



External Assessment Report 2012

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| Subject(s) | Italian |
| Level(s) | 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

The 2012 paper seems to have been well received by both teachers and candidates. No critical comments were received after the examination, and there were no significant issues regarding content, level of difficulty and marking. The setting and marking team continues to be the same as in previous years; this stability has no doubt helped to ensure that papers are set and marked to a consistent standard.

The content of the paper followed the prescribed themes and topics for Higher Level and was set at the correct level of difficulty. The marking scheme worked very well; as in previous years there were no non-functioning questions.

This year there was a decline in the number of presentations: 177 as against 223 in 2011. However, it should be noted that this year there has been a significant upturn in candidate numbers at Intermediate 1 and 2; this should ensure an increase in the number of Higher entries for next session. Returning to this year, there were 6 new and 22 returning centres out of a total of 36, a decrease from last year's total of 40.

There was also a slight decrease in the number of candidates achieving A: 63.8% this year as compared to 67.7% last year. As was the case last year, centres were cautious in the estimates they provided, predicting that about 51% of their candidates would gain an A. This year, however, 50.8% of the cohort had no previous record of attainment (up by 8.6% from last year), which may account for the slightly lower percentage of A passes. There was also a high (52.5%) number of S6 candidates. The Component Average mark for each element was as follows (figures for 2011 are in brackets):

Paper 1: (45 marks) 31.9 (34.2) = down 2.3

Paper 2: (30 marks) 19.1 (18.9) = up 0.2

Speaking: (25 marks) 22.6 (22.4) = up 0.2

The decline in performance in Paper 1 (Reading Comprehension and Directed Writing) was partly compensated for by slight improvements in Paper 2 (Listening and Writing) and in Speaking.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1 candidates seem to have coped well with the subject matter of the Reading Comprehension. The majority had good results here, with even a few managing to achieve full marks (less able candidates also managed to pass this section).

There was the usual spread of marks in Directed Writing, but it was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates had been well prepared and were (for the most part) able to adapt their pre-learned material effectively. Very few penalties were applied this year for the omission of bullet points.

In Paper 2 there was a slight improvement in overall performance, the average mark being 19.1 as opposed to last year's 18.9. The Listening Comprehension was done well and, as always, proved to be a good discriminator of ability. Performance in the Short Essay was good; the majority of candidates fully addressed the topic, and there were very few instances of irrelevance. Finally, the average mark in the Speaking Test rose from 22.4 last year to 22.6.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1 performance in the Translation section proved to be problematic, with an average mark of 5. Candidates clearly found some difficulty here (particularly in two out of the five sense-units) and there were many instances of outright mistranslation and awkward English.

Apart from the usual evidence of dictionary misuse, a worrying number of candidates were also unable to translate large numbers accurately. Despite this, performance in the Translation proved to be a highly effective indicator of overall performance in the rest of the paper.

In the Directed Writing, some candidates barely covered individual bullet points and had difficulty generating original language to address them.

In Paper 2, many candidates failed to recognise the word 'sciopero' and, because they had transcribed it inaccurately, were then unable to find it in the dictionary.

In the Short Essay there were frequent problems with the use of the impersonal 'si', especially with reflexive verbs.

The usual weaknesses in grammatical knowledge and accuracy were in evidence across both papers and can be listed as follows, in no particular order of importance:

- ◆ 'piacere' in all its forms
- ◆ 'qualche' with a plural noun
- ◆ agreement of adjectives
- ◆ articulated prepositions
- ◆ incorrect definite and indefinite articles

- ◆ prepositions before infinitives
- ◆ prepositions with towns and countries
- ◆ plural nouns and adjectives, especially those ending in –co and –go
- ◆ confusion between tu, voi and si
- ◆ la gente / la famiglia and plural verb
- ◆ irregular past participles, especially decidere and mettere
- ◆ direct and indirect object pronouns
- ◆ pensare di / che
- ◆ possessive adjectives with family members
- ◆ confusion between c'era and c'erano

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Candidates should be advised to tackle Paper 1 in the exact order in which it is presented. This year there were several instances of either the Translation or Directed Writing being done first, followed by the comprehension questions; in these cases performance was sometimes compromised.
- ◆ In the Reading Comprehension, candidates should be encouraged to make sure that they read all the questions carefully and attempt to answer them accurately and succinctly, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should also be told not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to set aside enough time to do the Translation thoroughly; this year there was evidence that the question had been rushed by a few. Candidates should also check carefully for accuracy and possible omissions, especially of single words as these can often incur a one or two point penalty. Special caution is needed when translating numbers, especially the larger ones.
- ◆ In the Directed Writing, candidates must be encouraged to read the whole scenario carefully and ensure that they cover all bullet points in adequate detail. Double line spacing is recommended for maximum legibility, especially if something is crossed out and then rewritten. If pre-learned material is used, it should be incorporated intelligently and logically into the scenario, making any necessary textual and grammatical adjustments. It is disappointing to note that, in some centres, candidates write almost identical essays or almost identical paragraphs to specific bullet points. Candidates should also ensure that they set aside sufficient time for effective proof-reading of what they have written.
- ◆ In the Listening Comprehension, candidates should be trained to use the questions in advance to anticipate the kind of information they might hear. They should listen carefully to numbers, times, dates and days, as many careless mistakes are made here. Similarly,

they should make sure that they include relevant adjectives in their answers, as these are often essential for a point or points to be awarded. If a question asks 'where' or 'when', exactly it usually indicates that some detail is required. Candidates should also ensure that any rough working is clearly scored out.

- ◆ In the Short Essay candidates must ensure that they read the essay question carefully and attempt to address the precise issues raised. When the essay is in two parts, there should be an attempt to deal with both in equal detail. The use of pre-learned material here can be dangerous as it may lead to partial or total irrelevance, unless an effort is made to adapt it to the essay title. Centres should note carefully how uneven writing is marked in the 'What if ...?' section of the Marking Instructions for the Short Essay. Once again, the importance of adequate proof-reading here cannot be over-emphasised, and candidates should also be encouraged to use the full allocation of time to achieve this. As is the case with Directed Writing, double line spacing is recommended for maximum legibility, especially if something is crossed out and then rewritten.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2011 | 227 |
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|------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of resulted entries in 2012 | 177 |
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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 | 63.8% | 63.8% | 113 | 70 |
| B | 15.3% | 79.1% | 27 | 60 |
| C | 11.9% | 91.0% | 21 | 50 |
| D | 4.0% | 94.9% | 7 | 45 |
| No award | 5.1% | 100.0% | 9 | - |

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.