



Course report 2019

Subject	Latin
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

All components performed as expected. Feedback from markers and centres suggested that all three components were generally well received and regarded as fair and accessible.

This was reflected in the grade boundary meeting, where the assessment was judged to be on standard and notional boundaries were applied.

Question paper: Literary appreciation

Generally, candidates were very well prepared and appeared to enjoy having an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. It was clear, even where candidates were not able to answer in full, that they had nevertheless engaged wholeheartedly with the texts and were keen to respond in a thoughtful and considered way. A few candidates opted for the Letters and Letter-writing section, but the majority continued to favour Ovid and Latin Love-poetry.

Both options offered candidates a good range of questions in terms of question-type and the variety of material covered. This parity extended to the level of demand, which was found to be appropriately challenging in both cases. Candidates of all abilities were able to access the majority of marks, while there was scope for differentiation and extension at the higher mark range.

The essay question was successful in stretching the most able, while giving those who had struggled earlier in the paper a chance to demonstrate what they knew about the texts and had learned from the course. The open nature of the essay questions meant that almost all candidates were able to articulate a personal response and it was encouraging to see how often that response was informed by an obvious enthusiasm for the course.

Most candidates were able to complete the paper within the allotted time and where a question was not attempted, lack of knowledge rather than lack of time seemed to be the issue.

Question paper: Translating

The question paper was challenging but fair and accessible. Candidates who were well versed in the prescribed grammar and syntax, and who had practised their skills were able to perform well and access the essential idea, if not the full 2 marks, in almost every block. A good number of candidates were able to achieve full marks in the majority of the blocks, with some achieving full marks for the question paper.

One of the most satisfying features of this year's paper was the way some relatively straightforward blocks were interspersed among the more challenging blocks. This often helped candidates who were starting to go astray get back on track. Candidates who did not start well, could often gain marks in the central blocks and score full marks here. Likewise, the concluding blocks offered a lifeline to some less able candidates to gain marks.

Although the context was broadly military, the fact that the passage itself focused on the personal rivalry between two brothers ensured that the content was accessible to most

candidates. No technical terminology was involved, apart from straightforward terms, for example 'advance' and 'attack', which were clearly defined in the wordlist. Keeping track of the two brothers proved tricky for some, but the storyline generally kept candidates engaged and the introductory sections in English offered clear guidance.

Almost without exception, candidates were able to complete the paper within the allotted time and several had time to produce both a draft and a final version.

Project–dissertation

As in previous years, the standard varied considerably. Overall, the majority of candidates produced a competent piece of work that fulfilled the basic criteria. In nearly every case there was clear evidence of effort, engagement and enthusiasm for the topic. Although the average mark seemed a little lower than in previous years.

Choice of topic was often seen to be a determining factor of a successful dissertation. Well-used topics tended not to produce the same level of research and innovation as was characteristic of more unusual or original topics. On the other hand, a few titles that expected a fairly standard response, went on to produce insightful analysis that brought a fresh perspective to familiar issues. It was encouraging to see literary topics were more popular this year.

Whatever their topic, it was encouraging to see how many candidates were able to make good use of primary sources in Latin. Most candidates managed to include a significant amount of quotation in Latin, and a considerable number were able to engage in some way with the Latin text.

The use of secondary sources proved to be more problematic and there was a tendency towards excessive brevity, with more dissertations than usual only just meeting the minimum word count.

The quality of candidates' written English was a little disappointing. Many candidates used language that was too casual or colloquial, and errors in spelling and grammar were widespread. In the worse instances, lack of clarity obscured what the candidates were trying to say and potentially interesting points were unintelligible.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Literary appreciation

Overall, candidates appeared to enjoy the paper. Whether they chose the Letters and Letter-writing, or the Ovid and Latin Love-poetry section, they were generally able to perform well. As intended, the questions on stylistic analysis proved to be effective discriminators, providing stretch and challenge for the most able candidates, while allowing the majority to access at least some of the marks available.

Letters and Letter-writing

Questions 1(b) and 4(b): the questions on language and technique proved effective in discriminating between candidates, with the majority achieving approximately half the available marks, and a few achieving full marks.

Question 3: candidates handled the question on humour well.

Question 4: most candidates were outraged at the suggestion Pliny was more concerned with money than morals, and some could find the evidence to prove it.

Question 5: candidates were quick to find evidence that Cicero and Tiro enjoyed a positive relationship.

Question 6: candidates were able to draw conclusions about the community around Hadrian's Wall from the three letters cited.

Ovid and Latin Love-poetry

Question 10(a): candidates handled this question well and most had no difficulty identifying Nape's excellent qualities.

