Course report 2019

Subject	Italian
Level	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

The reading question paper was from the context of culture. The text explored the reasons why people choose Italy as a holiday destination. The paper included a range of 1, 2 and 3-mark questions (mainly 2 marks) which were balanced with regards to high, low and average level of demand.

The overall purpose question tested candidates' inferential skills, requiring them to outline, with evidence from the passage, whether the writer's view of Italy as a holiday destination was positive. Question 7 required candidates to translate a section of the text to translate into English. The section for translation included the perfect and present tenses. The marking of the translation was divided into five sense units.

The directed writing question paper offered candidates the choice of writing within the context of society (scenario 1) or learning (scenario 2). Most candidates opted for scenario 1.

The listening question paper was from the context of employability. Item 1 was a monologue which explored the types of holiday jobs that young people look for and the skills required for them. Item 2 was a dialogue which focused on a young man's interview experiences. Both items were relevant to young people's current and/or future experiences of the world of work and candidates attempted these well. The absence of a dictionary to look up words was a new aspect of this year's listening question paper. Some candidates struggled with less common words, but overall, candidates performed fairly well considering this additional challenge.

The 20-mark assignment–writing was a new component this year, replacing the 10-mark essay that formerly followed the listening question paper. The assignment–writing tests candidates' ability to produce a lengthier piece of writing and requires a discursive and evaluative approach. Candidates were required to provide a stimulus.

Question paper 1: Reading and Directed writing

Markers felt that this question paper worked well and included a range of questions which were accessible to all candidates.

The need to provide extra detail in some questions, for example modifiers or quantifiers stretched more able candidates. The translation was considered appropriate for Higher. Markers found that less able candidates had enough opportunity to gain marks in sense units 1, 3 and 5, and sense units 2 and 4, although more complex, were open to candidates who displayed strong dictionary skills.

The directed writing question paper worked well. There was a balance of candidates choosing each scenario, suggesting that both scenarios were accessible to all candidates. Markers reported that the six bullet points in each scenario provided candidates with a fair degree of scope to successfully attempt this question paper.

Question paper 2: Listening

Markers commented that the listening question paper was an excellent test of candidates' knowledge of the topics of jobs, interviews and the world of work. In addition, both items contained vocabulary and phrases from other topic areas.

Markers felt that the question paper worked well as care had been taken when constructing the assessment to ensure that sufficient signposts were provided as cues to assist candidates to locate answers. Markers also commented that answers were well timed and spaced within the recording, taking account of candidates' need to listen and write at the same time.

Markers agreed that the degree of optionality within the marking scheme from question to question offset the challenges of the new format (no dictionary permitted). Only question (d)(ii), in item 1, offered no optionality, and candidates had a widened scope within which they could gain marks. As a result, most candidates gained at least half of the available marks.

Assignment–writing

Centres positively received this new element of course assessment. Markers were very positive about the degree of freedom that the assignment–writing gave candidates to individualise their responses.

Some markers felt that the assignment–writing perhaps created a disadvantage for candidates who were less at ease with the open-ended nature of the task, particularly with regards to choosing a suitable title and stimulus. Some candidates provided no title and/or stimulus, and markers felt that these candidates had less opportunity to produce a focused piece of work.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking now consists of a conversation only, rather than a presentation followed by a conversation. All centres in the verification sample adopted the new arrangements without difficulty, and carried it out effectively.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading and Directed writing

Most candidates found questions 1–3 straightforward. Almost all candidates gained the first mark in question 1(a) by recognising *quinto* (fifth) and most candidates gained 1 or 2 marks in question 1(b).

Generally, markers felt that questions requiring more detail (underlined in the marking instructions) were done exceptionally well by some candidates. Some candidates did extremely well in question 6, the overall purpose question, and spotted the two small but significant viewpoints which balanced the overall positive impression of the passage (*i prezzi alti dei voli* and *il soffocante caldo estivo*).

