



Course report 2023

National 5 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: 6,630

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 6,820

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	3,910	Percentage	57.3	Cumulative percentage	57.3	Minimum mark required	75
B	Number of candidates	1,096	Percentage	16.1	Cumulative percentage	73.4	Minimum mark required	62
C	Number of candidates	800	Percentage	11.7	Cumulative percentage	85.1	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	616	Percentage	9	Cumulative percentage	94.2	Minimum mark required	37
No award	Number of candidates	397	Percentage	5.8	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](https://sqa.my/) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading question paper was comprised of three texts of equal weight (10 marks for each item). There were three supported questions (worth 4 marks in total). The question paper covered the contexts of society, learning and employability (the three contexts not covered in the listening question paper), and the texts were based on interesting and relevant topics that engaged candidates.

Each text was accessible to all candidates, but text 1 proved to be more challenging than texts 2 or 3. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundary.

Question paper 1: Writing

The writing question paper required candidates to reply by email to a job advert. The question paper is worth 20 marks, with four predictable bullet points and two unpredictable bullet points. Candidate performance in this paper was slightly lower than in 2022.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper was comprised of two parts: a monologue worth 8 marks and a conversation worth 12 marks, both included a supported question worth 1 mark each. The paper was based on the context of culture.

Candidates performed better in this paper compared with 2022, especially in the monologue; however, overall performance was lower than pre-pandemic. 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 presentation, conversation and sustaining the conversation.

The National 5 performance–talking specifies that, in the conversation, candidates must go into at least one different context from the presentation. Following one or two lead-in questions associated with the context in the presentation, the substance of the conversation must be on a different context (society, learning, employability, culture), and not a different topic.

Some conversations were significantly short for this level, and this affected candidates' pegged marks, regardless of how well they performed. Other conversations were unnecessarily prolonged, and this affected the candidates' overall performances.

In the presentation, a few candidates struggled with the complexity of the language they chose to use.

Some candidates' conversations were overly prescriptive. Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible for the level being assessed. A number of conversations appeared to be excessively rehearsed. A wider variety of questions in the conversation helps candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected.

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

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

Text 1 – context: society

Questions 1(a)(i) and (a)(ii) (supported question) both worth 1 mark: many candidates answered these well and were able to gain the marks available.

Question 1(b)(i) worth 2 marks: candidates answered well with most gaining at least 1 mark.

Text 2 – context: learning

Question 2a(i) worth 1 mark: many candidates gave enough detail to gain the mark.

Question 2d(ii) (supported question) worth 2 marks: candidates answered particularly well with most gaining the marks.

Text 3 – context: employability

Overall, candidates coped well with all the questions in text 3. Candidates coped particularly well with questions 3(a), (b) and (d) (supported question), all worth 1 mark.

Question paper 1: Writing

Candidates performed well in this paper. Many candidates addressed the four predictable bullet points in a balanced manner and were able to use detailed vocabulary and grammatical structures expected at this level. Most candidates were prepared for the two unpredictable bullet points and did address these, albeit to a greater or lesser extent.

Question paper 2: Listening

Candidates found this paper challenging but performed better than in 2022, especially in the monologue.

Monologue

Question 1(a) (supported question) worth 1 mark: most candidates gained the mark.

Question 1(a)(i), (a)(ii) (supported question) and (b) all worth 1 mark: most candidates gained the marks.

Conversation

Question 2(c)(i) worth 1 mark: many candidates gained the mark.

Question 2(d)(ii) (supported question) worth 1 mark: most candidates gained the mark.

Performance—talking

Most centres in the verification sample applied the marking instructions accurately and in line with national standards, using the current marking instruction in conjunction with the National 5 grammar grid to make their assessment judgements.

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

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

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Texts 1 and 2 proved to be more challenging than text 3. Some candidates struggled with time management, which meant there was a higher number of no responses than in previous years. There were more examples of poor expression, mistranslation and illegible handwriting.

Text 1

Question 1(b)(ii) worth 1 mark: very few candidates gave enough detail to gain the mark, or they misunderstood *sans être dérangée*.

Question 1(c) worth 2 marks: very few candidates gained the 2 marks available as the constructions *je viens de* and *quelqu'un me le vole* were challenging.

Text 2 – context: learning

Question 2(c)(ii) worth 2 marks: many candidates misunderstood *environnante* as being 'environment'. There were many examples of poor expression in response to this question.

Text 3 – context: employability

Overall candidates performed well in all questions in this text.

Question 3(e) worth 3 marks: most candidates gained at least 1 mark for this question but many misunderstood *équipe* as being 'equipment' preventing them getting the full marks available.

Question paper 1: Writing

Most candidates addressed bullet points 5 and 6. However, some candidates, who had in effect covered unpredictable bullet point 6 in the first four bullet points, penalised themselves by creating a new paragraph, which led to dictionary misuse.

