Course Report 2015

Subject	French
Level	New Higher

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question papers

Reading

The Reading paper was a text that sampled the context of Society. The topic was technology. This proved to be a topic to which candidates related well. The text was accessible to all candidates but proved appropriately demanding and produced a good range of performances. Candidates were required to answer comprehension questions on the text in English, including an overall purpose question. The last question required candidates to translate a section of the text. The comprehension questions were worth 20 marks, which included two marks for the overall purpose question. The translation section was worth 10 marks

Directed Writing

The Directed Writing paper required candidates to choose one of two scenarios taken from the contexts of Employability and Culture. Candidates had to address 4 bullet points. The paper was accessible to all candidates, with the majority choosing Scenario 1 on Employability as this linked well with the writing they had done in National 5.This paper was worth 10 marks.

Listening and Writing

The Listening paper had two parts: a monologue worth 8 marks, including a supported overall purpose question worth one mark, and a dialogue worth 12 marks. The paper was based on the context of Learning. The writing section of this paper was on a topic which was familiar and accessible to all candidates. It was worth 10 marks

Component 2: Performance

All centres verified used the SQA guidelines for the Internally Assessed Component of Course Assessment — Higher performance: talking.

Overall, assessors used the pegged marks in the Marking Instructions successfully. Centres adopted the required Approach (Presentation / Conversation).

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question papers

Reading

The reading paper was generally well received by candidates, who related well to the topic of technology. Overall, candidates performed very well in the reading paper with few candidates scoring less than half marks.

Directed Writing

Most candidates chose scenario 1 on Employability as this built on the writing they had done in National 5, although both scenarios were seen as fair and accessible to candidates and related to topic development they should have covered in class. The reduction in the number of bullet points from six in the old Higher to four in the new Higher seems to have made the task more manageable for the majority of pupils.

Listening and Writing

In listening, most candidates performed reasonably well and related well to the topic area of learning in the classroom and the importance of learning a language.

The writing section was accessible to all candidates, and the topic of the importance of language learning was one with which candidates were familiar. There was a range of performances in this element with some very good performances.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates in the verification sample coped relatively well with the prepared Presentation, with a large majority achieving between 6 and 10 out of 10. Poor pronunciation was an issue in some performances. The weaker performances lacked the required detailed and complex language, structure and variety expected at this level.

Candidates did not cope as well with the less predictable Conversation. The majority of the candidates in the sample achieved between 9 and 12 out of 15. A number of candidates could only cope with seemingly rehearsed conversations. Poor pronunciation was an issue in some performances. The weaker performances lacked the required detailed and complex language, structure and variety expected at this level.

Many candidates performed very well in Sustaining the Performance.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question papers

Reading

Questions 1b, 1c, 2, 3b and 5b: Most candidates responded well to these questions as the marking instructions allowed for a variety of responses.

Questions 3a, 3b, 5a: The majority of candidates responded very well to these questions, with most gaining the maximum number of marks available.

Question 6:   The majority of candidates responded very well to the overall purpose question. A large number of candidates exceeded requirements and wrote lengthy answers.

Directed Writing

There were some very good responses from candidates in the directed writing paper that showed good knowledge of the past tense. Candidates generally tackled the more predictable bullet points well often writing more than was required.

Listening and Writing

Candidates generally performed better in Item 2 than in Item 1.

In Item 1, Question 1a(i) was well done by most candidates and very few candidates failed to get the mark for question 1d), the overall purpose question.

In Item 2, candidates generally responded well to questions 2a, 2c (i) and (ii) and 2d with most gaining the maximum number of marks available.

Most candidates made a good attempt at the writing element in this paper which was a topic which related clearly to appropriate topic development.

Component 2: performance

Candidates performed very well in the Presentation. The better performances had evidence of clearer pronunciation and intonation in the delivery.

In the Conversation, candidates who had to respond to less rehearsed questions performed better in Sustaining the Performance.

In both the Presentation and the Conversation, candidates who selected topics that allowed them to use detailed and complex language throughout performed well.

In the Conversation candidates performed better when the interlocutor used more open-ended questions.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question papers

Reading

Some candidates failed to achieve full marks for a number of questions as they did not write enough detail in their answers, or used their knowledge of the topic to make up their own answers. Some candidates also lost marks by putting correct information in the wrong question.

In question 2a, « Ainsi, un ado sur 20 développe des symptômes de dépendance » posed difficulty for some candidates, who failed to recognise the word *ainsi* and mistranslated the sentence as '20 year old Ainsi'.

In question 3a, many candidates misunderstood the word *oreiller* and confused it with 'oreille'. Many candidates also translated *allumé* as 'lit up' rather than 'switched on', and omitted to translate the word *chevet* resulting in marks being lost.

In question 4, a number of candidates omitted the comparison 'more private than phone calls' and many failed to recognise the phrase *coup de fils*.

In question 5, some candidates had difficulty expressing clearly the meaning of the sentence « Je pense que les textos sont en train de détruire la capacité des jeunes à bien s'exprimer quand ils écrivent. » The responses were often very unclear with some translating the phrase *en train de* as 'on the train'

In the translation section, sense units 1, 3 and 4 were generally well done by most candidates, although in sense unit 4 some candidates failed to recognise *achetée en ligne* and translated it as 'and buy music online'.

In sense unit 2, the translation of *ultra-performantes* caused difficulty for a number of candidates, and in sense unit 5, very few candidates translated *dans une moindre mesure* correctly.

