



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	English
Level	Intermediate 2

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

Candidates' performance across both papers reflected the reasonably wide range of attainment present in the Intermediate 2 cohort.

Close Reading

The passage (on the subject of the Chinese Terracotta Army) was written with clarity, and many candidates found it interesting and accessible. It provided a challenging read for the average candidate, but great care was taken to ensure that the questions were fair and pitched at the correct level. Key terms were again highlighted in bold.

Candidates approached the exercise with commitment, and the vast majority attempted to answer all questions.

Critical Essay

The range of questions available allowed candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the texts studied in a positive light.

The texts selected were similar to previous years. These included some challenging and thought-provoking pieces of literature. Shakespeare and Miller provided most of the texts chosen for Drama (*Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *The Crucible*). However, there were significant numbers of responses on *Bold Girls*, *An Inspector Calls*, and *Educating Rita*. Novels selected were often *Of Mice and Men* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*; Scottish writers featured in short stories selected for the Prose section, and in poetry (MacCaig, Morgan, Duffy, Rush).

Again, there was a small increase in uptake for the question dealing with non-fiction texts in the Prose section of the paper. (However, candidates should be reminded to take care to select an appropriate question for non-fiction). A few centres had prepared candidates for the Language section.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

Candidates approached the paper with commitment, and the vast majority answered all questions.

Many candidates tried to answer as fully as they could, and were able to write lengthy, detailed responses.

Questions on Understanding provided the most success, although, again, some candidates had difficulty in demonstrating their understanding through the use of their own words.

Critical Essay

Many candidates wrote extensively and accurately in both essays. The two essays were of relatively equal quality.

An attempt was made by the majority of candidates to ensure that relevance to the question was achieved in both essays. There were signs of improvement in this area.

There were indications that fewer candidates approached the examination with 'prepared essays.'

Most candidates demonstrated acceptable standards of technical accuracy.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

Candidates found difficulty with questions 6, 9b, 10, and 15.

Question 6 asked for some understanding of the structural function of the expression 'formidable war machine', ie an awareness of how the expression has a summative function at that point of the passage. While reviewing the marking instructions after the examination, it was acknowledged that many candidates were approaching this question as a 'linking question.' In the light of this, it was decided to give credit for such an approach. The marking instructions were amended, and up to two marks were available for candidates who approached the question in this way.

Question 9b was an Understanding question which offered three marks: each mark required a gloss of a word or expression from a short section of the passage. It seemed that many candidates found difficulty with this task because the words and ideas were not understood.

Question 10 was an example of what has come to be known as a 'linking question.' Where candidates had difficulty here, it was because they did not identify the relevant parts of the sentence (the words/expressions which had the linking function).

In question 15, most candidates were able to identify an example of word-choice, but few were able to relate their selection to a part or feature of the rest of the passage.

In general, candidates found it difficult to use their own words where required, and had difficulty in dealing with the 'how' part of analysis questions.

Critical Essay

A few candidates had difficulty in acknowledging the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts when selecting a question from the Prose section.

A lack of analysis was evident in the responses of some candidates. These responses tended to be plot-centred.

There was clear evidence of engagement with texts, but evaluation following analysis was not always well developed.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

- ◆ The advice, as always, is to encourage candidates to read widely to deal with challenges presented by subject matter, ideas, and vocabulary at this level.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to make some attempt to provide 'own words' where required.
- ◆ Candidates should try to answer fully those questions which require the identification of a technique and an explanation of its effectiveness.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to recognise a writer's use of word-choice, imagery and tone, and be able to comment on use and effectiveness.
- ◆ Candidates should be prepared to recognise the effect (and effectiveness) of a particular use of structure (eg sentence variety, linkage, balance, inversion).
- ◆ Candidates should recognise the overall structure of a passage, and be able to comment on how the key elements of introduction, topic sentences, and conclusion link the central ideas and themes.

Critical Essay

- ◆ Candidates should be reminded to read the questions carefully before making selections. Care should be taken over choosing fiction or non-fiction questions from the Prose section.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to develop and maintain a line of thought in their essays. This line of thought should be closely relevant to the question.
- ◆ Candidates should demonstrate skills of Analysis and Evaluation in addition to Understanding.
- ◆ Care should be taken over paragraphs, sentence and spelling in order to meet the demands of 'sufficiently accurate.'

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	21025
Number of resulted entries in 2010	21488

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	16.7%	16.7%	3590	66
B	25.8%	42.5%	5550	56
C	30.8%	73.3%	6612	46
D	9.9%	83.2%	2121	41
No award	16.8%	100.0%	3615	–

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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 to maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.