



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>English</b>
Level	<b>Intermediate 2</b>

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

The cohort performed very well at Intermediate 2 English this year. Performance was up in both examination components, candidates finding the Close Reading paper — on the issue of text messaging — accessible and engaging. The Folio offered candidates the opportunity to bring a new set of skills to the external assessment. Candidates responded to this challenge, and a wide range of types of writing was evident: poetry, dramatic monologues, writing in Scots together with short fiction, discursive writing and examinations of candidates' own experience.

The texts selected for use in the critical Essay paper were similar to those of previous years: *The Crucible*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Bold Girls*, *Educating Rita* were popular choices for Drama; Scottish and American short stories, or novels such as *Of Mice & Men* or *To Kill A Mockingbird* featured often for Prose; Scottish poets (MacCaig, Morgan, Duffy) were used frequently in the Poetry section (which remains a very popular option). Responses on film and TV Drama were, perhaps, down a little this year, and responses on language were slightly on the increase.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Close Reading

Candidates responded positively to the passage, finding in it a subject which touched on their own experience. The majority of candidates were able to provide an answer for all questions.

Question 1: This opening question gave candidates confidence from the outset - most achieved the mark.

Question 8: Almost all candidates understood the key idea about abbreviation.

Question 9: It was good to see most candidates achieve marks in this question, which required the careful use of own words.

Question 15: Again candidates did well to respond to the instruction to use their own words.

### Critical Essay

Most candidates made an appropriate selection from the question paper, and all questions in the Drama, Prose and Poetry sections were tackled. Candidates showed a genuine engagement with the texts they had studied; clear understanding was demonstrated and many candidates revealed a deeper awareness of the central concerns of the texts.

Successful candidates consistently related their responses to the demands of the question selected. The majority of candidates were able to refer to the text selected and often used direct quotation in support of their argument. Stronger candidates were able to highlight the effectiveness of techniques in contributing to the impact of the text.

## **Folio**

A range of different types of writing was evident. Many candidates wrote on aspects of their own experience, but considerable number attempted pieces of short fiction. A few tried poetry and drama. Some wrote in varieties of Scots. Discursive writing was well handled, with evidence of research being utilised. A small number submitted a report.

The majority of candidates expressed their ideas clearly in writing and employed reasonable structures which assisted the communication of meaning.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Close Reading**

At times, candidates found difficulty when instructed to use their own words. On such occasions direct lifts were evident, and marks were lost. Questions relating to structure were challenging for many candidates. The deconstruction of imagery also presented difficulties.

Question 5: This called for a careful reading of both the question and the passage. Some candidates were unable to tease out the contradiction element of the question.

Question 6: Many candidates were not able to comment fully on the image.

Questions 12, 13, 16: These questions (on structure) presented difficulties for many candidates.

### **Critical Essay**

Some candidates' responses showed an acknowledgement of the first part of the question, but did not deal fully with the second part.

Where a question required candidates to focus on a specific section of the text, some candidates tended to structure their response in a chronological narrative which resulted in reduced relevance.

A few candidates did not time their examination properly, with the consequence that the second question was either rushed or incomplete.

Question 3: Some candidates did not address the aspect of how the ending 'brings to a conclusion the central concerns of the text'.

Question 4: Some candidates made a reasonable selection of an incident, but did not deal sufficiently with how the incident was important in the development of characters and central concerns of the text.

Question 7: Candidates often showed their ability to make relevant references to the poem selected, but did not highlight the effectiveness of the language in deepening their understanding of an important issue.

Question 9: Candidates were able to select a poem written in a specific form, but found difficulty in dealing with the specific features of the form.

Question 10: Candidates make an appropriate identification of a character, but often did not track his or her development throughout the text.

### **Folio**

A number of candidates submitted pieces of writing that exceeded the word limit.

Some candidates seemed to be restricted in their expression through adherence to whole-class tasks.

In discursive writing, some candidates did not make sufficient attempts to re-cast sourced material into their own words. Similarly, some candidates did not make proper acknowledgement of sources consulted.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **General**

#### **Close Reading**

Candidates should, as always, be encouraged to read as widely as possible in order to be prepared to deal with challenges presented by subject matter, ideas and vocabulary at Intermediate 2 level.

Candidates should try to answer as fully as possible questions that require the examination of a technique and its effectiveness. (This year candidates found it challenging to deal with imagery.)

Candidates should be prepared to answer on aspects of a writer's use of structure.

The skills of paraphrasing should be practised.

#### **Critical Essay**

Candidates should be made aware of the importance of reading carefully and responding to all aspects of the question selected.

In their analysis of literary techniques, candidates should attempt to highlight the effectiveness of techniques to the overall impact of the text.

Candidates should aim to maintain a line of thought that is closely relevant to the question.

Care should be taken over paragraphs, sentence construction and spelling in order to meet the demands of 'sufficiently accurate'.

**Folio**

Candidates should be encouraged to take ownership of their choice of tasks in order to foster engagement and genuine response. Topics of 'local interest' to candidates produced successful responses this year.

Care should be taken over the use of internet research. Candidates must select relevant material, organise it in an appropriate way, and be careful to use their own words. Candidates should then be encouraged to make proper acknowledgement of sources consulted.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

### Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2010	21,488
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	23,212
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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	19.9%	19.9%	4,611	69
B	30.1%	49.9%	6,981	59
C	30.8%	80.8%	7,160	49
D	8.5%	89.3%	1,982	44
No award	10.7%	100.0%	2,478	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.