Course Report 2015

Subject	Italian
Level	Higher

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Reading/translation: 30 marks

The reading/translation paper was from the context of Society on the topic of untidiness in teenagers and the reasons behind this. The final question of the paper was an 'overall purpose' question.

Directed Writing: 10 marks

Candidates now have a choice of two scenarios for the Directed Writing. The number of bullet points has been reduced from six to four, with the first one being a two-part bullet point. The task requires the use of past tenses, and the final bullet point requires candidates to use other tenses such as the future or conditional. This year the Directed Writing paper sampled the contexts of Learning and Culture.

Listening and Writing

Section 1: Listening: 20 marks

In Section 1, Listening, the monologue and dialogue were from the context of Employability, on the topics of studying at university and choosing between work and further study after school respectively. The final question on the monologue was an 'overall purpose' question, in which candidates were required to select the correct answer from a choice of three.

Section 2: Writing: 10 marks

Candidates were asked to write about the advantages and disadvantages of further study compared with going into employment straight after school, and about their own plans for the future.

Component 2: Performance: Talking

The purpose of the performance is to deliver a presentation based on one context from society, learning, employability, culture, and then take part in a natural, spontaneous follow-on conversation, which must develop into at least one other context. The performance is worth 30 marks.

Overall, assessors applied the pegged marks in the Marking Instructions successfully. Centres used the required Approach (Presentation/Conversation).

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Reading/translation

Candidates generally showed a good understanding of the topic, which appeared relevant to both young people and adult learners.

The majority of candidates completed all questions within the time available. Most gained at least one mark in Question 10, the overall purpose question.

Directed Writing

The vast majority of candidates successfully completed the Directed Writing task, and relatively few omitted a bullet point or part of a bullet point. The reduction in the number of points from six to four may have helped them in this respect.

Most candidates achieved 6 or 8 of the 10 marks available in this paper. Scenario 1 (Learning) proved the more popular choice of question.

Listening and Writing

Candidates generally coped very well with Section 1: Listening. The vast majority of candidates also achieved at least 6/10 in Section 2 Writing, but only a few scored 10/10. Most candidates addressed both parts of the Writing question and wrote first about whether it is better to study or find and job and then about their future plans.

Component 2: Performance: Talking

Evidence reviewed at verification was not typical of the whole cohort. Most of the candidates reviewed were native speakers or adult learners.

The majority of performances were of a very high standard. There were no poor performances.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Reading/translation

Candidates generally found the paper accessible.

Directed Writing

Candidates generally addressed all bullet points and used learned material appropriately.

Listening and Writing

Many candidates had prepared a generic introduction to Section 2: Writing, which gave them a good start. A number of candidates introduced each paragraph with a suitable phrase, eg *secondo me, innanzitutto, in conclusione*, which assisted them in producing essays that flowed well. Many seemed well prepared in the work/study topic and frequently made reference to a gap year abroad in their answers.

Component 2 Performance: Talking

All presentations were well prepared and well chosen. There were a few different topics from the usual ones of school, career, healthy lifestyles and adult learners brought a new perspective to the test.

All the presentations were interesting and the follow-up questions were dealt with very effectively.

On many occasions candidates were able to recover from any hesitation. Candidates gave extended answers to questions and showed very confident handling and manipulation of the language. All candidates were able to sustain the conversation element and all had very good content.

Candidates were able to recover from any hesitation and to ask for help, eg repetition of a question in Italian.

All the conversations were spontaneous, with no suggestion of being over-rehearsed. At no time did the interlocutor merely ask questions from a script. There was a real sense of listening to a real conversation.

There was a huge range of vocabulary and grammatical constructions in evidence — use of subjunctive, command of compound tenses etc — and many examples of the candidates' ability to sustain a natural conversation. All tests were completed within the recommended time.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Reading/translation

In Question 3 (What examples does the writer give to prove that the mess that younger children make is in fact tactical and reasoned?) only the more able candidates gained all three marks, with the passive form *Le scarpe vanno messe là* causing particular difficulty.

Although Question 11, translation, seemed accessible to most candidates, the final sense unit (*Adesso butto via* …) proved challenging, with many failing to recognise the first person present tense of the verb *buttare*. This sense unit was frequently mistranslated by an imperative: 'Now throw away all your stuff.'

