External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Italian
Level(s)	Advanced 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.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

It would appear that this paper was well received by teachers and candidates. No critical comments were made by centres and there were no setting issues, the setting team having remained the same for some time now. Both marking schemes worked well (only minor amendments were made) and there were no non-functioning questions.

Performance in Paper 1 was better this year, with an average mark of 35.5 (compared to 31.3 last year), whereas performance in Paper 2 was almost the same as last year, with an average mark of 50.1 (49.9 last year). The discursive essay was well done, with all titles except one being tackled.

In the Folio the average mark was 18.2, again virtually identical to the 18.4 recorded last year. As is normally the case in Advanced Higher Italian, the vast majority of candidates opted for the Extended Reading/Viewing option. In the Speaking Assessment the average mark of 40.7 was up on last year's 39.7, and there were some good performances from a cohort made up largely of school pupils.

This year there were 29 candidates, a decrease of six from last year; these candidates came from 13 different centres (one less than last year). There was a clear decrease in the percentage of candidates presenting for the examination with no previous record of SQA attainment: 6.9% as compared to 14.7% last year.

Overall attainment was significantly up, with 100% of candidates receiving grades A–C as opposed to last year's 91.2%. There was also a very welcome increase in the percentage attaining an A pass: 62% as compared to 44.1% last year (an increase of 17.9%).

Areas in which candidates performed well

The subject matter of Paper 1 appears to have been very well received by all candidates and there was a good spread of marks in the comprehension questions. Performance in the translation and inferential questions continues to improve as teachers and candidates become more aware of the challenges involved and how best to tackle them.

There were a good number of excellent responses to the Listening element in Paper 2 while in the Discursive Writing there were a significant number of very good performances.

Performance in the Folio was generally comparable to last year, but with few new texts and background studies titles. As has been the case in recent years, the increase in word-count continues to give candidates a better opportunity to express themselves fully, and there were no deductions for excessive length.

Performance in the Speaking Assessment was much as expected; there were a number of good and very good performances.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1, one of the comprehension questions (2 (b)) was poorly done by many candidates who failed to provide adequate detail in their answers. However, some candidates did achieve full marks here and the question proved useful as a measure of candidate ability.

In Paper 2, one particular essay title (on politics) proved to be less popular than the others. Overall, some candidates demonstrated the usual weaknesses in grammar and the lack of effective checking and proof-reading, the latter being an area in which candidates could be trained more effectively.

In the Folio, essays on background topics were less well done than those on literary texts, due for the most part to essay titles that were often too vague and open-ended and did not lend themselves to a critical, analytical approach.

In the Speaking Assessment, there was the occasional problem of candidates over-relying on pre-learned material and getting into difficulty when asked to digress or expand on this.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

(Although this was the final year of the Advanced Higher examination in its current form, the following advice will be still relevant to the new examination.)

♦ Paper 1 should be done in the exact order in which it is presented. Every year many candidates do the translation and/or inferential question(s) before the comprehension questions; this is to be discouraged as working through the comprehension questions enables candidates to build up a detailed idea of the content, style and message of the passage before embarking on the inferential and translation questions.

♦ In Paper 1 candidates should ensure that they read all the comprehension questions carefully and attempt to answer them precisely, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should not include information from the translation section in these answers.

♦ Candidates should set aside enough time to do the inferential and translation questions properly; every year there is evidence of these questions having been rushed. In the translation, candidates should also check carefully for accuracy and possible omissions, especially of single words as these can often incur a penalty.

♦ More detailed and frequent grammar input and practice is recommended for the discursive essay, together with the development of effective proof-reading skills. Many basic errors could be avoided by careful checking of verb tenses and endings, adjectival agreements, genders, spellings and accents.

♦ Teachers should train candidates to incorporate any pre-learned material naturally during the Speaking Assessment and avoid any tendency to deliver mini-speeches, as the Speaking Assessment is a test of the ability to generate and sustain an ongoing and unscripted conversation.

- When choosing background topic essay titles care should be taken to avoid those which are too vague, over-ambitious and incapable of being properly addressed within the prescribed word-count.

- More detailed bibliographies are recommended for the Folio pieces. Essays on literary texts must clearly demonstrate that the candidate has read the original in Italian and not just an English translation.

- If possible, schools should try to select literary texts whose intellectual content and length is most suitable for S6 pupils. New texts and background topics are always welcome.

- Candidates should aim to adhere to the 750 word Folio essay limit.

- In terms of the Inferential Question, centres are reminded that SQA publishes on the website guidance and marking instructions from previous examinations which may prove useful in training candidates.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	35

Number of resulted entries in 2015	29

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 200				
A	62.1%	62.1%	18	140
B	17.2%	79.3%	5	120
C	20.7%	100.0%	6	100
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	90
No award	0.0%	-	0	-

For this Course, grade boundaries have been stable for a number of years and the intention was to set similar grade boundaries to previous years. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was 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.