Course Report 2016

Subject	French
Level	Advanced 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

Candidates on the whole were well prepared for each component.

The content of the 2016 Advanced Higher French examination articulated clearly with the new SQA course specification documents, and sampled across all four contexts specified in the arrangement document. Each element of the examination was found to be accessible to all candidates. As expected, some aspects of the examination were more demanding than others and as a result produced a range of performances.

Component 1: Question paper: 1 Reading and Translation

Component 2: Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The Maximum marks available for Reading and Translation and for Listening and Discursive Writing were 50 and 70 respectively.

Performance was strong overall. Areas of weaker performance were in the overall purpose question in Reading, and more significantly in the translation section of this paper.

Component 3: Portfolio

Maximum marks available: 30.

In the Portfolio, a similar pattern was evident, with the majority of candidates being well prepared, more notably when analysing literary texts. Candidate performance was overall not as strong when analysing a media text, and there was variation to a greater degree in the Language in Work Portfolio.

The mean mark suggests that candidates found the new approach encompassing one Portfolio piece to be accessible.

Component 4: Talking Performance

Maximum marks available: 50.

Candidates on the whole were well prepared, with some excellent performances and very few very poor performances, suggesting that candidates were comfortable using discursive language within the four prescribed contexts.

It is encouraging to see that the mean mark for the Talking component is relatively high. This suggests that the new pegged marks capture candidates' performance with a reliable degree of accuracy.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper: 1 Reading and Translation

In Reading, performance in the comprehension questions was very strong, with only a minority of candidates failing to understand finer points or omitting essential detail to obtain full marks. All candidates managed to answer the comprehension questions satisfactorily within the time set for the exam. This suggests that candidates are confident with the style of questioning required at AH level.

Component 2: Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

In Listening, which focused on the contexts learning/employability, performance was similarly strong in Part A. It was found that candidates were able to answer factual questions accurately, while often giving enough detail to gain full marks.

In the Discursive writing, all essay titles available were attempted. The essays titles on 'société multiculturelle' and 'l'éducation' were especially popular, with both being themes the majority of candidates should be comfortable discussing. Candidates who answered the essay title in a structured fashion while using language with a degree of sophistication were able to gain very high if not full marks. Ability to show a control of tenses and express ideas was frequently encountered in strong performances.

Component 3: Portfolio

Submissions which took literary texts as their focus produced particularly strong performances. Candidates performed well when:

♦ They had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question.
♦ Use of English was formal.
♦ Guidance regarding word limit and bibliography was observed.
♦ SQA Guidance was used effectively.

Component 4: Talking Performance

This is an area where candidates have truly excelled. It was found that candidates showed a significant degree of confidence overall when discussing areas of interest in the four contexts. The language accuracy, as well as discussion techniques, demonstrated by candidates allowed for the majority of performances to run smoothly.

Candidates performed well when they had chosen themes that allowed for discussion that would provide both breadth and depth, and were also prepared to use a variety of discussion techniques to cope with unexpected language.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper: 1 Reading and Translation

A small number of candidates had difficulty in completing the Reading paper in its entirety and as a result did not attempt the overall purpose question. When this was attempted, a significant number of candidates tended to produce unnecessarily long answers that failed to be critical in approach and failed to draw on inferences from the text. Such candidates did not achieve particularly high marks. Answers tended to be unstructured and repeated information that had already been provided in the comprehension question.

The Translation proved to be particularly challenging for a significant number of candidates. Often, candidates did not manage to convey sufficient understanding of the sense units to gain the full 2 marks available. When understanding was apparent, lack of detail or basic mistakes in tenses, for instance, would detract from a full mark. Poor dictionary use was sometimes encountered.

Component 2: Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

In the listening comprehension paper, candidates found Part B of the exam more demanding, sometimes not managing to capture enough information from the dialogue to gain full marks in a specific question, or answering a point that might be required in a different question.

In the discursive writing, there were poor performances when candidates did not answer the essay title or did not demonstrate sufficient control of language structures to express ideas accurately. This detracted from the overall quality of their performance.

Component 3: Portfolio

Performance was uneven between centres and candidates as there appeared to be a degree of confusion as to what constitutes a media text area of study. Candidates who either did not meet the requirements as set in the Advanced Higher Course Assessment Specifications or produced a descriptive rather than analytical piece of work performed poorly overall.

Some candidates were penalised for exceeding the word limit or failing to include a bibliography. On occasion, it was also unclear whether the sources accessed had been in the target language as specified in the arrangement document.

Component 4: Talking Performance

Where poor performance was encountered in the Talking performance, it tended to be that a candidate had either:

♦ Focused on a topic that was too prescriptive to allow for development of discussion
♦ Focused on a topic that was too broad in scope

Some candidates found themselves at a disadvantage as they were not able to discuss a theme constructively during the performance and lost marks as a result.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper: 1 Reading and Translation

Comprehension questions:

♦ Candidates should answer in their own words and resist the temptation to translate literally from the French.
♦ Practising specimen/exemplar/past papers in exam conditions would give candidates greater insight into exam time management, which is of particular importance when tackling the Translation.
♦ Translation practice would ensure greater familiarity with dictionary use and give candidates the opportunity to trust their own judgement when deciding on the meaning of a particular word or sense unit.

Overall purpose question:

♦ Candidates should give a broad statement at the start of their answer and then structure their response appropriately.
♦ They should draw on evidence from the text to substantiate their opinion, providing key information from the text AND linking it to specific rhetorical techniques used by the author of the text.
♦ It is important for candidates to summarise all their points in a brief concluding statement bringing to a close a concise but sophisticated answer, rather than producing long elaboration that repeats the same points throughout.

Component 2: Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening comprehension:

♦ encourage candidates to provide enough detail in their answers
♦ practise exam papers in order to familiarise themselves with time management techniques

Discursive writing:

♦ Encourage candidates to read essay titles thoroughly so that their focus is on providing an informed opinion on the statement given. Learned material must be relevant to the stimulus.
♦ Advise candidates to take time to proof read their essays in order to check for errors in verbs, adjectival agreements and genders, and to use the dictionary to double check when in doubt.
♦ Discourage candidates to plan or write an essay in English first and then attempt to translate it, as this will often lead to seriously incomprehensible French in their essays.
♦ Advise candidates to structure their work and provide short appropriate statements in their introduction and conclusion.
♦ Share pegged marks criteria as specified in SQA documentation.

Component 3: Portfolio

It is essential that centres make themselves familiar with the Course Assessment Specifications for Advanced Higher. This will assist them here to decide on an appropriate area of study and title.

In addition, it is advised that centres:

♦ Ensure that candidates use appropriately formal English.
♦ Ensure that candidates adhere to the word limit and follow the bibliography guidelines regarding their use of sources in the target language.
♦ Share with candidates the specifications for the Portfolio as specified in the SQA Course Assessment Specification.

Component 4: Talking Performance

Centres are advised to ensure that candidates are able to demonstrate a range of discussion techniques in order to cope with unexpected language.

On occasion, greater detail of the themes studied, ie 'le racisme et l'immigration dans une société multiculturelle' as opposed to 'multicultural society' would help examiners support candidates more effectively throughout the performance. Conversely, a theme that is too narrow in scope, such as 'le redoublement', can occasionally disadvantage some candidates.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	0

Number of resulted entries in 2016	698

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	38.5%	38.5%	269	140
B	26.8%	65.3%	187	120
C	19.3%	84.7%	135	100
D	6.3%	91.0%	44	90
No award	9.0%	-	63	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.