



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	French
Level(s)	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 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 many candidates again found the listening text challenging. There was a significant drop in the number of presentations (2323) which now stands at 1820. Many candidates moved over to the New Higher, and it is encouraging to note that the combined total of candidates sitting the two Higher examinations was 4559, which is an increase of over 400 on the previous year.

The Mean Marks for each component were:

Reading/Directed Writing = 29.0 (45) – up 0.7

Listening/Writing = 16.3 (30) – down 0.4

Speaking = 22.2% (25) – up 0.3

The mean marks indicate an able and well prepared cohort of candidates who performed strongly in all three components, including Listening/Writing where there was a slight drop in the mean mark. 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 a satisfactory 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 Translation) and with relatively few poor performances (and those mainly in the two Writing tasks, owing to the misuse of dictionary by some candidates).

Areas in which candidates performed well

The performance in Reading and Translation was again very encouraging with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage *Les métiers de rêve* accessible and on a topic to which they could relate. On the whole, candidates succeeded in responding accurately to the reading comprehension questions, in particular Questions 1 and 6(a+b+c).

There was also less evidence of 'word-for-word translation' of the text 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 Reading Comprehension was highly satisfactory, however some candidates found the detail required in Question 5(b) difficult, because of mistranslating *n'importe quel emploi*, and also Question 3(c) because of *des gens dans tous les domaines de la vie*. It was surprising that many candidates failed to demonstrate accurate comprehension of: *il devait 'garder' l'île et en faire la promotion à travers un blog / cela crée une sorte d'évasion pour eux*.

There was a mixed performance in the Translation section of Paper 1, with many candidates doing well in sections 4+5 but finding sections 1 and 2 very challenging. However, many candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles (le *métier* as a trade) and verb tenses particularly with *il y a eu* often translated as the present tense. Many candidates translated *avoir la chance* literally as to have the chance, and struggled with *ni le métier qu'il voulait faire enfant*, with only the more able candidates being able to translate that sense unit successfully.

There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a topic (importance and use of free time) with which candidates were familiar. There was a good variety of straightforward and more demanding questions, which allowed most candidates to gain points in questions 1–3, while many candidates struggled 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 in Question 1: *pendant la semaine / le weekend*, weather expressions *le temps peut changer très vite / l'orage / le brouillard* and the verbs *se casser / se mettre en route / demander de l'argent* and vocabulary including *la jambe / les pistes / l'entreprise*. Many candidates were also unable to retain sufficient details required to answer accurately the questions, often understanding part of the information but not giving sufficient details, eg continued to walk in fog / secretary in dad's firm.

The Writing tasks were again the element of the exam that produced the greatest range of performances, from very good to very poor. Some candidates struggled to incorporate learned material with the required level of accuracy and relevance to achieve a satisfactory performance, while a relatively small number of candidates produced poor and very poor performances with little or no control of basic grammar and verb formation and with serious misuse of dictionary.

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. Unfortunately some candidates (but fewer than in previous years) did not approach the tasks in this way, relying instead on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences, which often had a poor outcome.

In the Directed Writing task, the vast majority of candidates managed to address all 6 bullet points but only the more able were able to really develop the third bullet point 'what you had to do **in your job**'. In general, how well or poorly the candidates addressed the bullet points was taken into account under the 'Content' comments when arriving at the final impression mark and therefore relatively few candidates were penalised for avoiding a bullet point,

although some candidates were penalised for failing to address fully both parts of bullet points 1 and 2. Some recurring errors included the confusion between *rester* and *loger*, *voyage* and *journée*, and the erratic spelling of *je préfère*.

The topic of the personal response essay (Paper 2) was one with which all candidates should have been familiar and there were few instances of candidates struggling for ideas to express. The candidates seemed well prepared to deal with the first part of the stimulus (*Et vous, qu'est-ce que vous aimez faire? Vous aimez être actif/active ou non?*) However, many failed to continue that level of performance when developing the second part of the stimulus (*Vous croyez qu'il est important de trouver un équilibre entre le travail et les loisirs?*).

Although the essay was on a topic accessible to all candidates, many did less well than might have been expected through 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

Although this was the final year of this format of the Higher examination, the following advice may still prove relevant and useful for teachers and candidates for the new 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.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to attempt the translation **after** the reading comprehension questions, as that should make the context for the translation section clear.
- ◆ 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 incomprehensible use of English.
- ◆ 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

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Advise candidates to consider the wording of each bullet point carefully and to ensure that they incorporate learned material that is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.
- ◆ 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 expanded assessment criteria for Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Accuracy, Range and Variety.

Listening/Writing

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ In the Writing task, ensure candidates read the stimulus carefully and incorporate and adapt learned material that **is relevant to the aspects contained in the stimulus**.

General

Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible (particularly when writing in French) as this can adversely affect the impression mark.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	4157
Number of resulted entries in 2015	1821

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	49.1%	49.1%	894	70
B	20.7%	69.8%	377	60
C	14.9%	84.7%	272	50
D	6.1%	90.8%	111	45
No award	9.2%	-	167	-

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional value of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore the grade boundaries were set as intended.

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.