



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 that overall candidate performance was in line with previous years. There was a small improvement in the mean mark for Specialist Study – Dissertation.

Specialist Study – Dissertation

Based on the reported choices of candidates in 2014, figures for the percentage of types of specialist studies submitted by candidates are shown below.

Drama		Poetry		Prose Fiction		Other	
One dramatist Three + texts	2.2%	One poet Wide range (7+ poems)	2.8%	One novelist Three+ texts	4.1%	Mixed genres	2.2%
One dramatist Two texts	3%	One poet Narrow range (-4 poems)	1.8%	One novelist Two texts	15.7%	Language Study	0.2%
Two or more than two dramatists	1.4%	Two or more than two poets	1.2%	Two or more than two novelists	61.8%	Non-fiction	0.2%
Other drama	0%	Other poetry	0.3%	Other fiction (including short stories)	2.2%	Film or other media	0.9%

Prose Fiction continued to be the most popular genre for candidates to study. This is consistent with previous years. Studying the work of two or more than two novelists also remained the most popular option for those choosing this genre. Markers noted the impressive range of texts and topics in evidence, although some felt that the 'literary' element of the task was becoming lost (in some cases) and that candidates were attempting sociological/psychological/political treatments of their chosen texts. This was often to the detriment of the Specialist Study as a whole. Candidates should be reminded of the centrality of the analysis of the writer's craft in 'literary' dissertations.

Dystopian fiction remains a popular choice of topic. Markers noted some successful work on writers such as Conrad, Lawrence and Ibsen. Stevenson, Welsh and Galloway remain popular Scottish writers in terms of texts chosen by candidates. *Anna Karenina* was a text chosen by a number of candidates.

Markers reported the following areas in which candidates performed well:

- ◆ the best Specialist Studies were also very well presented with appropriate footnotes and bibliographies
- ◆ Specialist Studies which examined more than one novel by the same writer
- ◆ Specialist Studies which discussed a wide range of poems by the same poet
- ◆ Specialist Studies which discussed challenging texts

Markers reported the following areas in which candidates performed poorly:

- ◆ general level of expression (leading to ambiguity or inaccuracy)
- ◆ editing/proofreading
- ◆ choosing texts that were too disparate — often tenuously linked
- ◆ failing to include mandatory footnotes and bibliography
- ◆ reliance on 'ready-made' notes (Sparknotes, Shmoop etc)
- ◆ when groups of candidates from the same centre chose the same texts/approaches

Literary Study

Based on the reported choices of candidates in 2014, figures for the percentage uptake of the Literary Study questions are shown below.

Drama		Poetry		Prose Fiction		Prose Non-fiction	
1 Beckett	2%	12 Burns	0.5%	23 Atwood	3.4%	34	0%
2 Byrne	0%	13 Chaucer	0.1%	24 Austen	4%	35	0%
3 Chekhov	2.3%	14 Donne	3.4%	25 Dickens	2.9%		
4 Friel	1.6%	15 Duffy	6.7%	26 Fitzgerald	1.1%		
5 Lindsay	0%	16 Heaney	3.5%	27 Galloway	1%		
6 Lochhead	1.1%	17 Henryson	0.1%	28 Gray	0.9%		
7 Pinter	2.1%	18 Keats	1.1%	29 Hardy	2.7%		
8 Shakes.	22%	19 MacDiar.	0%	30 Hogg	1.4%		
9 Stoppard	0.3%	20 Muir	0.5%	31 Joyce	0.7%		
10 Wilde	2.1%	21 Plath	7.8%	32 Stevenson	0.5%		
11 Williams	20.1%	22 Yeats	1.8%	33 Waugh	2.3%		

Drama continued to be the most popular choice for candidates in 2014. In line with recent years, questions on Shakespeare and Williams continued to be the most popular in this section, accounting for over 42% of candidate responses. Duffy was once again the most popular 'Scottish' writer (by question uptake).

Markers reported the following areas in which candidates performed well:

- ◆ responses to the Beckett question
- ◆ answers on Donne
- ◆ answers on Atwood

- ◆ answers on Dickens (the requirement to focus on two characters meant that candidates concentrated on this aspect rather than offering more generalised comment)
- ◆ the question on Williams was well done in comparison to recent years
- ◆ there were some excellent answers on *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*
- ◆ some effective answers on Wilde
- ◆ some effective answers on Waugh which displayed insight, control and a perceptive overview of the texts
- ◆ the Duffy question allowed candidates to explore the theme effectively

Markers reported the following areas in which candidates performed poorly:

- ◆ Some answers on Austen were relied too much on narrative rather than analysis.
- ◆ Some candidates seemed to be unprepared to deal with *The Eve of St Agnes* in the question on Keats.
- ◆ *Wuthering Heights* was not always analysed in sufficient depth in response to the Duffy question.
- ◆ *The Ministry of Fear* was not always analysed in sufficient depth in response to the Heaney question.

