

External Assessment Report 2013 – Advanced Higher French

Overall Performance

The performance overall in each component was very encouraging, with some excellent performances in all elements and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in the Folio and Listening/Discursive Writing). The mean marks reflect this in spite of a drop in performance in the Folio, which may have been influenced by the introduction of the new 'Poor' category in the pegged mark descriptors.

Reading and Translation

- On the whole, candidates succeeded in responding accurately to the reading comprehension questions. There was less evidence of marks lost due to 'word-for-word translation' resulting in awkward use of English (with the exception of the phrase; *l'exposition extérieur*).
- In the inferential question (Q5) many candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers (commonly two and three pages) in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions, rather than address the actual question and highlight the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the author.
- While most candidates performed well in the Translation section, they often lacked the accuracy and details required for a fully accurate translation.
- Marks were lost through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles (*le choix* as 'a' choice), singular/plural nouns (*ces efforts* as 'this' effort) and verb tenses (*on pourrait* as 'you' can).

Listening Comprehension

- There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension, which was on a familiar topic for candidates. The clarity and speed of recording were commented on favourably by many centres.
- Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer the more demanding questions accurately, often understanding part of the information but lacking sufficient detail particularly with the statistics: *un Français sur trois / quatre millions n'ont que trois vraies conversations par an* and the activities; *les vieux jouent aux cartes et les jeunes au baby foot/ apprécier celle du juke-box*.

Discursive Writing and Folio

- These were the elements of the exam that produced the greatest range of performances but, in general, candidates seemed prepared in terms of structuring their responses and by referring throughout to the actual essay title.
- Some candidates struggled to incorporate relevant, learned material with the level of accuracy required to achieve a satisfactory performance.
- Only a small number of candidates produced poor performances with little or no control of basic grammar and verb formation and with serious misuse of dictionary.

- In the Folio, a wide range of literary texts and background topics were presented, and only one centre presented a Language in Work report.
- Weaker performances, whether literary texts or background topics, were those where the choice of essay title did not lend itself well to critical and analytical discussion but instead elicited a descriptive response from the candidate.
- Unfortunately, some candidates were penalised for exceeding the word limit and for failing to include a bibliography.
- In some background topics (and particularly those related to films), it was not always clear how much of the study had been in French or how far the topic was being approached from a French, as distinct from a European or American, perspective.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

- Centres should ensure that candidates understand the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation of a particular section of the text.
- It follows that candidates should be discouraged from giving word-for-word translations in response to the reading comprehension questions, as this often results in awkward use of English.
- Candidates should have sufficient practice in managing their time effectively. They should be discouraged from writing excessively long answers to the inferential question and thereby leaving themselves little time to complete the translation.
- Candidates should be encouraged to attempt the translation after completing the reading comprehension questions in order to make the context for the translation clearer.
- In the inferential question, candidates should be guided towards providing a more general response to the question asked and supporting this statement with specific, key information from the text while commenting on any particular stylistic features used by the writer. (Guidance on the inferential question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, has recently been made available on SQA's website)

Discursive Writing

- Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully, and to construct a relevant and personal response. They may draw upon learned material in this, but it must be relevant to the essay title.
- Advise candidates to use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, genders etc), not to create and invent new sentences.
- Share the assessment criteria for Discursive Writing with candidates so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Accuracy, Range and Variety.

Folio

- Ensure that candidates choose an essay title that allows for a critical and analytical response.
- Encourage candidates to develop an appropriately formal and accurate use of English.

- Ensure that candidates adhere to the word limit and include a bibliography.
- Share the assessment criteria for Folio Writing with candidates so that they know what is expected in terms of Content, Analytical approach and Structure.

General

- Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible (particularly when writing in French) or points can be lost.
- In 2012, Guidance on the Inferential Question, including candidate performances with markers' comments, was made available by SQA, and there is some evidence that this is leading to an improved performance by candidates.