



External Assessment Report 2014

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| Subject(s) | Italian |
| Level(s) | Advanced Higher |

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 paper appears to have been well received by teachers and candidates. No critical comments were made by centres, and there were no setting issues, the setting team having remained the same for a number of years. Both marking schemes worked well (only minor amendments were made) and there were no non-functioning questions.

Performance in Paper 1 showed a slight decrease this year, with an average mark of 31.3 (32.4 last year), whereas performance in Paper 2 was almost the same as last year, with an average mark of 49.9 (50.1 last year). The discursive essay was well done, with the full range of titles being tackled.

In the Folio the average mark was 18.4, again virtually identical to the 18.6 recorded last year. As is normally the case in Advanced Higher Italian, all candidates opted for the Extended Reading/Viewing option.

In the Speaking Assessment the average mark of 39.7 was very slightly down on last year's 40.0, but there were some good performances from a cohort made up for the most part of school pupils.

This year there were 34 candidates, a welcome increase of 10 from last year and a return to the 2011 total. These candidates came from 14 different centres (three more than last year). This year showed a slight decrease in the percentage of candidates presenting for the examination with no previous record of SQA attainment: 14.7% as compared to 16.7% last year. Overall attainment this year was very slightly down, with 91.2% of candidates receiving grades A–C as opposed to last year's 91.7%. The percentage attaining an A pass was lower than last year: 44.1% as compared to 58.3% (a reduction of 14.2%).

Areas in which candidates performed well

The subject matter of Paper 1 was accessible to all candidates and there was a good spread of marks in the comprehension questions. There were also some good translations and responses to the inferential question.

In Paper 2 the choice of discursive essays offered resulted in the full range of titles being attempted; it was also heartening to see a number of very good performances.

Performance in the Folio was generally comparable to previous years. There were some new texts and background studies titles. Essays on literary texts were better done than those on background topics. As has been the case in recent years, the increase in word-count continues to give candidates a better opportunity to express themselves fully.

Performance in the Speaking Assessment was much as expected; there were a number of good and very good performances.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As is always the case, the inferential and translation questions in Paper 1 caused problems for some candidates. There was some evidence of a lack of time devoted to these two parts of the paper, with some candidates spending too long on the comprehension questions. The translation in particular threw up instances of poor command of English and improper dictionary use. However, both the inferential and translation questions proved to be effective discriminators of ability and final level of performance.

In Paper 2, the discursive essay demonstrated the usual weaknesses in grammar and the lack on occasions of effective checking and proof-reading, the latter being an area in which candidates would benefit from more training and guidance from teachers.

In the Folio, essays on background topics were less well done than those on literary texts, due for the most part to essay titles that were often too vague and open-ended.

In the Speaking Assessment, some candidates tended to over-rely on pre-learned material and were uncomfortable when asked to digress or expand on this.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ It is recommended that Paper 1 be done in the exact order in which it is presented. Every year, many candidates do the translation and/or inferential question(s) before the comprehension questions; this is to be discouraged as working through the comprehension questions enables candidates to build up a detailed idea of the content, style and message of the text before embarking on the inferential and translation questions, thereby ensuring that these latter two questions are dealt with more accurately and confidently.
- ◆ In Paper 1 candidates should be encouraged to make sure that they read all the comprehension questions carefully and attempt to answer them precisely, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should also be told not to include information from the translation section in these answers.
- ◆ Candidates should set aside enough time to do the inferential and translation questions properly; every year there is evidence of these questions having been rushed. In the translation, 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.
- ◆ More detailed and frequent grammar input and practice is recommended for the discursive essay, together with the development of effective proof-reading skills. Many basic errors could be avoided by careful checking of verb tenses and endings, adjectival agreements, genders, spellings and accents.
- ◆ Teachers should train candidates to incorporate any pre-learned material naturally during the Speaking Assessment and avoid any tendency to deliver mini-speeches. They

should be aware that the Speaking Assessment is a test of the ability to generate and sustain an ongoing and unscripted conversation.

- ◆ The choice of background topic essay titles in the Folio should be carefully considered by both teachers and pupils so as to avoid titles which are too vague, over-ambitious and incapable of being properly addressed within the prescribed word-length.
- ◆ More detailed bibliographies are recommended for the Folio pieces. Essays on literary texts must clearly demonstrate that the candidate has read the original in Italian and not just an English translation.
- ◆ If possible, schools should try to select literary texts whose intellectual content and length is most suitable for S6 pupils. New texts and background topics are always welcome.
- ◆ Candidates should aim to adhere to the 750 word Folio essay limit.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2013 | 24 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2014 | 35 |
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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 200 | | | | |
| A | 45.7% | 45.7% | 16 | 140 |
| B | 28.6% | 74.3% | 10 | 120 |
| C | 17.1% | 91.4% | 6 | 100 |
| D | 2.9% | 94.3% | 1 | 90 |
| No award | 5.7% | - | 2 | - |

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.