Options

Based on the reported choices of candidates in 2014, figures for the percentage uptake of the four optional components are shown below.

Creative Writing	65.3%
Textual Analysis	31.2%
Reading the Media	3.4%
Language Study	0.1%

Although Creative Writing remains by far the most popular option, there was a slight increase in the uptake of Textual Analysis and Reading the Media in 2014.

Creative Writing

Markers reported the following distribution of genres submitted in Creative Writing folios:

Reflective Essay	28.4%
Fiction	42%
Poetry	14.5%
Drama	15.2%

This is broadly in line with submissions in previous years.

Markers reported the following areas in which candidates performed well:

- ◆ some genuinely reflective and expressive reflective essays were submitted

- ◆ short story writing (including some very effective use of genre conventions)
- ◆ creating a sense of place in fiction
- ◆ structuring fiction effectively
- ◆ producing experimental (in terms of style) and interesting fiction
- ◆ exploiting particular poetic forms
- ◆ utilising conventions of style and structure in drama
- ◆ use of stage directions/lighting/staging in drama
- ◆ interaction between characters clearly understood and demonstrated in the best drama

Markers reported the following areas in which candidates performed poorly:

- ◆ weaker reflective essays failed to distinguish between simple narrative and reflection
- ◆ many fiction and drama pieces were too simplistic and not of an adequate standard at Advanced Higher level
- ◆ lack of plot in fiction
- ◆ ill-considered endings to fiction
- ◆ poetry often marred by lack of structure/shape/pattern
- ◆ offering poems which seemed wilfully obscure
- ◆ failure to edit/shape poetry effectively
- ◆ underdeveloped characters in drama
- ◆ dramatic monologues
- ◆ failure to proof read work effectively

Markers noted the popularity of American voices and settings for much imaginative work. As in previous years, 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.

Some candidates used very esoteric and unusual vocabulary — often to no good effect. Candidates might benefit from being reminded that ordinary language can be used to create extraordinary results.

Textual Analysis

Based on the reported choices of candidates in 2014, figures for the percentage uptake of the four Textual Analysis questions are shown below.

Prose fiction	50.3%
Prose non-fiction	3.2%
Poetry	40%
Drama	6.5%

In 2014 there was a significant increase in the number of candidates who chose to answer on Poetry (Don Paterson's *Rain*), and a significant decrease in the number of candidates who chose to answer on Prose non-fiction (an extract from Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*).

Prose fiction answers were competent on the whole, with a few showing genuine excellence in understanding and ability to analyse the extract from Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. Weaker responses tended to rely too much on narrative or merely provided a paraphrased commentary on the extract.

The length of the Prose non-fiction extract seemed problematic for some candidates who also found it challenging to engage with its more esoteric style.

Responses to Poetry varied widely in terms of quality. Some were very good but too many candidates attempted to impose a narrative and/or meaning on this complex and subtle poem that simply was not there. Better responses recognised the ambiguities in the text and offered perceptive analysis of structure and form.

Candidates generally displayed a sound technical vocabulary in their responses to the Drama question.

Reading the Media

Based on the reported choices of candidates in 2014, figures for the percentage uptake of Reading the Media questions are shown below.

Question 1	37.9%
Question 2	50%
Question 10	12.1%

Question 1 was often poorly done. Markers reported that candidates either identified elements present in the opening scene not present in the closing scene (and vice versa), or discussed the scenes in terms of contrasting audience reaction rather than analysing technique. Some candidates discussed opening/closing credits, which was unhelpful.

Question 2 was answered well with most candidates' responses 'more than adequate' in terms of *Understanding, Analysis, Evaluation* and *Expression*.

Question 10 was reasonably well done. Most candidates seemed well versed in appropriate theory and some candidates were able to apply this well effectively in their responses.

Language Study

Based on the reported choices of candidates in 2014, figures for the percentage uptake of Language questions are shown below.

Question 2	50%
Question 9	50%

In answers to the Language Study questions candidates were clearly engaged by their chosen areas of study and showed a generally sound understanding of dialect and language variation. Candidates' responses were 'more than adequate' in terms of *Relevance* and *Understanding, Analysis, Evaluation* and *Expression*.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

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* available

at http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/English_Advanced%20Higher_Valid_from_August2010.pdf and the advice provided on *Understanding Standards* available

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 3500 and 4500 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 against which their dissertations will be assessed.

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 should 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 2013	1743
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	1716
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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 70				
A	22.3%	22.3%	382	65
B	29.8%	52.0%	511	56
C	32.4%	84.4%	556	48
D	7.8%	92.2%	134	44
No award	7.8%	-	133	-

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.