



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Italian
Level(s)	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

This year's examination was received very positively by both teachers and candidates, and appears to have been an excellent indicator of ability. There were no significant issues regarding content, level of difficulty and marking. The setting and marking team was the same as in previous years, a fact that has helped to ensure that papers are set and marked to a consistently high standard. The content of the paper followed the prescribed themes and topics for Higher Level and was set at an appropriate level of difficulty. The marking scheme worked very well and there were no non-functioning questions.

This year there was a drop in the number of presentations: 173 as against 234 last year (down 26%), due for the most part to a number of centres who only present every two years. The figures in this respect are very similar to those of 2012. There were 11 new and six returning centres out of a total of 37, a decrease of two from last year's total of 35.

There was a welcome increase in the number of candidates achieving As: 60.7% this year as compared to 58% last year. As has been the case in recent years, centres were cautious in the estimates they provided, predicting that 51.8% of their candidates would gain an A. This year, however, 36.4% of the cohort had no previous record of attainment (down by 8.9% from last year).

The Component Average mark for each element was as follows (figures for 2013 are in brackets):

Paper 1: (45 marks) 31.0 (33.4) = down 2.4

Paper 2: (30 marks) 19.4 (16.1) = up 3.3

Speaking: (25 marks) 23.1 (22.5) = up 0.6

The improvement in performance in Paper 2 (Listening and Writing) and Speaking more than cancelled out the slight deterioration in performance observed in Paper 1 (Reading Comprehension and Directed Writing).

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Paper 1 proved to be a good and testing paper to which the majority of candidates reacted positively, especially with regard to the subject matter of the Reading Comprehension. The comprehension questions were done well even by less able candidates, with very few poor performances noted.

Results in the Translation were also good and an average mark of 6 was attained, exactly the same as last year. (This part of the paper has always proved to be a good and accurate predictor of overall performance.)

The Directed Writing showed that a good number of candidates had been able to depart from their pre-learned material when required and formulate original material of their own. As was the case last year, few penalties were applied for the omission of bullet points. The average mark was 9.

Paper 2

In Paper 2 performance in the Listening was good and the full range of marks was observed.

Performance in the Short Essay was better than usual. The majority of candidates made a commendable attempt at addressing the topic and many were successful in using information gleaned from the Listening to help with the content. Consequently there was less reliance on pre-learned material. The average mark was 7.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

In Paper 1 poor English in some responses to the comprehension questions led to a loss of marks (this was also noted last year).

In the Translation the same weaknesses in English were observed and candidates lost marks as a result.

Paper 2

In Paper 2, questions 2 (b) and 3 (a) were done less well, but in the latter case this was because some candidates had misread the question.

In the Short Essay the usual weaknesses in grammatical knowledge and accuracy were noted. These were also apparent in the Directed Writing and can be listed as follows, in no particular order of importance:

- ◆ *piacere* in all its forms
- ◆ difference between perfect and imperfect tenses
- ◆ verbs with collective nouns as subjects
- ◆ *qualche* with a plural noun
- ◆ agreement of adjectives
- ◆ articulated prepositions
- ◆ incorrect definite and indefinite articles
- ◆ prepositions before infinitives, towns and countries
- ◆ plural nouns and adjectives, especially those ending in *-co* and *-go*
- ◆ confusion between *tu*, *voi* and *si*
- ◆ irregular past participles, especially *decidere* and *mettere*
- ◆ direct and indirect object pronouns
- ◆ *pensare di / che*
- ◆ *aiutare a*
- ◆ possessive adjectives with family members
- ◆ confusion between *c'era*, *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 again 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 set aside enough time to do the Translation properly; every year there is some evidence that the question has been rushed. 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. Proper dictionary training is essential here.
- ◆ 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. They should also be encouraged to present each bullet point as a separate paragraph, as this makes it easier for both candidates and markers to check that everything has been covered. 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 be reminded that they should avoid lifting phrases, whole sentences and sometimes even entire paragraphs from the text of the Reading Comprehension; this year there were several instances of this happening. Finally, 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*, this 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 issue(s) raised. The use of pre-learned material here 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 overemphasised, 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

Number of resulted entries in 2013	238
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2014	173
------------------------------------	-----

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	60.7%	60.7%	105	70
B	15.0%	75.7%	26	60
C	15.6%	91.3%	27	50
D	5.8%	97.1%	10	45
No award	2.9%	-	5	-

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.