External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	English
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Entries were down significantly this year (from 19,344 to 1,734), but candidates performed well again at English Intermediate 2, with some candidates achieving very high marks.

Component marks were broadly similar to last year.

Feedback suggested that candidates found the Close Reading passage (on the subject of technology and the written word), to be interesting and accessible.

Candidates had little difficulty selecting an appropriate Critical Essay question from the broad range available. Poetry was, again, chosen by a large number of candidates. Scottish poets featured strongly: Duffy (*Shooting Stars, Havisham, Revelation*), MacCaig (*Assisi, Hotel Room 12th Floor, Visiting Hour, Brooklyn Cop*), and Morgan (*Hyena, Glasgow 5th March 1971, In The Snack Bar, Glasgow Sonnet*). Other poets included Heaney (*Digging, Mid Term Break*), and Owen (*Dulce Et Decorum Est, Anthem For Doomed Youth*).

Popular choices in Drama were Miller (*The Crucible, All My Sons, A View from the Bridge*) and Shakespeare (*Macbeth,* and *Romeo and Juliet*). Novels selected included *Lord of the Flies, To Kill a Mockingbird, Of Mice and Men,* and *Cal*.

Short Stories included *Father and Son, Only a Disease* by Bernard MacLaverty, *The Test* by Shirley Jackson, and *The Pedestrian* by Ray Bradbury. For Non-Fiction, *Letter to Daniel* and *A Hanging* were popular. Media responses tended to be on film, with most answering on *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Godfather*, *Black Swan*, *I am Legend, Psycho* and *Stand By Me*.

Other texts (perhaps reflecting the fact that some candidates had started off the year as Higher candidates) included poems by Browning, plays by Williams and Ibsen, etc.

The Folio gave the candidates an opportunity to demonstrate additional skills in the external assessment.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading

♦ Candidates engaged well with the passage, and demonstrated understanding of the main ideas.
♦ Candidates answered with commitment and there were few incomplete papers. Many candidates gave very full answers.

Question 1:   Most candidates understood the meaning of the writer's use of the word 'gizmos' in this context.

Question 2:   Candidates coped well with the meaning of the word 'railed,' and were

Question 5:	able to provide an appropriate supporting reference.
Question 5:	Most candidates were able to gloss both 'purists' and 'shudder.'
Question 5 (b):	Candidates were given a variety of options here, and most were able to provide a suitable explanation.
Question 6 (b):	Most candidates handled this analytical question on imagery effectively. Most chose to answer on 'magpies.'
Question 7:	This question was handled well by candidates despite the challenging vocabulary involved.
Question 10:	Most candidates found this 'link' question reasonably straightforward.
Question 11:	Candidates showed good understanding in their responses to this question.
Question 13:	Most candidates were able to comment effectively on the appropriateness of the expression.

Critical Essay

♦ Many candidates demonstrated clear engagement with the texts they had studied.
♦ Most candidates had no difficulty with finding two questions from different sections of the paper that suited the texts they had studied.
♦ Question 4 led to some very good responses, and seemed to suit many of the prose texts studied by candidates.
♦ Question 8 offered very many candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of poetry, and was a very popular choice.
♦ There were very few issues with the 'sufficiently accurate' requirement for Critical Essay.
♦ Many candidates successfully related their responses to the demands of the question.
♦ Most candidates were able to employ either direct quotation or relevant references in their responses.
♦ Poetry was generally handled especially well by candidates.

Folio

♦ Candidates wrote sensitively and effectively about their own lives and experiences.
♦ Many candidates showed clear engagement with current prominent issues. This was apparent in their pieces of discursive writing.
♦ The techniques of persuasive writing were handled well by many candidates.
♦ Some candidates made effective use of rhetorical techniques.
♦ Many candidates had clearly made effective use of the drafting process.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading

Question 3:	Some candidates found difficulty in providing a precise explanation of the effectiveness of the expression 'swamped' as an image or metaphor.
Question 4 (b):	Rather than basing their answers on analytical comments on the

language of the passage, some candidates relied on irrelevant external material to frame their answers.

Question 6 (a): Some candidates were too general in their response to this question and did not achieve the mark.

Question 8: Many candidates found difficulty in making appropriate comments about the identified words in brackets.

Question 9 (b): Some candidates were not able to comment effectively on the writer's attitude at this point in the passage.

Critical Essay

♦ A few candidates had difficulty in maintaining relevance to the question throughout their responses.

♦ Some candidates did not address all aspects of the question selected.

♦ A small number of candidates did not make selections from the appropriate genre section of the paper.

♦ Although engagement was strong in many candidates' responses, some candidates had difficulty in expressing evaluative comments.

♦ In Question 6, some candidates — who chose to write on 'place' — did not have sufficient knowledge on place/situation/environment to achieve satisfactory relevance. This was true too of Question 11.

Folio

♦ When attempting short fiction, some candidates found it difficult to sustain a credible narrative structure.

♦ Some candidates did not make sufficient acknowledgement of sources consulted.

♦ In personal writing, a few candidates did not attempt to reflect on their experiences, offering simply an account of the events.

♦ A few candidates did not write within the stated word limits.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading

♦ Candidates should be careful to make an attempt to use their own words when instructed to do so. Reminders are always given in the wording of the questions.

♦ Candidates should try to answer as fully as possible questions that ask for analysis of a writer's use of language techniques. Remember, the general approach is: 1 mark for a relevant reference, 1 mark for a suitable comment.

♦ Candidates should be prepared to answer on the writer's use of structure (eg linkage, conclusion).

♦ Candidates should be encouraged to read as widely as possible to deal with the complex vocabulary/ideas contained in the passage.

Critical Essay

♦ Candidates should aim to develop a line of thought in their responses that is relevant to the question selected.

♦ Candidates should attempt to deal with all aspects of the question.

♦ Candidates should be reminded of the genre requirements of the question paper.

♦ Care should be taken to meet the requirement for 'sufficiently accurate' in Critical Essay writing. Please note that allowances are made for writing under exam circumstances.

Folio

♦ Best results seem to be produced when candidates are closely involved in the selection of subject matter for pieces of writing for the Folio.

♦ Teachers should monitor the drafting process carefully to ensure authenticity.

♦ Care should be taken over the use of internet research. Candidates should select and organise their material before taking care over the use of their own words and proper acknowledgement of sources consulted.

♦ Candidates should be encouraged to keep a record of sources used to add it to Folio pieces.

♦ Candidates should be reminded to adhere to stated word limits.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	19453

Number of resulted entries in 2015	1742

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	19.6%	19.6%	341	69
B	30.4%	49.9%	529	59
C	28.8%	78.8%	502	49
D	8.1%	86.9%	141	44
No award	13.1%	-	229	-

Question paper on standard. 2014 adjustment no longer required.

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.