Questions 11(a) and (b): candidates showed enthusiasm for the questions on humour and emotional tone.

Question 13: candidates were keen to communicate their impressions of Pyrrha and the young man in poem 28.

Question 14: good answers to the essay question tended to focus in on the 'just fallen in love' aspect rather than generic points about lovers. The very best responses tried to apply a coherent overall structure, for example dividing their essay into encouragement, warnings and lessons.

Question paper: Translating

Most candidates coped well with the relative clause in line 1, and were able to attribute the adjectives correctly in lines 1–2. Candidates handled the long sentence in lines 2–4 fairly well. Although the indirect statement in lines 5–6 caused problems, most were able to deal with that in line 7, possibly because they could translate it very literally in English. Many candidates who were beginning to lose their way by the end of the first paragraph, were able to get back on track at this point (block 13) and most were able to score at least 1 mark in each of the next two blocks (blocks 14 and 15). No matter how they performed in the earlier sections, the majority of candidates were able to pick up marks in the final three to four blocks of the passage.

It was also noticeable that less able candidates, who were able to use the wordlist effectively, performed reasonably well overall.

Project–dissertation

The majority of candidates engaged well with their topic and worked hard to produce a carefully researched piece of work, giving them scope to develop their own analysis and argument. Almost without exception, candidates were keen to communicate their findings.

Most dissertations contained factually accurate information that was broadly relevant to the topic, even if lacking in depth or prone to digression. Secondary reading tended to be rather thin but the use of Latin was handled well. Most were able to quote effectively from a variety of Latin authors, as appropriate to their chosen topic, and to include an accurate translation.

A few candidates were able to produce a translation of their own for at least one of their quotations. The strongest were able to interact in some way with the Latin text. They would integrate analysis, for example of word choice or rhetorical technique into their discussion and use the insights gained as a basis for further argument and analysis.

Generally, most candidates were able to analyse at least one or two of their points, even if they could not sustain that analysis or integrate it into their wider discussion. Nearly every candidate was able to formulate a line of argument, even if again they could not substantiate it or develop it in a systematic way. This is where successful candidates proved their calibre, analysing evidence in depth and synthesising material from a variety of sources in order to corroborate their claims and build a strong and well substantiated line of argument that led to a firm conclusion.

These candidates were adept at giving a very clear and coherent structure to their discussion. While not all were so effective, it was encouraging to see that most were able to impose some order on their material and achieve a basic level of organisation in terms of having both an introduction and conclusion and dividing their discussion into chapters or sub-themes.

The appropriate generic features, such as footnotes and bibliography, were present in nearly every case. While candidates did not always do this well, including these meant that almost every dissertation could gain some marks for referencing.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Literary appreciation

Letters and Letter-writing

Question 1(a): candidates who were not very familiar with the second half of letter 2, or whose answers suggested they had been expecting a different question, failed to gain all the available marks for this question.

Question 1(b): while most candidates could identify and evaluate one technique, some found it hard to identify and evaluate a further two.

Question 4(b): where examples of language-use should be fairly easy to spot, it was surprising how many had difficulty identifying even straightforward features, for example repetition and/or the use of a tricolon.

Question 4(c): asked candidates to evaluate differing interpretations. Several candidates simply rehearsed the content of the passage, without either expressing an opinion or differentiating in any way between the two interpretations.

Question 7: candidates who did not read the essay question carefully, did not realise that they should be discussing the importance of letter-writing to the Romans, rather than to the modern reader. However, once candidates realised their error, most were able to get back on track.

Ovid and Latin Love-poetry

Question 9(a): candidates did not handle this question particularly well, despite it being quite straightforward. Several candidates answered with reference to a completely different part of the poem, suggesting either poor examination technique or lack of familiarity with the second half of the poem.

Questions 9(a) and 10(b): overall, candidates answered the questions on language-use less successfully. Both questions were looking for analysis and evaluation. Less able candidates tended to paraphrase the content instead of identifying, exemplifying specific techniques and commenting on their effectiveness.

Question 12(a): some candidates seemed unable to make sense of the Latin, even with the text in front of them, and consequently tried to answer from vague memory rather than the lines cited.

Question 14: the essay question had the least successful responses. Some candidates elaborated at length on a narrow selection of texts, tying points back to the question with a brief, and often superficial, evaluative comment, for example 'this would be useful to the lover today'. Such limited, almost formulaic, responses could not gain marks.

Question paper: Translating

Although the passage was relatively straightforward syntactically, only the most able candidates could translate the more difficult sections. Not many candidates were able to reflect the sense of obligation inherent in the gerundive, for example *metuendus* (line 2) and the connecting relative (*qui*, line 8) seemed unfamiliar to quite a few.

