



Course Report 2015

Subject	English
Level	New Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

This assessment comprises two unseen non-fiction passages, with questions focusing on passage one and one question across both passages. Candidates apply their reading skills in understanding, analysis and evaluation when tackling the questions on passage one. In the question on both passages, candidates identify three key ideas shared by the two passages and provide evidence from the passages to support their choices.

Component 1 is worth 30 marks. Candidates have one hour and 30 minutes to complete this component.

Component 2: Question paper, Critical Reading

This assessment has two sections: Scottish textual analysis and Critical Essay. In the Scottish text section, candidates apply understanding, analysis and evaluation skills to questions on a previously-studied Scottish text, or extract from a longer text, and link this to the wider text or collection of Scottish set texts they have studied. In the Critical Essay section, candidates write an extended response to a further previously-studied text from one of the following contexts: drama, prose, poetry, film and television drama or language.

Component 2 is worth 40 marks (20 marks for the Scottish text section, 20 marks for Critical Essay). Candidates have one hour and 30 minutes to complete this component.

Component 3: Portfolio of Writing

The Portfolio of writing is worth 30 marks (15 marks for each piece). Candidates submit two pieces of writing in different genres: one broadly creative (personal or imaginative), and one broadly discursive, based on research individually undertaken by candidates.

General

Close articulation with National 5 enables candidates to progress from the skills they have acquired in understanding, analysis and evaluation. Markers reported that the variety of questions in both question papers offered candidates opportunities to demonstrate a wide range of skills. The positive approach of the assessment emphasised strengths in the candidates' performance, encouraging recognition of achievement. In Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation, markers commented on the investigative nature of Question 9 (on both passages), which draws on a range of learning experiences, for example the Added Value Unit at National 4 level and high tariff summary questions of National 5 level.

In Critical Reading, many markers felt that the combination of textual analysis and one critical essay enabled candidate to be rewarded fully for their knowledge and understanding

of texts. The two categories of 'broadly creative' and 'broadly discursive' provided rich opportunities for personalisation and choice in Portfolio writing.

The Portfolio is worth 30% of the overall Course award; 40% is allocated to textual analysis and critical essay; and the final 30% is given to the assessment of how a candidate can apply his or her reading skills to unseen non-fiction material.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Summary of candidate performance

Candidates engaged with the new Higher English assessment and many performed well. It was clear that candidates were well prepared for the external assessment, and demonstrated a good understanding of the demands of the Course, including new aspects such as the Scottish Text. A promising number of candidates accessed the top end of the marks range. The high number of candidates achieving A–C grades mirrors the success of National 5 in 2014.

21,147 candidates sat the external exam for new Higher English in 2015. The majority of these (70.5%) had been presented for National 5 in 2014, although a reasonable minority came from Intermediate 2 (16.1%) and from the existing Higher English (8.0%). Most candidates (73.3%) were S5 school pupils. The encouraging numbers of candidates achieving A–C grades, and the small number of no awards, suggest centres are presenting candidates at appropriate levels of the Course.

Component 1: Question paper, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Candidates seemed to find the passages accessible and the subject (intensive farming) interesting. Candidates approached the task conscientiously and many performed well. The vast majority of candidates completed the paper in the allocated time, including spending sufficient time on the final question on both passages. Most candidates answered all questions.

Candidates coped well with the 'Identify ...' and 'Explain...' type questions, and many wrote substantial and detailed answers to the higher-tariff questions asking them to 'Analyse...' It was clear that candidates had been prepared well for the demands of the questions. In particular, responses to the high tariff final question showed commitment and enthusiasm.

Component 2: Question paper, Critical Reading

Candidates were well prepared for Critical Reading. They demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of their chosen texts, both in the Scottish Text section and the Critical Essay. The vast majority of candidates succeeded in completing the paper and showed commitment and diligence in their approach. Markers commented on the enthusiasm shown by candidates for the literature they had studied, especially the Scottish texts used in the textual analysis part of the paper.