Directed Writing

Although there were some good responses to the directed writing task, a number of essays tended to lack complex structures or compound sentences. The majority of candidates scored between 4 and 8 out of 10. There were few very good performances and very few poor responses.

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

Lack of accuracy is still a problem for candidates, with genders, plurals and adjectival agreement 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.

Some candidates are still overly reliant on the dictionary, particularly in the less predictable bullet points, which can result in serious mistranslation. 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, a number of candidates interpreted the first bullet point as referring to the work experience and not to the hotel.

In scenario 2, bullet point 3 was often characterised by dictionary misuse and mother tongue interference. Candidates often had good ideas but did not have the necessary language to express them.

Listening and Writing

Although the topic was a familiar one, many candidates used their own knowledge to answer the questions rather than focusing on what was being said in the text. Many candidates lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers.

In question 1a (ii), many candidates failed to mention '**download** language games' or the fact that it was a **foreign** pen pal.

In question 1b, many failed to recognise that it was competitive pupils who benefited from competitions.

In question 1c, it was disappointing to see that a large number of candidates failed to recognise *nord-est*. Many also lost the point by omitting the second part of the answer or only giving one rather than both details about the length and cost of the journey.

Candidates lost marks in question 2b as they did not answer the question in sufficient detail.

In the writing section of the paper, there was greater evidence of dictionary misuse and mother tongue interference than in the directed writing, because it is less prescriptive.

Some essays lacked structure and showed little knowledge of the present tense of verbs, preceding direct objects and adjectival agreement. The content of some essays was very repetitive.

Component 2: Performance

Some candidates found the Conversation more demanding. On some occasions interlocutors used closed questions, which did not always allow candidates to expand on their answers or to use detailed and complex language. Some candidates responded with short answers without the detailed and complex language expected at this level.

Some candidates did not achieve full marks for Sustaining the Conversation as the Conversation sounded too rehearsed.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Reading

In reading, candidates should be encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions, ensuring that what they have written makes senses and answers the question they are asked to answer. They should be encouraged to spend time going over what they have written at the end of the exam.

In the overall purpose question, 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 trained to write succinctly, and should be discouraged from writing a lengthy response in answer to this question.

Candidates should be given 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.

Directed Writing

Candidates need to ensure that they have a sound knowledge of how to conjugate verbs in the past tense. They should be encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender, and adjectival agreement.

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

Listening and Writing

Candidates should be encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions in listening 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 as the questions are merely there to serve as prompts.

Candidates should be encouraged to write accurately and should be discouraged from translating directly from English. It is important that they have a sound knowledge of the present tense for this particular element.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates must use detailed and complex language at Higher in most parts of the performance. At this level, long lists of more than two or three items, or repetitions of straightforward descriptions, are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary.

In the Presentation, some candidates seem 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.

Interlocutors should try and avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able candidates. Questions such as *Tu vas aller à la fac?* are likely to invite very short answers and prevent candidates from demonstrating their full ability.

For the most part, interlocutors were supportive of candidates, especially with nervous ones. Where interlocutors were aware of candidates' interests, this helped more natural/spontaneous conversations.

Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the Presentation and 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 Performance: talking, General assessment information*.

The majority of centres asked questions in the Conversation that followed on naturally from the Presentation topic chosen by candidates. As per the requirements at Higher, assessors went on to refer to other contexts, which allowed for personalisation and choice. On occasions, where candidates were asked questions about the same topic/context as in their Presentation, candidates were 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.

Some centres were overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation. Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible for the level assessed. Some conversations sounded excessively rehearsed. It is recommended that interlocutors ask a range of questions adapted to the responses from and the ability 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 Appendix 1 of the *Modern Languages performance: talking, General assessment information* which is available on the CfE section of the SQA website).

Following on from a lesson on a particular topic, an example of sensible preparation towards the Conversation could be to invite candidates to think about the type of questions the interlocutor is likely to ask them about this topic. They then could think about the key words in French that would be in those questions (eg question words). Candidates could then review the vocabulary studied in the lesson and try and answer those questions. Candidates should also be aware that questions in French can be asked in a variety of ways, hence the importance of identifying key words. The teacher/lecturer could help candidates practise understanding questions orally by requiring them to identify key words in a list of random questions he/she speaks out to the class. During the assessment, the interlocutor could use some of these questions, possibly rephrasing them, and also some unrehearsed questions on this topic as part of a more natural conversation at this level.

Pronunciation was a significant issue for some candidates who did not perform well at this level. Verifiers — sympathetic (native or non-native) speakers of French — must be able to understand candidates, no matter how good the content of their Presentation/Conversation is. It was felt that, on occasions, assessors had been lenient regarding pronunciation, possibly because they already had an inclination as to what candidates were going to say. Having a sample listened to by a third party could help identify issues with pronunciation.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0

Number of resulted entries in 2015	2751

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	45.8%	45.8%	1259	73
B	24.8%	70.6%	683	62
C	16.9%	87.5%	465	52
D	5.2%	92.7%	142	47
No award	7.3%	-	202	-

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. While the Course assessment functioned as intended, changes in the format and weighting of the assessment created the conditions for a revised standard. A new assessment approach in the Talking component allowed a slightly higher degree of accessibility at the top end of performance which equated to a 2 mark increase at the A boundary. The Overall Purpose question in Reading was also easier than expected and impacted on the C candidates by a 2 mark increase in the boundary, and A candidates by an additional 1 mark increase.

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.