



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	French
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It 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 question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

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 candidates but proved demanding and produced a good range of performances. Candidates on the whole were well prepared for each component with very few really poor performances, although a number of candidates struggled to deal with the translation passage. The Mean Marks for each component were as follows:

Reading/Directed Writing = 26.2 (45) – down 2.9

Listening/Writing = 17.1 (30) – down 0.7

Speaking = 20.7% (25) – up 0.2

The mean marks show an encouraging performance in all components of the examination, although the mean marks for both of the written papers were down from the high performance in the previous year. Candidates seem to have performed less well in the translation and to have found the first two bullet points in Directed Writing more demanding than in previous years. The slight drop in the mean mark for Paper 2: Listening and Writing indicates that Listening is still the skill most candidates find most difficult, as there was overall an improved performance in the Writing element in Paper 2. However, the performance overall in each component was very encouraging with some excellent performances (particularly in Reading) and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in the two Writing tasks, owing to the misuse of dictionary by some candidates).

Areas 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 ' **Ils vivent dans les bois, été comme hiver!**' accessible and on a topic (homeless people) to which they could relate, although less easily than in the previous year (creating a blog). 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 (with the exception of volunteers for **volontiers**) resulting in the loss of marks through awkward use of English. Again this year there were also some excellent performances in both of the writing tasks but particularly in Paper 2, 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 which candidates found demanding

Performance in the Translation section of Paper 1 was disappointing with many candidates losing points for a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles (**leur** as the/a) and singular/plural nouns (**la niche** as the kennels). As was expected, many candidates found the fourth and fifth sense units demanding (**Pas facile à faire pousser des légumes en pleine forêt..... Mais, ils y arrivent**) with many candidates giving a literal translation of **ils y arrivent** (they arrive there).

There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a topic (**experience as a foreign language assistant**) with which candidates were familiar and the clarity and speed of recording were commented on favourably by many centres. There was a good variety of straightforward and more demanding questions, which allowed most candidates to gain points in the early questions 1-4, while only the more able candidates coped well with questions 5-8, which required more detailed responses. It was disappointing, however, that some candidates failed to demonstrate comprehension of the 'easier' points by failing to recognise the more factual information including the time phrases: **plus tard, chaque semaine** and **jusqu'à 20 heures**, the verbs **éviter** and **partager** and vocabulary including **enrhumée** and **déprimée**. Many candidates were also unable to retain sufficient details required to answer accurately question 6 b, often understanding

part of the information e.g. that Scottish food is unhealthy (**la nourriture écossaise est mauvaise pour la santé**) but without the detail that she liked it anyway (**mais je l'aime quand même**).

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 small but significant 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 and required the candidates to select, manipulate and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks. It was worrying that a number of candidates did not approach the tasks in this way, relying instead on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences with predictably dire consequences. This was particularly noticeable in the Directed Writing task, where many candidates struggled to find any relevant learned material for the less predictable bullet points (particularly number 3: **what you did during the working day** and number 6: **what you plan to do with the money you earned**) and often resorted to misuse of dictionary and 'unidiomatic translation from English'. However, in general in the Directed Writing relatively few candidates were penalised for avoiding a bullet point, although some candidates were penalised for failing to address fully bullet points 1(a) **why you applied for the job** and 2(b) **how you travelled to work**.

The topic of the personal response essay (Paper 2) was one with which all candidates should have been familiar, however there were still a few 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. The candidates seemed better prepared to deal with the first part of the stimulus (**Quels sont les avantages /desavantages de vivre en Ecosse?**) than the second part (**Vous pensez aussi qu'il est important de visiter d'autres pays?**). Although the essay was on a topic accessible to all candidates, many did less well than might have been expected through the inability to distinguish between **Ecosse** and **Ecossais**, poor grammatical knowledge of genders and verb tenses and through poor spelling and the lack of accents which could have been checked through appropriate use of the dictionary.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation:

- 1 Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation of a particular section of the text
- 2 Encourage candidates to attempt the translation **after** the reading comprehension questions as that should make clear the context in which the translation section is situated
- 3 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.
- 4 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:

- 1 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
- 2 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.
- 3 Advise candidates to use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, genders etc.) **not** to create and invent new sentences.
- 4 Share with candidates the expanded assessment criteria for Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Accuracy, Range and Variety.

Listening/Writing:

- 1 In the Listening Comprehension 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
- 2 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
- 3 In the Writing task, ensure candidates read the stimulus and incorporate and adapt learned material, which **is relevant to the aspects contained in the stimulus**.

General:

- 1 Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible.
- 2 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, accents 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.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	4602
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	4577
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	42.6%	42.6%	1948	68
B	20.8%	63.4%	953	58
C	19.0%	82.4%	869	48
D	6.8%	89.1%	309	43
No award	10.9%	100.0%	498	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and 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.
- Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). 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 management team at SQA.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- 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, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this 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.
- 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.