In question 7, the translation, most managed the first sense unit very well and translated accurately in the perfect tense. Most candidates also recognised the switch to the present tense in sense unit 2 onwards.

Markers were impressed with how well candidates coped with the two reflexive verbs which appeared in the translation (*piacersi* and *innamorarsi*) and with the large number who tackled the tricky superlative in sense unit 2. Markers felt that many candidates had very good dictionary skills.

In the directed writing question paper, candidates coped extremely well with the two-parted first bullet point in both scenarios. Compared to previous years, fewer candidates lost marks due to the omission of one or more bullet points, suggesting that candidates have been well prepared by centres, as they now have to address two additional bullet points. Candidates were expected to cover a wider range of topics and rely less on memorised material. The majority of candidates rose to the challenge and markers commented that there was less similarity among responses compared to previous years.

There were many excellent examples of responses which included the whole range of tenses which appear in the productive grammar grid for Higher, with many going beyond this to include subjunctives and less common idiomatic expressions.

Question paper 2: Listening

Candidates coped well with the additional challenge of not having a dictionary at their disposal in the new format of this question paper. In item 1, the monologue, it was evident that the topic was familiar to candidates, most of whom gained more than half the available marks in this item. Markers were impressed with the amount of candidates who gained full marks in the monologue.

Assignment–writing

Many candidates were well prepared for the demands of this element of course assessment and produced responses which were discursive in nature and which drew an appropriate conclusion.

Markers were pleased with the range of topics attempted. Markers were also impressed with the amount of idiomatic expression used in responses.

Performance–talking

In most performances, candidates responded well to supportive assessors. The use of open-ended questions frequently gave candidates the opportunity to use detailed and complex language and to express opinions, allowing them to access most of the marks available for this element of course assessment.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Question 1(b): some candidates failed to include the correlating adjective along with the noun in their answer, both of which were required to gain the mark, 'sandy beaches' and 'historical towns'.

Question 2: similarly, a number of candidates failed to pick up one of the marks in this question, which required them to include 'at the start of' (autumn) in their answer.

Question 3(b): a significant number of candidates found the word *proprio* (own) tricky and mistranslated it as 'clean' (its other meaning) or 'proper', or omitted it and did not gain the mark. Some mistranslated 'nephew' for 'niece' in this question.

Question 4(b): a number of candidates failed to include the notion of a superlative (the ten most common gestures) and did not gain the mark.

Question 5(a): it was evident that many candidates were not familiar with the difference between a railway line and a railway platform. Many lost a mark for responding with 'they discussed it on the railway lines'.

Question 6: generally, candidates found the overall purpose question challenging, and although many candidates scored 1 mark, fewer picked up the full 2 marks available. In general, candidates tended to write very lengthy answers for a 2-mark question.

Question 7: the translation was the most challenging part of the question paper for candidates. A few candidates mistranslated *paese* (country) with its other meaning (village).

Sense unit 2: this proved trickier, and the placement of *Ciò che* at the start of the sentence required those unfamiliar with this phrase, to carefully use the dictionary to select from a range of possible meanings. The superlative in *di più* (the most) was missed by some candidates who instead opted for the comparative (more).

Sense unit 3: most candidates scored at least 1 mark, and many gained both available marks. Marks lost in this sense unit were mostly through poor English expression, particularly 'different of' rather than 'different from' the others.

Sense unit 4: candidates found this the most challenging part of the translation. The expression *Più … più …* (The more … the more …) required good dictionary skills from candidates who were not familiar with this usage of *più*. In addition, candidates who were less familiar with reflexive verbs struggled with the tricky word order triggered by the presence of the pronouns *ci* and *si*.

Sense unit 5: most candidates translated the second half of this sense unit well. However, some candidates struggled with the beginning of this sense unit and the expression *Non vediamo l'ora di …* (We cannot wait to …). Although this expression appears in dictionaries, candidates who were unfamiliar with this fairly common expression may have struggled.

Question paper 2: Listening

Item 1
Question (d)(ii): candidates performed less successfully as many did not know *pronto soccorso* (first aid).