Performance was very similar across the fourteen options in the Scottish textual analysis section and across the three genres of drama, poetry and prose. In the Scottish textual analysis, the final question in each option is worth 10 marks and the demand and subject of these questions was consistent across the options, tending to focus on character, theme or technique as appropriate.

In terms of chosen options in this section, the most popular genre was poetry. The most popular option, overall, was Duffy, followed by *The Cone Gatherers* and MacCaig, and then *Men Should Weep*. In poetry, after Duffy and MacCaig, the more popular choices were Lochhead, then Paterson and Burns. Few candidates chose MacLean.

In prose, after *The Cone Gatherers*, the more popular options were *Sunset Song* and Crichton Smith short stories, followed by *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and Mackay Brown short stories.

In drama, after *Men Should Weep*, the more popular choice was *The Slab Boys*. Few candidates chose *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. All options were chosen by some candidates.

Some candidates opted to answer on texts from the SQA Scottish text list for both the extract-based analysis and the critical essay, although many candidates wrote their essays on other texts or writers. Candidates chose a wide range of texts for their essays, mainly literature. Performance was similar across the different questions and genres.

In drama, Shakespeare was popular, especially *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Other popular playwrights included Arthur Miller (for example *A View from the Bridge*, *Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons* and *The Crucible*) and Tennessee Williams especially *A Streetcar Named Desire*).

In prose, as well as Scottish texts such as *The Cone Gatherers* and *Sunset Song*, popular choices included *Lord of the Flies* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. A small number of candidates opted for prose non-fiction: the essays of George Orwell were most frequently chosen here. Since many candidates chose poetry for the Scottish textual analysis, relatively few chose this genre for their essay. For those who did, the poetry of Sylvia Plath, Seamus Heaney and Robert Browning were popular choices. Some candidates chose a media text for their critical essay: for example, the films *The Godfather* and *Shutter Island* were successfully tackled. Very few candidates chose to write on Language, with no candidates choosing Q18, on advertising.

Component 3: Portfolio

The Portfolio of writing shares many similarities with the existing Higher folio and enables effective progression from the National 5 portfolio. In the 'broadly creative' category, markers reported on the variety of personal and imaginative subjects and styles, including some drama scripts, poetry and pieces written in Scots. In the 'broadly discursive' piece, candidates chose a wide range of topics, including both well-established and more unusual subjects.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

- Q1: Most candidates were able to identify two positive aspects of Central Valley, California and to use their own words.
- Q5: Most candidates accurately summarised the differences between UK Government food policy and consumer wishes. Those who managed to express these ideas in their own words scored well.
- Q7: Most candidates managed to make three key points explaining how the writer continued the ideas of 'nightmarish'.
- Q9: Most candidates correctly identified three key ideas on which both writers agreed. Many managed to support their key points with ideas from the passages.

Component 2: Question paper, Critical Reading

Candidates had clearly been prepared thoroughly for the Critical Reading question paper. In both the Scottish text analysis and the Critical Essay, candidates showed detailed knowledge and understanding of texts.

Most candidates performed well in the shorter analysis questions on the extracts or texts in the Scottish textual analysis (Section 1). Most candidates devoted sufficient time to answering the final, 10-mark, question and made successful links between the extract or text on the page and the wider work studied in class. Most candidates were able to quote or refer accurately to the rest of the text or texts, and many made perceptive comments on these references. Most candidates opted to answer this question in a series of bullet points, an approach which worked well.

In the Critical Essay (Section 2), the vast majority of candidates found a suitable question. Most candidates managed to structure their essays effectively and to demonstrate thorough knowledge of the texts they had studied, for example through use of quotation and direct references to areas of content.

