External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

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

Candidates again performed well at English Intermediate 2 this year, with some candidates achieving very high marks. Marks were broadly similar to last year in all three externally-assessed components. The Folio continued to provide candidates with the opportunity to bring an additional set of skills to the examination. Most candidates made effective use of this opportunity.

General standards of technical accuracy in candidates' use of language remained constant.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

Many candidates found the subject matter of the passage readily accessible. The vast majority of candidates were able to answer all questions.

An encouraging number of candidates offered full, detailed answers.

- Question 1: Many candidates made effective selections and offered perceptive comments.
- Question 3(a): Many candidates were able to identify 'real-life' as standing in opposition to 'virtual.'
- Question 4: Candidates were generally able to analyse two components of the selected expression.
- Question 5: Candidates understood the use of the word 'web' in the context of this passage.
- Question 7(d): Many candidates successfully identified the use of a rhetorical question.

Critical Essay

The vast majority of candidates made an appropriate selection from the question paper.

Candidates generally showed genuine engagement with the texts they had studied.

Clear understanding was apparent, and many candidates were able to show awareness of the central concerns of the texts.

Successful candidates consistently related their responses to the demands of the question selected.

The majority of candidates were able to refer to the content of their chosen texts, and often use direct quotation in support of their arguments.

Many candidates showed a perceptive awareness of writers' use of techniques.

Folio

There were more personal than imaginative pieces, but some interesting and engaging short fiction was submitted.

Argumentative writing contained balanced views. Good use was made of researched statistics. Persuasive writing tended to be more successful than argumentative writing.

Discursive essays on 'smaller,' specific topics were more successful than essays on larger, more general topics.

Some candidates made effective use of rhetorical techniques.

Many candidates used topic sentences to sign-post structure.

There was evidence of careful re-drafting.

Some candidates wrote successfully in Scots.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading
♦ Question 2: Some candidates did not deal with both sides of the image.
♦ Question 6: Many candidates approached this question in a formulaic way, offering a general, non-specific answer.
♦ Question 9: This was handled successfully by some candidates, but others found this question (on structure) challenging.
♦ Question 10: Some candidates were not successful in using their own words when answering this question.
♦ Question 13: Many candidates were unsuccessful in making a suitable reference to previous ideas/language from elsewhere in the passage.

Critical Essay
Some candidates did not deal effectively with all aspects of the questions selected.

Some candidates offered responses that were heavily narrative-based.

♦ Question 1: Some candidates correctly identified a breakdown in a relationship within a play, but did not go on to show the significance/impact of this breakdown.
♦ Question 4: Many candidates discussed conflict between two characters in a prose text, but did not explain to what extent this conflict was resolved.
♦ Question 7: It was apparent that some candidates were unclear as to what precisely was meant by 'an incident.' A broad interpretation was permitted.

Folio
In some pieces of short fiction there was too much reliance on narrative, with little development of character. There was also a lack of focus on the ending.

A few candidates made errors with 'comma splice,' and inconsistent verb tenses.

Some candidates did not write within the stated word limits.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Close Reading
♦ Candidates should be encouraged to read as much as possible so they are prepared to deal with the challenges presented at this level.
♦ Candidates should try hard to use their own words when instructed to do so. (Reminders are given in bold). Not using own words, where required, will result in a loss of marks.
♦ Candidates should try to answer as fully as possible questions asking for analysis of a writer's use of techniques.
♦ In questions on imagery, candidates should try to deal with both sides of the image.
♦ Candidates should be prepared to tackle questions on a writer's use of structure (eg linkage, conclusion).

Critical Essay
♦ Candidates should read the questions carefully to deal with all aspects of the questions selected.
♦ Candidates should make every effort to produce a response which is relevant to the question, and does not just re-tell the narrative of the chosen text.
♦ Candidates should aim to develop a line of thought in their essays which is strongly relevant to the question.
♦ Care should be taken to meet the requirement for 'sufficiently accurate' in essay writing.

Folio
♦ Best results seem to be produced when candidates are closely involved in the selection of subject matter of pieces of writing.
♦ When writing short fiction, candidates should not concentrate too much on narrative. Clear characters should be developed, and a sense of structure should be apparent.
♦ Candidates should take care to avoid errors involving 'comma splice.' Verb tenses should be consistent.
♦ Candidates should adhere to the stated word limits.
♦ Care should be taken over the use of internet research. Candidates should select relevant material, organise it in an appropriate way, and be careful to use their own words when writing essays.
♦ Teachers should monitor the drafting process carefully.
♦ Candidates should be reminded to keep a record of, and to acknowledge, all sources consulted.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2012	23832

Number of resulted entries in 2013	23455

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	23.4%	23.4%	5488	69
B	31.4%	54.8%	7367	59
C	28.2%	83.0%	6603	49
D	7.5%	90.5%	1766	44
No award	9.5%	100.0%	2231	-

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.