



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Italian
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

It was good to note that there was a slight rise in the number of presentations at Higher Level this year – 203 as against 188 in 2008. However, this is still short of the 232 presentations in 2006, and the 291 in 2005. This year 41.4% of the cohort had a record of previous attainment at Standard Grade, and 20.2% had progressed from Intermediate 2. Of the other candidates, 33.5% had no previous record of attainment in Italian and were most likely sitting the examination after only one year of preparation.

The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus as outlined in the prescribed themes and topics for Higher Level. It was set at an appropriate level of difficulty and a number of candidates were able to achieve full marks in individual papers and elements. Although there were some poor performances, these were fewer than last year.

The Component Average for each element was as follows (figures for 2008 in brackets):

Reading Directed Writing	31.1	(29.6) – up 1.5	possible mark	45
Listening/Writing	18.8	(16.1) – up 2.7	possible mark	30
Speaking	22.5	(22.0) – up 0.5	possible mark	25

The mean marks show an encouraging improvement in all components of the examination, with a significant improvement in performance in listening comprehension and in the personal response. Candidates responded well to the topic of work experience abroad. A number of candidates scored full marks for Paper 1, with the vast majority achieving over half the available marks in the Reading Comprehension. There was a marked improvement in the Translation even although it contained a few difficult points. Although there were some very good performances in the Directed Writing, with a significant number of candidates achieving full marks, a greater number than last year failed to score half marks. Despite this, the overall performance in each component was very encouraging, with well-prepared candidates achieving good results.

Areas in which candidates performed well

There were some very good performances in Reading Comprehension, with very few candidates scoring under half marks. The language and vocabulary in the topic *I Teenager Italiani* were clearly accessible to the candidates, and it was a topic to which they could relate. Good candidates showed high levels of comprehension, producing well-written responses to the questions. There were very few poor responses, and even many weaker candidates achieved half marks and above. Performances in the Translation section were also very encouraging.

There were some very sound responses to the Directed Writing. Many candidates had been well prepared and clearly had sufficient grasp of the language system to adapt material they had prepared in class to the specific scenario and bullet points in the exam. Relatively few candidates incurred penalties for the omission of bullet points.

Overall there was a good response to the Listening Comprehension. Weaker candidates were able to cope well with the ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘why’ questions, and candidates in general were directed to the answer by phrases like *prima di tutto, come seconda cosa*. More able candidates were able to give added detail. Candidates in general, coped well with the Personal Response. Most essays were of the right length and candidates on the whole managed to maintain relevance. The essays were interesting and the topic clearly provided food for thought. Candidates were able to incorporate some learned material but they also had to write spontaneously, which provided a good basis for judging their ability to manipulate the language.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Although the majority of candidates' answers to the Reading passage were well written, there were still some who lost marks because their poor English expression meant that they failed to communicate their answers clearly enough. Some candidates did not realise when their answers were clearly wrong – e.g. stating that people spend 30 hours a day sending text messages. In attempting to answer question 2, some candidates had difficulty understanding *più ne ricevono, più si sentono importanti*, rendering this as 'they receive more of them'. In question 6, very few candidates picked up the mark for understanding *Chi gliel'ha dato? Sono stati i genitori.*

The main difficulties in the Translation were with *da soli, quanto a, la letteratura, nemmeno, and addirittura*. Some candidates lost marks through omissions, not infrequently the phrases listed in the previous sentence. This may have been carelessness, or they may simply not have known the meaning. It was surprising how many candidates clearly did not recognise *giocano* as third person plural, present tense of *giocare*. It was frequently translated as 'playing', and even 'for fun'. Some candidates also had difficulties with *poter*, not recognising it as an infinitive, and immediately delving into the dictionary, where, inevitably, they chose the noun 'power', even although *poter* was preceded by *per* in the passage.

In the Directed Writing, while many candidates wrote well-structured essays, others treated the bullet points as discrete items, writing essays that did not hold together in a coherent whole. Not infrequently, these essays worked on the assumption that the reader knew what was being discussed – e.g. there was no indication of when the visit to Italy took place, no indication as to why there were reference to staying with a family in Italy, no mention of 'next summer', or indeed any other time reference, in the bullet point on future plans. Some had completely illogical opening sentences – e.g. *due giorni fa ho passato due settimane in Italia*.

There was a tendency for some candidates to write excessively about bullet points that were not in the exam, and then to cover those that were actually in the scenario in a very perfunctory manner. This is presumably because they were trying to make use of learned material. However, far greater weight is given to the language required to cover the compulsory points than to other material that is included, and so these candidates were frequently doing themselves a disservice, and were, at times, in danger of writing substantially irrelevant responses to the task.