Component 3: Portfolio

The vast majority of candidates had clearly worked hard on their Portfolios and submitted two pieces of writing that clearly addressed the requirement for one 'broadly creative' and one 'broadly discursive' writing piece. In the portfolio, candidates have the opportunity to re-draft and improve pieces, and the standard of written English in their finished work was often high.

In creative writing, many candidates chose to write about personal experience. This was often handled with maturity and insight, with a strong sense of the writer's personality coming through. Many candidates who chose to submit imaginative writing showed

awareness of genre requirements such as character and plot. Many achieved a high standard of writing in creation of atmosphere and setting and in the use of structure. Although only a small number of candidates submitted drama or poetry, those who did were often successful.

In discursive writing, most candidates chose a subject which clearly interested them. Many candidates conducted appropriate research and structured their essays effectively to convey meaning. Some candidates showed impressive engagement with current national and international affairs and wrote with enthusiasm and commitment. Some candidates managed to address their chosen subject with wit and humour.

Consistent technical accuracy was achieved by the vast majority of candidates.

The overwhelming majority of candidates chose to word-process their pieces, and the standard of presentation was high. Most managed to use and to identify any sources used.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

- Q2: Many candidates scored one mark each for two basic comments on language, rather than two marks for detailed/insightful comments. Some candidates clearly understood that a negative picture was being created. However, they asserted that language features such as the word choice of 'deeply disturbing' created this, rather than showing how it was done. Some candidates built up marks, scoring one mark for each point, but some included only two points in their answers, and so lost potential marks.
- Q3: Many candidates scored one mark each for two basic comments on a combination of word choice or sentence structure, rather than two marks for detailed/insightful comments. Some candidates asserted that word choice such as 'grotesquely' or features of sentence structure such as a list conveyed disapproval, but did not analyse how this was done. Some candidates built up marks, scoring one mark for each point, but some included only two points in their answers, and so lost potential marks.
- Q4: Many candidates scored one mark for a more basic comment explaining the function of the lines in the development of the writer's argument. Fewer candidates scored two marks for a more detailed or insightful comment.
- Q6: Most candidates scored one mark each for two basic points on imagery or sentence structure, but relatively few scored two marks for detailed/insightful comments. Some candidates asserted that a particular image, such as the 'front line', conveyed the writer's criticism, but did not analyse how this was done. Some candidates built up marks, scoring one mark for each point, but some

included only two points in their answers, and so lost potential marks.

Q8: Many candidates scored one mark for a basic comment evaluating the effectiveness of the final paragraph as a conclusion. Fewer scored the full two marks for a detailed or insightful comment. Some candidates wrote slightly vague responses; others did not take full account of the requirement to discuss the paragraph 'as a conclusion'.

Component 2: Question paper, Critical Reading

In the final 10-mark question of the Scottish textual analysis, some candidates did not concentrate on the question's key focus. Their answers were therefore too vague. Some candidates did not address the idea of commonality fully and lost potential marks. Some struggled to organise their answers effectively.

In the Critical Essay, some candidates showed understanding of their chosen texts, but did not focus sufficiently on the requirements of the question. Answers were therefore less relevant. Some candidates spent too long on explaining basic plot or character details, rather than focusing on analysis and evaluation of the text.

A small number of candidates had difficulty in choosing an appropriate Critical Essay question and struggled to match the text they knew to the question chosen. In some instances, candidates' knowledge and understanding would have been better directed in response to another question.

Time management was an issue for a small number of candidates.

A small number of candidates had difficulty with following the genre requirements of the paper. They did not follow the instruction for the Critical Essay that 'Your essay must be on a different genre from that chosen in Section 1.' Some chose, for example, a drama question, but answered it on a novel. A very small number answered on the same text for Scottish text and Critical Essay.

Component 3: Portfolio

Some candidates did not adhere to the published word limit of 1,300 words.

For some candidates, there was evidence that research had been conducted, but it was not employed effectively to support the candidate's argument.