Directed Writing

Candidates frequently had difficulty in producing the Italian for 'exchange partner'.
In response to Scenario 1, bullet point 3 'How you got on with your exchange partner', candidates tended to refer to friends they had made and how they got on with them. In this case, the examiners considered the bullet point to have been addressed, but only minimally. In Scenario 2, bullet point 1, some candidates failed to address the second part of the bullet.

Past tenses of *piacere* caused difficulties and many candidates struggled to express the idea that they 'got on well with' their partner. They had similar difficulties with the imperfect tense forms *si chiamava* and *si trovava*.

There were several examples of native speakers writing fluent and accurate answers, sometimes writing two or three times as much as necessary but failing to address all parts of each bullet point.

Listening and Writing

Item 1, Question (b) 'How is the attitude of her university teachers different from school?' proved challenging, and many candidates based their answers on general knowledge rather than the Italian they had heard.

Almost all candidates answered Item 1, Question (g), the overall purpose question, correctly. In Item 2, Question (b), candidates needed to be specific: Anna says that she is able to save to **buy** a flat. 'Pay for a flat' was not sufficient.

In Section 2 Writing, candidates generally gave relevant answers, although there were some instances of inserting a learned paragraph that did not answer either of the questions. Candidates often used *per/di/a* unnecessarily before an infinitive.

Component 2 Performance: Talking

All the candidates dealt very well with all aspects of this assessment. Normally the conversation is the less successful part of the assessment, but the candidates were able to cope with the demands of both sections of the test very effectively. There was no area of the assessment which proved difficult for candidates.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Reading/translation
Question 10, the overall purpose question was tackled well by candidates. The difficulties encountered in the final sense unit of Question 11 (translation) highlight the importance of looking closely at verb endings, especially when the subject pronoun is not used.

Directed Writing
Centres should continue to encourage candidates to address all bullet points as there is a penalty for failure to do so. Even confident candidates should be trained to do this.

Listening and Writing
In Writing, centres should encourage candidates to use the stimulus as a framework on which to build a considered response. Candidates should be encouraged to check verb forms and tenses carefully, since these frequently prove decisive in allocating a mark.

Component 2 Performance: Talking
Candidates must use detailed and complex language at Higher in most parts of the performance. At these levels, long lists of more than two or three items or repetitions of straightforward descriptions are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary.

Interlocutors should try and avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able confident candidates. Asking more open questions adds to the spontaneity of the performance.

Centres should develop strategies to enable the candidates to recover from any hesitation and to ask for help in the foreign language.

Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the Presentation and the Conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of Higher as provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance: talking, General assessment information*.

Interlocutors should ask questions that follow on from the presentation and then move on to other contexts, which allows for personalisation and choice. Candidates should be discouraged from repeating large amounts of material which was in the presentation. Centres should ensure that questions are chosen so that the conversation flows naturally and gives further opportunity for personalisation and choice.

It is recommended that interlocutors ask a range of questions adapted to the responses from, and the ability of, each candidate, rather than asking the same questions to the whole cohort. A wider variety of questions in the conversation can aid candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected (in line with Appendix 1 of the *Modern Languages performance: talking, General assessment information* which is available from the CfE section of the SQA website).

Following on from a lesson on a particular topic, an example of sensible preparation towards the Conversation could be to invite candidates to think about the type of questions the interlocutor is likely to ask them about this topic. They then could think about the key words in Italian that would be in those questions (eg question words). Candidates could then review the vocabulary studied in the lesson and try and answer those questions.

Candidates should also be aware that questions in Italian can be asked in a variety of ways, hence the importance of identifying key words. The teacher/lecturer could help candidates practise understanding questions orally by requiring them to identify key words in a list of random questions he/she speaks out to the class. During the assessment, the interlocutor could use some of these questions, possibly rephrasing them, and also some unrehearsed questions on this topic as part of a more natural conversation at this level. However, candidates must not know the exact questions and/or their order in advance. This would be detrimental to the Sustaining the Conversation element of the Conversation.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0

Number of resulted entries in 2015	104

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	76.0%	76.0%	79	71
B	14.4%	90.4%	15	60
C	9.6%	100.0%	10	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	-	0	-

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional value of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. The course assessment proved to be easier than intended in the Listening Component. The grade boundaries were raised by 1 mark for Grade A and 1 mark for Grade C to reflect this.

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.