External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The cohort again performed well at English Intermediate 2 with some candidates achieving very high marks. Marks were broadly similar to last year in both examination components (Close Reading was slightly down, but Critical Essay remained constant). The third component (the Folio of Writing) continued to provide candidates with the opportunity to bring a new set of skills to the external assessment. Marks for this component showed a slight increase.

The texts used for the Critical Essay paper were similar to those of previous years: *A View From the Bridge*, *The Crucible, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Bold Girls* for Drama; Scottish or American short stories, or novels such as *To Kill A Mockingbird* or *Of Mice and Men* for Prose; Scottish poets (Burns, MacCaig, Morgan) featured often in the Poetry section (which was again a popular option). Responses on Film and TV Drama were mainly drawn from classic film texts, such as *Jaws, Saving Private Ryan*, or *Psycho.* The Language questions were attempted by a small number of candidates.

There was no change in general standards of technical accuracy in candidates' use of written English.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

Candidates found the passage to be interesting, relevant and accessible. The majority of candidates were able to provide an answer for all questions.

Question 3: This question on the writer's use of structure was done well.

Question 4: Candidates coped well with the requirement for own words in this Understanding question.

Question 6: Candidates were required here to summarise the writer's main ideas from an identified section, and then to re-cast these ideas into their own words. This involved engagement with the writer's main purposes, and was done well by candidates.

Question 7: Candidates were able to identify the effect achieved by the writer (humour) in this identified section.

Question 9: Many candidates were able to identify the double meaning and thus demonstrate their awareness of the nuances of language.

Critical Essay

The vast majority of candidates made an appropriate selection from the question paper and all questions in the Drama, Prose and Poetry sections were tackled. Candidates often showed genuine engagement with the texts they had studied; clear understanding was apparent, and many candidates were able to offer an awareness of the central concerns of the texts. Successful

candidates consistently related their responses to the demands of the questions selected. The majority of candidates were able to refer to the content of their chosen texts and often used direct quotation in support of their arguments. Many candidates were able to highlight the effectiveness of techniques in contributing to the impact of texts.

Folio

Again, a range of writing types was evident. Many wrote on aspects of their own experience, but a significant number wrote pieces of short fiction. A few submitted poetry or drama, while others wrote in varieties of Scots. Discursive writing was well handled with evidence that research had been conducted in an attempt to substantiate arguments. A few candidates took up the option of writing a report.

The majority of candidates expressed their ideas clearly in writing, and employed reasonable structures to assist with the communication of meaning. There was evidence of re-drafting. There were far fewer cases of candidates submitting Folio pieces that exceeded the word limit.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

Question1: Some candidates answered with an example rather than with an explanation.

Question 5: Candidates found the idea of 'groundbreaking' difficult, and were not able to offer a precise comment on the idea of innovation.

Question 10 (a): Candidates were often not able to relate the ideas from the lines selected to those of the previous paragraph.

Question 12: Most candidates were unable to explain the use of the colon in this instance.

Question 13 (b): This was a challenging question set deliberately with a value of only one mark in order not to disadvantage candidates. Many candidates found difficulty in analysing the writer's use of sentence construction in these lines.

Question 14: A full explanation of how the image worked was often not given.

Question 16: Many candidates did not successfully identify a feature from earlier in the passage which was re-visited by the writer in his conclusion.

Critical Essay

Some responses were unbalanced in the sense that the first part of the question was well handled but the second part was only dealt with in a cursory way.

Some candidates relied too much on a narrative approach in developing their essays. This often resulted in reduced relevance.

Questions 1 and 2: Some candidates were able to identify conflict or characters' actions, but were not able to go on to comment on the effects of the conflict/characters' actions.

Questions 4 and 5: Again some candidates were able to identify a turning point or a key aspect of setting, but were unable to discuss the wider significance of these features.

Question 12: Candidates often relied too heavily on a narrative approach when answering this question.

Folio

In discursive writing some candidates did not make sufficient attempts to re-cast sourced material into their own words. Some did not make proper acknowledgement of sources consulted.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

As always, candidates should be encouraged to read as widely as possible in order to be prepared to deal with the challenges presented by subject matter, ideas and vocabulary at Intermediate 2 level.

Candidates should try to answer as fully as possible questions that require the explanation of the effectiveness of a writer's use of technique.

Candidates should be prepared to answer on aspects of a writer's use of structure.

The skills of paraphrasing should be practised.

Critical Essay

Candidates should be made aware of the importance of reading carefully and responding to all aspects of the question selected.

In their analysis of literary techniques, candidates should attempt to highlight the contribution of techniques to the overall impact of the text.

Candidates should aim to maintain a line of thought which is closely relevant to the demands of the question.

Care should be taken over paragraphs, sentence construction and spelling in order to meet the requirement for a 'sufficiently accurate' essay.

Folio

Candidates should be encouraged to take ownership of their writing in order to foster engagement with the task, and to encourage genuineness of response.

Care should be taken over the use of internet research. Candidates must select relevant material, organise it in an appropriate way, and be careful to use their own words when constructing their pieces of writing. Teachers should monitor the drafting process, and candidates should be encouraged to develop good study habits by keeping track of, and acknowledging, all sources consulted.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2011	23212

Number of resulted entries in 2012	23832

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards				Lowest
	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	18.9%	18.9%	4503	69
B	31.2%	50.1%	7441	59
C	31.0%	81.1%	7387	49
D	8.4%	89.5%	2004	44
No award	10.5%	100.0%	2497	-

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.