



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Italian
Level(s)	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 reaction to the examination from both teachers and candidates appears to have been very positive this year. No negative comments were received after the examination took place, and there were no significant issues regarding content, level of difficulty and marking. The setting and marking team was the same as in previous years, a fact that has helped to ensure that papers are set and marked to a consistent standard.

The content of the paper followed the prescribed themes and topics for Higher Level, and was set at an appropriate level of difficulty. The marking scheme worked very well and there were no non-functioning questions.

This year there was a significant and welcome increase in the number of presentations: 234 as against 177 last year (an increase of 32%), due for the most part to a good number of last year's large contingent of Intermediate 2 candidates returning to do Higher. There were six new and five returning centres out of a total of 35.

There was a slight decrease in the number of candidates achieving As: 59% this year as compared to 63.8% last year. As has been the case in recent years, centres were cautious in the estimates they provided, predicting that only 39.8% of their candidates would gain an A. This year, however, 45.3% of the cohort had no previous record of attainment (down by 5.5% from last year). There were 14% more S5 pupils and 13.6% fewer S6 pupils than last year. The Component Average mark for each element was as follows (figures for 2012 are in brackets):

Paper 1: (45 marks)	33.4 (31.6)	= up 1.8
Paper 2: (30 marks)	16.1 (19.1)	= down 3
Speaking: (25 marks)	22.5 (22.6)	= down 0.1

The improvement in performance in Paper 1 (Reading Comprehension and Directed Writing) almost compensated for the decline in performance observed in Paper 2 (Listening and Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1 candidates reacted very well to the subject matter of the Reading Comprehension. The majority had good results in the comprehension questions, all of which were well done, even by less able candidates; very few were out of their depth. Results in the Translation were also good, and an average mark of 6.3 was attained.

There was the usual spread of marks in Directed Writing, but it was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates had been well prepared and were usually able to adapt their pre-learned material effectively. Very few penalties were applied this year for the omission of bullet points. The average mark was 10.1.

In Paper 2 some very good performances in the Short Essay were noted, with the majority of candidates attempting to address the topic fully.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1 poor English in some responses to the comprehension questions led to a loss of marks. In the Translation some candidates had problems translating the question forms of the first two sense-units.

In Paper 2, many candidates found the listening to be tricky despite the apparent accessibility of the subject-matter and a clear and well-paced recording. The average mark for Listening was 10.3 out of 20. Questions 4b) and 6a) were done particularly poorly; many candidates failed to recognise the words *sfidata* and *palcoscenico* and were unfamiliar with the present tense of the verb *salire*.

While candidates reacted well to the Short Essay title, performance here was uneven, and the average mark was 4.9 out of 10. The usual weaknesses in grammatical knowledge and accuracy were again noted; these were also apparent in the Directed Writing and can be listed as follows, in no particular order of importance:

- ◆ *piacere* in all its forms
- ◆ *qualche* with a plural noun
- ◆ agreement of adjectives
- ◆ articulated prepositions
- ◆ incorrect definite and indefinite articles
- ◆ prepositions before infinitives
- ◆ prepositions with towns and countries
- ◆ plural nouns and adjectives, especially those ending in *-co* and *-go*
- ◆ confusion between *tu*, *voi* and *si*
- ◆ *la gente* / *la famiglia* and plural verb
- ◆ irregular past participles, especially *decidere* and *mettere*
- ◆ direct and indirect object pronouns
- ◆ *pensare di / che*
- ◆ *aiutare a*
- ◆ possessive adjectives with family members
- ◆ confusion between *c'era* and *c'erano*

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Candidates should be advised to tackle Paper 1 in the exact order in which it is presented. This year there were several instances of either the Translation or Directed Writing being done first, followed by the comprehension questions; in these cases performance was sometimes compromised.
- ◆ In the Reading Comprehension, candidates should be encouraged to make sure that they read all the questions carefully and attempt to answer them accurately and succinctly, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should also be

told not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.

- ◆ Candidates should set aside enough time to do the Translation properly; every year there is some evidence that the question has been rushed. 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. Special caution is needed when translating numbers, especially the larger ones. Proper dictionary training is essential here.
- ◆ In the Directed Writing, candidates must be encouraged to read the whole scenario carefully and ensure that they cover all bullet points in adequate detail. They should also be encouraged to present each bullet point as a separate paragraph, as this makes it easier for both candidates and markers to check that everything has been covered. Double line spacing is recommended for maximum legibility, especially if something is crossed out and then rewritten. If pre-learned material is used, then it should be incorporated intelligently and logically into the scenario, making any necessary textual and grammatical adjustments. It is disappointing to note that in some centres candidates write almost identical essays or almost identical paragraphs to specific bullet points. Candidates should also ensure that they set aside sufficient time for effective proofreading of what they have written.
- ◆ In the Listening Comprehension, candidates should be trained to use the questions in advance to anticipate the kind of information they might hear. They should listen carefully to numbers, times, dates and days, as many careless mistakes are made here. Similarly, they should make sure that they include relevant adjectives in their answers, as these are often essential for points to be awarded. If a question asks *where* or *when exactly*, this usually indicates that some detail is required. Candidates should also ensure that any rough working is clearly scored out.
- ◆ In the Short Essay, candidates must ensure that they read the essay question carefully and attempt to address the precise issues raised. The use of pre-learned material here can be dangerous as it may lead to partial or total irrelevance, unless an effort is made to adapt it to the essay title. Centres should note carefully how uneven writing is marked in the 'What if ...?' section of the Marking Instructions for the Short Essay. Once again, the importance of adequate proofreading here cannot be overemphasised, and candidates should also be encouraged to use the full allocation of time to achieve this. As is the case with Directed Writing, double line spacing is recommended for maximum legibility, especially if something is crossed out and then rewritten.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	177
Number of resulted entries in 2013	238

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	58.8%	58.8%	140	70
B	19.3%	78.2%	46	60
C	14.3%	92.4%	34	50
D	2.9%	95.4%	7	45
No award	4.6%	100.0%	11	-

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.