



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

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

Markers reported overall candidate performance was in line with previous years.

Specialist Study

The following table provides data relevant to the reported nature and scope of the specialist studies undertaken by candidates in 2013. All figures are based on reports received from markers at the time of writing.

In 2013 Prose Fiction continued to be the most popular genre for candidates to study (84%). This is consistent with previous years. Studying the work of two or more novelists also remained the most popular choice for those choosing this genre. Dystopian novels continued to feature prominently, as did studies involving writers' exploration of the place of women in society. Another popular topic was the 'divided self' (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*).

Drama	97	Poetry	87	Prose Fiction	1428	Other	85
One dramatist Three + texts	23	One poet Wide range (7+ poems)	33	One novelist Three+ texts	64	Mixed genres	62
One dramatist Two texts	55	One poet Narrow range (-4 poems)	29	One novelist Two texts	225	Language Study	2
Two or more than two dramatists	19	Two or more than two poets	16	Two or more than two novelists	1104	Non-fiction	5
Other drama	0	Other poetry	9	Other fiction (including short stories)	35	Film or other media	16

As in previous years, most candidates had obviously worked diligently to produce specialist studies that met the assessment criteria at this level. In general, most candidates' work was at least 'adequate' (at Advanced Higher level) in terms of Understanding, Analysis, Evaluation and Expression. Markers also reported numerous examples of work that was 'more than adequate' in these areas. The best specialist studies were those that undertook **detailed** comparative studies of **challenging** texts/materials.

Less successful specialist studies again suffered from poorly constructed topics/tasks; poor expression; and a disregard for the mandatory requirements for footnotes and bibliography.

A 'serial' treatment of two or more texts often led to weak analysis. Markers also noted an over-reliance on a limited range of secondary sources (usually the more well-known commercial or semi-commercial websites). Candidates with better, more substantial use of research tended to do well.

Literary Study

The following table provides information on the reported uptake of questions in the Literary Study section of the 2013 examination paper by 1607 candidates. Drama continued to be the most popular choice for candidates, and 53% chose to answer a question on this genre (54% in 2012). In line with recent years, questions on Shakespeare and Williams continued to be the most popular in this section. Duffy was the most popular 'Scottish' writer (by question uptake), followed by Galloway.

Drama	859	Poetry	389	Prose Fiction	356	Prose Non-fiction	3
1 Beckett	33	12 Burns	15	23 Atwood	17	34	2
2 Byrne	0	13 Chaucer	28	24 Austen	87	35	1
3 Chekhov	28	14 Donne	73	25 Dickens	55		
4 Friel	4	15 Duffy	58	26 Fitzgerald	6		
5 Lindsay	0	16 Heaney	56	27 Galloway	38		
6 Lochhead	34	17 Henryson	0	28 Gray	13		
7 Pinter	56	18 Keats	30	29 Hardy	60		
8 Shakes.	347	19 MacDiar.	0	30 Hogg	30		
9 Stoppard	13	20 Muir	5	31 Joyce	15		
10 Wilde	11	21 Plath	106	32 Stevenson	6		
11 Williams	333	22 Yeats	18	33 Waugh	29		

Markers reported that candidate responses to questions in the Literary Study section of the examination paper were generally 'adequate' or 'more than adequate'(at this level) in terms of Relevance to the question, Understanding, Analysis, Evaluation and Expression. As in previous years, there were some very impressive responses that revealed thoughtful engagement with texts and which suggested a high standard of teaching and learning had taken place. It was clear that some centres had allowed candidates to choose from a wide range of texts/genres, and this often resulted in strong performances by these candidates.

According to markers, candidates responded especially well to the questions on Shakespeare, Williams, Donne and Austen. Question 8 (b) (Discuss Shakespeare's presentation of the relationship between fathers and their children in *The Winter's Tale* and in *The Tempest*) allowed candidates to display their knowledge of the texts in a convincing fashion. Candidates who attempted 8 (a) (*Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) seemed to find this more demanding.

Answers on Williams were generally well constructed and thoughtful, and more successful than some of the more 'mechanical' responses seen last year (although a small number of candidates seemed to have difficulty in understanding the concept of an 'outcast'). Effective responses on Yeats, Dickens, Chekhov, Pinter and Atwood and Beckett were also noted.

Markers reported that some candidates produced weak responses on Duffy and Plath. These answers suffered from either a lack of sufficient detail in the analysis of the printed poem, or a lack of developed analysis of at least one of the additional poems required by the questions. Some responses on Keats were judged to be rather vague and lacking in a clear line of thought.

Options

Based on the reported choices of 1,652 candidates in 2013, figures for the percentage uptake of the four optional components are shown below. These are broadly in line with the figures for 2012. There was a slight decrease in the uptake of Reading the Media and of Language Study, and an increase in the uptake of Textual Analysis.

