



## External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Italian
Level(s)	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

There were no significant issues regarding content, level of difficulty and marking in this year's examination and it appears to have been a good indicator of ability. The setting team was the same as in previous years (a fact that has helped to ensure that papers are set and marked to a consistently high standard). The content of the paper followed the prescribed themes and topics for Higher Level and was set at an appropriate level of difficulty. The marking scheme worked very well and there were no non-functioning questions.

This year there was a dip in the number of presentations: 108 as against 173 last year (down 38%), but this must be seen in the context of the examination taking place in tandem with the new Higher. Indeed, when the numbers of presentations for both examinations (108 for the old Higher and 104 for the new Higher, total 212) are added together, there is a healthy increase of some 18%. This year there were 10 new and four returning centres out of a total of 26, a decrease of 11 from last year's total of 37, but once again this can be explained by the dual running.

There was a welcome increase in the number of candidates achieving A grades: 63% this year as compared to 60.7% last year. As has been the case in recent years, centres were cautious in the estimates they provided, predicting that only 45.8% of their candidates would gain an A. This year, however, 45.4% of the cohort had no previous record of attainment (up by 6% from last year).

The Component Average mark for each element (figures for 2014 are in brackets) were:

Paper 1: (45 marks) 33.9 (31.0) = up 2.9

Paper 2: (30 marks) 17.8 (19.4) = down 1.6

Speaking: (25 marks) 23.0 (23.1) = down 0.1

The improvement in performance in Paper 1 (Reading Comprehension and Directed Writing) more than cancelled out the slight deterioration in performance observed in Paper 2 (Listening and Writing).

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Paper 1

Paper 1 proved to be an excellent paper. Most candidates reacted very positively to it and it was obvious that they had largely identified with the subject matter of the Reading Comprehension. The comprehension questions were done very well even by less able candidates and very few poor performances were noted.

Results in the Translation were better than last year (this part of the paper has always proved to be a good and accurate predictor of overall performance).

As always, the Directed Writing showed that a good number of candidates had been able to depart from their pre-learned material when required and formulate original material of their own. Fewer candidates than usual were penalised for the omission of bullet points.

## Paper 2

In Paper 2, performance in the Listening was less good; some less able candidates had difficulty relating to the cultural element of the subject matter (together with its associated areas of vocabulary) and struggled to attain full marks in some of the questions. More able candidates did manage to achieve high scores and the Marking Instructions ensured that there was a good number of acceptable alternative answers.

Performance in the Short Essay was good, but some candidates failed to pick up on the purpose of the second half, which was to describe what their **own** region could offer tourists (*la vostra regione*) and so wrote their entire essay on the first half, thereby incurring a penalty.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Paper 1

In Paper 1 poor English in some responses to the comprehension questions led to a loss of marks, as it was unclear whether overall meaning had been understood (this was also noted last year). Questions 2 and 4 seem to have presented the most difficulty but these proved to be effective discriminators of performance.

In the Directed Writing some candidates tended to cover one or more bullet points far too thinly and should have included far more relevant detail.

### Paper 2

In Paper 2, many candidates found difficulty with questions 3 (b), 4 (a), 4 (b), 4 (c) and 4 (d) — as already stated, this may have been due to the subject matter, which some candidates appear to have found unfamiliar, but it is fair to say that not enough use was made of the dictionary here and it was disturbing to note that many candidates failed to recognise basic items of vocabulary.

In the Short Essay the usual weaknesses in grammatical knowledge and accuracy were noted; these were also apparent in the Directed Writing and can be listed as follows, in no particular order of importance:

- ◆ articulated prepositions
- ◆ *avere* and *essere* verbs
- ◆ *piacere* in all its forms
- ◆ difference between perfect and imperfect tenses
- ◆ verbs with collective nouns as subjects
- ◆ *qualche* with a plural noun
- ◆ agreement of adjectives
- ◆ incorrect definite and indefinite articles

- ◆ prepositions before infinitives, towns and countries
- ◆ confusion between *tu*, *voi* and *si*
- ◆ irregular past participles, especially *decidere* and *mettere*
- ◆ direct and indirect object pronouns
- ◆ possessive adjectives with family members
- ◆ confusion between *c'era*, *era* and *c'erano*

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

(Although this was the final year of the Higher examination in this format, the following advice will be still relevant to the new examination):

- ◆ In the Reading Comprehension, candidates should read all the questions carefully and answer them accurately and succinctly, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should not include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.
- ◆ Candidates should set aside enough time to do the Translation properly; every year there is evidence that the question has been rushed. They should check carefully for accuracy and possible omissions, especially of single words as these can incur a penalty. Special caution is needed when translating numbers, especially the larger ones.
- ◆ In the Directed Writing, candidates should read the whole scenario carefully and cover all bullet points in adequate detail. They should present each bullet point as a separate paragraph as this makes it easier for both candidates and markers to check that everything has been covered. Double line spacing is recommended for maximum legibility, especially if something is crossed out and then rewritten. Pre-learned material should be incorporated intelligently and logically into the scenario, making any necessary textual and grammatical adjustments. It is disappointing to note that some candidates write almost identical essays or almost identical paragraphs to specific bullet points. Candidates should also avoid lifting phrases, whole sentences and sometimes even entire paragraphs from the text of the Reading Comprehension. Finally, they should set aside sufficient time for effective proof-reading of what they have written.
- ◆ In the Listening Comprehension, candidates should use the questions in advance to anticipate the kind of information they might hear. Teachers should ensure that candidates are able to transcribe words that they do not know phonetically in their rough notes and attempt to look them up in the dictionary once the recordings have been heard. Candidates should listen carefully to numbers, times, dates and days — many careless mistakes are made here. Similarly, they should include relevant adjectives in their answers, as these are often essential for full points to be awarded (eg if a question asks *where* or *when exactly*, this usually indicates that some detail is required). Candidates should also ensure that any rough working is clearly scored out.
- ◆ In the Short Essay candidates must read the essay question carefully and attempt to address the precise issues raised. The use of pre-learned material here can be dangerous as it may lead to partial or total irrelevance unless an effort is made to adapt it to the essay title. Centres should note carefully how uneven writing is marked in the *What if ...?* section of the Marking Instructions for the Short Essay. Once again, the

importance of adequate proof-reading here is vital, and candidates should use the full allocation of time in order to achieve this. As is the case with Directed Writing, double line spacing is recommended for maximum legibility, especially if something is crossed out and then rewritten.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	173
Number of resulted entries in 2015	108

## 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	63.0%	63.0%	68	70
B	22.2%	85.2%	24	60
C	10.2%	95.4%	11	50
D	4.6%	100.0%	5	45
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.