Course Report 2017

Subject	Italian
Level	Higher

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

The Reading paper was from the context of Learning. The text explored the subject of learning languages and the experiences of two language assistants/teachers who had worked in primary and secondary schools in Scotland. The text was very current, topical and relevant to candidates. The last question required candidates to translate a section of the text, which was worth 10 marks. Although this question was more demanding, it provided a suitable degree of challenge at Higher level. Overall, the paper was accessible to a wide range of abilities.

The Directed Writing paper required candidates to choose one of two scenarios taken from the contexts of Employability and Culture. Candidates had to address four bullet points, the first one having two parts to it. The first scenario required candidates to write about their past experiences of a summer job in a restaurant in Italy. The second scenario asked candidates to write about their past experiences of an Italian language course. Both scenarios were accessible to all candidates. Scenario 1 was more popular, possibly because it addressed the topic of work, a topic particularly familiar to candidates who had sat Italian at National 5.

Feedback from markers indicated that overall, this component was fair and provided sufficient demand for Higher level.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

The Listening paper was composed of a monologue and dialogue from the context of Society. The monologue, worth 8 marks, was on the topic of flat-hunting, and the dialogue, worth 12 marks, was on the topic of wedding plans. Together, both items addressed the theme of becoming an adult, one of the suggested topics for context development in the Higher Course Support Notes.

Whilst the dialogue proved quite straightforward, the monologue was more challenging than expected, perhaps because the topic of flat-hunting was a more mature, less familiar subject for candidates. Feedback from markers indicated that the more challenging nature of monologue was offset by the more straightforward dialogue and that, overall, the Listening component was fair and met the expected level of demand for Higher level.

The Writing section, worth 10 marks, required candidates to write about friends and family and which is more important. Candidates were asked to write 120–150 words. The subject provided plenty of scope for candidates to apply their knowledge of a range of topics to develop their response. The subject was familiar to candidates and built on the course content.

Component 3: performance: Talking

The centres verified for the Talking component had used the SQA course assessment task for Modern Languages to assess candidates effectively for Higher level. The chosen topics for the performance provided candidates with a good opportunity to show a range of structures and tenses and to express ideas. The presentations and conversations provided scope for candidates to demonstrate accurate handling of detailed and complex language and of a range of tenses appropriate to the 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 paper. Candidates related well to the relevant topic of language learning in schools.

Questions 1(a), 2(a), 3(a) and 5(a) were done exceptionally well by candidates. These were mostly single-mark questions. Questions 1(b), 1(c), 2(b), 4, 5(b) and 6 were mostly worth 2 or 3 marks and proved slightly more challenging, but the majority of candidates managed to gain at least one mark, with many picking up all the marks. This indicates that candidates included good detail in their answers.

The overall purpose question was managed well, most candidates gaining at least one mark and many gaining the full two. Most candidates were successful in making an assertion and backing it up with evidence from the text. Many candidates showed their ability to explain quotations well.

The majority of candidates coped reasonably well with the translation. This was very good considering the degree of challenge across the five sense units.

The majority of candidates used and benefited from the signposts provided by line references. Very few candidates wrote a correct answer in the wrong question area.

Candidates coped very well with the Directed Writing. Scenario 1 was by far the more popular of the two. Candidates seemed particularly at ease with the task of describing their job duties and how they got on with their work colleagues. Performance in Scenario 2 was slightly weaker, but most candidates coped well.

In both scenarios, many candidates provided extra details, and a good number went beyond the minimum requirements regarding word count. There were some outstanding pieces which showed some real idiomatic flair. In general, candidates were confident in their use of perfect tense, and many included a wide range of other tenses to enhance their pieces. Candidates who made use of memorised or pre-learned material generally used it appropriately.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Overall, candidates performed well in the Listening and Writing component. The dialogue proved more accessible than the monologue.

Questions 2(a), 2(b) (i), 2(b) (ii), 2(d) (i), all single-mark questions, were done exceptionally well by the vast majority of candidates. The majority of candidates coped well with the Writing element. There were examples of outstanding responses, many of which went beyond Higher level in some areas. Many candidates chose to structure their response over two paragraphs, one addressing the importance of friends, the other addressing the importance of parents. This gave them scope to include a variety of topics in their response, eg free time/outings with friends, family gatherings, housework, holidays with friends/ parents.

Component 3: performance – talking

Candidates responded effectively to a supportive interlocutor. Generally speaking, conversations were of an interactive nature allowing candidates to demonstrate their ability to sustain a conversation.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

In Question 1(c) a number of candidates struggled with the word *sistemazione* (accommodation), perhaps because they are more familiar with the word *alloggio*. Many candidates mistranslated the word *farmi* (to make me/myself) and confused it with the noun *farmacia* (chemist).

In Question 3(b) a number of candidates failed to render the phrase *molto commossi* (very moved) correctly as they ignored the modifier *molto*. At Higher level, candidates should not disregard modifiers (in this case an adverb) as they are sometimes required for the mark.

In Question 4, some candidates connected the word *adeguato* (adequate) to teachers instead of the number of teachers, thus lost a mark.

