

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Modern Languages

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

Italian Intermediate 1 & 2, Higher

Statistical information: update

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2004	131
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	185
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Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2004	157
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	189
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Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2004	268
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	292
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

There was an increase in entries across all levels. At Intermediate 1 and 2, this could perhaps be accounted for by the move away from Standard Grade in some local authorities and schools. At Intermediate 1 there was a drop in entries at S5 and S6, whereas 27.1% of the presentations were from S4 (8.8% in 2004). At Intermediate 2, 40.4% of entries came from students in S4 (27.5% in 2004). It was noted that approximately half of the S4 presentations at Intermediate 2 came from one school which also presented a significant number of candidates at the other levels. It is less easy to account for the increased entries at Higher Level. At this level, presenting centres change from year to year and one or two centres dropping out or coming in can have a noticeable affect on overall presentations.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	50.8	50.8	94	70
B	14.1	64.9	26	60
C	14.1	78.9	26	50
D	4.3	83.2	8	45
No award	16.8	100.0	31	-

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	52.4	52.4	99	70
B	16.9	69.3	32	60
C	11.6	81.0	22	50
D	7.4	88.4	14	45
No award	11.6	100.0	22	-

Higher

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	53.4	53.4	156	70
B	19.9	73.3	58	60
C	13.7	87.0	40	50
D	3.8	90.8	11	45
No award	9.2	100.0	27	-

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

Intermediate 1 & 2, Higher

Slight adjustments were made to grade boundaries in 2004 because of difficulties identified in one question in Listening at Intermediate 1, and the tight marking scheme applied to Reading at Intermediate 2. There were no significant problems identified in any papers in 2005 and they provided the candidates with an appropriate challenge at each level. Standard boundaries were applied.

At Intermediate 1 and 2 there was a decrease in the percentage of candidates awarded an A or Upper A, and an increase in the percentage awarded at B, C and D/No award. At both levels, this reflects the performance of a less able cohort than in 2004, in evidence also in the marks awarded in Speaking and Writing, the more predictable elements of the papers.

At Higher, there was an increase in the percentage awarded a pass at A or Upper A and at B, and a decrease at C and D/No award, showing a slightly more able cohort and reflecting the slight increase in marks awarded by the centres for Speaking.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Intermediate 1

Mean Marks by Component (2004 in brackets)

Reading	21.7	(23.0)
Listening	13.3	(10.2)
Writing	9.2	(10.8)
Speaking	25.6	(26.4)

The examination was appropriate in terms of content which related to the prescribed themes and topics. In general, markers considered the paper fair and the responses varied from poor to excellent. Some questions in both Reading and Listening were very accessible to the less able candidates, while a number were sufficiently testing to allow the more able to shine. At the pre-appeal stage 3 candidates had achieved full marks.

Mean Marks in Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking were all lower this year. The Mean Mark in Listening was depressed in 2004 because of difficulties identified in two questions that affected, in particular, the more able candidates. There were no problems identified in the 2005 paper.

It is not possible to identify how the candidates presented from S4 preformed in the examination. Some candidates did not seem to be able to make use of their knowledge of the world to aid them in comprehension. Perhaps the performance of candidates from S4 across all languages is an area that would merit some research.

In Listening and Reading, markers commented on the very poor English, both grammar and spelling that made it very difficult to make sense of some of the answers of some candidates.

In Writing, the introduction of the three-line layout caused problems for some more able candidates who wanted to go beyond the bounds of the examination. In a few cases, candidates opted to do the writing on a separate piece of paper. Perhaps the decision to introduce the lines could be reconsidered.

Markers commented favourably on the extended criteria for marking Writing. They found them helpful in moving away from the perception that this paper is a Foundation exercise, The criteria underline the fact that Intermediate 1 is benchmarked against Standard Grade General Level.

Intermediate 2

Mean Marks by Component (2004 in brackets)

Reading	19.5	(18.5)
Listening	10.6	(12.3)
Writing	13.0	(15.2)
Speaking	23.7	(24.0)

The examination was appropriate in terms of content which related to the prescribed themes and topics. There was a good spread of marks in all papers which markers considered testing but appropriate. The Mean Marks were lower this year in Listening, Writing and Speaking, reflecting the ability of the cohort. The lower Mean Mark in Reading last year resulted from a tight application of the marking key in one question. There were no problems this year.

