



## External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

Markers reported overall candidate performance was in line with previous years. There was a slight improvement in Specialist Study.

## Specialist Study

The following table provides data relevant to the reported nature and scope of the specialist studies undertaken by candidates in 2012. Prose fiction continues to be the most popular genre for candidates to study (81%). This is consistent with previous years. Studying the work of two more than two novelists also remains the most popular subject for those choosing this genre. Dystopian novels continue to feature prominently.

Drama	127	Poetry	126	Prose Fiction	1390	Other	68
One dramatist Three + texts	28	One poet Wide range (7+ poems)	64	One novelist Three+ texts	116	Mixed genres	43
One dramatist Two texts	74	One poet Narrow range (-4 poems)	31	One novelist Two texts	255	Language Study	1
Two or more than two dramatists	25	Two or more than two poets	29	Two or more than two novelists	994	Non-fiction	6
Other drama	0	Other poetry	2	Other fiction (including short stories)	25	Film or other media	18

Most candidates had obviously worked diligently to produce specialist studies which met the assessment criteria at this level. The best specialist studies were those which undertook *detailed* comparative studies of *challenging* texts/materials.

Less successful specialist studies suffered from poorly constructed topics/tasks; poor expression and a disregard for the mandatory requirements for footnotes and bibliography. Markers also noted an over reliance on a limited range of secondary sources (usually the more well-known commercial or semi-commercial websites). Candidates with better, more substantive use of research tended to do well.

## Literary Study

The following table provides information on the reported uptake of questions in the Literary Study section of the 2012 examination paper by 1648 candidates. 54% of candidates chose to answer a question on Drama. Questions on Shakespeare and Williams continued to be the most popular in this section.

Drama	887	Poetry	361	Prose Fiction	400	Prose Non-fiction	0
1 Beckett	21	12 Burns	1	23 Atwood	38	34	0
2 Byrne	2	13 Chaucer	24	24 Austen	86	35	0
3 Chekhov	29	14 Donne	58	25 Dickens	63		
4 Friel	36	15 Duffy	54	26 Fitzgerald	15		
5 Lindsay	0	16 Heaney	37	27 Galloway	40		
6 Lochhead	30	17 Henryson	0	28 Gray	14		
7 Pinter	70	18 Keats	45	29 Hardy	60		
8 Shakes.	363	19 MacDiar.	3	30 Hogg	18		
9 Stoppard	12	20 Muir	0	31 Joyce	31		
10 Wilde	36	21 Plath	126	32 Stevenson	13		
11 Williams	288	22 Yeats	13	33 Waugh	22		

Markers reported that candidate responses to questions in the Literary Study section of the question paper were generally 'adequate' (at this level) in terms of *Analysis, Evaluation and Expression*. *Relevance to the question* and *Understanding* were judged to be 'more than adequate'. As in previous years, there were some very impressive responses that revealed thoughtful engagement with texts and which suggested that a high standard of teaching and learning had taken place.

According to markers, candidates responded especially well to the Shakespeare question (on the role of Caliban in Shakespeare's treatment of the thematic concerns of *The Tempest*). Effective responses on Beckett, Friel, Pinter, Stoppard, Wilde, Donne, Keats, Austen and Dickens were also noted. Although there were some good answers on Williams, there were also very many responses to this question that offered no more than a listing of techniques accompanied by copious examples from the plays. Answers on Plath tended to suffer from candidates' failure to deal with the 'inevitability of loss' demanded by the question. In addition, markers reported that there was too much 'assertion' (based on biographical knowledge) in these answers rather than analysis of Plath's poetry justified by textual reference. Responses on Yeats were often marred by candidates' failure to make a *detailed* study of Yeats's use of the swans in the printed poem.

## Options

Based on the reported choices of 1606 candidates in 2012, figures for the percentage uptake of the four optional components show a slight increase in the percentage of candidates attempting Creative Writing and a reduction in the percentage of candidates attempting Textual Analysis. There was no significant change in the percentage of candidates attempting the other two options.

Creative Writing	69.1%	(64.7% in 2011)
Textual Analysis	27.1%	(31.6% in 2011)
Reading the Media	3.4%	(3.4% in 2011)
Language Study	0.4%	(0.3% in 2011)

The 1109 candidates who opted for **Creative Writing** submitted:

669	reflective essays
917	pieces of fiction
299	poems
333	examples of drama

Markers felt that candidates were most successful when they had paid attention to the conventions of particular genres. The best drama made effective use of appropriate techniques and was genuinely 'dramatic', often with skilful use of characterisation and stage directions. Conversely, many pieces submitted as dramatic monologues showed only limited awareness of the genre and failed to achieve high marks.

Too many reflective essays continue to lack the quality of reflection demanded at this level, and candidates seemed more confident when producing pieces of fiction. The best poetry displayed a clarity of thought and expression that was lacking in less successful efforts, which were often marred by unnecessary obscurities and/or unsophisticated use of poetic techniques. Candidates might benefit from increased opportunities to read (and hear) contemporary poetry – particularly examples of rhythmic free verse. Candidates could also be encouraged to create authentic voices in Scots in all genres.

