



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Italian
Level	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

This paper followed the pattern of recent years in presenting no significant setting issues. The setting team for Papers 1 and 2 has been in place now for a number of years and has built up a good degree of expertise. Paper 1 was tackled very well by the majority of candidates and proved straightforward to mark; it was felt that the increased time allocation had helped candidates to formulate more effective answers. Performance in Paper 2 was better than expected, given the nature of the subject matter of the listening (Pavarotti and Italian opera in general). There were no non-functioning questions in either paper. In the Folio there were several texts and topics which have not appeared before. The Oral continued to throw up a good range of effective performances. While the number of candidates showed a slight decline on last year, the number of centres remained about the same with two new and four returning centres. This year there were a number of very good and excellent individual performances, with 61% of all candidates receiving an A pass. (It should also be noted that all candidates passed the examination.) Once again the majority of candidates were from the school sector (83.3%). The continued good performance in Paper 2 and the Folio suggest that centres are now preparing well for these parts of the examination.

Areas in which candidates performed well

As stated above, performance was very good in Paper 1, with the paper producing a good range of responses. In Paper 2, candidates responded well to the subject-matter as a whole, though it would be fair to say that Part B was better done than Part A. The choice of discursive essays this year seems to have been well-judged; all the titles were tackled by candidates, many of whom produced some very good and thoughtful responses. Folio essays were of a good standard overall; the usual texts and background studies were supplemented by some new arrivals. As was the case last year, the increase in the word-length seems to have aided candidates in fully developing their ideas; however, there was a tendency for some candidates to overshoot the upper word-length limit in the knowledge that exceeding this limit by up to a hundred words would not incur a penalty. In my view this gives such candidates an unfair advantage over those who adhere strictly to the limit, and I would like to see the one hundred word tolerance significantly reduced. (It may be of interest to note that the average length of essays this year was 798 words, almost 50 words over the notional limit.) Performance in the oral showed a slight improvement this year with some notable performances.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Once again the inferential question in Paper 1 presented difficulties for some candidates, who responded by answering it last after the translation. However, the increase in time allocation seems to have led to more measured and thoughtful responses from other candidates. One of the main difficulties with the inferential question for setters is that the subject matter and style of the passages is largely similar from year to year, thus making it more difficult for setters to find different types of questions. (Obviously it could also be argued that this ongoing similarity in the inferential questions being set is of benefit to the candidates, as they should know what to expect.) As for the translation question, there were the usual weaknesses in written English and the tendency of some candidates to translate “word for word”, although to be fair to candidates some very nice turns of phrase were noted. In Paper 2, Part A proved to be more difficult than Part B, but this is usually the case as candidates normally find it easier to locate answers within a dialogue between male and female voices. Discursive essays demonstrated the familiar problems of basic weaknesses in grammatical understanding and poor proofreading; candidates have to be trained to devote more care and attention to checking what they have written. In the Folio, there were some examples of poor phrasing and too many candidates presented barely adequate bibliographies.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- More training needed in how to tackle inferential question.
- More grammar input (especially the subjunctive, noun and adjective agreements and singular/plural verb forms) and better proofreading in the discursive essay.
- Less reliance on pre-learned material in the Oral and more attention to training candidates to generate spontaneous and creative language.
- Candidates should be encouraged to strive for a personal response in the Folio, based not only on teachers' notes but predominantly on their own personal research.
- More detailed bibliographies needed in Folio pieces; in the bibliography candidates should not include title of book on which their essay is based.
- Candidates should stick to the 750 word Folio essay limit.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	21
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	19
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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 - 200				
A	57.9%	57.9%	11	140
B	31.6%	89.5%	6	120
C	10.5%	100.0%	2	100
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	90
No award	0.0%	100.0%	0	-

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.