



## External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Italian
Level(s)	Advanced 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

It would appear that this year's paper has once again been well received by both teachers and candidates. No critical comments were received from centres, and there were no setting issues, perhaps due to the fact that the same setting team has now worked on these papers for a number of years. The Marking Instructions worked well and there were no non-functioning questions.

Performance in Paper 1 declined this year, with the average mark being 31.3 (compared to 34.1 last year). Performance in Paper 2, however, showed a marked improvement; this year's average mark was 51.1 as compared to the 44.5 of last year. The discursive essay in this paper was well done, with the full range of titles being tackled.

In the Folio the average mark was 17.7, a slight increase on the 17.0 recorded last year. As is normally the case in Advanced Higher Italian, all candidates opted for the Extended Reading/Viewing option. A new feature this year was the opportunity candidates took to refer in essays to studies undertaken as part of the Baccalaureate.

In the Speaking Assessment the average mark of 41.7 was slightly up on last year's 40.0, and a pleasing number of good performances were noted. This year there were 30 candidates, four down from last year; these candidates came from 14 different centres (three more than last year). There were five new and nine returning centres. There was also a decrease in the percentage of candidates who presented for the examination with no previous record of SQA attainment: 6.7% as compared to 17.6% last year.

Overall attainment this year was excellent, with 93.4% of candidates receiving grade A-C. The percentage attaining an A pass was 53.4%, significantly up on the 41.2% of last year.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates appear to have reacted well to the subject matter of Paper 1 and consequently results were good in the comprehension questions. Some excellent translations were also noted.

In Paper 2 the range of discursive essays was well received by candidates, who attempted all titles. A number of essays were of a very high standard with reasoned and thoughtful discussions of the topics.

Performance in the Folio was comparable to previous years, with the appearance of some new texts and background studies titles (the increase in the word-length introduced several years ago continues to help candidates to write effectively).

Performance in the Speaking Assessment was as expected, with only a few Poor performances, as well as some very good ones.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

This year the main areas of difficulty proved to be the inferential and translation questions in Paper 1. In the inferential question many candidates seem to have had difficulty in addressing both sides of the two-part question equally; as a consequence the first part was quite well done to the detriment of the second. The translation also proved to be somewhat tricky, with a number of candidates scoring poorly. Here the usual weaknesses regarding poor command of English and improper dictionary use were observed. However, both the inferential and translation questions, despite their apparent difficulty, proved to be very effective discriminators of ability and final level of performance.

In Paper 2, the discursive essay threw up the usual problem areas of weaknesses in grammar and poor proof-reading, the latter being an area in which candidates would benefit from some guidance from teachers. In the Folio, essays on background topics were generally weaker than those on literary texts, with little or no attempt at critical evaluation or analysis. 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 passage 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 adequately; 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 candidates to avoid titles that 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. There is also an over-reliance on Wikipedia, which is not always the most accurate of sources. Essays on literary texts should clearly demonstrate that the candidate has read the original in Italian and not just an English translation. New texts and background topics would be welcomed.
- ◆ Candidates should aim to stick to the 750 word Folio essay limit.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	34
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	30
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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	53.3%	53.3%	16	140
B	23.3%	76.7%	7	120
C	16.7%	93.3%	5	100
D	3.3%	96.7%	1	90
No award	3.3%	100.0%	1	-

## 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.