The 436 candidates who chose **Textual Analysis** in 2012 produced:

182	responses to Prose fiction
44	responses to Prose non-fiction
133	responses to Poetry
77	responses to Drama

Markers reported that candidates' responses were 'more than adequate' in terms of relevance and *Understanding*. *Analysis* and *Evaluation* tended to be 'adequate'. Responses to Drama were generally good, with candidates able to display a confident use of appropriate technical vocabulary. Candidates also seemed to find the Prose fiction passage interesting and challenging.

Although there were one or two excellent responses, answers on Poetry tended to be less successful, with some candidates failing to deal with the core concept of 'patterns' in the printed poem. Many answers focused on word choice and imagery, and failed to deal with the wider range of poetic techniques employed. Some candidates clearly benefited from having been *taught* the techniques appropriate to Prose non-fiction.

55 candidates attempted **Reading the Media** in 2012. 43 candidates chose to answer on *Film*, one on *Print Journalism*, and 11 on *Advertising*. Most responses on *Film* were competent and some were excellent. While most candidates clearly had a thorough knowledge of the films being analysed, this was not always deployed in a selective and relevant fashion. Answers on *Advertising* were sometimes limited to description rather than offering analysis; elements such as 'values' and 'underlying ideology' were omitted or dealt with only in passing.

Six candidates from two centres were presented for **Language Study**. Candidates' responses were generally 'more than adequate' in terms of *Understanding* and *Analysis* and some candidates showed signs of excellence in their responses. Where appropriate, more elaboration on candidates' own research would have been welcome.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Advice offered to centres in past years remains valid and is set out below. In addition to this, teachers/lecturers should refer to the *Advanced Higher English Arrangements Documents* available at:

[http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/English\\_Advanced%20Higher\\_Valid\\_from\\_August2010.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/English_Advanced%20Higher_Valid_from_August2010.pdf)

and the advice provided on *Understanding Standards* available at

<http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/Subjects/English/Advanced-Higher/Advanced-Higher> .

Teachers/lecturers are also directed to the Advanced Higher English pages on the *SQA Secure* site.

For the **Specialist Study**, teachers/lecturers should ensure that:

- ◆ texts of appropriate substance and quality are selected
- ◆ groupings of disparate texts are avoided
- ◆ mixed genres studies (novels and films, films and plays, plays and poems etc.) are avoided
- ◆ specific and manageable topics are constructed
- ◆ unambiguous statements of intent are included (as headings to dissertations)
- ◆ the analytical thrust of each study is incorporated into the statement of intent and title
- ◆ length is between 3500 and 4500 words (including quotations)
- ◆ mandatory footnotes and bibliographies are provided

- ◆ dissertations are free from plagiarism
- ◆ candidates are acquainted with **all** of the advice and regulations provided by SQA

The importance of selecting the topic to be pursued in the Specialist Study cannot be overstated. In specifying topics, candidates and centres should be aware that they are effectively selecting and defining their own individual instruments of assessment. It should be emphasised, therefore, that vague, generalised and unfocused topics are unlikely to enable candidates to demonstrate attainment of the standards against which their dissertations will be assessed.

For **Literary Study**, teachers/lecturers should ensure that candidates are:

- ◆ offered an experience of literary study of sufficient depth and breadth to allow reasonable choice in the context of an unseen examination
- ◆ thoroughly prepared in the art of critical essay writing
- ◆ given ample practice in making effective use of the time available (1.5 hours)
- ◆ provided with strategies for addressing the terms of the question and for appropriate planning of their responses
- ◆ equipped with a precise and extensive critical vocabulary
- ◆ reminded that ‘analysis’ need not always be ‘inserted’ (often inappropriately) in the form of extensive quotation that is then subjected to micro-analytical comment on individual words and phrases
- ◆ shown how valid analysis may well reside (often by implication) in a permeating thread of relevant critical comment that informs an emerging argument

For **Creative Writing**, it is recommended that:

- ◆ candidates should enrich their own experience by reading extensively in the work of other writers, including their peers) to familiarise themselves with genre conventions and the range of approaches that might be taken in their own writing
- ◆ the submission of pieces generated by common stimuli or arising from whole class exercises should be avoided
- ◆ the submission of groups of unrelated (or loosely related) poems should also be avoided

For **Textual Analysis**, it is recommended that candidates should:

- ◆ through guided reading, develop close and essential familiarity with the conventions of a range of literary genres
- ◆ through focused teaching and extensive practice, acquire the critical apparatus necessary for the analysis and evaluation of complex texts

**Statistical information: update on Courses**

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2011</b>	1861
---	------

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2012</b>	1694
---	------

**Statistical information: Performance of candidates**

**Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries**

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	21.4%	21.4%	362	65
B	28.7%	50.1%	487	56
C	29.9%	80.0%	507	48
D	8.1%	88.1%	137	44
No award	11.9%	100.0%	201	-

## 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.