It was disappointing to note that some candidates who dealt fairly competently with the more straightforward, predictable bullet points were unable to manipulate even basic constructions when they were generating their own language. These candidates wrote fairly accurately in the perfect tense when describing how they travelled, and yet could not correctly write *ho aiutato* when describing how they helped organise the celebrations. The most challenging bullet points were reasons for going to Italy and plans for next summer. Indeed, it was clear that a number of candidates had little knowledge of how to form the future tense. There was also a tendency to treat the bullet point about living with the family as likes/dislikes of being in Italy.

There were several common areas of weakness in language knowledge. As ever, difficulties with *piacere* in all its forms were in evidence. Other common errors included:

La gente used as plural

Collective nouns followed by plural verbs

Confusion of *migliore/meglio*

Visitare used with people

Confusion of *alloggiare* and *restare*

Spelling of *viaggiare, alloggiare*

Use of *dividere* instead of *condividere*

Use of *sentire* instead of *sentirsi*

Divertirsi/divertimento/eccitarsi

Mancare

Prepositions before the infinitive, especially *aiutare a/decidere di*

Formation of future with *are* verbs, and with *andare/venire*

Perfect tense with *essere*
Omission of *che* with noun clauses
Relative pronouns with prepositions
Position of adverbs, particularly *anche*
The use of the article with possessives
Possessives as in *suo fratello compleanno*
Agreement of adjectives
Errors with plural adjectives ending in *co – simpatico/antichi*
Other tongue interference – e.g. *molto di*

In Paper 2, in the Listening comprehension, a number of candidates did not distinguish between *nonno* and *nonna*, despite the reinforcement of *lui mi ascolta*. Question 3(c) is probably the one that proved most taxing. Candidates did not pick up on *dovrò **informarmi** su tutte le precauzioni*, and assumed, where they understood it at all, that it was *dovrò **prendere***. In the Personal Response, a few candidates produced a learned essay that had little real relevance to the topic. When these candidates tried to manipulate the language, it was clear they had no knowledge of the language system. A number of essays that could have been good, even some essays where the verbs were generally sound, were let down by basic errors such as prepositions, spelling, and gender. As in past years, some candidates had difficulties with impersonal forms of verbs, moving inconsistently from *si* to *tu*, to *voi*.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

In responding to the Reading Comprehension passage, candidates must be encouraged to make sure that their answers actually address the question. A number of candidates still translate, at times extensively, and at times verbatim. The information they give has to answer the question, and long translations can lead to answers whose overall meaning is unclear. Candidates should also check for illogicalities in their answers, or answers that contradict common sense.

In Translation, candidates should check carefully for omissions. A number of candidates once again gave alternative answers. It should be made clear to candidates that there is no point in doing this. If either alternative is wrong, the point will be deducted.

In the Listening Comprehension task, candidates should be encouraged to use the questions in advance to anticipate the kind of information they might hear, without, however, jumping to conclusions. They should listen carefully to numbers, times, dates and days and take care not to lose marks with careless rendering of these generally straightforward facts. Similarly, they should make sure they include adjectives in their answers, as these are often essential. If a question asks where or when *exactly* it usually indicates that some detail is required.

In the Directed Writing, candidates must be encouraged to read the whole scenario carefully and take it on board. They should be aware that they must write in a balanced manner across all bullet points, including the final ones. Candidates should also read bullet points with more care, and ensure that they address them accurately. Writing about likes and dislikes of Italy does not properly address what you liked/disliked about living with an Italian family. Saying your pen friend will come to Scotland does not adequately address 'your plans for your pen friend's visit to your home next summer.'

In the Short Essay candidates must ensure that they read the essay question carefully before tackling the response, and use the sub-questions it contains to help them structure their essay, and to ensure that they address the topic fully.

In both the Directed Writing and the Personal Response, it is disappointing to note that in some centres, candidates write almost identical essays, or almost identical paragraphs to specific bullet points. While it is highly appropriate for candidates to use material they have previously prepared in class, they should be dissuaded from assuming that they can reproduce it unaltered. Bullet points are devised so that candidates should have the language resource to address them individually without having to reproduce material they have

almost rote-learned. Candidates who rely on using learned material are in great danger of performing poorly. Either the material they write is of dubious relevance, or, when they reach the point that they must diverge, they simply do not have the language resource to do so. Centres should not carelessly how uneven writing is marked in the “What if ...?” section of the Marking Instructions for both Directed Writing and the Personal Response.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	194
---	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2009	212
---	-----

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	59.9%	59.9%	127	70
B	19.3%	79.2%	41	60
C	9.9%	89.2%	21	50
D	4.7%	93.9%	10	45
No award	6.1%	100.0%	13	-

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.