As with Intermediate 1, markers commented on the very poor English that made it very difficult to make sense of the answers of some candidates in Listening and Reading. Problems also arose on occasions when candidates did not answer in sentences, leaving the marker to guess at the intended verb. In some cases, poor English expression lost pupils marks.

Listening is consistently the most challenging aspect at Intermediate 2. Perhaps a period of two minutes for candidates to look at the questions before listening to the tape (in line with Higher) should be considered.

Higher

Mean Marks by Component (2004 in brackets)

Reading/Directed Writing	28.9	(30.3)
Listening/Writing	17.8	(16.1)
Speaking	22.0	(21.4)

The papers covered a cross section of themes and topics and all were accessible to candidates in terms of language and content. Candidates responded well, especially to the reading passage where loss of marks was not uncommonly due to poor English expression resulting in unclear or ambiguous answers. Translation had a good mixture of straightforward and taxing components. Listening was more taxing but it allowed abler candidates to meet the challenge. Both Writing elements allowed candidates to demonstrate their proficiency. It is pleasing to note that one candidate scored full marks across all papers and another 4, 99%. There were some candidates, however, for whom Higher level was not appropriate.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Intermediate 1

The majority of candidates scored half marks and above in all papers with evidence of good attention to detail, particularly in Reading. All candidates generally performed well in multiple-choice answers, even though some of the options were not entirely obvious.

There were some very strong performances in Writing with more able, well prepared candidates using learned material successfully without much evidence of misuse of the dictionary. These candidates manipulated verbs well. Even with less able candidates, the first person of the verb was often well formed. The first two sections were generally handled better than sections three and four.

Intermediate 2

There were some very good performances in Writing with many candidates achieving full marks. In the best attempts the language was accurate and flowed well. The candidates had also developed techniques that enabled them to personalise the content successfully and in this way address the topic fully. This was particularly true of those who picked up the pet aspect of the advertisement. These able candidates also tended to give more evaluative and reflective comments in the first three bullet points, lifting the letters from the mundane lists that are so often the basis of the approach to school/college career.

The majority of candidates handled the Reading paper either satisfactorily, well or very well, with a minority finding it testing. There was a good spread of marks in Listening in response to a challenging but fair paper. The first passage was the most accessible to candidates.

Higher

Candidates generally performed well in Reading. They were well directed to the section of the passage in which the answer was to be found so that there was, perhaps, less of a scattergun approach in the responses. There were few irrelevant essays in the Directed Writing and few also where bullet points had been omitted. Some candidates were able to write at length and yet to maintain accuracy, successfully incorporating previously prepared material.

Although the Listening was challenging, less able candidates were able to score half marks while the more able met the challenge well, with a good number gaining all available points. The vast majority of candidates ensured that their responses to Writing were relevant with a sizeable number producing very sound, interesting attempts that merited full marks. In these essays, candidates selected material carefully from a range of previously prepared essays (eg. school / future career / relationship with parents essay) and adapted the extracts successfully to the context in which they were writing.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Intermediate 1

In Writing, less able candidates struggled to reproduce learned material and on occasions appeared to panic, putting words in the wrong order and, not infrequently, omitting some altogether. In these cases there was little sign of understanding of the structure of the language. Some candidates were unclear about the difference between *e* and *è*, and, indeed, the use of accents in general.

In Reading and Listening there were some surprising gaps in knowledge, most notably the days of the week, low numbers and time, common jobs – *cameriere*, *maestra*, and clothes – *cravatta*, *camicia*. *Cucina* and *piatti* were frequently only recognised in their literal sense of *kitchen* and *plates* and not as *cooking* and *dishes*. There was evidence of overuse of the dictionary in these and other instances with very unfortunate results - *maestra* rendered as *mistress*. *Mezza pensione* was another instance where the dictionary was a hindrance rather than a help.

