



## Course Report 2018

Subject	French
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

# Section 1: comments on the assessment

## Summary of the course assessment

All assessment components performed largely as expected. Feedback from centres and candidates indicated that the components were seen as fair and accessible to all candidates at Higher.

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

The reading section of the question paper was a text that sampled the context of culture. The topic was on holidays in Madagascar. This proved to be a topic to which candidates related very well. It was accessible to all candidates and was seen to be of a level appropriate to Higher.

Candidates are required to answer, in English, comprehension questions on the text, including an overall purpose question. The comprehension questions are worth 20 marks which includes 2 marks for the overall purpose question. The last question requires candidates to translate a section of the text, which is worth 10 marks.

The directed writing section of the question paper is worth 10 marks and requires candidates to write in the past tense in French, choosing one of two scenarios. The scenarios, which sampled the contexts of society and learning, were of a similar level of difficulty and the majority of candidates were able to attempt all four bullet points. The majority of candidates chose scenario 1: society.

The balance of accessible and more challenging questions in reading, particularly the overall purpose question and the translation, as well as the directed writing, helped differentiate candidate performance. The reading and directed writing question paper performed in line with expectations.

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

The listening and writing question paper sampled the context of employability and the topic was on interview skills and summer jobs to which candidates related well. The paper was accessible to all candidates and was seen to be of a level appropriate to Higher.

The listening section of the paper has two parts — a monologue worth 8 marks, and a dialogue worth 12 marks. The writing section of the question paper, worth 10 marks, required candidates to write about whether they would like a summer job and the importance of earning money.

The balance of straightforward and more challenging questions in listening, and the open-ended writing element, resulted in a good range of marks and differentiated candidate performance, as intended.

### **Component 3 — performance—talking**

The performance—talking coursework performed as expected.

In the performance—talking candidates are required to carry out a spoken presentation and then take part in a conversation directly afterwards.

Centres are familiar with how this coursework task works, and it is the same format year on year.

In both the presentation and conversation sections, candidates are required to use detailed and complex language at Higher.

As in previous years, very detailed descriptions for each pegged mark are available in the detailed marking instructions. The marking instructions allow centres to mark candidates' performances with confidence. From the sample that was externally verified this session, the majority of centres marked candidates' performances in line with national standards.

In the performance—talking, candidates are required to demonstrate their abilities against the four aspects of the performance: content, accuracy, language resource and interaction.

Teachers and lecturers play an important role in guiding candidates prior to the assessment, in their choice of contexts and topics. This is outlined in *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*.

From the centres sampled this session, the majority had encouraged candidates to identify topics (from two of the contexts) which gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their ability against the four aspects.

## **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 section of the question paper, with most candidates gaining more than half of the available marks, although overall performance was slightly down on previous years. Most candidates had a clear understanding of the text and related well to the contemporary, relevant topic of holidays.

Questions that required less detailed answers or had optionality were tackled well by the majority of candidates. Questions 1, 3(a), 3(b)(i), 3(b)(ii), 4, 5(a) and 6 were particularly well answered, and very 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. A very small minority of candidates failed to score any marks in this question. Sense units 2 and 3 were particularly well done by all candidates.

In directed writing, both scenarios were seen as fair and accessible to candidates, and related to course content. The vast majority of candidates opted for scenario 1: society rather than scenario 2: learning. Those candidates who opted for scenario 2 performed marginally less well than those who chose scenario 1.

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

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

Candidates related well to the topic area of interview skills and summer jobs. Candidates performed better in the dialogue than the monologue. There were very few instances of candidates failing to answer questions and most candidates were able to gain at least half of the available marks. Questions which required little detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well answered.

The majority of candidates coped well with questions 1(a), 1(d) and 1(e) in the monologue and questions 1, 2(b) and 2(e) in the dialogue.

The writing section was accessible to all candidates, and the topic of types of summer jobs and the importance of earning money provided a range of responses with most candidates gaining 4 or 6 marks out of 10 marks. Candidate responses in this paper were slightly better than last year.

### **Component 3 — performance—talking**

In the sample submitted, candidates generally performed well or very well. Overall, there were very few poor performances. The presentation section attracted the upper two pegged marks for most candidates in the sample. Most conversations were awarded pegged marks 9 or above, however very few 15 pegged marks. The sustaining the conversation section mostly attracted 3 marks.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

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

In the reading section of the question paper, some candidates failed to achieve full marks for a number of questions, as they did not write enough detail in their answers. Some candidates lost marks by putting the 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 2, many candidates failed to write sufficient detail and this resulted in them failing to gain all the marks available for this question.

