



Course Report 2017

Subject	French
Level	National 5

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 Writing

The Reading paper comprised three texts of equal difficulty and weight (10 marks for each item). Over the whole paper, there were three supported questions (worth 4 marks).

The paper covered the contexts of Learning, Culture and Employability (the three contexts not covered in the Listening paper) and the texts were based on interesting and relevant topics which engaged the candidates. However the choice of stimulus materials made the paper less challenging than previous years.

The Writing paper required the candidates to reply by e-mail to a job application. The paper was worth 20 marks with 4 predictable bullet points and 2 unpredictable bullet points.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening

The Listening paper had two parts: A monologue worth 8 marks and a dialogue worth 12 marks, including a supported question worth two marks. The paper was based on the context of Society.

Although the monologue part of this component performed as expected, the dialogue was less challenging than in previous years. These factors were taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

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 National 5. However, it may be useful to remind assessors that the use of 'detailed' language in the candidates' responses is expected at this level.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Although it was felt that both the Reading and Listening papers were, overall, less demanding than in previous years, centres should be very encouraged by the performance of candidates this year. From the improved performance in the Writing paper and the fact that many candidates attempted all questions in the Reading and Listening papers it is clear that the majority of candidates are being presented at the correct level.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Writing

Candidates performed very well in the Reading paper, with very few candidates giving no response to a question. There were very few examples of poor expression and mistranslation this year and the majority of candidates gave enough detail to gain the marks available.

Candidates performed very well in the Writing component, with most attempting the unpredictable bullets well and in detail. It was very clear from the number of very good responses that candidates were much better prepared to tackle the Writing element. There was less evidence of misuse of dictionary and learned material. It was encouraging to see that there was a marked improvement in candidates' ability to form questions in French.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening

Candidates performed very well in the Listening paper this year and, as with the Reading, there were very few candidates giving 'no response' to a question. Candidates performed particularly well in the dialogue with many achieving the full 12 marks available. Questions 1a and 2a, 2b and 2d (i) were answered particularly well.

Component 3: Performance: Talking

The candidates in the sample that was verified performed very well in the Presentation, often better or much better than in the Conversation. Some candidates used language and structures that went 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 Writing

Reading

- ◆ Question 1b (i): Some candidates used information from another part of the text as an answer to this question and, although the information was correct, it did not answer the question.
- ◆ Question 2e (ii): Many candidates translated *fermées* as 'open' and/or did not give enough detail to get the mark for this question, with many omitting *pendant la journée* which was essential information to get the mark.
- ◆ Question 3d: Many candidates found this question rather challenging and did not understand the meaning of *domaine*, and this led to incorrect responses.

Writing

Overall, candidates made a very good attempt at addressing the unpredictable bullet points in the Writing paper. There were a few instances of misuse of dictionary or mother tongue interference.

Some candidates did repeat themselves when answering bullet point 5 (information required about hobbies), as they had already addressed this in predictable bullet point 3.

Component 2: Question Paper 2: Listening

Monologue

- ◆ Question 1a (ii): Many candidates had difficulty with this question. Many did not understand *quatrième étage* or misheard *ascenseur* and translated this as 'living with/without her sister'.
- ◆ Question 1b: Many candidates guessed the answer or did not give enough detail to get the 2 marks available for this question.
- ◆ Question 1c (ii): As with question 1b, many candidates tried to guess the answer. Very few candidates understood *fait la vaisselle* and many heard *ses amis* and 'weekend' but failed to hear 'invite'. This led to candidates misunderstanding that 'she invites friends at the weekend' and therefore responses included 'she goes out with friends at the weekend' or 'she goes to her friends at the weekend'.

Dialogue

Question 2f: Many candidates heard *sans permission* but not *voiture*, and therefore there were many guesses given to this question.

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 being unable 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 Writing

Reading

Candidates should be guided by the number of marks available for each question, and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood. They should be discouraged from giving extra information and/or giving choices for answers, as this could negate any correct information and therefore be penalised.

Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of verb conjugation, adjective endings and the comparative, as this will minimise mistranslation if using a dictionary for comprehension. Candidates should also be reminded to use the dictionary carefully and not always choose the first word given. Centres should also ensure candidates are aware of common 'false friends' and encourage candidates to check these carefully in the dictionary.

Candidates should be encouraged to read each question carefully and underline the key word or words, which will lead them to the answer in the text. Candidates should also be encouraged to read their own answers carefully to ensure they make sense in English.

Writing

Centres should be encouraged by the performance of candidates in the Writing paper this year. As the Writing is in the form of an email, there is now no requirement for candidates to use a formal beginning and ending as this often leads to errors being made.

Centres should ensure that candidates read the information carefully regarding the job for which they are applying. Candidates should be advised to:

- ◆ Ensure they have addressed all six bullet points — there may be occasions where candidates will have covered the information required for the unpredictable bullet points

in the four predictable points. This is perfectly acceptable, and candidates should be encouraged to check this first and not write the same information twice.

- ◆ Use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, accents, genders etc) but **not** to create new sentences, as this often leads to many inaccuracies and sentences which are incomprehensible.
- ◆ **Ask questions** regarding the job as this could be one of the unpredictable bullet points.
- ◆ Leave time to read through their piece of writing to ensure all bullets have been covered and silly mistakes have not been made eg spelling, adjective endings, accents, words missed out etc.
- ◆ Be aware of the criteria to be used in assessing performances in Writing, so that they are aware of what is required in terms of content, accuracy and variety and range of language to achieve the good and very good categories.

Component 2: Question Paper 2: Listening

Centres should be very much encouraged by the performance of candidates in the Listening paper as many candidates do find this paper to be the more demanding of all the papers.

In responding to the questions in the Listening paper, candidates should be guided by the number of marks available for each question, and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood. Candidates should be discouraged from giving extra information and writing lists of answers as this could negate any correct information given and therefore be penalised.

Centres should ensure that candidates are able to give accurate answers through confident knowledge of numbers, seasons, months, common adjectives, nationalities, school subjects, weather expressions, days of the week and question words, so that some of the 'easier' points of information are not lost through lack of sufficiently accurate details.

Candidates should be encouraged to read all the questions carefully and underline key words to listen out for so they can pick out the information required more easily. More practice on note-taking would also help candidates improve their listening skills.

Candidates hear both the monologue and dialogue 3 times and should be encouraged to make use of the third listening to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers.

Component 3: Performance: Talking

To be considered for the top range of pegged marks, candidates must use detailed language at National 5 in most parts of the performance. 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.

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 advise 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 expected, and this affected the candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the Presentation and the Conversation should last in the document *Modern Languages Course Assessment Specification* (January 2017).

Conversation

Interlocutors should try to avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able candidates. Questions such as *qu'est-ce que tu préfères, la physique ou la biologie?* 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 anxious 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 affects the candidates' performances. 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 National 5 as provided in the document *Modern Languages Course Assessment Specification* (January 2017).

The interlocutor should ask questions that follow on naturally from the Presentation topic, as recommended in the National 5 *Modern Languages Performance: talking Assessment task* document. From 2017–18, the Conversation must address at least one context not addressed in the Presentation.

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, they 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 for the level assessed and 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.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	9292
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	9078
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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 -				
A	59.7%	59.7%	5423	77
B	17.1%	76.8%	1553	67
C	12.5%	89.3%	1131	57
D	3.9%	93.2%	156	52
No award	6.8%	-	615	-

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.