



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 number of entries for Intermediate 1 English was down by approximately 2,000, but performance was similar to that of last year. Marks for Critical Essay and Folio elements remained constant, but candidates were more successful this year in the Close Reading paper. The subject matter of the passage (The Proclaimers), seemed to provide sufficient cultural relevance.

Candidates were well prepared for all three components. There was evidence of good teaching in the way that candidates approached their answers in analytical questions in the Close Reading paper. However, candidates at Intermediate 1 English find the act of putting these skills into practice challenging.

Candidates were well prepared to write a Critical Essay on a text that they had studied. Most candidates chose to write on poetry for this component, and comparatively few chose drama.

The Folio again gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate a wider set of skills in the external assessment.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

- ◆ Candidates seemed to engage well with the passage. The topic had contemporary relevance. Most candidates answered with commitment, and attempted all of the questions.
- ◆ Question 1(a): Candidates showed clear understanding of why the Proclaimers were 'once dismissed.'
- ◆ Question 2(b): The identification of two facts from this section was done well by most candidates.
- ◆ Question 4(a): This analytical question allowed candidates to gain 2 marks by providing two relevant retrievals from the passage. Many successfully adopted this approach.
- ◆ Question 8: Candidates showed that they had been taught this aspect of structure, and were often able to identify the direction of a link, but were not always able to support this with an appropriate reference.
- ◆ Question 12: As for Question 4(a), but some candidates did have difficulty with the idea of 'lyrical bite.'
- ◆ Question 13: The variety of acceptable answers for this question gave candidates some freedom of interpretation.
- ◆ Question 14: As directed in the question, many candidates successfully selected an expression from the final paragraph and related it to an idea mentioned earlier in the passage.

Critical Essay

- ◆ Candidates had no difficulty in finding a suitable question to answer.
- ◆ Question 6: This was a popular and successful question.
- ◆ Most candidates wrote a reasonably extended response.
- ◆ In terms of expression, most candidates managed to meet the 'mainly accurate' requirement.
- ◆ Most candidates were able to employ a basic line of thought in their responses.
- ◆ Most candidates were able to make some relevant references to the texts they had studied.

Folio

- ◆ Candidates who chose to write about their own experiences did so with some degree of sensitivity and self-awareness. (This was the most popular option.)
- ◆ Many candidates wrote successfully on a discursive topic (common topics were the Scottish Referendum, footballers' wages, body image).
- ◆ An encouraging number of candidates were again able to handle source material effectively, and there was evidence of good research habits being fostered.
- ◆ The writing of most candidates communicated meaning clearly at first reading, and technical accuracy was acceptable. Most candidates showed signs of having taken advantage of the drafting process.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

- ◆ Many candidates found the use of 'own words' to be a challenge.
- ◆ Question 1(b): Candidates had difficulty understanding the word 'precarious.'
- ◆ Question 5: Candidates tended to concentrate on meaning in their answers to this question, rather than the use of inverted commas as punctuation.
- ◆ Question 8: There were signs of good teaching in candidates' answers here, but many found it challenging to provide an appropriate selection from the passage.
- ◆ Question 9(a): Candidates did not read this question carefully enough. They did not focus on the 'surprising' nature of the fact that The Proclaimers turned down an American tour.
- ◆ Question 11: Many candidates found it difficult to use their own words, as directed in the question.
- ◆ Question 12: Candidates had difficulty in understanding the expression 'lyrical bite.'

Critical Essay

- ◆ Some candidates' essays were predominately narrative, rather than analytical.
- ◆ There were signs of some candidates struggling to shape pre-planned essays to fit the demands of the question.
- ◆ Question 3: Some candidates did not focus enough on the ending. Responses tended to be too narrative.
- ◆ Many candidates had difficulty in providing sufficient analysis when writing about Drama, Prose or Media. More success in this area was evident in Poetry.

Folio

- ◆ Some candidates did not acknowledge sources consulted for discursive writing.
- ◆ Effective sentence construction remains a challenge for some candidates.
- ◆ Some candidates found it difficult to construct a convincing narrative when attempting to write short fiction.
- ◆ Some discursive writing did not contain sufficient ideas/opinions: information predominated.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

- ◆ Candidates should attempt to use their own words when asked to do so. A 'full gloss' is not usually required; marks are awarded for some attempt to paraphrase.
- ◆ Candidates should try to practise analytical comments. They are generally able to identify a writer's effective use of language, but analytical comments tend to be thin or weak.
- ◆ Candidates should revise the uses of punctuation.
- ◆ Good habits of reading should be encouraged so that candidates are better prepared for the challenges provided by complex vocabulary.

Critical Essay

- ◆ Candidates should be reminded to make a clear indication of which question has been selected.
- ◆ Candidates should try to avoid over-reliance on a narrative approach in their responses.
- ◆ Candidates could consider the use of topic sentences to aid the formation of a structure in critical essays.

Folio

- ◆ Candidates should attempt to include reflective comments/thoughts when writing about personal experience.
- ◆ Successful discursive writing should contain opinion and argument. It should not just gather and convey information.
- ◆ Sources consulted should be clearly acknowledged.
- ◆ Candidates should remember to use their own words in discursive writing.
- ◆ Candidates should aim to plan a narrative when attempting to write short fiction.
- ◆ A report should have a stated remit and an appropriate structure. At least two sources should be acknowledged.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	7346
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	5188
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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 100				
A	10.9%	10.9%	564	69
B	33.8%	44.6%	1751	57
C	34.7%	79.4%	1802	46
D	10.3%	89.6%	534	40
No award	10.4%	-	537	-

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.