



Course report 2024

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 2,282

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 2,298

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,174	Percentage	51.1	Cumulative percentage	51.1	Minimum mark required	82
B	Number of candidates	465	Percentage	20.2	Cumulative percentage	71.3	Minimum mark required	70
C	Number of candidates	331	Percentage	14.4	Cumulative percentage	85.7	Minimum mark required	58
D	Number of candidates	208	Percentage	9.1	Cumulative percentage	94.8	Minimum mark required	46
No award	Number of candidates	120	Percentage	5.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The course assessments covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture. All question papers offered an appropriate level of challenge.

The reading and directed writing question papers performed as intended. Candidates performed well in these papers, and very well in the assignment–writing. Candidate performance in the listening paper was mixed, with some finding this paper more challenging.

Question paper 1: Reading

The question paper performed as expected. The text was about students sharing a flat abroad and sampled the context of culture. Candidates engaged well with the topic. A few candidates left some questions unanswered, mainly in the overall purpose question.

Candidates performed better in the reading paper than in 2023 and 2019. Candidates responded confidently to the comprehension questions (questions 1 to 5), with many answers having the level of detail required at this level. The overall purpose question (question 6) was done well by most candidates.

All questions performed as expected. There was a balance of accessible and challenging questions, with some questions offering options for acceptable answers.

Candidates translate a section of the reading text into English, a skill requiring a high degree of grammatical accuracy and higher order skills that help in differentiating candidate performance. Most candidates attempted this part of the question paper (question 7).

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The question paper performed as expected. Scenario 1 (on the context of society) and scenario 2 (on the context of learning) were fair, accessible and of equal demand.

Candidates have to write mostly using the past tense, with the conditional and/or future tense needed to answer the last bullet point.

Many candidates chose to write about staying with a French family (scenario 1), with fewer candidates choosing to write about the language school trip (scenario 2). Candidates were able to answer the bullet points in both scenarios.

Candidates performed better in the directed writing paper than in 2023 and very similar to 2019. More confident performances were characterised by candidates addressing the bullet points in a balanced way, demonstrating good content, grammatical accuracy, and language resource appropriate to the level. Candidates adapted learned material effectively to address their chosen scenario.

Weaker performance highlighted problems with coverage of the bullet points, more limited content and language resource along with problems sustaining grammatical accuracy.

Question paper 2: Listening

The question paper sampled the context of employability. Candidates listen to a monologue about aspects relating to having several jobs, and a conversation about working for a charity.

The question paper was fair, and on a topic that candidates could engage with. This produced a range of performances. Some candidates coped well, while others continue to find listening a challenging skill.

The listening paper contained a mixture of more accessible and more demanding questions, with several questions in both the monologue and conversation offering optionality. Some candidates found aspects of the question paper to be challenging, but most attempted all questions.

Performance in listening was better than in 2023 but still below 2019. Aspects that were more challenging than expected for all candidates were considered when setting grade boundaries.

Assignment–writing

The assignment–writing was reinstated this session and performed as intended. Candidates choose a stimulus on a topic of their choice and write discursively using detailed and complex language in response to the stimulus.

Candidates used a variety of contexts and topics from the contexts of society, learning or culture, with fewer essays on the context of employability.

The assignment–writing is designed to offer an element of personalisation and choice and give candidates opportunities to write on a topic that interests them.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

- ◆ question 1(a): some candidates answered incorrectly, expressing ‘a point of view’, ‘their point of view’
- ◆ question 2: many candidates achieved 2 marks. Few achieved the third mark as they included ‘courses’ or ‘classes’ for *les courses* or did not include the detail ‘save time and money’
- ◆ question 3(a): most candidates included the idea of comparison (bigger or very big compared to their parents’ flat)
- ◆ question 3(b): most candidates did well and gave an acceptable rendition for ‘stage’
- ◆ question 3(c): several options were available, and most candidates included the first three
- ◆ question 4: the third mark required the detail ‘come back home late, preventing others from sleeping’. Some candidates gained the mark by giving more detailed responses and recognising the verb *rentrer*
- ◆ question 5: most candidates performed well
- ◆ question 6 (the overall purpose question): most candidates gained 1 or 2 marks. They gave the correct assertion that the text covered many positive points about sharing a flat abroad or that there was a balanced view. Candidates had many choices of positive examples (or negative, depending on their assertion) to use in their justification
- ◆ question 7: while the translation was challenging in parts, many candidates gained marks; in particular, they did well in sense units 1 and 2

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Many candidates performed well in directed writing, achieving pegged marks of 12, 16 or 20 in both scenarios.

