



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Italian
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

The indications are that the paper was well received by teachers and candidates; no critical comments from centres were received, and there were no setting issues (the setting team has remained the same for a number of years). The Marking Instructions worked well and only minor amendments were made; there were no non-functioning questions.

Performance in Paper 1 showed a slight improvement this year, with the average mark being 32.4 as compared to 31.3 last year.

Performance in Paper 2, however, was a little down; this year's average mark was 50.1 (compared to 51.1 last year). The discursive essay in this paper was moderately well done, with the full range of titles being tackled.

In the Folio the average mark was 18.6, a slight increase on the 17.7 recorded last year. As is usually the case in Advanced Higher Italian, all candidates opted for the Extended Reading/Viewing option.

In the Speaking Assessment the average mark of 40.0 was slightly down on last year's 41.7, but a number of good performances were noted. This year there were 24 candidates, a decrease of six from last year; these candidates came from 11 centres (three less than last year). There were two new and two returning centres. This year showed a 10% increase in the percentage of candidates who presented for the examination with no previous record of SQA attainment: 16.7% as compared to 6.7% last year.

Overall attainment this year was excellent, with 91.7% of candidates receiving grade A–C. 58.3% of candidates obtained an A pass.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The subject matter of Paper 1 was accessible to all candidates, and most tackled the comprehension questions well. There were also some good translations.

In Paper 2 the choice of discursive essays offered resulted in the full range of titles being attempted; it was heartening to see a number of good performances from candidates who in some cases presented accurate and imaginative discussions of the topics.

Performance in the Folio was comparable with previous years, with the appearance of some new texts and background studies titles. As was the case last year, the increase in **word-count** continues to give candidates a better opportunity to express themselves fully.

Performance in the Speaking Assessment was much as expected; this year there were a number of good and very good performances.

Comment [A1]: Originally 'word-length', which means more letters per word, and I read as an error.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As was the case last year, the inferential and translation questions in Paper 1 caused problems for some candidates. In the inferential question some neglected to back up their assertions with detailed references to the text, and tended to offer vague and generalised observations; this may have been due in some cases to lack of time — some candidates tend to spend too long on the comprehension questions.

The translation proved to be testing, with some candidates scoring poorly. As has been the case in previous years, there were instances of poor command of English and improper dictionary use. However, both the inferential and translation questions, despite their apparent difficulty, proved to be effective discriminators of ability and final level of performance.

In Paper 2, the discursive essay showed a similar picture; there were areas of weaknesses in grammar and general proof-reading was poor, the latter being an area in which candidates would benefit from more training and guidance from teachers.

In the Folio, essays on background topics were often less well done than those on literary texts, with little attempt at critical evaluation or analysis; this was due for the most part to essay titles which were far too vague and open-ended.

In the Speaking Assessment, some candidates tended to over-rely on pre-learned material and were uncomfortable when asked to digress or expand on this.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ It is recommended that Paper 1 be done in the exact order in which it is presented. Every year, many candidates do the translation and/or inferential question(s) before the comprehension questions. This is to be discouraged, as working through the comprehension questions enables candidates to build up a detailed idea of the content, style and message of the passage before embarking on the inferential and translation questions, thereby ensuring that these latter two questions are dealt with more accurately and confidently.
- ◆ In Paper 1, candidates should be encouraged to make sure that they read all the comprehension questions carefully and attempt to answer them precisely, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should also be told not to include information from the translation section in these answers.
- ◆ Candidates should set aside enough time to do the inferential and translation questions properly; every year there is evidence of these questions having been rushed. In the translation, candidates should also check carefully for accuracy and possible omissions, especially of single words, as these can often incur a one or two point penalty.
- ◆ More detailed and frequent grammar input and practice is recommended for the discursive essay, together with the development of effective proofreading skills. Many basic errors could be avoided by careful checking of verb tenses and endings, adjectival agreements, genders, spellings and accents.
- ◆ Teachers should train candidates to incorporate any pre-learned material naturally during the Speaking Assessment and to avoid any tendency to deliver mini-speeches. They

should be aware that the Speaking Assessment is a test of the ability to generate and sustain an ongoing and unscripted conversation.

- ◆ The choice of background topic essay titles in the Folio should be carefully considered by both teachers and pupils so as to avoid titles that are too vague, over-ambitious and incapable of being properly addressed within the prescribed word-length.
- ◆ More detailed bibliographies are recommended for the Folio pieces.
- ◆ If possible, schools should try to select literary texts whose intellectual content and length is most suitable for S6 pupils. New texts and background topics are always welcome.
- ◆ Candidates should aim to adhere to the 750 word Folio essay limit.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	30
Number of resulted entries in 2013	24

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	58.3%	58.3%	14	140
B	20.8%	79.2%	5	120
C	12.5%	91.7%	3	100
D	4.2%	95.8%	1	90
No award	4.2%	100.0%	1	-

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.