There were more instances of illegible handwriting than in previous years.

Question paper 2: Listening

Monologue

Question 1(e) worth 1 mark: although not required in the answer, many candidates understood *à la menthe* as *allemand*, which then made the answer incorrect, as they stated 'German tea'.

Conversation

Question 2d(ii) worth 1 mark: many candidates did not understand *cuisine* and did not gain the mark.

Questions 2(e)(i) and 2(e)(ii) both worth 2 marks: many candidates attempted a guess or did not give sufficient detail required for this answer.

Performance—talking

Pronunciation remains the one of the main issues for many of the candidates who did not perform well. Verifiers — sympathetic (native or non-native) speakers of French — must be able to understand candidates, no matter how good the content of their presentation or conversation is. Other candidates did not perform well because of the choice of topic.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should:

- ◆ encourage candidates to read each question carefully and underline the key word or words in the question that will lead them to the answer in the text
- ◆ encourage candidates to read their own answers carefully to ensure they make sense in English
- ◆ ensure candidates are being guided by the number of marks available for each question and give as much detail in their answer as they have understood
- ◆ discourage candidates from giving extra information as this could negate any correct information and result in not gaining the mark(s)
- ◆ ensure candidates have a sound knowledge of verb conjugation, adjective endings, and the comparative. This will minimise mistranslation if using a dictionary for comprehension
- ◆ remind candidates to use the dictionary carefully and not always choose the first definition listed
- ◆ ensure candidates are aware of common ‘false friends’ and encourage them to check these carefully in the dictionary
- ◆ ensure alternative arrangements are in place for candidates whose writing is illegible handwriting

Question paper 1: Writing

As the writing is in the form of an email, there is no requirement for candidates to use the formal beginning and endings. Many candidates who include these formal beginnings and endings often make errors in these parts.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the information carefully regarding the job for which they are applying
- ◆ know to address all six bullet points (if either one of these has been covered in the predictable bullet points, they do not need to be readdressed, as this can lead to repetition and/or inaccuracies)
- ◆ are aware there is no requirement for bullet point 4 (related work experience) to be in the past tense
- ◆ only write about a past professional experience if they can use the past tenses in French accurately
- ◆ write enough detailed language accurately for the unpredictable bullet points
- ◆ use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, accents, genders) — not to create new sentences
- ◆ ask questions regarding the job, as this could be one of the unpredictable bullet points

- ◆ leave time to read through their piece of writing to ensure all bullets have been covered and basic mistakes have not been made, for example spelling, adjective endings, accents and words missed out
- ◆ know the criteria used in assessing candidate writing, so that they are aware of what is required in terms of content, accuracy and range and variety of language to achieve the good and very good categories
- ◆ handwriting is legible and if not, alternative arrangements should be in place

Question paper 2: Listening

Listening is a skill that candidates find challenging, and it is encouraging to see the progress candidates have made over the last year. Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates regularly practise this skill and use French as often as possible in the classroom and reinforce listening strategies. More practice involving note-taking would help candidates improve their listening skills.

Teachers and lecturers should:

- ◆ encourage candidates to read all the questions carefully and underline the key words to listen out for so they can pick out the required information more easily
- ◆ remind candidates they hear both the monologue and conversation three times and should make use of the third listening to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers
- ◆ ensure candidates are being guided by the number of marks available for each question and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood
- ◆ encourage candidates to answer every question; however, candidates should be discouraged from giving extra information and giving long lists of possible answers as this could negate any correct information and result in not gaining the mark(s)
- ◆ ensure that candidates are able to give accurate answers through confident knowledge of numbers, seasons, months, common adjectives, nationalities, school subjects, weather expressions, days of the week and question words, so that some of the more accessible points of information are not lost through lack of sufficiently accurate details

Performance–talking

To be considered for the top range of pegged marks, candidates must use detailed 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 conversations may not allow candidates to meet the criteria for the top pegged marks in the performance.

An important aspect of candidate performance is the ability to sustain the conversation. Effective strategies include:

- ◆ a mixture of extended and shorter answers (not a suite of short presentations or monologues)
- ◆ appropriate thinking time
- ◆ natural interjections (*euh, bah, ben, alors*)
- ◆ acknowledgement that they have understood the question (*oui, je suis d'accord, non, pas du tout*). Some centres included a brief commentary to describe how the candidate showed they had understood through non-verbal means the question and/or response from the interlocutor, as it would happen in a natural conversation. This is very useful for verifiers who cannot physically see the candidates
- ◆ asking questions that are relevant to the conversation and at relevant times
- ◆ asking for repetition or clarification (for example *pardon?*)

This is not an exhaustive list and one example from the above list on its own would not be sufficient to be awarded full marks.

Candidates can still be awarded 5 marks for sustaining the conversation even if they briefly hesitate and recover successfully.

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

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](#).