Course report 2023

Higher French

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   2,498

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   2,282

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,187	Percentage	52	Cumulative percentage	52	Minimum mark required	74
B	Number of candidates	394	Percentage	17.3	Cumulative percentage	69.3	Minimum mark required	62
C	Number of candidates	321	Percentage	14.1	Cumulative percentage	83.3	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	223	Percentage	9.8	Cumulative percentage	93.1	Minimum mark required	38
No award	Number of candidates	157	Percentage	6.9	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading question paper sampled the context of society. It was accessible to all candidates and was appropriate to the level. The balance of accessible and more challenging questions, particularly the overall purpose question and the translation, helped differentiate candidate performance in line with expectations. Overall, candidates performed slightly better in the reading question paper than in 2022, but not as well as in 2019. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundary.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The directed writing question paper performed in line with expectations. Most candidates chose scenario 1, which sampled the context of culture. Fewer candidates chose scenario 2 on employability. Both scenarios were of a similar level of difficulty, and most candidates were able to attempt all six bullet points. As expected, the paper generated a range of performances.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper sampled the context of learning. The balance of straightforward and more difficult questions in the listening question paper resulted in a wide range of marks and differentiated candidate performance, as intended. Many candidates found the question paper to be challenging this year, and it was evident that preparation and practice are still being affected by the disruption to learning. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundary.

Assignment–writing

The requirement to complete the assignment–writing was removed for session 2022–23.

Performance–talking

All centres sampled for verification used the task set by SQA. Centres adhered to the required approach to assessment and provided a breakdown of marks awarded for the discussion.

The Higher performance–talking specifies that, in the discussion, candidates must use detailed and complex language on two contexts.

Some candidates' discussions were overly prescriptive. They should be as spontaneous as possible. A number of discussions appeared to be excessively rehearsed. A variety of questioning approaches helps candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected.

It is not compulsory for candidates to ask the interlocutor a question during the discussion, however this can allow for a more natural discussion.

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Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

Many candidates appeared to have been well-prepared for the question paper and generally performed well across the comprehension questions and translation, but less well in the overall purpose question.

Questions 1(a), (b)(ii), 2(a), 4(a) and (b)(i) were well done by most candidates.

Question 7: most candidates did well in the translation and, overall, performance in this question was better than in 2022. Sense units 3 and 4 were particularly well done.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Most candidates were well-prepared to answer the predictable bullet points in this question paper. Many performed well in the paper overall, demonstrating accuracy, appropriate content and skilful demonstration of language resource.

Very few candidates failed to address three of the six bullet points and very few candidates failed to attempt the paper.

Performance–talking

Most centres in the verification sample conducted the performance–talking in line with national standards, using the marking instruction effectively, and in conjunction with the productive grammar grid.

Interlocutors were supportive, especially with nervous candidates. Where interlocutors were aware of candidates' interests, this helped achieve more natural and spontaneous discussions.

Overall candidate performance was good, and the mean mark similar to previous years.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Some candidates failed to gain marks in some of the comprehension questions as they did not write sufficient detail in their answers. A few candidates failed to provide a response to questions, missing out on the available marks.

- question 1(b)(i): most candidates did not recognise the idiomatic phrase *cul sec,* and did not gain the mark
- question 2(b): many candidates did not gain marks as they did not write sufficient detail in their answer or misunderstood the detail, omitting to write 'while testing their own limits' or translating *propre* as 'clean' or 'proper'

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- question 3(a): some candidates did not gain the mark as they omitted to write 'what they do to impress everyone' or mistranslated *tout le monde* as 'the whole world'
- question 3(c): some candidates did not gain the mark as they mistranslated *certaines limites ne doivent pas être dépassées* as 'certain limits should not be overtaken' or 'it is their duty not to pass certain limits'
- question 4(b)(ii): many candidates missed a mark as they omitted to say 'in the room next door' or by translating *sain et sauf* as 'safe and healthy'
- question 5: some candidates omitted the detail of *quand ils postuleront pour un emploi* and did not gain the mark
- question 6: the overall purpose question proved challenging. Some candidates gained 1 mark for this question, but some did not achieve any marks. Many candidates answered by reiterating details from the comprehension questions, without making an assertion and justifying why they had made that assertion. Other candidates only quoted parts of the text in French, resulting in them gaining no marks. Most candidates attempted to make an assertion but gave no justification as to why they thought this was the case. However, some candidates were able to make an assertion and justify it by going on to give relevant details about these aspects from the text
- translation sense unit 2: some candidates missed marks as they translated *adolescents* as 'young people' or mistranslating *prêts* as 'prepared to'
- translation sense unit 5: some candidates mistranslated *rien de grave* and gave 'nothing will happen to them till death or till the grave'. Many mistranslated *arriver* as 'arrive'

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The following issues affected candidate performance:

In scenario 1 bullet point 5, candidates were asked what they noticed about the French way of life. The language candidates used was often inaccurate or had been translated directly from English. This was also the case in scenario 2 bullet point 3, which asked candidates to say why they had decided to take part.

