



## Course Report 2016

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 Directed Writing**

The Reading paper was a text that sampled the context of Culture. The topic was film. This proved to be a topic to which candidates related very well. The text was accessible to all candidates and was of a level appropriate to Higher, which resulted in a good range of performances.

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. All questions were very well answered by the vast 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 very well.

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

### **Component 2: question paper 2: 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 Employability.

The Writing section of this paper, worth 10 marks, required candidates to write about future plans and the benefits of taking a gap year. This topic was familiar and accessible to all candidates and built on content covered at National 5 level. This resulted in candidates achieving higher marks than in previous years in this paper. This was effected in the grade boundaries set for 2017.

### **Component 3: performance: Talking**

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

The dialogue between the assessor and the internal verifier was more developed and useful than in previous years.

Overall candidate performance was high.

A large majority of centres applied the marking instructions for the performance in talking accurately and in line with national standards.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

#### **Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

Overall, candidates performed very well in the Reading paper. Most candidates had a clear understanding of the text and related well to the contemporary, relevant topic of young people in film, with few candidates scoring less than half marks.

Questions which allowed a degree of optionality were tackled well by the majority of candidates, as were questions which required minimal detail.

Questions 1, 2 (b), 2 (c), 3 (a), 3 (b) (i), 3 (b) (ii), 4 (b) and 5 (a) were particularly well answered, and few candidates were unable to answer any of the questions.

The translation was generally well done and most candidates gained at least half of the available marks. Sense units 2 and 3 were particularly well done and extremely few candidates failed to score any marks in this question.

In Directed Writing, both scenarios were seen as fair and accessible to candidates and related to topic development they would have covered in class. Scenario 1 proved to be slightly more popular than Scenario 2.

Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points. There were very few poor performances. 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 very well to the familiar topic area of Employability. As a result, there was an increase in the number of candidates who performed well in this paper. In general, the dialogue was better tackled than the monologue. The language was accessible to candidates and the use of cognates supported them in their responses. There were very few instances where candidates failed to respond to questions.

Questions which required little detail or where there was optionality were particularly well done. The vast majority of candidates coped well with Questions 1 (b), 2 (a) (i), 2 (a) (ii) and 2 (c). Very few candidates failed to gain the mark for the overall purpose question (Q1 (d)).

The Writing section was accessible to all candidates, and the topics of future plans and the benefits of taking a gap year were ones with which candidates were familiar, and enabled them to cover a range of ideas. This resulted in a good range of performances in this element with some very good performances.

### **Component 3: performance: Talking**

Candidates performed better in the presentation section of the performance. In the sample verified, most candidates were awarded one of the two top pegged marks (8 or 10). This is as expected as this section can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment.

### **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 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 some instances, candidates lost marks due to poor English expression, which left the meaning of their answer unclear and difficult to understand.

In question 1, « Elle pratiquait des sports avec ses grands frères tout en étant majorette dans son lycée » posed difficulty for some candidates, who failed to recognise the word *majorette* and mistranslated the sentence.

In question 3 (b) (i), many candidates failed to understand « ils sont incapables de leur donner des limites ».

In question 4 (a) « ...l'adolescent qui ne sait pas communiquer avec ses camarades de classe... » was rendered by some as '... do not/cannot communicate ...' which resulted in marks being lost. In the same question, a number of candidates lost the mark for failing to write 'spend **all** their time in front of the computer'.

In a number of cases, candidates lost marks by not paying enough attention to detail.

In question 2 (b), a number of candidates did not recognise the comparative in « de plus en plus jeune ».

In question 4 (c) « des bandes d'adolescents » was often rendered as 'a group of teenagers' rather than 'groups of teenagers', and in question 5 (b) (i), some candidates did not include a verb in their answer and therefore lost the mark.

Question 6, which is the overall purpose question, was not particularly well done by a number of candidates who failed to make an assertion and back it up with a justification 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, many candidates lost both marks in sense unit 1 by translating the word « héros » as 'main character'. In sense unit 3, a number of candidates failed to recognise « tels que » and in sense unit 4 « il faut avouer que » .. seemed to prove difficult for some candidates.

Sense unit 5 also proved to be difficult for some candidates who failed to translate « pas du tout ». Some candidates 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 tended to lack detailed and complex structures, a variety of tenses and compound sentences to score 10/10. 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 spelling, genders, plurals, accents, 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. 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, some candidates did not say why they went to France. Some candidates were unable to write accurately about where exactly they went and made mistakes in basic expressions. The word « journée » continues to be used to translate 'journey' by a surprising number of candidates.

Candidates who wrote about the weather as a positive aspect of the French way of life in bullet point 3 often rendered basic weather expressions incorrectly. In scenario 2, many candidates merely listed a selection of sports in bullet point 2, which did not have the detailed and complex language required at Higher level. Some candidates also wrote about work experience, which was not relevant to the task.

## **Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing**

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

In question 1 (b), some candidates missed out the detail of 'not getting on well with the **boss**'. A number of candidates also failed to recognise the phrase « de bonne heure ».