In the opening sentence, candidates had to identify the subject from the verb ending and this proved difficult for some, despite the prompt in the introductory sentences in English. Not many candidates scanned far enough ahead to recognise and render correctly the indirect statement in lines 5–6, and *dolore permotum* (line 5) was generally not well handled, with candidates either failing to link the participle to *Adherbalem*, or misconstruing the use of the ablative.

Candidates also struggled with what should have been fairly basic concepts, for example the neuter plurals *aedificia* (line 4) and *contumeliosa dicta* (lines 8–9), even though these forms should have been familiar to them from National 5 and Higher. For many candidates, it was not just a weak grasp of grammar that let them down, but also an inability to use the wordlist effectively. A surprising number of candidates looked up the wrong entry on more than one occasion. While others, who found the correct entry, were confused as to the part of speech involved and seemed unfamiliar with the conventions that would have helped them work out, for example, the voice of a verb or the case of a noun, or whether a noun was singular or plural.

Project–dissertation

While very few included material that was irrelevant, less able candidates tended to take an approach that was too broad and lacking a clear analytical focus. Loosely defined aims, and a tendency to assert rather than argue a point, did not allow even the best attempts to reach a reasoned conclusion.

A significant number of candidates fell far short of the 3,000–4,000 word count, and in a number of cases candidates did not allow themselves sufficient space to explore their topic in any depth.

Progress in the use of primary sources seems to have come at the cost of candidates' secondary reading. As in previous years, the use of secondary sources was generally quite poor. Too many candidates had consulted an insufficient number of secondary sources, and/or consulted sources of dubious reliability, for example blogs, travel and tourism websites, or outdated academic articles.

Referencing was also a problem for many candidates who struggled with the use of appropriate conventions, and with the requirement to acknowledge some, if not all, the secondary sources cited in their bibliographies within their discussion. Less able candidates seemed unaware that citing secondary sources is not only good practice, but an essential means of substantiating their claims and providing supporting evidence for their arguments.

Choice of topic also had an impact on analysis and argument. Many candidates chose a topic that was too extensive or too multi-faceted to be analysed and evaluated successfully within the number of words available. Dissertations that amounted to little more than a

general survey, no matter how well informed or factually accurate, lacked the requirements in terms of argument and analysis.

It was pleasing to see literary topics becoming more popular but noticeable that, when comparing literary texts or authors, candidates generally seemed unsure of what to do with the similarities and differences they detected. Candidates often, having made perceptive observations, did not draw any conclusions from their findings or try to make sense of them in a wider historical or cultural context.

Those tackling historical topics would have benefited from showing a greater awareness of chronology and being more explicit in evaluating the reliability of their historical sources.

A significant number of candidates had difficulty finding the appropriate tone for their dissertation and their proofreading was often inadequate and failed to eliminate errors in spelling and grammar.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper: Literary appreciation

Generally, centres had prepared candidates well for this question paper. However, three key points emerged from this year's paper.

- 1 Candidates must learn each text in its entirety. In the interests of course coverage, any part of any text in the prescribed texts may be sampled. Candidates need to be as familiar with the concluding sections of a text as they are with opening lines. It is always worth reminding candidates to read questions carefully and not to jump to conclusions based on the wording of questions in previous years. They also need to remember that their answers must be based on the lines cited in the question, and that points from different parts of the text will not gain marks.
- 2 Candidates would benefit from more practice in answering questions on the use of language, including specific guidance on how to answer this type of question in the examination. It is worth noting that 1 mark is available for identifying and exemplifying a relevant use of language or literary technique, and a further mark is available for an appropriate critical or evaluative comment. It is not possible to gain full marks simply by identifying the number of techniques or examples, or by explaining what the text says. Several examples of the same technique does not normally gain marks and candidates should be discouraged from answering at excessive length. Once they have gained the maximum number of marks, there are no more available marks, no matter how much more a candidate writes. It is a better approach for candidates to identify an appropriate number of examples, comment on their effectiveness and move on.
- 3 Candidates should develop their answers at length for the essay question, as this approach is most likely to gain marks. However, candidates need to be aware that while a long list of relevant points gain some marks, they must be able to develop their discussion within an analytical framework if they hope to achieve marks in the higher range. The questions tend to be phrased in a very open way, and it is up to candidates to find a critical way of approaching the question that offers them the scope needed to analyse and evaluate a wide range of appropriate examples, and reach a clear conclusion. Simply linking points back to the question by means of a formulaic phrase will not normally gain more than a few marks. More effective strategies might involve candidates' structuring their discussion around several key themes (three is a good number), drawing comparisons between texts and/or authors, and weighing up the extent to which some texts or authors may be more or less effective than others, as appropriate to the question.

