakfast'. A number of candidates did not recognise *le footing* and wrote 'football/walking' in their answer.

Question 2(c)(ii): a number of candidates lost the mark by only writing 'she earns money' and failing to add the detail of 'and practising a sport she loves'.

Question 2(d): a number of candidates did not write sufficient details in their answers and wrote 'she earned a lot of money' but omitted to add 'easily', and 'she travelled a lot' without adding 'around the world/abroad/to different countries'.

Question 2(e): many candidates failed to recognise *suivre un régime* rendering it as 'she had to follow a strict regime' rather than 'a strict diet'.

Assignment–writing

Although performance in this element of course assessment was very high, a number of candidates incorporated sophisticated and complex language but were unable to sustain this level of performance throughout their piece of writing.

Many candidates' performances were characterised by poor use of verb endings, lack of adjectival agreement, poor spelling and lack of accents which detracted from the overall impression of the writing.

Performance–talking

A number of candidates seemed to struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen. Many discussions were significantly long or short in relation to the guidelines and this affected the candidates' performances.

Pronunciation was the main issue for many of the candidates who did not perform well. Several centres did not take this into account when judging the evidence as they may have had an inclination as to what their own candidates were trying to express during the recording. However, verifiers were unable to decipher some of the points made by some candidates, in spite of pausing and having the recordings checked by another verifier and/or team leader.

Other candidates did not perform well as the choice of topic, or questions asked by the interlocutor, did not allow candidates to respond using detailed and complex language as expected at this level.

The extended duration (approximately 10 minutes) affected the performance of several candidates, with accuracy dipping near the end of the discussion.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

Centres should remind candidates:

- ◆ it is extremely important to ensure that their handwriting is legible. There was a large increase this year in the number of scripts which were very difficult to read
- ◆ to include as much detail as possible in their answers
- ◆ to ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions to ensure that they gain marks for their answers. This is particularly important if a question has several parts to it. They should be reminded that marks are not transferrable across questions
- ◆ to check what they have written makes sense, and answers the question that has been asked
- ◆ to leave sufficient time to check their answers at the end of the exam
- ◆ in the overall purpose question, they should make an assertion, give a reason for that assertion and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the passage to gain both points
- ◆ in the overall purpose question, that no marks are given for simply quoting chunks of text in French to justify their answer
- ◆ to write succinctly in their answer to the overall purpose question, and discourage them from writing lengthy responses which merely reuse answers from the comprehension questions
- ◆ to focus on tense recognition and attention to detail, to ensure that the final translation is an accurate reflection of the French sentence. Centres should provide opportunities to practise translation as much as possible in class

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Centres should ensure that candidates:

- ◆ check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points
- ◆ address all bullet points in a balanced way, using detailed and complex language appropriate to Higher. They should try to use a variety of tenses and structures if they wish to achieve high marks
- ◆ have a sound knowledge of past tense verbs, in particular how to conjugate the perfect and imperfect tenses, and when to use these tenses
- ◆ have opportunities to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and are given techniques on how to deal with these bullet points
- ◆ are encouraged to be more accurate in verb tenses, verb endings, number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of a dictionary

Question paper 2: Listening

Centres should ensure that candidates:

- ◆ use the time before the recording starts to read the questions carefully and include as much detail as possible in their answers
- ◆ focus on the actual text and not their own knowledge of a particular topic or theme

Assignment–writing

Centres should ensure that candidates:

- ◆ use the correct assignment–writing booklet and that the stimulus and all suggested questions are included
- ◆ continue to be well prepared for the assignment–writing
- ◆ continue to have a choice of stimuli
- ◆ are encouraged to be more accurate in verb tenses, verb endings, number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of a dictionary.

Performance–talking

In some of the performances sampled, the grammatical errors included gender errors and problems with agreement of adjectives and verbs, including omissions of the latter in some instances.

Centres should:

- ◆ continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of the language as an integral part of learning and teaching
- ◆ encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate. The assignment–writing could contribute towards aiding candidates' understanding of how language works
- ◆ ensure candidates can be understood by speakers of the language who are not familiar with what the candidates have studied
- ◆ have performances and allocated marks verified by another assessor, or another centre, to ensure accuracy in judgements

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use enough detailed and complex language and this prevented them accessing the upper pegged marks

Centres should ensure candidates have a range of strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to utter when they have not understood an aspect of the discussion.

Candidates who were able to use relevant interjections, ask relevant questions and use idiomatic phrases were able to sustain the discussion. Centres should continue to prepare candidates in this way.

Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, teachers or lecturers should continue to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic. They should give candidates appropriate thinking time before doing this.

The length of the performances sampled varied and centres are advised to refer to the advice on the recommended duration of the discussion. This is to ensure candidates are able to demonstrate their full ability to meet the demands of the task as provided in the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*. A few of the performances went beyond

the recommended duration, with many more being significantly shorter. On occasion, this prevented candidates from accessing the upper pegged marks.

While candidates may wish to prepare language and phrases for topic-related questions, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to continue to put open-ended questions to candidates which can elicit detailed and complex language in the answers.

Teachers and lecturers are also encouraged to put a variety of questions to their candidates, even where the same or similar topics have been selected by candidates from the same centre. For example the same question can be asked in different ways keeping the same key words for candidates to identify. In turn, this provides for personalisation and choice and provides scope for candidates to produce a more varied discussion.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	3780
------------------------------------	------

Number of resulted entries in 2019	3417
------------------------------------	------

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	48.9%	48.9%	1671	86
B	21.8%	70.7%	744	74
C	16.6%	87.2%	566	62
D	8.5%	95.8%	292	50
No award	4.2%	-	144	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.