



Course Report 2017 – External Assessment

Subject	Latin
Level	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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

The number of entrants were slightly down on last year, but the number of centres delivering Advanced Higher Latin this year increased slightly. It was also encouraging to see representation increasing across the length and breadth of the country, with new centres delivering in the Highlands and the Borders areas.

Component 1 — question paper: Literary Appreciation

Candidates had been well prepared and were able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills successfully. The overall standard was high. Candidates continued to cope well with the increased focus on the Latin texts, and indeed they seemed to thrive on the challenge.

The most noticeable feature was an improvement in examination technique. Candidates seemed to have a more confident grasp of what the questions required (with one or two exceptions), few responses strayed outside the specified line references, and excessive length was generally avoided. Understandably, some candidates were still keen to ‘hedge their bets’, especially in questions on literary style, but generally the length of responses was more carefully tailored to fit the question and the number of marks available.

Candidates also seemed to manage their time more efficiently, and whilst there was still a lot to do, there was no sign of anyone having failed to finish due to lack of time. Almost every candidate was able to complete the essay question, and do so at considerable length.

The open nature of the questions meant that candidates of all abilities were able to demonstrate their knowledge, and enthusiasm for the texts studied. Indeed, the essay gave some of those who had struggled with the shorter questions a real chance to shine and pick up valuable marks. The highest marks (17 – 20), however, were reserved for those who managed to inject some analysis and evaluation into their discussion and turn what could otherwise become a long list of points into a well-honed argument.

In previous years there appeared to be a trend for candidates to submit no response to the penultimate question of this paper. This year, this question was deliberately structured in a short, succinct way to encourage candidates to attempt the question rather than miss it out completely. This approach was judged to have worked well.

Ovid and love poetry

The majority of centres continue to choose this option and to prepare their candidates well. From the quality of the responses, it was clear the candidates had enjoyed the course and were keen to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. As a result, the overall standard of performance here was high.

Letters and letter-writing

A few centres chose this option. This continues to represent a significant improvement on numbers for this option under previous arrangements.

Even more encouraging was the high standard of performance. It was gratifying to see this option attracting some of the strongest candidates, as well as some of those who were weaker across the board, and it was impressive to see it handled so knowledgeably and skilfully across the ability range.

Component 2 — question paper: Translating

This year's passage really tested the candidates' knowledge of grammar and syntax. However, every candidate gave it their best shot: a significant number performed extremely well, and the vast majority managed to finish the passage. For those who did not finish there were no signs that a shortage of time was to blame.

A number of candidates who scored well in the other components did see their marks drop here; but by the same token some candidates who struggled elsewhere proved to be very effective translators who were able to pick up valuable marks. Overall, the passage was judged to have been very effective in discriminating at the top end, whilst remaining accessible to the wider ability range.

Component 3 — project–dissertation

Overall, the candidates performed well. There was a lot of good work and some that was truly excellent: the best was of undergraduate standard. As in previous years, the gap between top and bottom was fairly considerable, but even the weakest had something to commend.

All of the candidates were able to communicate interest and enthusiasm for their topic and the pride they took in producing an independent piece of work was evident.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1 — question paper: Literary Appreciation

Ovid and love poetry

In this option, question 6(d) proved an effective discriminator. Nearly all were able to access some of the marks by explaining Ovid's claims, but only those who also included some evaluation were to achieve full marks.

Candidates tackled question 8(b) with particular confidence and considerable success. The comparison question, 3(b), prompted some thoughtful responses, as did question 10(c) on the English text. In the essay, all agreed with the claim that love poets express a wide range of emotions, although it would have been possible to argue otherwise.

Letters and letter writing

Again, candidates enjoyed literary analysis questions, handling question 3(a) with a consistent degree of success.

The comparison questions 3(b) and 4(b) were also handled well. The best essays here differentiated intelligently between the persona letter-writers wanted to project and the inadvertent insights they offered into their personalities.

Component 2 — question paper: Translating

Generally the first two paragraphs were found to be easier than the third, although there were some whose performance improved as the passage progressed and who fared better in the second half than in the first.

Component 3: project — dissertation

Generally, the guidance offered to candidates seems to have been very effective this year — far fewer fell down on the technicalities. Effective guidance did not compromise originality, and even where centres had clearly promoted a ‘house style’, content and approach continued to be diverse and to reflect the candidates’ own efforts and abilities.

It was especially pleasing to note that most had heeded the advice to quote in Latin, with many quoting from at least five different sources. The highest marks, however, were awarded to those who actually engaged with the Latin and commented on points of significance. If candidates fell short here, it was usually not due to a lack of Latin but because they chose their extracts unwisely; quoted at excessive length; omitted to include an accurate translation (whether their own or from a published work); and failed to comment on significant details, especially where some remarks on date and genre would have been relevant and appropriate.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1 - question paper: Literary Appreciation

Ovid and love poetry

Question 9(b) caused a few to falter. This was the only question where candidates tripped up because they did not pay enough attention to the lines specified in the question. However, where candidates were careful here, they tended to do very well.

Letters and letter writing

A few missed out on full marks in question 4 (c)(ii) because they failed to address their comments to the modern world.

Component 2 - question paper: Translating

Where candidates tripped up, they did so in a variety of different ways and for a variety of different reasons. For the most part, it was blocks 17, 18, 20 and 21 that proved the most effective discriminators. However, no single block proved universally difficult. Some candidates sailed through 17 and 18 only to stumble in block 19, whilst others took 19 to 20 in their stride, having faltered in 17 and 18. Most candidates were able to pick up some points here and very few scored no points.