Some candidates took a minimalist approach and lost marks by omitting essential adjectives or adverbs. On the other hand, others lost marks by offering too much information and getting some of it wrong. This was particularly the case where candidates were instructed to e.g. give **one** detail / piece of information, and where the extraneous rule could come into play. It is quite difficult at times for candidates to identify exactly what constitutes *one detail*.

At times candidates failed to notice the use of comparatives, particularly with *più*. This lost them marks as the essential information was missing.

Intermediate 2

In writing there was evidence that less able candidates were struggling to remember a template without having any real understanding of the underlying grammar. Some of these candidates could address in a reasonably straightforward manner the first three bullet points but had difficulties with the spelling and structures of phrases to request information about the job, or in trying to give a reason for the application which took account to the advert. A few candidates only this year applied for the wrong job and therefore fell into the unsatisfactory category. Putting the name of the job in bold seems to have helped candidates to focus.

Common difficulties experienced by candidates in Writing:

Confusion of *piace* / *piacciono* and spelling of *piacciono*

Combined prepositions and articles – *in il sesto anno*

Articles with possessives – *in mi famiglia*

Formation of possessives and frequent confusion with Spanish

Poor style, in particular with the position of *anche*

In tackling Reading, some candidates made excessive use of the dictionary, putting down what they found regardless of the sense it made in English and the context of the passage – eg *alla scoperta (di Roma)*. Some candidates did not take careful account of parts of speech, rendering eg *si trova facilmente lavoro* as *it is easy work*. *Locale notturno*, *a bordo* and *da piccolo* caused many weaker candidates difficulties, and the common meaning of *borse*) = bag was frequently assumed rather than the meaning within the context of a grant/bursary. Many candidates seemed to be unaware of the examination system in Italy and failed to recognise *la maturità*.

In Listening one of the most widespread areas of difficulty was the question involving weather, in which candidates confused *nebbia* with *nevica*. This is a somewhat surprising error at this level. In this question, candidates were asked for *one* detail. Many went beyond this, incurring a penalty from the imposition of the extraneous rule.

Spettacolo caused many candidates difficulty. They assumed the meaning was spectacular. This should, however, be a common word to candidates studying leisure activities.

Despite being asked about a *surprising* fact discovered on Interent, candidates went for what they assumed

would be the answer – a cheaper holiday – ignoring the clearly expressed *la vacanza costava di più*.

Responses to question 1(c) could perhaps have been more accurate if the question had focused on *what* rather than *why*.

Higher

In Reading marks were generally lost because of imprecision in the answers or failure to note significant details in the text. In response to the question about information from multi-media kiosks, many candidates responded with *nutritional value of food* (general and incorrect) rather than *nutritional value of the foods*. In the same question, it was clear that many candidates were unfamiliar with the use of *da* + time and the phrase *da quanto tempo*. Candidates were not always successful in selecting the correct meaning when using the dictionary (*ricette* = recipe, receipt). Again, in this instance, the use of the plural in the text should have helped. Less able candidates fail to make use of these clues. Irregular past participles (e.g. *mosso*) caused some candidates difficulties. *A posto* was not well known, despite the fact that it must be a common phrase where target language is used in the general management of the class. Some candidates assumed it meant post/postman, again despite the contextual clues that *posto* was not being used as a noun and therefore needed further investigation as to meaning.

In Translation, failure to note detail once again lost candidates marks (eg. *ore preziose* = a precious hour). Some candidates had difficulty recognising the future (*sarà*) and the perfect (*è ... arrivata*, rendered by *is arriving*). *Alcuni*, surprisingly, was not infrequently taken to mean *various* or *many*. The idiomatic phrases *niente di ...* and *alla portata* were not well known. Candidates were also let down by their command of English expression. *Its/It's* are, of course, common problems. The apostrophe also cause difficulties with *nothings strange* and *within everybodys/everybodies reach*.

In Directed Writing there were some substantially irrelevant essays where candidates failed to read the context fully and reproduced, in what often appeared to be its entirety, the learned holiday essay. Although, in general, most candidates who made the effort to address the topic covered all bullet points, less able candidates concentrated on the easier, more predictable ones, and produced essays that lacked balance. On occasion, even fairly able candidates gave a cursory glance only at one, or perhaps two points, generally the more taxing, and in so doing ruled themselves out of full marks. Some candidates were unable to manipulate language independently, relying on putting together memorised passages. The accuracy of these passages contrasted markedly with the quality of the language used to link the learned sections. Perhaps the weakest bullet point was the last one where candidates concentrated on future plans in general rather than adapting the information to incorporate precisely, or to express indecision about, where they wanted to live and the kind of work they wanted to do.