Lack of accuracy continues to be a problem for candidates, with spelling, genders, plurals, accents and adjectival agreement all posing problems. Some candidates did not appear to have a sound knowledge of tenses. The formation of the past tense is often inconsistent, with the infinitive sometimes being used, or the auxiliary verb being omitted in the perfect tense. Some candidates had difficulty distinguishing the difference between the imperfect and conditional tenses.

Many candidates were unable to maintain accuracy in the less predictable bullet points. This was often characterised by dictionary misuse and other language interference.

Candidates often had good ideas but did not have the language resource necessary to express them. This resulted in over-reliance on dictionary usage, which sometimes led to mistranslations.

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Question paper 2: Listening

Most candidates found the listening paper challenging and many did not achieve the marks for the questions as they did not write enough detail in their answers or guessed answers.

♦ question 1(b)(i): many candidates missed out the detail of *une carrière dans le secteur de la création*

♦ question 1(b)(ii): some candidates missed the mark by omitting to write 'she got the best mark in the **art** class'

♦ question 1(d)(ii): this question was worth 2 marks; however, many candidates missed out the detail in the first point by omitting to include 'three-month work placement' in their response, or by writing 'two months' for *trois mois.* Some candidates missed out on the mark as they gave *juin* as 'July'. In the second point, some candidates did not state that she would continue to work there on Saturdays after the holiday and did not gain the mark

♦ question 1(d)(ii): some candidates did not gain the mark in this question by failing to state that it would enable her to develop her skills in that domain, or to see if she really wants to study architecture at university

♦ question 2(b): most candidates managed to get at least 1 mark for this question, but some missed a mark for omitting to state 'more than' for *il y a plus de cinquante étudiants par classe*

♦ question 2(c): many candidates failed to recognise *club de randonnées* and therefore missed the mark in this question

♦ question 2(d): many candidates did not recognise *j'essaie de ne pas réviser à la dernière minute* and rendered it as 'she revises at the last minute'. Many failed to state 'she avoided going out too often' or 'she went out less often'

♦ question 2(e)(i): many candidates did not gain the mark in the first point for failing to recognise *il y a de petites salles qui nous permettent de nous concentrer plus facilement*

♦ question 2(e)(ii): some candidates omitted to state that there were 'too many' distractions and therefore did not gain the mark

♦ question 2(f): many candidates did not recognise *plus mûre* and missed the mark

Performance–talking

Pronunciation remains an issue for many of the candidates who did not perform well. Verifiers must be able to understand candidates, no matter how good the content is.

Other candidates did not perform well because of the choice of topic, or the questions did not allow candidates to respond using language at the corresponding level.

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Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ include as much detail as possible in their answers

♦ pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions to ensure that they gain marks for their answers. This is particularly important if a question has several parts to it

♦ are aware that marks are not transferrable across questions

♦ check what they have written makes sense and answers the question

♦ leave sufficient time to check their answers

♦ in the overall purpose question they should make an assertion, give a reason for the assertion, and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the text in English to gain both marks. They will not achieve any marks for quoting examples in French to justify their answer

♦ write succinctly in their answer to the overall purpose question, and avoid writing lengthy responses that merely reuse answers from the comprehension questions

♦ focus on tense recognition and attention to detail to ensure that the translation is an accurate reflection of the French

♦ have opportunities to practise translation as much as possible in class

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ check they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points

♦ address all bullet points in a balanced way, using detailed and complex language

♦ know how to use a variety of tenses and structures to achieve higher pegged 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

♦ have opportunities to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class

♦ gain 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 a dictionary

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Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ use the time before the recording starts to read the questions carefully and include as much detail as possible in their answers
♦ focus on the actual text and not their own knowledge of a particular topic or theme
♦ have a sound knowledge of basic vocabulary such as days of the week, months of the year, numbers

Performance–talking

To be considered for the top range of pegged marks, candidates must use detailed and complex language in most parts of the performance at this level. Long lists of items (for example, places in town, school subjects) or repetitions of straightforward descriptions (for example, family members) are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary.

Using scripted discussions may not allow candidates to meet the criteria for the top pegged marks in the performance.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

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standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.