Features of stronger responses included:

- ◆ full coverage of the bullet points and additional information relevant to the scenario
- ◆ a good or very good level of grammatical accuracy with good control of past tenses and the conditional tense for bullet points 6 in each of the scenarios
- ◆ good or very good language resource, for example: *j’ai eu la chance de, je me suis très bien entendu avec, j’ai beaucoup aimé, je me suis bien amusé, j’ai eu l’opportunité de, je dois admettre que, tout ce dont j’avais besoin, pour rendre visite à, pour être honnête, grâce à, je me suis senti*
- ◆ good use of discourse markers, for example: *pour commencer, parfois, quelquefois, chaque soir, pendant la journée, de temps en temps, dans l’ensemble, pendant mon séjour, en général, personnellement, en conclusion*

Question paper 2: Listening

- ◆ questions 1(a)(i) and (d)(ii): most candidates recognised relatively straightforward vocabulary and structures
- ◆ question 1(a)(ii): many candidates showed good recognition of *mes collègues sont très compréhensifs*
- ◆ question 1(d)(i): many candidates recognised the first available answer about gaining experience in two, or different, sectors
- ◆ questions 2(d) and (f): many candidates performed well

Assignment–writing

There were some excellent pieces of writing at this level and many candidates achieved the upper pegged marks of 16 and 20, with most candidates achieving 12 pegged marks or higher.

Features of stronger performances included:

- ◆ relevant content, with some essays fully addressing the title in a discursive way
- ◆ many essays had a good structure, with different viewpoints on the topic and a clear conclusion
- ◆ a very good or good degree of grammatical accuracy, where errors did not always detract from the overall impression
- ◆ good language resource with sustained use of detailed and complex language; language structures, verbs and vocabulary were topic dependant, for example *la relation qu'on entretient avec, il est vraiment important de, élargir ses horizons, c'est l'occasion de pouvoir, cela permet de construire, les gens devraient considérer, ce n'est pas pour tout le monde, par exemple, la famille ne vous soutient pas, les disputes ne durent qu'un moment, voyager est affreux pour l'environnement*
- ◆ use of discourse markers, for example *cependant, d'abord, pour conclure, de nos jours, par conséquent, aussi, donc, néanmoins, de plus*
- ◆ discursive language, for example *les avantages/désavantages de...sont que..., on ne peut pas nier, il va sans dire que, il y a des gens/ceux qui disent que, d'un côté, de l'autre côté, en revanche, par contre, examinons, d'autre part, tout compte fait, ayant dit cela, il y a des arguments pour et contre, il est évident que, à vrai dire, en ce qui concerne*

Performance–talking

Most candidates performed well.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Sense units 3 and 4 in the translation (question 7) were the most challenging aspect of this paper.

- ◆ sense unit 3: *C'est tout à coup un nouveau monde qui s'ouvre* many candidates missed marks by incorrectly translating *tout à coup* as something to do with a shock. Candidates found difficulty with translating *s'ouvre* correctly in the context (opens up), and some allowances were made for this in the marking instruction
- ◆ sense unit 4: *où chacun devra apprendre à*, very few candidates recognised the future tense of *devoir*

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Where candidates only partially addressed the bullet points, they missed out on the upper pegged marks. For example, in scenario 1, a few responses did not address thoughts on the town, and in scenario 2 a few responses missed where the language school was.

A very small number of performances that had serious inaccuracies and very little of the essay made sense, gained no marks. The same applied if candidates produced pre-learned language and phrases that did not address the bullet points in the chosen scenario. A few candidates repeated the same language, ideas and opinions in scenario 1, bullet points 3 and 5.

