Course Report 2017

Subject	French
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Paper 1 performed largely as expected, enabling candidates to access the full range of marks available. The comprehension questions proved clearly achievable and were attempted with notable success. The overall purpose question is by its very nature discriminatory and was attempted with success by more able candidates, while the less able candidates had difficulty addressing the question due to an inability to draw effective inferences or to express themselves in coherent English, or where the candidate's approach was simply to paraphrase the content of the passage. The translation proved challenging for some candidates.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Paper 2 performed as expected, with more able candidates performing strongly in both the Listening comprehension and Discursive Writing. In Item 2 (g) (i) the wording of the question proved problematic in that many candidates missed the expected 'hook' in the audio recording and therefore did not score as well as might have been expected. This was taken into account when setting grade boundaries. All four essays were attempted by candidates.

Component 3: portfolio

The portfolio was most successfully completed when candidates were able to write coherently about (in most cases) the literature or films studied. Few centres presented candidate evidence relating to Language in Work. Candidates addressing an appropriate essay title performed best.

Component 4: performance: talking

As expected, the performance allowed candidates an opportunity to showcase their talents and perform to their potential. For instance, candidates often performed strongly where an informative l STL form had been received by the Visiting Assessor, allowing for a wide-ranging discussion of a variety of topics, and where candidates had clearly been prepared to deal with unexpected language.

Candidates were, on the whole, well prepared for this element of the exam.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Questions 1 – 6 allowed candidates to perform well. Many candidates were able to identify the required information and express this appropriately.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Both Items 1 and 2 in Listening allowed candidates to perform well. In Discursive Writing, candidates attempted all four questions in similar numbers. The essay titles were such that able candidates were able to perform very well, as all titles were readily accessible to the majority of candidates. Strong performances showed an ability to manipulate language and use a range of tenses and constructions with confidence.

Component 3: portfolio

Many centres discussed an appropriate question and effective approaches with their candidates, which often led to performances which were well executed, showing an appropriate level of knowledge of the subject matter.

Component 4: performance: talking

The performance in talking allowed candidates to excel and to demonstrate their ability to engage in a meaningful conversation on a variety of topics at this level. Where candidates had engaged well with the approach and preparation, a number of performances were outstanding.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Question 7 (overall purpose question) proved challenging for the less able candidates, who were often unable to identify the overall purpose of the text or to draw appropriate inferences. Question 8 (translation) proved demanding for less able candidates.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Item 2, question (g) (i) caused candidates difficulty as a result of the wording of the question. While the question demanded information about parents at Christmas, the audio recording

did not mention parents explicitly, resulting in less able candidates being unable to access the necessary information.

Component 3: portfolio

Performances were less accomplished when candidates were attempting to make comparisons between, for example, two films which bore little relation to each other, or when essay titles were unnecessarily complex or did not afford an opportunity to produce a well-argued response. Careless or informal language had an effect on some performances, as did the use of incorrect quotations.

Component 4: performance: talking

Some candidates tended to perform less well when the STL form contained sparse information, or where centres had attempted to script the conversation via the STL form, thus allowing little opportunity for candidates to react spontaneously to the Visiting Assessor. The STL Form must not be used by centres for presenting a suggested scripted conversation.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates are, on the whole, coping well with reading comprehension, and are able to extract appropriate information from the text.

The overall purpose question has proved challenging to some candidates, who should be offered opportunities to consider literary techniques employed in texts so they are better able to address this question.

In translating, candidates should be advised to check their work carefully to make sure that appropriate English is used. Candidates should be encouraged to check that they have used the appropriate tense in translating, and that they have addressed each sense unit adequately.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates might benefit from paying close attention to the number of marks available for each question in Listening. In Discursive Writing, careful checking of the accuracy of written French would benefit candidates.

Component 3: portfolio

Candidates should produce a portfolio in response to a relevant and appropriate question which can be addressed in a way that allows a relevant and reasoned argument to be made. Centres should refer to SQA guidelines when preparing their candidates in this aspect of the assessment, particularly regarding word count and suitability of the bibliography used.

Component 4: performance: talking

Centres should ensure that candidates have filled in the STL form appropriately and fully, allowing Visiting Assessors the opportunity to prepare well in advance of the assessment, providing a springboard for discussion and therefore affording candidates the opportunity to achieve to their full potential by engaging in a spontaneous discussion, employing appropriate techniques to sustain the conversation.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	698

Number of resulted entries in 2017	774

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	32.3%	32.3%	250	138
B	25.8%	58.1%	200	118
C	20.4%	78.6%	158	98
D	7.6%	86.2%	59	88
No award	13.8%	-	107	-

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.