In Question 4, *una strategia che ha avuto molto successo*, some candidates did not make it clear what was successful — the strategy or the learners.

A number of candidates failed to answer the overall purpose question 7 fully. Some failed to make an assertion, while others made an assertion but did not give enough evidence to support it. A significant number did not appear to understand the term 'a balanced view'.

Overall, candidates found Question 8 (translation) challenging. Most candidates found sense units 3 and 5 more accessible than sense units 1, 2 and 4. In sense unit 1, *invece* (however) was mistranslated by many candidates. This is likely due to the fact that it has several meanings and candidates may be more familiar with its usage as 'instead'. Similarly, in sense

unit 2, many candidates confused the meaning of *proprio* (really) with its other meaning (own), and some candidates missed it out entirely. Although many candidates struggled with the idiomatic expression *da più grandi* in sense unit 4, some managed to use their dictionary well to render the phrase into good Italian.

Some candidates did not fully address the two details required in the first bullet point (Directed Writing). The maximum mark available to candidates who made this omission was 6 out of 10 marks. Some candidates wrongly used *avere* instead of the modal *dovere* to express 'I had to'. Many candidates used a plural verb and plural adjective agreement with *gente*.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

In Question 1(a) quite a number candidates did not recognise the word *quarto* (fourth).

In Question 1(b) many candidates did not note the comparative *più grande* and expressed their answer as 'a big apartment' instead of 'a bigger apartment'.

Question 1(c), worth 3 marks, required candidates to make a comparison between what is said by estate agents and what is actually meant. Many stated a point but did not then go on to make the comparison and so their answers were too thin.

In the Writing element, quite a number of candidates found it difficult to express a comparative in Italian. There were many examples of candidates using *che* where *di* or its variations are required, eg *I miei genitori sono più importanti dei miei amici*.

Unfortunately, a handful of candidates misunderstood the subject of the essay and, reading the first sentence of the stimulus, proceeded to write an essay on marriage.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Centres are to be congratulated on their success in assisting candidates with techniques which help them to tackle a lengthy reading comprehension at Higher level.

Candidates should be encouraged to look out for the words *più* and *meno* which often trigger a comparative. Similarly, the word *molto* (very) is often omitted by candidates, but is often required in the body of an answer. Candidates should be reminded to check what comes directly before an adjective when writing their answers.

Many candidates wrote very lengthy answers to the overall purpose question, beyond what was required in many cases. This is commendable but could impact on candidates' ability to manage their time and complete the whole exam. Candidates should be encouraged to make an assertion and then explain why they have made the assertion using one or two examples from the passage. These should be as brief as possible.

Centres should help candidates to recognise when a writer is expressing a balanced viewpoint rather than a one-sided viewpoint. In questions which require candidates to illustrate a writer's balanced view, candidates' answers should include at least one positive and one negative point expressed by the writer.

When tackling the translation, centres should encourage candidates to tick off all the words within a sense unit as they cover it to avoid omitting any words. It is also beneficial to dedicate a substantial amount of time to dictionary work. In particular, candidates should be trained to explore the range of meanings of certain words, especially homonyms, highlighting the way in which dictionaries provide lengthy sections on their range of meaning. In Italian, such examples are *proprio*, *quanto* and *invece*.

Centres should discourage candidates from tackling the translation before completing the reading comprehension. Candidates who do so miss out on acquiring a feel for the content of the text and this can impact on their marks.

Whilst candidates' use of the perfect tense was generally good, use of the imperfect was less secure. It is useful to frequently revise repeated (habitual) actions in the past. These are often required in one of the Directed Writing bullet points, eg Every afternoon I prepared (*preparavo*) the coffee in the restaurant and in the evenings I did (*facevo*) the dishes.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Inevitably, the more a candidate hears Italian the more he/she will get used to the way in which words flow and blend into one another, so the more listening work centres can do the better. Centres should ensure that candidates have a good knowledge of the present tense for the Writing element, particularly irregular verbs.

It is also important to ensure that candidates know how to make use of their dictionary, which can often help them to recall verb patterns and irregulars when they are stuck. Candidates should also be encouraged to be deliberate in their checking process when it comes to accuracy in number, gender, plurals, adjective agreement and spelling.

Component 3: performance: Talking

Of the sample verified, the approaches to assessment used by centres were all accepted. In assessing Talking, assessors had made effective use of the marking instructions to support marks awarded to each candidate. Centres had also provided a simple but clear pro forma for each candidate giving commentary on each performance and a record of the marks awarded for each section. The pro forma also provided evidence of internal verification. This is very helpful during the verification process.

The evidence presented was well organised and was very helpful during the verification process. Centres are to be commended for this.

Of the sample verified, the assessment judgements made by assessors were in line with national standard.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	220

Number of resulted entries in 2017	264

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	64.4%	64.4%	170	72
B	17.4%	81.8%	46	60
C	9.5%	91.3%	25	49
D	5.7%	97.0%	15	43
No award	3.0%	-	8	-

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.