



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

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

There was a significant decrease in the number of entries for Intermediate 1 English this year. Entries in 2014 were 4,840; in 2015 the figure was 301. However, performance was broadly similar to that of last year. Marks for Critical Essay and Folio elements showed a slight increase, but candidates were marginally less successful this year in the Close Reading paper.

Candidates were well prepared for all three components. There was evidence of good teaching in the way that candidates approached their answers in understanding questions in the Close Reading paper; however, candidates at Intermediate 1 English find the skills of analysis and evaluation in unseen Close Reading challenging. Candidates were well prepared to write a Critical Essay on a text that they had studied. Most candidates chose to write on poetry for this component, and comparatively few chose drama. The Folio again gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate a wider set of skills in the external assessment.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

Candidates seemed to engage reasonably well with the passage. The topic of cycling had contemporary relevance. Most candidates answered with commitment, and attempted all of the questions.

Question 1: Candidates showed clear understanding of why the “planned cycle tour was a daft idea.” However, some candidates were not successful in re-casting the writer’s ideas in their own words.

Question 2: Most candidates identified two reasons here, but some lifted the word “better” from the passage.

Question 4: Most candidates did well here, as there was no requirement for “own words.”

Question 6 (b) & (c): Most candidates scored at least one mark for each.

Question 8 (a): Candidates coped well with the requirement to isolate a difference between past and present.

Question 9: Candidates showed good understanding here.

Question 10: Most candidates showed understanding of the changes in Cornwall as observed by the writer.

Question 12 (a): This analytical question on the writer’s use of word choice was done well by a majority of candidates.

Critical Essay

Candidates had no difficulty in finding a suitable question.

Question 5: this question proved to be inclusive in terms of demand, and was done well by those candidates who selected it.

Most candidates wrote a reasonably extended response.

In terms of expression, most candidates managed to meet the “mainly accurate” requirement.

Most candidates were able to employ a basic line of thought in their responses.

Most candidates were able to make some relevant references to the texts they had studied.

Folio

Candidates who chose to write about their own experiences did so with some degree of sensitivity and self-awareness. (This was the most popular option).

Many candidates wrote successfully on a discursive topic (common topics were footballers’ wages, goal-line technology, capital punishment, body image and other health related topics).

An encouraging number of candidates were again able to handle source material reasonably effectively, and there was evidence of good research habits being fostered.

The writing of most candidates communicated meaning clearly at first reading, and technical accuracy was acceptable. Most candidates showed signs of having used the drafting process effectively.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

Many candidates found the use of “own words” to be a challenge in “understanding” questions. In questions involving the skills of analysis, candidates tended to concentrate on meaning: analytical comments were thin.

Question 3: In this question about the writer’s use of linkage, candidates were often able to make a relevant selection from the passage, but did not follow this up with an appropriate analytical comment. One mark out of two was often achieved.

Question 5: Candidates found it difficult to comment on the function of the words in brackets.

Question 6 (a): As is often the case at Intermediate 1 level, candidates struggled here to explain the writer’s use of figurative language.

Question 6 (c): In this evaluative question, candidates tended to achieve one mark for a correct selection, but the analytical comment was often limited.

Question 8 (b): Candidates found it difficult to make an evaluative or an analytical comment on the expression “Lycra louts.”

Question 12 (b): Candidates relied on straight lifts from the passage in their responses to this question.

Question 12 (c): Again, this evaluative question proved to be challenging for most candidates.

Critical Essay

Some candidates' essays were predominately narrative, rather than analytical.

There were signs of some candidates struggling to shape pre-planned essays to fit the demands of the question.

Question 3: Some candidates did not focus enough on the decision made by a main character. Responses tended to be too general.

Question 6: Some candidates were insufficiently specific about "a place or an event."

Many candidates had difficulty in providing sufficient analysis when writing about Drama, Prose or Media. More success in this area was evident in Poetry.

Some candidates did not indicate which question they had selected.

Folio

Some candidates did not acknowledge sources consulted for discursive writing.

Effective sentence construction remains a challenge for some candidates.

Some candidates found it difficult to construct a convincing narrative when attempting to write short fiction.

Some discursive writing did not contain fully developed ideas/opinions. Treatments were superficial, at times.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Close Reading

Candidates should attempt to use their own words when asked to do so. A "full gloss" is not usually required; marks are awarded for some attempt to paraphrase.

Candidates should try to practise analytical comments. They are generally able to identify a writer's effective use of language, but analytical comments tend to be thin or weak.

Candidates should revise the uses of punctuation.

Good habits of reading should be encouraged in order that candidates are better prepared for the challenges provided by complex vocabulary.

Critical Essay

Candidates should be reminded to make a clear indication of which question has been selected.

Candidates should try to avoid over-reliance on a narrative approach in their responses.

Candidates could consider the use of topic sentences in order to aid the formation of a structure in critical essays.

Folio

Candidates should attempt to explore their feelings and reactions as fully as possible when writing about personal experience.

Candidates should attempt to develop their opinions and arguments as fully as possible in discursive writing.

Sources consulted should be acknowledged clearly.

Candidates should remember to use their own words in discursive writing.

Candidates should aim to plan a narrative when attempting to write short fiction.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	5188
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	311
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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	19.9%	19.9%	62	68
B	39.5%	59.5%	123	56
C	28.0%	87.5%	87	45
D	4.8%	92.3%	15	39
No award	7.7%	-	24	-

Close Reading paper proved slightly more demanding than expected, resulting in a 1 mark downward adjustment to all grade boundaries.

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.