



## External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	French
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 Advanced 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 some excellent performances and with few really poor performances in each component. There was an encouraging increase in the number of presentations (61) which now stands at 667. The Mean Marks for each component were:

Reading and Translation = 30.7 (50) – up 1.2

Listening and Discursive Writing = 41.9 (70) – down 0.5

Folio = 18.4 (30) – down 1.4

Speaking = 36.7 (50) – no change

It is encouraging to note that the mean mark for each component is well in excess of half of the marks available, and this would indicate an able cohort of candidates who have been well prepared all components of the examination.

In spite of the slight drop in the mean mark for Paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing, there was an encouraging performance in the Listening element, which is still the skill most candidates find most difficult, and there were fewer poor attempts at the Discursive Writing. However, the performance overall in each component was encouraging with some excellent performances in all elements and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in the Folio and Listening comprehension).

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Performance in the Reading Comprehension component of Paper 1 was very encouraging, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage accessible and on a topic and concepts to which they could relate (**'Intelligent Technologies'**).

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 resulting in the loss of marks through awkward use of English.

There were also some excellent performances in Speaking and in Discursive Writing, where very able candidates were able to draw upon the topics they had covered in the Advanced Higher course and produce fluent, accurate and interesting performances that demonstrated all the elements required of a very good performance and contained an excellent range and variety of language structures. It was encouraging to note that there was also a sustained

improvement in the response to the listening texts on the topic of the role of the press in society with candidates performing well particularly in the presentation in Part A.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

Performance in Reading Comprehension was highly satisfactory, with only the following phrases consistently troubling candidates: *les riverains éviteront les mauvaises odeurs; elles sont déjà conçues autour des technologies.*

The inferential question (Question 5) was successful in producing a range of performances, but proved very challenging for many candidates who wrote unnecessarily long answers (commonly two and three pages) in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions rather than address the actual question and highlight the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the author, such as the use of statistics, sub-headings, quotes and the ending.

Most candidates performed well in the Translation section (particularly in the final three sense units) but many found the first three sense units very challenging. Candidates often managed to demonstrate overall comprehension of the sense units but often lacked the accuracy and details required for a fully accurate translation. Many candidates lost marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles and singular/plural nouns (*nos quartiers* as the district) and verb tenses (*guidera / vont envoyer* as the present tense). The most demanding sense units were those containing *ont pris une longueur d'avance*, *muni de, c'est ainsi que* and *désormais*, with only the more able candidates translating these accurately and with appropriate English expressions.

A number of candidates had difficulty in completing all the components of Paper 1 within the time set for the paper. As a result these candidates failed to attempt or complete the inferential question or failed to complete the translation or final reading comprehension questions.

There was a range of performances in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a topic (the role of the press in society) with which candidates were very familiar. The clarity and speed of recording were commented on favourably by many centres.

There was a good variety of straightforward, factual questions (Part A Q1a+b and Q4 / Part B Q3(a) and Q5) and more demanding questions (Part A Q5 / Part B Q1 and Q6), which required more detailed responses. Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer accurately the more demanding questions, often understanding part of the information but lacking sufficient detail, particularly with the statistics and time phrases; *plus de 50% / le journal de sept heures / le matin je me réveille* and with the following phrases; *le temps de lire d'une manière critique / les plus diplômés / du prix que l'on y attache / les actualités d'aujourd'hui feront l'histoire de demain.*

The Discursive Writing task and the Folio were the elements of the exam that produced the greatest range of performances, from very good to poor, although candidates seemed better prepared in terms of structuring their responses and by referring throughout to the actual essay title.

In the Discursive Writing, all six essay topics were attempted, with the most popular being Topic 1 (La technologie a révolutionné la communication. Est-ce une bonne chose à votre avis?) and Topic 3 (La famille a vraiment changé ces derniers temps. Que pensez-vous de ces changements?) Many candidates who attempted Topic 5 did not address the aspect set in the essay title but wrote mainly about the dangers and the reasons for protecting the environment. Some candidates struggled to incorporate **relevant** learned material with the required level of accuracy to achieve a satisfactory performance, while only a small number of candidates produced poor performances with little or no control of basic grammar and verb formation and with serious misuse of dictionary.

In the Folio a wide range of literary texts and background topics were presented, and four centres presented a Language in Work report. Weaker performances, whether literary texts or background topics, were those where candidates were descriptive rather than critical and analytical in their discussion, often resulting from a poor choice of essay title. Some candidates were penalised for exceeding the word limit and for failing to include a bibliography. In some background topics, and particularly those related to films, it was not always clear how much of the study had been in French or how far the topic was being approached from a French as distinct from a European or American perspective.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Although this was the final year of this format of the Advanced Higher examination, the following advice may still prove relevant and useful for teachers and for candidates being presented for or working towards the New Advanced Higher.

### Reading and Translation

- ◆ Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation of a particular section of the text **with appropriate use of English expressions**.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to plan their time management carefully to ensure they attempt the translation **after** the reading comprehension questions, as that should make clear the context for the translation section; and also to ensure that they do not write excessively long answers to the inferential question, thereby leaving themselves little time to complete the translation.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to **answer the specific wording of the question** and discourage them from giving a word-for-word translation of the text as a response to the reading comprehension questions, as this often results in English that is difficult to comprehend.
- ◆ When answering the inferential question, encourage candidates to give a general response to the question asked and to support this statement with specific, **key** information from the text while commenting on any particular stylistic features used by the author. (Guidance on the inferential question, including candidate performances with Examiners' comments, has recently been made available by SQA).

## **Discursive Writing**

- ◆ Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material but this must be relevant to the essay title.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Share with candidates the assessment criteria for Discursive Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Accuracy, Range and Variety.

## **Folio**

- ◆ Ensure that candidates choose an essay title that allows for a critical and analytical response.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to develop an appropriately formal and accurate use of English.
- ◆ Ensure that candidates adhere to the word limit and include a bibliography.
- ◆ Share with candidates the assessment criteria for Folio Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Analytical approach and Structure.

## **General**

- ◆ Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible (particularly when writing in French) or points can be lost.
- ◆ Centres are encouraged to make use of guidance issued by SQA in the form of the materials (marking schemes and Photostat essays) used at the Professional Development Workshop on Advanced Higher (SQA 2006) and Guidance on the Folio of Writing at Advanced Higher (September 2002 and revised in November 2010). In 2012, Guidance on the Inferential Question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, were also made available by SQA with the intention of leading to an improved performance by candidates.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	618
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	669
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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 - 200				
A	32.3%	32.3%	216	143
B	24.1%	56.4%	161	123
C	25.1%	81.5%	168	103
D	8.4%	89.8%	56	93
No award	10.2%	-	68	-

For this Course, grade boundaries have been stable for a number of years and the intention was to set similar grade boundaries to previous years. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

## 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.