In imaginative writing, some candidates tended to focus on plot-based, unrealistic topics, rather than developing characters fully.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper, Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

- ◆ Centres have prepared their candidates thoroughly for this component and are to be commended. Careful and useful preparation should continue.
- ◆ Reading good quality non-fiction, for example broadsheet journalism, will greatly assist candidates to prepare for this part of the Course assessment.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to adhere to the requirement for own words where required (indicated in the wording of the question where this is required). Direct lifts of words/expressions from the passage will gain no marks here.
- ◆ In questions that require the analysis of the writer's use of language, candidates should be aware that no marks are awarded at Higher level for references or quotations alone. No marks are awarded for assertion that an effect has been produced: candidates must analyse how this has been done.
- ◆ Candidates should remember the '2 marks for detailed/insightful comment; 1 mark for more basic comment' division of marks in many Higher questions.
- ◆ Candidates should attempt to explain their analytical comments as clearly and as fully as they can. In questions asking for a response on the writer's ideas, candidates should attempt to ensure that their full understanding is expressed.
- ◆ The use of bullet points, etc, might assist candidates in the structuring of answers for high tariff questions.
- ◆ Centres have clearly focused on the final question on both passages, shown by the success of candidates in this question, and should continue to provide opportunities for candidates to develop their skills in this new area.

Component 2: Question paper, Critical Reading

- ◆ Centres have clearly focused effectively on the key areas of study in the texts they have taught their candidates, leading to high levels of knowledge and understanding. Most candidates showed genuine enthusiasm for their texts and sincere engagement with, for example, characters and situations. This impressive work should continue.
- ◆ Candidates should continue to make appropriate links within a longer text or between shorter texts, for use in the final question in the Scottish textual analysis.
- ◆ Candidates should be aware of the three-part requirement of the final question in the Scottish textual analysis: 2 marks for commonality, 2 marks for the extract or text given,

6 marks for commenting on the wider text or texts. Organising their answers in a series of bullet points in three sections might benefit candidates.

- ◆ Candidates should be reminded of the requirements for choosing a question from the Critical Essay section of the paper. This must be from a different genre to the Scottish Textual Analysis. They should make sure that they have chosen the appropriate genre of question for their text. Some candidates were disadvantaged by choosing an inappropriate question.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded to stay relevant to the question in their responses to Critical Essay questions.

Component 3: Portfolio

- ◆ Centres are commended for the appropriate guidance they have given their candidates, enabling them to produce a high standard of writing for the Portfolio. They should continue to provide this.
- ◆ Candidates are reminded to adhere to stated word limits, for example 1300 words maximum for each piece.
- ◆ All sources used in preparation for pieces of writing must be declared.
- ◆ Time taken on the organisation and acknowledgement of sources improves presentation, assists markers, and helps to develop good study habits.
- ◆ Candidates are required to submit one piece of broadly creative writing. When submitting poetry it is acceptable to submit more than one poem, but, if doing so, these should be linked in some way, for example thematically or through the use of different narrative voices. A group of poems will be considered as one piece.
- ◆ Clarity of structure should be encouraged in candidates' writing.
- ◆ Encouraging personal choice can be beneficial when considering topics for discursive writing. Often local and current issues have powerful relevance for candidates.
- ◆ In discursive writing, sufficient research should be undertaken in order that the candidate's argument can be fully explored.
- ◆ In personal writing, candidates should try to focus on thoughts and feelings rather than relating events.
- ◆ In imaginative writing, candidates should try to focus on developing characters and atmosphere, rather than over-elaborate plotting.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	21147

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	26.8%	26.8%	5672	74
B	28.1%	54.9%	5946	65
C	25.6%	80.6%	5416	56
D	8.4%	88.9%	1766	51
No award	11.1%	-	2347	0

The assessments proved slightly less demanding than intended across both question papers, which necessitated an adjustment upwards at the A and C boundary. The upper A was set below notional to reflect historical marking patterns in English.

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.