



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Latin
Level	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 a high standard of candidate performance this year. In the Interpretation paper, there was a marked improvement in the responses to the ten-mark questions, with very little evidence of the “prepared” answers that candidates have produced in the past. Most candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of prescribed text and seemed to have engaged enthusiastically with the material. Most candidates chose Virgil in Section A, and the thirteen candidates who opted for Plautus gained a wide range of marks, but none gave an outstanding performance. In the Translation paper, the overall standard was reasonable with some very good answers. There were few very poor papers. Most candidates wrote in good English and markers did not see any totally nonsensical translations this year. Most grasped the overall sequence of events and outcome of the story.

Candidates’ time-management in both papers was appropriate.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Interpretation:

The ten-marks responses (“the essays”) were often well done, especially the Virgil essay on whether Aeneas deserved praise for making his journey in to the Underworld (question 5 (a)), and the Cicero essay about giving misleading information in the trial against Verres (question 6 (b)).

In the Virgil section, the questions on Palinurus (question 2) and Charon’s boat (question 3) were particularly well done. There continues to be an improvement in scansion.

In the Cicero section, question 5 on the different emotions possibly felt by the jury was challenging but very well answered. Candidates displayed excellent analysis in their responses.

Translation:

There was a preponderance of coherent and technically accurate English versions with good spelling. There was some evidence that candidates had used the information contained in the introductory English lines to support their progress through the translation.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Interpretation:

In the Virgil section, there was evidence from the candidates’ responses to Virgil question 1 that many did not know the English passages in sufficient detail. Some candidates failed to spot the elision in the scansion.

In the Plautus section, the essays were generally disappointing and few candidates went beyond simply retelling the plot of the play. There was very little evidence of analysis.

In the Cicero section, candidates displayed muddled thinking over the possibility that the pirate was a fake (question 4 (b)).

Translation:

The first paragraph proved to be the most challenging in content and candidates tended to be most flustered, if at all, in this section.

Markers reported a general vagueness over pronouns (“cuius” line 2; “sibi” line 3; “ille” lines 6 and 16; (“eam” line 9; “eo ipso die” lines 13/14). The majority of candidates showed very little confidence in handling these.

Identification of the main verb (“reformidat” line 6; “respondit” line 7; “existimavit” line 9) proved a challenge for many. More than half the candidates failed to structure their sentences around these main verbs.

Candidates guessed how to handle the gerundive “quaerendum” with varying degrees of success.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- Ensure candidates are sufficiently familiar with the English passages of the prescribed text.
- Candidates should be discouraged from using inappropriate language. This year’s examples include: “dumping”; “a big ask”; “gonna riot”; “the rubbish navy”; “Anaes’ ex”.
- Candidates should be encouraged to have their own opinion on whether the pirate is a fake or not, in the Cicero prescribed text.
- To assist with essay writing, candidates need to consider the text as a whole and avoid simply retelling the story
- To help candidates prepare for the challenges of an unseen Cicero translation, they need more practice in identifying main verbs and how to handle pronou

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	257
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	199
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 150				
A	51.3%	51.3%	102	105
B	20.1%	71.4%	40	90
C	17.1%	88.4%	34	75
D	3.0%	91.5%	6	67
No award	8.5%	100.0%	17	-

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 all the available information is brought together (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 Higher Chemistry for example, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not particularly closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels, and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.