



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Latin
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

General comments

There was a 14.3% increase in presentations. Two of the sixteen participating centres entered candidates for the first time at this level.

In the Translation and Dissertation components, there were many good and some very good performances. Because of slightly less strong performances in Interpretation than in recent years, there were few exceptionally able candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Interpretation

Cicero and Letter-writing

The nine candidates from five centres who chose this option were well prepared and tackled all three authors with confidence. Questions 1 (a), 2 (b) and 3 (a) were especially well done. Both essay titles proved equally popular and clearly showed personal involvement.

Ovid and Latin Love-poetry

The prescription was well known by most candidates. Questions 2 (c), 2 (d), 3 (c) and 3 (d) were especially well done. Both essay titles proved equally popular and every candidate demonstrated genuine involvement in the issues raised, responding, especially in 4 (b), with considerable originality. There were two outstanding candidates.

Translation

Most candidates completed both Translations with reasonable success. There was one outstanding candidate. The Livy was generally tackled with greater confidence than the Virgil.

Dissertation

60% of candidates scored 70% or more and one scored 96%. Greater care than hitherto had been taken with presentation of footnotes and bibliography.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Interpretation

Cicero and Letter-writing

Some candidates failed to realise that Letter 21 by Pliny is light-hearted and consequently found Question 3 (b) problematic.

Ovid and Latin Love-poetry

Poem 2, the focus of Question 1, had not been studied/revised thoroughly enough by some candidates. Imprecise responses to Questions 2 (a) and 2 (b) on Poem 12 (in English) suggested that some candidates had been left to study it in isolation without detailed teacher input. A few candidates chose to omit Question 3 (e),

presumably to allocate more time to the essay. This was an unfortunate decision because Question 3 (e), requiring justification of personal preference, was deliberately set for swift completion.

Translation

All candidates completed the Livy. Timing proved an issue for four candidates, who either only completed the Virgil in part or did not attempt it at all. All candidates followed the Livy story-line and were able to make good sense of the piece. Command of grammar and syntax was generally stronger than in recent years, problems only arising with *inferentes* in line 7, *secutus* in line 8 and *in eos* in line 9. Difficulties did however arise with location of vocabulary and selection of the most appropriate dictionary meaning, for example *aperit* / *aperitur* in lines 2/7, *nota* in line 6, *familiare* in line 6, *venatore* in line 8 and *traicit* in line 9. The Virgil also posed very few problems grammatically apart from the failure of some to link *obscenas* with *volucres* in line 7 and *vim* with *ullam* in line 8. Again the problem for many was selection of appropriate dictionary definitions, for example for *herbam* in line 2, *socii* in line 6, *ferro* in line 7 and *lapsae* in line 9.

Dissertation

Some candidates relied too much on narrative and ignored the need for relevant argument. Some made little or no critical comment on sources. Three candidates did not produce Dissertations tightly enough tied to the title supplied. Two candidates produced work more appropriate for Standard Grade Investigations. Some candidates chose historical topics in which judicious incorporation of relevant archaeological evidence was essential to support primary written evidence. In failing to do this, they seriously undermined the strength of their submissions.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Interpretation

Candidates should be prepared to answer textual questions on content, significance and author's intention in considerable detail. It is essential that work covered early in the course is thoroughly revisited for the final exam. Although the Prescription presented in Latin will obviously dominate the teaching-learning schedule, it is most unwise to underestimate the time and effort which should be put into studying the extensive amount of the Prescription presented in English. It is also highly inadvisable to ask candidates to study these English sections unsupported by teacher input since they may well misinterpret content, fail to take account of context and misunderstand mood and tone.

Translation

Translation of both authors demands careful application of dictionary skills which it is essential for candidates to practise regularly in timed conditions. Confident and accurate knowledge of grammar and syntax is paramount. Livy presents the challenge of longer and more complex sentences, Virgil of terseness, poetic nuance and abstraction. Both would most effectively be supported by a structured programme of teacher-guided practice where stylistic features may be actively analysed and discussed.

Dissertation

Choice of topic is all important. It is inadvisable to choose a topic too closely related to the Higher or Advanced Higher Interpretation Prescriptions since it might appear that the Dissertation lacks fresh research. It is inadvisable to choose a topic which seems more appropriate for Standard Grade in its simplicity. Wording of the title must be carefully crafted. Since there is no requirement to submit titles in advance for approval, there is no excuse for a Dissertation and its title not to be a perfect match. If the title states that a political career is to be analysed, it is irrelevant to focus on a military career. If the title states that two historical figures are to be compared, it is completely inadequate to make comparisons only in the concluding paragraph. In many topics, archaeological evidence can play a valuable part in strengthening argument and should be actively researched for inclusion where relevant. Dissertations must avoid over-reliance on narrative; relevant

argument is a key requirement. Secondary sources should not appear only in the bibliography but should be actively discussed in the body of the text. The two weakest areas to be improved are those of critical comment on sources and quotation of Roman authors in Latin as well as in English translation. Candidates who do not have access to the Latin of source authors in book form should be advised that all but the most obscure texts are easily found on various user-friendly web-sites. Centres and candidates are strongly recommended to consult the published Dissertation marking scheme.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	35
---	----

Number of resulted entries in 2009	40
---	----

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 300				
A	37.5%	37.5%	15	210
B	25.0%	62.5%	10	180
C	25.0%	87.5%	10	150
D	2.5%	90.0%	1	135
No award	10.0%	100.0%	4	-

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.