Features of weaker performances included:

- ◆ problems with grammatical accuracy in spelling, gender, plurals, accents and adjectival agreement, for example:
 - *le famille, le experience, la village, le campagne, une mois, une bus, un langue, ma temps, ma ecole, la francais, la style de vie, l'année dernier, compétences français, ma études, mon chambre. picturesque, beacoup, benifique, recontré, recommanderais, etait, grandé, voyage* (instead of *past participle voyagé*), *améliorer, très, comprehensif*
- ◆ a lack of knowledge of tenses, with little control of language or an inability to sustain the correct use of past tenses, and essays reverting to the present tense, particularly after the first bullet point
- ◆ use of the infinitive instead of a past tense and auxiliary verbs being omitted in the perfect tense. Some candidates confused the imperfect and conditional or future tenses, for example:
 - *j'ai appris/apprendé, j'ai/nous avons allé, nous avons resté, j'ai passer, je ferai perdu, j'ai dû partagé, j'adoré* (missing auxiliary), *je pris, la famille étais*
- ◆ use of incorrect words and/or phrases, for example:
 - *amusement* (for *amusant*), *dans l'avenir* (instead of *à l'avenir*), *avec une famille* (instead of *chez une famille*), *l'année été, j'ai manqué ma famille, ils étaient intéressés* (instead of using the structure *s'intéresser à*).

Question paper 2: Listening

A lack of detail in answers or a lack of knowledge of common vocabulary meant candidates missed gaining marks in the following questions.

- ◆ question 1(c)(i), *il accueille des clients étrangers*: most candidates did not recognise the meaning of the verb
- ◆ question 2(a)(i), *je voulais faire quelque chose qui n'avait rien à voir avec mes études*: most candidates did not recognise the structure *rien à voir* and missed the gist
- ◆ question 2(g), *ajouter quelque chose d'intéressant à son CV*: although this question had straightforward language and cognates, most candidates missed the key idea about the CV and guessed 'have fun' from *tout en s'amusant*
- ◆ question 1(b), *trop fatiguée pour sortir avec mes amis, pas assez de temps pour me détendre*: many candidates missed one or more marks as they did not give the idea of going out or omitted 'too'. In the second answer, candidates did not recognise *pas assez* or did not give this in their answer
- ◆ question 1(c)(ii), *il distribue des repas aux patients*: some candidates did not recognise the cognate *patients* and vocabulary *repas*, which is common vocabulary that should be recognised at this level
- ◆ question 2(a)(ii), *je peux choisir combien d'heures je travaille*: many candidates did not recognise *choisir* and *je travaille* and the cognate *heures*, which is expected at this level
- ◆ question 2(b), *je mets les prix sur les articles à vendre, j'aide les clients à choisir des cadeaux...trier les sacs de vêtements et les livres*: many candidates did not recognise the cognates *prix*, *articles*, *clients*, and verbs and vocabulary that are straightforward for the level *vendre*, *j'aide* and *cadeaux*
- ◆ question 2(c), *j'ai l'impression de faire quelque chose d'utile, je rencontre des personnes très intéressantes*: many candidates did not recognise the phrase *avoir l'impression*
- ◆ question 2(e), *enseigner le français aux enfants...construire un terrain de sport...faire ce que je peux parce que les enfants ont besoin de mon aide*: many candidates missed one or more marks. In the second question, some candidates did not recognise *construire* and some did not recognise *terrain*, although straightforward for the level

Assignment–writing

The writing at this level should be largely discursive. Some candidates' essays had titles and stimuli that should have elicited a discursive response; however, their responses were from a personal point of view with mostly personal ideas and opinions, and little discussion of different viewpoints. Some submissions lacked an appropriate conclusion. There were some titles or stimuli that required candidates to recount their experience, and this did not provide them with the necessary scope to consider different viewpoints.

If essays read as a personal response to a topic and had either few or no discursive elements, the candidates could not gain the upper pegged marks.

Features of weaker performances included:

- ◆ content with limited coverage of different arguments and/or viewpoints
- ◆ an insufficient level of accuracy for the level. Some essays had errors that detracted from the overall quality of some performances, for example:
 - verb and tense errors: *car vous devenir forte, je fait, certains dirait, les amis pouvez, je dirait que, les gens pence que, j'ai quitterais, les gens peuvent mettent, les élèves peuvent avons, la langue que vous sont apprendre*
 - gender and agreement errors: *les gens etranger, cet opinion, nouveau culture, bonne carrière, une domaine, en plein forme, d'autre pays, le pressions, la famille est très important, de bon conseils, un responsabilité*
 - spelling errors: *par exemple, medicine, benifique, mauivaise, perdonner, oppurtunité, vaccances, finalement*
 - incorrect or incomplete structures: *tous les temps, tout de réfléchi, je ne suis pas ce que je veux étudier, cet parce que d'apprendre..., les gens avec un travail, autour le monde, dans ensemble, ceux-ci choses, tous jours, un beaucoup de, aider tout le monde qui est lutte, votre langue compentences*
 - inconsistent use of accents: *competitif, experiènces, prèmièrement, achèter, problemes, meme, coute, sante*

In terms of language resource, most candidates' essays showed they attempted to use detailed and complex language, but weaker performances showed unsuccessful use of language and structures, mostly due to issues with accuracy.