Many candidates did not understand *un cocktail à la noix de coco*, with a large number choosing to write 'a walnut and coconut cocktail' or 'a cocktail in/from a coconut'.

In questions 3 (b)(i) and 3(b)(ii), a number of candidates put the answer to question 3(b)(ii) in 3(b)(i) and therefore lost the mark.

Many candidates had difficulty with question 5(c)(i) and 5(c)(ii). Many lost the mark for failing to recognise *des randonnées de différents niveaux* as 'walks of different levels of difficulty'. In question 5(c)(ii), very few candidates gained the mark for failing to translate *l'entretien* correctly, with many choosing to write 'talk about/have a conversation about'.

In question 6, a number of candidates chose to write 'family hospital' for *une famille hospitalière*, but most candidates gained the three marks as this question had a degree of optionality.

Question 7, the overall purpose question, was not particularly well answered by the vast majority of candidates. Very few candidates gained full marks for this question and a significant number were awarded 0/2. Many candidates answered this question by reiterating details from the comprehension questions or simply quoting parts of the text in French. Many candidates made no attempt at making any kind of assertion, justifying the reason for their assertion and quoting relevant detail in English from the passage to support what they had written.

In the translation, some candidates lost both marks in sense unit 1 by translating *de l'Afrique du Sud* as 'from the south of Africa'.

In sense unit 4, a number of candidates did not recognise the reflexive verb *s'attendre* and translated it as 'wait for' rather than 'expect'. A number also mistranslated *ému* as 'excited' or in some instances 'emus'.

In sense unit 5, some candidates misunderstood *l'accueil chaleureux* and translated it as 'the welcome warmth'.

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

In the directed writing task, there were few very good responses and very few poor responses. However, a significant number of essays lacked the detailed and complex language and a range of tenses required at this level to gain high marks. The majority of candidates attained 4 or 6 marks out of 10 marks.

In some instances, candidates incorporated learned material which was not relevant to the bullet point, resulting in the bullet points not being tackled in a balanced way. Some candidates failed to address any of the bullet points and wrote essays that did not address the task. In these instances, candidates were awarded 0 marks.

In scenario 1, bullet point 2, where candidates were asked to describe the family's house, the language was often very basic and not of the level expected at Higher. This was also the case in scenario 2, bullet point 3, which asked candidates to describe the activities they did in the evening.

In scenario 1, bullet point 3, a number of candidates failed to talk about the activities organised by the family and simply wrote about what they did.

In scenario 2, bullet point 2, in many candidates ignored what they did on the course and merely recounted a list of activities, and therefore lost marks.

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.

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.

## 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. Many candidates lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers.

In question 1(b), some candidates missed out the detail of ‘the phone number of the business’ and ‘the contact details of the person you were going to meet/who was going to interview you’.

In question 1(c), many candidates failed to recognise *des points importants de votre CV* and simply wrote ‘you should talk about your CV’.

A number of candidates put the answer to question 1(d) in 1(c), and therefore lost the mark.

In question 2(c), a number of candidates misunderstood the word *costume* and wrote that Séverine was dressed in a swimming costume. Some candidates also omitted the detail that her phone rang twice, or failed to recognise that it was her phone that rang.

In question 2(d), some candidates ignored ‘*je ne savais pas comment répondre aux questions*’ and answered by saying ‘she did not answer the questions’.

Many candidates lost a mark in question 2(f) by writing Séverine ‘loved ice cream’, omitting the detail that she could ‘eat as much ice cream as she wanted’ or ‘eat ice cream when she liked’.

In question 2(g), a number of candidates did not recognise the words *circuler* or *embouteillage* and therefore lost marks.

In the writing section of the question paper, there were more poor responses than in previous years, and few very good responses. Most candidates gained 4 or 6 marks out of 10 marks. Poor use of tenses and verb endings, adjectival agreement, gender and accents as well as mother/other tongue interference, and misuse of the dictionary is characteristic of a large number of responses.

## Component 3 — performance—talking

In the presentation, a very small number of candidates seemed to struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen. Many presentations were significantly short in relation to the guidelines and affected the candidates’ performances. Pronunciation was the main issue for many of the candidates who did not perform well. Other candidates did not perform well because of the choice of topic or the questions in the conversation did not allow candidates to respond using language at the appropriate level.

## Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

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

For the reading section of the question paper, centres should remind candidates:

- ◆ it is extremely important to ensure that their handwriting is legible. There was a large increase this year in the number of scripts, which were very difficult to read
- ◆ to include as much detail as possible in their answers
- ◆ to ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions to ensure they gain marks for their answers. This is particularly important if a question has several parts to it. They should be reminded that marks are not transferrable across questions
- ◆ to check what they have written makes sense, and answers the question that has been asked
- ◆ to leave sufficient time to check their answers at the end of the exam
- ◆ in the overall purpose question, they should make an assertion, give a reason for that assertion and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the text to gain both points
- ◆ in the overall purpose question, that no marks are given for simply quoting chunks of text in French to justify their answer
- ◆ to write succinctly in answer to the overall purpose question, and discourage them from writing lengthy responses which merely regurgitate answers from the comprehension questions
- ◆ to focus on tense recognition and attention to detail when translating, to ensure that the final translation is an accurate reflection of the French sentence. Centres should provide opportunities to practise translation as much as possible in class

For the directed writing section of the question paper, centres should ensure candidates:

- ◆ check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points
- ◆ know if they miss out a bullet point or part of a bullet point, the maximum mark they can achieve is 6/10
- ◆ address all bullet points in a balanced way, using detailed and complex language appropriate to Higher. They should try to use a variety of tenses and structures if they wish to achieve high marks
- ◆ have a sound knowledge of past tense verbs, in particular how to conjugate the perfect and imperfect tenses, and when to use these tenses
- ◆ are given the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and to be given techniques on how to deal with these bullet points
- ◆ are encouraged to be more accurate in verb tenses, verb endings, number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary



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

Centres should ensure candidates:

- ◆ are encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions, and are reminded to focus on the actual text and not their own knowledge of a particular topic or theme
- ◆ understand the questions in French in the writing section of the question paper. There is no need to write an equal number of words for each question — the questions are merely there to serve as prompts
- ◆ check their writing is relevant to the task set, express opinions, and give reasons for those opinions
- ◆ are encouraged to write accurately, and are discouraged from translating directly from English
- ◆ have a sound knowledge of the present tense for this particular element
- ◆ are encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary

## **Component 3 — performance—talking**

In some of the performances sampled, the grammatical errors included gender errors and problems with agreement of adjectives and verbs, including omissions of the latter in some instances.

Centres are encouraged to continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of the language as an integral part of learning and teaching. Centres should continue to encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate. The new assignment–writing coursework task, introduced from session 2018–19, could contribute towards aiding candidates’ understanding of how language works.

Centres are encouraged to ensure candidates can be understood by speakers of the language who are not familiar with what the candidates have studied. Having performances verified by another assessor or another centre is seen as good practice.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use enough detailed and complex language and this prevented candidates from accessing the upper pegged marks.

In the conversation section, centres are encouraged to ensure candidates have a variety of strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to say when they have not understood any aspect of the conversation.

Candidates who were able to use relevant interjections, ask relevant questions and use idiomatic phrases were able to sustain the conversation well. Centres are encouraged to continue to prepare candidates in this way.

Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, assessors should continue to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic. Assessors should give candidates the appropriate response or thinking time before doing this.

The length of the performances sampled varied and centres are advised to refer to the advice on the recommended duration of the presentation and the conversation. This is to make sure candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of the task at Higher, as provided in the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*. Many performances were significantly shorter than the recommended duration. On occasion this prevented candidates from accessing the upper pegged marks.

As noted in previous years' Higher French course reports, some candidates gave what appeared to be short, 'mini-presentation' answers in the conversation. While candidates may wish to prepare language and phrases for topic-related questions, centres are encouraged to continue to put open-ended questions to candidates, which can elicit detailed and complex language in the answers.

Centres are also encouraged to put a variety of questions to their candidates, even where the same or similar topics have been selected by candidates from within the same centre (the same question can be asked in different ways, keeping the same key words for candidates to identify, for example *Pourquoi les jeunes commencent à fumer/Quelles sont les raisons pour lesquelles les jeunes fument/Beaucoup de jeunes fument — pourquoi d'après toi?*). In turn, this provides for personalisation and choice and provides scope for candidates to produce a more varied conversation and therefore to access the upper pegged marks for sustaining the conversation (which is merged with the pegged marks for the conversation from session 2018–19).

## Grade boundary and statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	3918
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	3780
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### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	43.1%	43.1%	1631	72
B	24.4%	67.5%	921	61
C	19.8%	87.3%	749	50
D	6.2%	93.5%	234	44
No award	6.5%	-	245	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.