Course Report 2018

Subject	Italian
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 documents and marking instructions.

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

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

The reading section of the question paper was from the context of society. The text explored the topic of travel and outlined the experiences of young people and inter-railing. The topic was very relevant to the holiday and travel pursuits of many young people. It was evident that centres had prepared candidates extremely well to tackle the vocabulary and language in this context. The questions for the reading text provided a spread of 1, 2 and 3 marks, which were balanced in relation to high, low and average level of demand. The overall purpose question tested candidates' inferential skills, requiring them to outline, with evidence from the text, the writer's attitude to travel. Generally, candidates found this question more challenging and tended to write very lengthy answers for 2 marks.

Candidates had a section to translate into English. The translation was divided into five sense units, and each sense unit contained a variety of grammatical challenges, from the more straightforward to more complex aspects of language and tense. Full marks for individual sense units required good English expression as well as accurate grammatical knowledge. The translation proved to be the most challenging aspect of the paper overall, particularly in relation to tense and word order, however it was tackled well overall.

The directed writing section of the question paper offered candidates a choice of two scenarios from the contexts of learning and employability. Candidates had to address four unseen bullet points, the first one having two parts to it. The first scenario required candidates to write about their experiences of an Italian language course while scenario 2 focused on a work experience opportunity in a hotel in Italy. Both scenarios proved to be very accessible and gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the Italian language. Around two thirds of candidates chose scenario 2: employability. The directed writing was completed extremely well, with many candidates scoring full marks.

Candidates were thoroughly prepared for the exam. There were some very impressive examples of excellent written Italian.

Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

The listening section of the question paper consisted of a monologue and a dialogue from the context of culture. The monologue, worth 8 marks, was on the topic of smoking and explored the advantages of giving up smoking. The dialogue, worth 12 marks, focused on the advantages and disadvantages of moving to Rome. Both items proved to be very accessible to candidates who scored well in this paper. Questions varied in level of demand and were well signposted. It was evident that centres had prepared candidates to tackle a wide range of vocabulary and to apply well-developed dictionary skills.

The writing section of this question paper was tackled very well. Candidates were at ease writing about their attitudes to healthy eating, sport and exercise. The topic built upon the course content of National 5, thus many were very familiar with it. The stimulus questions within the essay title helped candidates to structure their writing. Many candidates brought in wider aspects of the topic area: alcohol, drugs and the repercussions of unhealthy lifestyles.

There were some outstanding pieces of writing and it was evident that centres had trained candidates to use the stimulus questions as much as possible and to vary tense and language within their pieces.

Component 3 — performance–talking

The performance assessment task for Italian is now well established in centres and again has been used effectively to assess candidates at Higher.

The topics chosen by candidates allowed them to demonstrate the use of detailed and complex language at the appropriate level.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Overall, candidates performed very well in the reading section of the question paper.

Questions 1, 2(b) and 5(b) were each worth 3 marks. Candidates performed well in questions 1 and 2(b), with many gaining the full 3 marks available. It was pleasing to note that candidates included the quantifier *meno* ('less') which was a required element for one of the marks in question 1. Candidates similarly included of the qualifier *sempre* ('later') in question 3(b), also a required element for the mark.

The translation, was split into five sense units. Sense units 2 and 5 were done very well by most candidates. The majority of candidates recognised and translated the quantifier *tante persone* and the plural *da paesi diversi* in sense unit 2. Many candidates scored the full 4 marks available in these two sense units.

Candidates demonstrated a high level of performance in the directed writing. Most opted for scenario 2: employability, which required them to write about their work experience in an Italian hotel. Candidates coped extremely well with the two-parted first bullet point in both scenarios. Compared to previous years, fewer candidates lost marks due to the omission of one or more bullet points. This shows that centres are preparing candidates well in technique.

Candidates are to be commended on their knowledge and application of vocabulary, tense and complex language features which often elevated their performance. Many candidates scored the full 10 marks available in this section of the question paper.

Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

This question paper was tackled very well by the majority of candidates. The monologue proved to be very accessible to most candidates. Markers were impressed that many candidates recognised the verb *tossire* in 1(b) and the comparative use of *più*, which was necessary to gain the marks in question 1(d).

The dialogue contained several more challenging 2 mark questions, but most candidates managed to gain at least 1 mark in these. Candidates coped well with the required quantifier *troppo* in question 2(b)(i).

Component 3 — performance – talking

Candidates were well prepared for this aspect of assessment and responded well to encouraging assessors. Most candidates from the centres selected for verification achieved 8 or 10 pegged marks in the presentation, 12 or 15 pegged marks in the conversation, and 3 or 5 pegged marks for sustaining the conversation.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Out of the three 3 mark questions in the reading, question 5(b) was done least well. This question required candidates to identify the signpost word *flessibili* and find the 3 marks which followed this signpost. A significant amount of dictionary work was required here.