Performance–talking

Pronunciation remains an issue for many candidates who did not perform well.

Some candidates did not perform well due to their choice of topic. A few candidates struggled with the complexity of the language they chose to use.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

For the comprehension questions, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ pay close attention to the number of marks for each question and provide as much detail as they can
- ◆ know that if a question says, 'state any one thing', there is more than one possible correct answer
- ◆ know that the comprehension questions have key words to help them find the correct answer in the text
- ◆ leave time to check their answers
- ◆ are aware that marks are not transferrable across questions

For the overall purpose question, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ know they should answer the question (assertion), going beyond the simple statement of 'yes' or 'no'. They should follow this with a justification that shows an accurate reading of the text, using examples or reasons with reference to the text
- ◆ are aware that quotes in French without an explanation of their relevance, will not gain any marks

For the translation, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ have opportunities to practise the skill of translation as often as possible
- ◆ complete the translation question after the comprehension questions
- ◆ pay attention to verb tenses and detail to ensure that the translation is an accurate reflection of the French
- ◆ re-read their translation in English to check it makes sense

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ check they have answered all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points
- ◆ try to give detail for each bullet point in a balanced way
- ◆ write in paragraphs
- ◆ use detailed and complex language, avoiding repeating the same structures and ideas
- ◆ include additional information, where appropriate
- ◆ develop a robust knowledge of aspects of grammar appropriate to the level
- ◆ know how to conjugate perfect and imperfect tenses
- ◆ have a secure understanding of when to use the perfect or imperfect tense

- ◆ use a variety of tenses and structures, using different verb forms, for example first- or third-person plural
- ◆ set aside time to read over their writing to check, for example, gender, spelling, adjectival agreements using the dictionary

Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ practise listening skills, including note-taking in class
- ◆ use the time before the recording starts to read the questions
- ◆ try to identify or highlight key words in each question
- ◆ include as much detail as possible in their answers
- ◆ practise basic vocabulary on a regular basis. This includes vocabulary covered before starting the Higher course, for example days of the week, time, numbers, months of the year, food, shopping, travel, holidays, and family

Assignment–writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates:

- ◆ read the general marking principles and detailed marking instructions to understand that, at this level, they should present different arguments or viewpoints and draw a conclusion
- ◆ view examples of discursive writing on [SQA's Understanding Standards web page](#) to better understand the style of writing required in the assignment–writing
- ◆ have a choice of stimuli at the start of the drafting process, to help them write discursively about a topic
- ◆ use the time spent between the first draft and final version to improve accuracy in all aspects of grammar and spelling
- ◆ write the stimulus and any associated questions in English in the answer booklet
- ◆ avoid including any draft work in the answer booklet

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ prepare for their discussion by thinking about the type of questions they are likely to be asked on their chosen topic, including key words that could be used in the questions
- ◆ know they can gain full marks, even if they briefly hesitate and recover successfully
- ◆ know they don't have to ask questions during the discussion
- ◆ know the level of language they should be able to cope with and ensure they understand what they have prepared

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to build on strategies they developed at National 5, including:

- ◆ a mix of extended and less extended answers (not short presentations or monologues)
- ◆ appropriate thinking time
- ◆ natural interjections, for example *euuh, bah, ben, alors!*
- ◆ acknowledgement that they have understood the question: *oui, je suis d'accord, non, pas du tout, tout à fait, bien sûr*
- ◆ asking questions that are relevant to the discussion and at relevant times
- ◆ asking for repetition or clarification, for example *je n'ai pas compris. Veuillez/peux-tu répéter?*

Teachers and lecturers should make use of the Understanding Standards materials for Higher French: performance–talking (IACCA) published on SQA's secure website. These are available through your SQA co-ordinator.

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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).