Course Report 2017

Subject	French
Level	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 1: Reading and Directive Writing

The Reading paper was a text that sampled the context of Society. The topic was the role that media plays in society. This proved to be a topic to which candidates related very well. The text was accessible to all candidates and was deemed to be of a level appropriate to Higher, which resulted in a good range of performance.

Candidates were required to answer comprehension questions on the text in English, including an overall purpose question. The comprehension questions were worth 20 marks, which included two marks for the overall purpose question. Most questions were well answered by the majority of candidates. The last question required candidates to translate a section of the text, which was worth 10 marks. The majority of candidates tackled this well.

The Directed Writing paper required candidates to choose one of two scenarios taken from the contexts of Learning and Employability. Candidates had to address four bullet points. The paper was deemed to be fair and accessible to all candidates. This Directed Writing paper was worth 10 marks.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

The Listening paper has two parts — a monologue worth 8 marks, and a dialogue worth 12 marks. The paper was based on the context of Culture. The topic was about different types of holidays.

The Writing section of this paper, worth 10 marks, required candidates to write about whether they preferred organised holidays or holiday with parents or friends. This topic was fair and accessible to all candidates.

Component 3: performance: Talking

This component performed as expected since the task remains the same year on year.

This year there was a minor addition of pegged mark 1 for sustaining the conversation section of the performance. In the sample verified, very few candidates were awarded this pegged mark. Assessors seem to have benefited from the more detailed pegged mark descriptors in the detailed marking instructions at Higher. However, it may be useful to remind assessors that the use of 'detailed and complex' language in the candidates' responses is expected at this level.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Overall, candidates performed well in the Reading paper, with most gaining more than half of the available marks, although overall performance was slightly less than in previous years. Most candidates had a clear understanding of the text and related well to the contemporary, relevant topic of the role media plays in society.

Questions which required less detailed answers were tackled well by the majority of candidates. Questions 2 (a), 3 (a), 3 (b), 3 (c), 4 and 7 were particularly well answered, and few candidates were unable to answer any of the questions. The majority of candidates gained at least 1 out of 2 marks for the overall purpose question.

The translation was generally well done, and most candidates gained at least half of the available marks. Extremely few candidates failed to score any marks in this question.

Sense units 4 and 5 were particularly well done by all candidates.

In Directed Writing, both scenarios were seen as fair and accessible to candidates, and related to topic development they would have covered in class. Neither scenario was favoured over the other.

Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points. There were very few poor performances, but very few strong performances. The majority of candidates scored 4 or 6 out of 10. Very few candidates failed to tackle all the bullet points and very few omitted bullet points. Some candidates wrote accurately demonstrating that they could use a wide variety of structures and a range of tenses.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Candidates related well to the familiar topic area of types of holidays. In general, the monologue was better tackled than the dialogue. However, there were very few instances where candidates failed to respond to questions, and most candidates were able to gain at least half of the available marks. Questions that required little detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well done.

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

The Writing section was accessible to all candidates, and the topic of types of holidays and holiday preferences provided a range of performances with most candidates gaining 4 or 6 out of 10.

Component 3: performance: Talking

The candidates in the sample verified performed very well in the Presentation, often better or much better than in the Conversation. Some candidates used language and structures going beyond the demand at the level. Pronunciation was overall better in the Presentation than in the Conversation.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

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

Some candidates also lost marks by putting correct information in the wrong question. In some instances, candidates lost marks due to poor English expression, which left the meaning of their answer unclear and difficult to understand.

- In Q1, a number of candidates failed to recognise the comparative or the correct number of minutes in *c'est-à-dire cinquante minutes de plus que surfer sur Internet* and many mistranslated *personne* as 'person', thus losing marks.
- In Q2 (b), many candidates failed to understand *pour m'éloigner du stress du travail*, choosing to render the verb as 'forget or get rid of the stress of work' which resulted in a large number of candidates failing to gain the mark for this question.
- In Q2 (c), very few candidates recognised *elles n'ont rien à voir avec la vie du Français moyen*, choosing to write 'they have nothing to see….'
- In Q4, several candidates lost the mark by rendering *leur propre site web* as 'they had a clean website'.
- In Q5, some candidates lost marks by not paying enough attention to detail and merely wrote 'older people buy a newspaper' rather than 'older people continue to buy a newspaper every day'.
- In Q6, *quartier* was often rendered as 'quarter' rather than 'area'.
- Q8, which is the overall purpose question, was not particularly well done by a number of candidates, who failed to make an assertion, give a reason for that assertion, and back it up with relevant detail from the text.