Creative Writing	68.1%
Textual Analysis	29.6%
Reading the Media	2.1%
Language Study	0.1%

The 1126 candidates who opted for Creative Writing submitted:

685	reflective essays
928	pieces of fiction
271	Poems
368	examples of drama

Markers reported that the best pieces (in all genres) were those that showed clear awareness of genre conventions and which exploited (or on occasion subverted) these to the full. The best drama showed lively characterisation and made effective use of appropriate techniques. The best fiction was interesting and innovative and there was some excellent poetry which showed a very high level of control of the medium.

The reflective essay continues to be problematic for some candidates — too many essays were overly autobiographical or discursive to the detriment of any reflective quality. Work submitted in Scots (in all genres) was often of a high standard, especially where the candidate made consistent use of appropriate dialect forms and orthography.

The 489 candidates who chose **Textual Analysis** in 2013 produced:

290	responses to Prose fiction
50	responses to Prose non-fiction
127	responses to Poetry
22	responses to Drama

Markers reported that many candidates' responses were 'more than adequate' in terms of Relevance, Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation. Prose fiction was by far the most popular choice: candidates responded well to the Tobias Wolff short story, 'Powder'. The best prose fiction answers showed a sound understanding of the author's use of metaphor and symbol.

Candidates seemed to find the prose non-fiction more difficult, but those who had been taught effective techniques to approach this kind of text also did well.

While there were some good answers on *Ulysses*, some candidates were obviously challenged by the nineteenth century language. Fewer candidates chose to answer on Drama this year. Weak candidates continued to rely on paraphrase and comment rather than analysing the extracts using appropriate critical terminology.

This year, 35 candidates attempted **Reading the Media** — 30 chose to answer on Film and five to answer on Advertising. In general, candidates seemed well prepared and were familiar with their chosen texts, although markers reported that candidates' ability to produce a response that was relevant to the question was no more than 'adequate' (at this level).

Two candidates were presented for **Language Study**. Candidates' responses were 'more than adequate' in terms of Relevance and Understanding. Analysis, Evaluation and Expression were all judged 'adequate'.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Advice offered to centres in past years remains valid and is set out below. In addition to this, teachers/lecturers should refer to the *Advanced Higher English Arrangements Documents* at http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/English_Advanced%20Higher_Valid_from_August2010.pdf and the advice provided on *Understanding Standards*, at <http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/Subjects/English/Advanced-Higher/Advanced-Higher>.

Teachers/lecturers are also directed to the Advanced Higher English pages on the SQA Secure site.

Specialist Study

Teachers/lecturers should ensure that:

- ◆ texts of appropriate substance and quality are selected

- ◆ groupings of disparate texts are avoided
- ◆ mixed-genre studies (novels and films, films and plays, plays and poems, etc) are avoided
- ◆ specific and manageable topics are constructed
- ◆ unambiguous statements of intent are included (as headings to dissertations)
- ◆ the analytical thrust of each study is incorporated into the statement of intent and title
- ◆ length is between 3,500 and 4,500 words (including quotations)
- ◆ mandatory footnotes and bibliographies are provided
- ◆ dissertations are free from plagiarism
- ◆ candidates are acquainted with **all** of the advice and regulations provided by SQA

The importance of the topic to be pursued in the Specialist Study cannot be overstated. In specifying topics, candidates and centres should be aware that they are effectively selecting and defining their own individual instruments of assessment. It should be emphasised, therefore, that vague, generalised and unfocused topics are unlikely to enable candidates to demonstrate attainment of the standards.

Literary Study

Teachers/lecturers should ensure that candidates are:

- ◆ offered an experience of literary study of sufficient depth and breadth to allow reasonable choice in the context of an unseen examination
- ◆ thoroughly prepared in the art of critical essay writing
- ◆ given ample practice in making effective use of the time available (1.5 hours)
- ◆ provided with strategies for addressing the terms of the question and for appropriate planning of their responses
- ◆ equipped with a precise and extensive critical vocabulary
- ◆ reminded that 'analysis' need not always be 'inserted' (often inappropriately) in the form of extensive quotation that is then subjected to micro-analytical comment on individual words and phrases
- ◆ shown how valid analysis may well reside (often by implication) in a permeating thread of relevant critical comment that informs an emerging argument

Creative Writing

It is recommended that:

- ◆ candidates enrich their own experience by reading extensively in the work of other writers (including their peers) to familiarise themselves with genre conventions and the range of approaches that might be taken in their own writing
- ◆ the submission of pieces generated by common stimuli or arising from whole class exercises should be avoided
- ◆ the submission of groups of unrelated (or loosely related) poems should also be avoided

Textual Analysis

It is recommended that candidates should:

- ◆ through guided reading, develop close and essential familiarity with the conventions of a range of literary genres

- ◆ through focused teaching and extensive practice, acquire the critical apparatus necessary for the analysis and evaluation of complex texts

Reading the Media

It is recommended that candidates should:

- ◆ be reminded of the importance of responding to the wording of the question to produce a relevant response

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	1694
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	1743
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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	22.9%	22.9%	399	65
B	29.4%	52.3%	513	56
C	29.1%	81.5%	508	48
D	7.9%	89.4%	138	44
No award	10.6%	100.0%	185	-

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.