Question paper: Translating

Most candidates would benefit from some practice, or even some specific training, in the effective use of the wordlist.

Centres should remind candidates:

- ◆ to take care when using the wordlist to encourage greater accuracy and prevent them from looking up the wrong word
- ◆ of all the other useful information they can glean from the wordlist, provided they understand the conventions governing the way words are listed
- ◆ practice in using these conventions to identify and distinguish between different parts of speech may help reduce the risk of translating nouns as verbs and vice versa
- ◆ it can be helpful to take a few moments at the start of the question paper to review the wordlist and highlight words they regularly find problematic, for example deponent verbs, or words that are similar in appearance and easy to confuse
- ◆ to make a note alongside neuter nouns to remind them that the plural generally ends in ‘-a’

To use the wordlist to its full effect, candidates need to have a good knowledge of basic accidence. There is evidence from this year’s paper to suggest that even more able candidates would benefit from some revision in this area. A firm grasp of accidence will be even more important next year, when candidates have to translate verse as well as prose. However, if candidates brush up on the basics, practise their skills using the wordlist and then use these with care, they should be in a strong position to attempt the new question paper.

In addition, all the standard advice still applies. Grammar and syntax, as well as accidence, need regular revision. Candidates should practise handling all the major constructions contained in the prescription, as any of these may be sampled in future. This year’s question paper showed that even without subordinate clauses using the subjunctive, there are many syntactic features that candidates find difficult, for example gerundives, connecting relatives and extended passages of indirect statement.

Centres should continue to encourage candidates to read the English sections closely and to refer back to them regularly. This helps candidates start with a clear sense of where the passage is heading, and have a means of checking whether or not their own translation is still on track.

Project–dissertation

Candidates need to choose their topic carefully, according to their own interests and the amount of relevant material available. Any type of topic, be it literary, historical or cultural, is normally acceptable as long as it can be explored in some breadth and depth, lend itself to analysis and evaluation, and offer scope for active engagement with texts in Latin. It might be interesting, for example, to see more dissertations engaging with the modern reception of the Roman world, whether in film, television, books or games.

Ideally, every candidate should come up with an original topic, but if this is not possible, centres can assure candidates that standard topics or familiar authors can work well as long

as they approach these in an analytical way, focusing on a specific aspect or aspects, and provided they do their own research thoroughly. One of the drawbacks of mainstream topics is that candidates, especially the more able, can be tempted to rely on prior knowledge and reluctant to do much new reading around a topic they feel they know already.

On the other hand, these topics have a wealth of relevant material that is readily available and easily accessible. It is always worth stressing to candidates, whatever their topic, that the dissertation is primarily a research exercise, and that a considerable amount of secondary reading is required and expected.

It is particularly important for candidates tackling standard topics, that they are encouraged to read more widely and to seek out specialised books and articles that touch on their particular area of interest, and not to rely on a few generic works. Not only will this lend weight to their discussion but it will bring them into contact with current academic thinking and a wide range of scholarly opinion. These topics are likely to have been argued over and interpreted in a variety of ways. There should be no shortage of different and potentially competing opinions with which candidates can engage, providing them with information to develop a more sophisticated discussion.

As there is so much material now available online, candidates will probably need some advice and guidance in order to be discriminating. Blogs, travel websites and undergraduate essays may look plausible but are often unreliable and generally candidates should avoid these. Candidates will use Wikipedia, but centres should ensure candidates know they should treat it as a useful starting point and never to form the mainstay of their bibliography. Candidates should always double check key points sourced from Wikipedia, especially if they are fundamental to a candidate's line of argument. Errors repeated from Wikipedia are not necessarily penalised, but they do detract from the overall quality of a candidate's work.

Candidates do not have to quote from their secondary sources but they do need to acknowledge where they found key pieces of information. They can do this by citing the source in a footnote. In this way, they can properly substantiate their claims. They should be encouraged to refer to as wide a range as possible (citing most, if not all the secondary sources listed in their bibliography) and to avoid overdependence on a single writer or text. Detailed advice on referencing and the recommended conventions is available on SQA's website.

It is essential that candidates check their work and proofread it carefully before final submission.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	44
Number of resulted entries in 2019	59

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	33.9%	33.9%	20	119
B	16.9%	50.8%	10	102
C	23.7%	74.6%	14	85
D	5.1%	79.7%	3	76
No award	20.3%	-	12	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.