In question 1 (c), some candidates failed to state that the person on work experience 'gets paid less'.

In question 2 (b) (i), many candidates failed to recognise the word « institutrice » and translated it simply as 'teacher'.

In question 2 (b) (ii), many candidates did not render « j'aurai encore du temps pour décider quelles études je veux faire » in sufficient detail.

In question 2 (d), many candidates failed to write detailed answers and omitted to state 'the **satisfaction** of seeing pupils progress and that she was responsible **for their future**'.

In the Writing section of the paper, there were fewer very poor performances than in previous years, but also few very good performances. There is still evidence of dictionary misuse and mother tongue and Spanish interference.

In a number of cases, writing is still characterised by poor use of tenses, spelling, accents and adjectival agreement.

### **Component 3: performance: Talking**

Some candidates found the conversation section of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable and less rehearsed. Centres and candidates should follow the advice given in section 3 of this document to ensure the conversation and sustaining the conversation elements are approached more successfully.

The language used by some candidates at Higher was not detailed and complex enough, including in the presentation section. This is surprising considering it is the part of the performance which can be thoroughly prepared. This might indicate that these candidates were entered at the wrong level.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

- ◆ Candidates should ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions, particularly where a question has several parts, to ensure that they get credit for their answers.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions, ensuring that what they have written makes sense and answers the question they have been 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 trained to make an assertion and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the passage 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 trained to write succinctly in answer to the overall purpose question, and should be discouraged from writing lengthy responses which merely regurgitate answers from the comprehension questions.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ With Directed Writing, centres should remind candidates to check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points. Candidates should be reminded that the maximum mark they can achieve is 6/10 if they miss out a bullet point or part of a bullet point.
- ◆ 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 be given the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and to be given techniques on how to deal with these bullet points.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to address all bullet points in a balanced way, using 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**

In Listening, 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 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**

Pronunciation was the main issue for many of the candidates who did not perform well.

It was felt that, on occasions, interlocutors had been lenient regarding pronunciation, possibly because they already had an inclination as to what candidates were going to say. 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.

In general, centres provided clear commentaries to demonstrate how they made the assessment judgement, which was very useful for the verifiers. This is also useful for internal verifiers and promotes constructive professional dialogue.

In the Higher Modern Languages performance: talking assessment task, centres are reminded that the presentation and follow-up conversation must be carried out in a single assessment event, ie the presentation must be followed by the conversation during the single recording of the 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 (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.

### **The presentation**

In the presentation, candidates should not struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they have 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.

Significantly long or short presentations can affect 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 Higher as provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance: Talking, General Assessment Information*.

### **The 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.

Interlocutors should be supportive, especially with nervous candidates. Where interlocutors were aware of candidates' interests, this helped more natural/spontaneous conversations. Unnecessarily prolonged or significantly short conversations can affect 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 Higher as provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance: Talking, General Assessment Information*.

Centres should ask questions which follow on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates, as recommended in the Higher Modern Languages performance: talking assessment task document. Assessors could go on to refer to other contexts, which allows for personalisation and choice. 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 (in line with Appendix 1 of the *Modern Languages Performance: Talking, General Assessment Information*, which is available from SQA's website).

### **Sustaining the conversation element**

Candidates do not necessarily have to ask a question in the conversation to gain full marks for this element.

In some cases, candidates may pause — briefly — during the conversation to think about their answers; this is a natural part of a conversation. Assessors should give candidates appropriate time to think and respond. However, if candidates struggle to answer certain questions, assessors should try to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic.

Some conversations sound more natural when candidates answer with a mixture of longer and shorter answers which are clearly not scripted. Using scripted conversations may not allow candidates to meet the criteria for the top pegged marks in the performance, but, above all, it does not prepare candidates for the demands at Advanced Higher or in real life situations. Instead, candidates could prepare for their conversation by thinking about the type of questions the interlocutor is likely to ask on their chosen topic and thinking about what key words the interlocutor is likely to use in his/her questions.

Examples of how candidates could demonstrate their ability to sustain the conversation include the following:

- ◆ a mixture of extended and shorter answers (ie not a suite of short presentations/ monologues)
- ◆ appropriate thinking time
- ◆ natural interjections ('*eah/ bah/ ben/ alors*')
- ◆ acknowledgement that they have understood the question ('*oui, je suis d'accord/non, pas du tout*') — some centres included a brief commentary to describe how the candidate showed how they had understood through non-verbal means the question/response from the interlocutor
- ◆ asking questions that are **relevant** to the conversation and at **relevant** times
- ◆ sustaining the conversation, asking for repetition or clarification (eg '*pardon?*')

This is not an exhaustive list and one example from the above list on its own may not be sufficient to be awarded full marks.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	2751
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	4581
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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	45.6%	45.6%	2090	77
B	25.7%	71.3%	1177	66
C	17.5%	88.8%	802	55
D	5.7%	94.6%	263	49
No award	5.4%	-	249	0

## 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.