Common areas of language difficulty:

- Piacere* in all its forms and tenses
- Bene/buono, meglio/migliore*
- Molto* – adjective, variable, *molto* – adverb, invariable
- Divertimento/divertente*
- Combined prepositions
- c'è/c'era/è/era*
- gente/famiglia* + singular verb/adjective
- studiare molto/lavorare sodo*.

There were also some irrelevant essays in the Writing section in paper 2, in which candidates produced the holiday or the future career essay without any attempt at adapting the material. Some candidates did not have the essential skills for Higher and their attempts crumbled when they tried to introduce the necessary flexibility. Some candidates sought security for part of the essay by writing about school subjects and in so doing produced partially irrelevant responses. Other candidates were successful in making this into a relevant paragraph by focusing on a particular subject / particular subjects they had enjoyed at school and hoped to study at university, expressing fears at forgetting important elements if they took a year out.

Common areas of language difficulty (many of the difficulties identified in Directed Writing are also found in

this paper):

Confusion with the impersonal *you* – *si, tu, voi*, with a knock on effect on the use of *tuo, vostro*, etc.

Sometimes all three were used in the same essay, or even in the same sentence

Andare a + infinitive, mistakenly to express the future

Use of *sia* – students frequently write *penso che sia è ...*, or even start the idea with *Sia ...*

Expressing the idea of making friends

Poi/puoi

È importante/meglio/una buona idea di

Misuse of gerund – *lavorando è importante*

Common expressions –e.g. *il mondo del lavoro / degli affari*, not *di*.

Conditional / if clauses

Use of the partitive

Vorrei essere etc + job (use or otherwise of the indefinite article).

Recommendations

Intermediate 1

Candidates should take more care in reading instructions and introductions to questions. They should distinguish more carefully between “when”, “what” and “why”.

While it is clear that candidates who do not attempt an answer will get no marks, they should be wary of the dangers of wild guessing or of resorting to the dictionary on a grand scale, particularly where they have correctly rendered some information. They should be encouraged to consider their answers more critically, and to realise that e.g. “refined kitchen” is unlikely to be included in the price in a hotel.

Perhaps more thorough memorisation of basic vocabulary – e.g. days of the week and common jobs – could overcome some of the problems with the dictionary. Candidates should be encouraged to view it as a help to be used sparingly.

Intermediate 2

In Writing, centres should take account of content as well as accuracy in considering an attempt that might fall in to the “very good” category. Given this, centres should also consider carefully the rigidity with which they encourage candidates to memorise the same letter. This can disadvantage the more able candidates who do not adapt the letter to the specific topic of the exam, and the less able candidates who do not understand the underlying structures and are stuck when they forget what they are trying to say.

In Reading, candidates should be aware that writing in note form might obscure the full meaning eg *a house in Alatri* – who has the house? Daniela? Her parents? In general much more attention needs to be given to some of the detail in the passages and also to English expression in answers.

In both Listening and Reading, while candidates should not ignore common sense, they must make sure their answer is derived from what they have read/heard, not what they expected to read/hear.

Higher

In Reading and Translation, greater familiarity with common irregular past participles could save candidates time with often fruitless dictionary searches. Candidate must also take more note of the clues to meaning that are to be found by looking more closely at the grammatical structures in the text.

In Directed Writing, centres should note, and make candidates aware that they must try to address the bullet points in a balanced manner. If they concentrate on the easier aspects of the task they are unlikely to gain full marks even if the writing is, on the whole, grammatically accurate. At Higher level, candidates need the ability and skills to adapt memorised material and to construct linking language independently.

In Listening/Writing, there is even more need to ensure that candidates can identify appropriate material from the work they have produced in class, and that they have the necessary skills and knowledge of grammar to adapt the ideas to the context. Tense manipulation is essential.