Question (e): some candidates did not understand the word *abbastanza* (enough), possibly confusing it with its alternative meaning (quite) and did not gain the mark.

Item 2
Item 2 proved trickier than item 1, undoubtedly due to its longer length and the pressure of sustaining attentive listening skills and working without a dictionary.

The most challenging words and phrases for candidates were:

Question 2(b): *vestito scuro* (dark suit)
Question 2(c): *sicuro di sé* (confident/sure of himself), *un test scritto* (a written test)
Question 2(d)(iii): *in grado di* (capable of)
Question 2 (e): *la verità* (the truth)

Assignment–writing
A significant number of candidates produced pieces which were not discursive and/or did not attempt to draw a conclusion. Although many of these candidates produced accurate responses, their lack of discursive elements resulted in a lower pegged mark.

The marking instructions table (in the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*) shows that candidates who do not produce a discursive piece, which attempts to draw a conclusion, will find difficulty scoring 12 marks or above.

Performance–talking

A few candidates used a limited or repetitive range of verbs and structures. The role of the assessor in asking questions which give candidates sufficient opportunity to use detailed and complex language is vital in this respect.

Section 3: Preparing candidates for future assessment

Reading and Listening question papers

In the reading and listening question papers, candidates should recognise the importance of including additional detail, namely qualifiers and quantifiers, for example *più di, abbastanza, molto, troppo, tanto, piu, meno*.

Candidates should be encouraged to look for signposts which alert them to where an answer is located within a text. In the reading question paper, candidates should double check that they source their answer from the section indicated in the question rubric, for example 'Read lines 20–29 …' as marks are not transferable between questions at Higher.

Directed writing question paper

At the start of the course, centres should ensure candidates are familiar with the six bullet point format, and the 150–180 word count for their piece of writing. This will help them to focus on the techniques required for directed writing, and the importance of gaining a thorough knowledge of the perfect and imperfect tenses which essentially make up this question paper.

Centres should encourage candidates to recognise the type of information that they are required to write about. It is useful to help familiarise candidates with the map of Italy and Italian place names so that they can confidently refer to a specific town or city in their response, if required. Similarly, it is beneficial to teach candidates time phrases which help them to open their first paragraph (for example 'Last summer…', 'During the Easter holidays…', 'A year ago…'). It is useful to provide candidates with a copy of the marking instructions.

Assignment–writing

It is important that candidates aim to include different viewpoints in their assignment responses. Using openers, for example *Secondo me*, *A mio parere*, *Io credo che*, *Da un lato*, *Molta gente trova che*, *Però*, *Purtroppo* helps candidates to express their own viewpoint and balance it with another. Encouraging candidates to include frequent summing up words, phrases and/or sentences, (for example *dunque*, *perciò*), will ensure that they achieve the evaluative aspect of the assignment.

Useful opening and closing phrases include *tutto sommato, allora, per concludere, per riassumere, finalmente*. Candidates should be encouraged to make extensive use of phrases of a discursive and evaluative nature, particularly for use at the start and end of paragraphs.

Centres should encourage candidates to use a stimulus which lends itself to discussion or steers candidates towards a discursive and evaluative approach to writing. Stimuli which invite candidates to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a topic are helpful.

It is important that centres spend time discussing the assignment–writing marking instruction with candidates. Candidates should be familiar with the terms: content, accuracy and language resource (the three column headings which make up the assignment–writing marking instruction descriptors).

It would also be beneficial to provide candidates with a copy of the productive grammar grid, found in appendix 2 of the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*. This would assist them to identify areas of language which are considered to be appropriate for Higher.

Performance–talking

Assessors can give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate detailed and complex language by asking open-ended questions and by ensuring that the topics covered are appropriate to Higher.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	252

Number of resulted entries in 2019	221

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	66.5%	66.5%	147	84
B	15.8%	82.4%	35	72
C	6.8%	89.1%	15	60
D	7.2%	96.4%	16	48
No award	3.6%	-	8	-

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.