Many candidates lost marks for quoting parts of the text in French as the means of justifying their answer.

In the translation, some candidates lost both marks in sense unit 1 by translating the word *observe* as 'watch'. In sense unit 2, a number of candidates translated *taper* as 'banging or 'slapping' rather than 'typing'. Many also omitted to translate *partout* and therefore lost both marks.

In sense unit 3, a number of candidates failed to recognise *tout en regardant* and translated the phrase as 'all watching last night's programmes'.

Some candidates also lost marks because of lack of accuracy, omitting words, and using the dictionary incorrectly.

Although there were some good responses to the Directed Writing task, a number of essays lacked the detailed and complex structures and range of tenses required to score 10/10. The majority of candidates scored between 4 and 6 out of 10. There were few very good performances and very few poor responses.

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.

In some instances, candidates incorporated learned material that was not relevant to the bullet point, resulting in the bullet points not being tackled in a balanced way. 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 the 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 some candidates.

In scenario 1, bullet points 2 and 3 posed the most difficulty for some candidates. They had ideas but did not express them accurately in French.

In scenario 2, bullet point 3 led to many candidates merely listing presents they had bought for family members which did not have the detailed and complex language required at Higher level.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Although the topic was a familiar and very accessible one, many candidates merely guessed answers to the questions rather than focusing on what was being said in the text, particularly in the dialogue. Many candidates lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers.

♦ In Q1 (a), some candidates missed out the detail of 'I am **no longer** a baby' or stated 'their friends miss them' rather than 'they miss their friends'.
♦ In Q1 (b), a number of candidates failed to recognise the word *erreur*.
♦ In Q1 (c) (i), many candidates failed to recognise *séjours linguistiques* or *séjours en famille* and wrote 'they went on family holidays' rather than 'they stayed with **a** family'.
♦ In Q1 (d), a number of candidates lost the point for failing to recognise *ils se sentent en sécurité*.
♦ In Q2 (a), many candidates omitted the detail of 'She was an only child and had nobody to play with'.
♦ In Q2 (b) (i), very few candidates recognised the word *peinture*, with many merely guessing or writing 'parkour'.

- In Q2 (c), some candidates did not write sufficient detail in their answer and omitted to render *j'ai aidé les plus jeunes* correctly.
- In Q2 (e), many candidates did not recognise the word *surveiller* and translated it as 'surveyed' or 'served' the children.
- In Q2 (f), a number of candidates failed to render *c'est une région que je ne connais pas* correctly, and many lost the point for stating 'she is going to Spain' rather than 'she wants or hopes to go to Spain'.

In the Writing section of the paper, there were poorer performances than in previous years, and few very good performances. There is still evidence of dictionary misuse and mother tongue and Spanish interference. In a number of cases, writing continues to be characterised by poor use of tenses, spelling, accents and adjectival agreement.

In a number of instances, candidates failed to address the task properly and wrote an essay more appropriate to a directed writing on a past holiday rather than expressing their opinion on types of holidays they preferred and why. In some instances, candidates included irrelevant material and wrote about family relationships, which did not address the task.

Component 3: performance: Talking

When candidates did not achieve the top pegged mark, it was often due to a lack of detailed language, eg using vocabulary and structures that were too simple for this level. The Conversation was overall less successful, with many candidates not being able to go beyond lists or short responses. Many Conversations were significantly shorter than the expected length so candidates were unable to demonstrate the use of a variety of structures, verbs, tenses and vocabulary.

Pronunciation often impeded comprehension by a speaker of French.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing
- Candidates should be reminded that it is extremely important to ensure that their handwriting is legible. There was a large increase this year in the number of scripts that were very difficult to read.