Candidates encountered difficulty with the imperfect modal *Doveva essere* ('It was supposed to be'). In addition, the translation of *solo andata* ('a return ticket'), proved tricky as candidates confused the word *solo* with its other meaning 'only'.

Question 6, the overall purpose question, required candidates to use inferential skills to outline the writer's view on travel. Candidates did fairly well in this question, but some failed to score the 2 marks available as they often simply repeated information which they had already used to gain marks in other questions. Others made an assertion about the writer's viewpoint but did not use evidence from the passage to back it up.

The translation was fairly well done but was definitely the most challenging aspect of the paper for candidates. Sense units 2 and 5 were fairly straightforward and done well by most candidates, with many scoring the full 2 marks available. The word *proprio* ('actually') in sense unit 1 was mistranslated as 'proper' due to its similarity to the English word. Sense unit 3 challenged many who omitted or mistranslated the object pronoun *ti* and some struggled to put the tricky Italian word order into clear English. More able candidates managed this sense unit well. Sense unit 4 contained a perfect tense construction *è stato*. Although more able candidates recognised the tense, many mistook the auxiliary *è* for the word 'and'.

The general feeling by markers was that the vast majority of candidates understood the gist of the five sense units. Marking reflected their commendable efforts to show a good general understanding of the excerpt, and the majority of candidates managed to gain at least 5 of the 10 marks available.

Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

In question 1(b) of the monologue, candidates had difficulty understanding *sentir male*, many confusing the latter with the verb 'sentire' (to smell). In question 1(d), candidates found *senza fiato* (breathless) challenging.

In question 2(c)(i) of the dialogue, candidates missed the sense of Paolo having to work 'extra' hours — *ore supplementary*. Many simply wrote 'lots of hours' and thus did not obtain the mark.

In 2(c)(ii), the mark was lost by quite a number of candidates who mistranslated the verb *annoiarsi* as 'to annoy' instead of 'to be bored', while other candidates expressed that a gym membership is 'too expensive' rather than 'a waste of money'.

In question 2(c)(iii), most candidates scored the mark for saying that team sports are played outdoors but many lost the second available mark for not expressing the idea of having fun 'while' doing exercise.

In 2(d)(i), less than half of the candidates gained the full 2 marks. Many lost a mark for failing to express that Paolo 'never' misses breakfast and/or has breakfast 'every' day.

Component 3 — performance–talking

At Higher, there is a requirement for candidates to demonstrate a wide range of detailed and complex language in order to achieve the higher pegged marks. In some cases, candidates tended to use a rather limited range of tenses and structures.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

It is very encouraging to see the high level of achievement in Italian at Higher, and centres are to be commended on this.

Candidates should continue to focus on the importance of tenses, and to pay particular attention to auxiliaries in the perfect tense, for example *ho* with *avere* verbs and *è* with *essere* verbs — and to understand when such words are being used as auxiliaries as opposed to their usage as 'I have' or 'he/she/it is', etc.

When preparing candidates for the overall purpose question, it is useful to focus on the following rule: make an assertion, then back this assertion up, for example 'The writer has a positive attitude towards travel because …' followed by evidence which illustrates the writer's attitude. If the candidate quotes an appropriate section of the text as evidence but does not paraphrase what the quotation means, they cannot gain the mark. Candidates should also take care not to reuse previous answers for which they have already accrued marks.

In translation, the importance of qualifiers and quantifiers should be frequently reiterated to candidates (for example, *molto, troppo, tanto, più, meno*). It is also important to encourage candidates to make good use of their dictionary when required to translate such words. Often, the omission or mistranslation of these results in the loss of 1 or 2 marks.

Markers highlighted a degree of weakness in candidates' knowledge of prepositions followed by a definite article (articulated prepositions), for example *al/alla/allo/all*. These can be complex in Italian, but their correct usage is a useful discriminator.

Extra care should be taken by centres to ensure that all candidates taking the course are familiar with the exam process. This year, there was a very small number of candidates who seemed to be unfamiliar with the expectations of the Higher exam. As a result, some used Italian instead of English in their reading/listening comprehension answers, or wrote their directed writing/listening essays in English. Centres should ensure that all candidates are well briefed on the examination process and are encouraged to read the instructions before tackling individual question papers.

It has been very encouraging to see many new centres choosing Italian.

Candidates should be encouraged to use a wide range of detailed and complex language, including a variety of tenses and structures.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	264

Number of resulted entries in 2018	252

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	64.3%	64.3%	162	72
B	17.5%	81.7%	44	61
C	9.9%	91.7%	25	50
D	4.4%	96.0%	11	44
No award	4.0%	-	10	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.