- Candidates should ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions to ensure that they get credit for their answers. This is particularly important if a question has several parts to it.

- Candidates should be encouraged to ensure that what they have written makes sense and answers the question that has been asked.

- Candidates should be encouraged to leave sufficient time to check their answers at the end of the exam.

- In the overall purpose question, candidates should be able to make an assertion, give a reason for that assertion, and justify their answer by choosing **relevant** detail from the text to gain both points.

- Candidates should be reminded that they will be given no credit for simply quoting chunks of text in French to justify their answer.

- Candidates should also be encouraged to write succinctly in answer to the overall purpose question, and should be discouraged from writing lengthy responses that merely regurgitate answers from the comprehension questions.

- Candidates should have the opportunity to practise translation as much as possible in class. There should be a focus on tense recognition and attention to detail to ensure that the final translation is an accurate reflection of the French sentence.

- Candidates should be reminded to check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points.

- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of past tense verbs — in particular how to conjugate the perfect and imperfect tenses, and when to use these tenses.

- Candidates should have the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and to learn techniques to deal with these bullet points.

- Candidates should be encouraged to address all bullet points in a balanced way. They should try to use a variety of tenses and structures if they wish to achieve high marks.

- Candidates should be encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions, and should be reminded to focus on the actual text and not their own knowledge of a particular topic or theme.

- In Writing, candidates should ensure that they understand the questions in French. There is no need to write an equal number of words for each question — the questions are merely there to serve as prompts.

- Candidates should ensure that their writing is relevant to the task that is set, expressing opinions and giving reasons for those opinions.

- Candidates should be encouraged to write accurately and should be discouraged from translating directly from English.

- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of the present tense for this particular element.

♦ Candidates should be encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary.

Component 3: performance: Talking

Candidates must use detailed and complex language in most parts of the performance to be considered for the top range of pegged marks at this level. Long lists of more than two or three items (eg places in town, school subjects), or repetitions of straightforward descriptions (eg hair and eyes), are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary. It is important that the topic chosen allows candidates to demonstrate the use of detailed and complex language.

Presentation

In the presentation, a very small number of candidates seemed to struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen. Centres should provide advice to candidates as to what level of language they should be able to cope with, and should ensure comprehension of their presentation in preparation for delivering it.

A few presentations were significantly longer or shorter than is expected, and this affected the candidates' performance. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates can demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of Higher level as provided in the document *Modern Languages Course Specification* (April 2014).

Conversation

Interlocutors should try to avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able candidates. Closed questions are likely to invite very short answers and prevent candidates from demonstrating their full ability. Alternatively, these questions could be immediately followed by '*Pourquoi?*' to elicit fuller answers.

For the most part, interlocutors should be supportive, especially with nervous candidates. Where interlocutors are aware of candidates' interests, this helps more natural/spontaneous conversations.

Conversations should not be unnecessarily prolonged or significantly short, as this can affect candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the latest information on the SQA's website regarding the recommended length of time the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of Higher as provided in the document *Modern Languages Course Specification* (April 2014).

The interlocutor should ask questions that follow on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates, moving on to another context in the Conversation. Naturally moving on to other contexts or topics also allows the candidates to demonstrate a variety of language. Where candidates are asked questions about the same topic/context as in their presentation, candidates are often limited to repeating parts of their presentation in their answers. Centres should therefore try to avoid asking questions about items that candidates have already addressed in the presentation.

Centres should ensure that questions are chosen so that the conversation flows naturally and gives further opportunity for personalisation and choice.

Centres should not be overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation.

Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible, and should not sound excessively rehearsed. It is recommended that centres ask a range of questions adapted to the responses of each candidate rather than asking the same questions to the whole cohort. A wider variety of questions in the conversation can aid candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected in line with the *Modern Languages Course Specification* (April 2014) document.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	4581

Number of resulted entries in 2017	3918

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	43.2%	43.2%	1691	72
B	25.3%	68.5%	993	60
C	18.7%	87.2%	731	49
D	5.8%	93.0%	227	43
No award	7.0%	-	276	-

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.