In terms of grammar and syntax, most errors were ultimately due to candidates' patchy knowledge of case endings and/or their inability to scan ahead and analyse complex sentences. As a result, simple concepts like singulars and plurals and subject/verb agreement accounted for many of the marks lost. 'ei qui' was not handled well, being frequently rendered as singular, whilst the gerundive caused considerable confusion, with the horsemen refreshing themselves as often as the horses.

There was a lot of inconsistency in candidates' approach to the historic present and 'se' was all too often translated as emphatic. 'ad unum' inspired some intelligent guesswork, as well as the occasional stab in the dark ('a single infantryman killed them all'). In the heat of the moment, a surprising number lost sight of the clues contained in the English sections, and Curio managed to survive his death on more than one occasion.

Component 3: project-dissertation

Secondary sources proved somewhat problematic this year. Several pieces seemed rather thin and under-researched in this regard. This was especially the case where candidates chose a topic with which they were already familiar, whether from Higher Latin or other courses. Such candidates were much more likely to write 'off the top of their heads', so to speak, whereas those choosing a more unusual topic almost inevitably had to do their research more thoroughly.

A surprising number had clearly read quite widely and yet made no reference at all to their secondary sources. No matter how impressive a bibliography looked, secondary sources had to be properly cited — either in footnotes or end notes — before full credit could be given.

There was also an increased tendency to rely on websites that were either very generic or of dubious academic value. Plenty of excellent material is available online but candidates have to use their critical judgement when selecting appropriate material. One or two even used historical novels as sources without any acknowledgement that these were works of fiction not fact. Examining fictional responses to the Roman world is potentially very fruitful so long as candidates make their intentions clear. Factors that may limit a candidate's access to appropriate material are always taken into account, but as far as possible candidates are

expected to engage with current scholarship, using a range of academic texts, including both books and websites.

Spelling and grammar were generally good, but in a few cases it was sad to see a candidate's hard work undermined by incoherent expression and poor organisation. Some also suffered from being written in an overly colloquial or casual register.

Finally, a lack of in-depth analysis and evaluation led not only the weakest, but also some otherwise conscientious students to fall short of the heights they hoped to achieve. Choice of topic had a big part to play here. Broad topics tended to fare less well than those with a clearly defined focus, and several candidates compromised their chances from the outset by choosing titles that were so wide open they could hardly hope to achieve any depth, let alone the complex analysis and evaluation required at this level.

An awkwardly framed question was never penalised where the content was in keeping with the specified aim. Problems only arose where content bore very little relation to the stated title. In such cases, the candidate would have been well advised to rethink the title to make it a better fit.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1 — question paper: Literary Appreciation

It is clear that centres are preparing their candidates well. The following pointers are intended simply as reminders or as tips for new centres.

- ◆ Candidates should have a thorough knowledge of the set texts so that they can answer questions on content, theme, style technique and tone.
- ◆ Practice in the skills of analysis and evaluation is also important, and as questions on imagery often prove tricky, some extra guidance might be helpful here.
- ◆ Questions often ask candidates to compare and contrast, so they should be aware of the themes and generic features that link the texts as well as the distinctive qualities that differentiate them.
- ◆ It is always worth reminding candidates that their answers must be based on the lines cited in the question and that drawing upon material outside the cited lines will not gain any marks.
- ◆ Candidates should also continue to be encouraged to take the number of marks available into account when formulating their answers. Continuing to make additional points long after the maximum number of marks has been achieved risks wasting valuable time.

- ◆ Conversely, two or three lines are hardly likely to satisfy the requirements of a six-mark question.
- ◆ As a general rule of thumb, ‘explain’ questions (often worth an odd number of marks) will generally require one substantiated point per mark, whereas in questions asking for analysis or evaluation (usually worth an even number of marks), there will usually be two marks available per point — one for identifying and exemplifying a relevant feature, and one for making an appropriate critical or evaluative comment.
- ◆ In the essay question, points need to be substantiated with reference to the text. Quotation in Latin is not an absolute requirement, but it is highly desirable and is to be encouraged at this level. Again, additional marks are available for developed points, but as the essay is marked holistically, a long list of points will not necessarily equate to 20 marks. To be sure of accessing the top marks (17–20), candidates need to build some analysis and evaluation into their discussion.

Component 2 — question paper: Translating

- ◆ Provision of a word list means that assessment focuses more sharply than ever on candidates’ grasp of grammar and their translating skills. For the most part, it will not be possible to decode the meaning from the vocabulary alone, so it is essential that candidates have a sound working knowledge of the prescribed accidence and syntax. At the very least, they need to be able to differentiate between singular and plural. Regular practice in translating should help them develop the more advanced skills needed, including scanning ahead, unpacking subordinate clauses, and anticipating what is likely to come next. A reminder about how to handle the reflexive pronoun in indirect statement might be useful; likewise some tips on how to handle the historic present and advice on the use of the gerundive.
- ◆ Finally, a reminder to pay closer attention to the title and linking passages in English might be timely, since these are intended to keep candidates on track and often contain significant clues. If a translation ends up contradicting the English, then something has gone wrong and a re-think is in order.

Component 3 — project–dissertation

- ◆ It is crucial to choose a topic that lends itself to the type of in-depth analysis, argument and evaluation required at AH level. In particular, there needs to be scope for detailed discussion of texts in Latin. Broad topics that cannot be covered in any depth within the 4000-word limit should be avoided, unless they can be approached from a specific angle (eg not ‘Roman Women’ but ‘The impact of Augustus’ legislation on women’s lives’).
- ◆ Whilst historical and social themes are always welcome, candidates should not be discouraged from considering topics based on language and literature. Far from being more difficult, such topics often offer rich opportunities for success, especially as it is generally easier to engage with Latin when dealing with a literary theme.

- ◆ Whatever the topic, particular care should be taken when framing the title. Relevance is very much a matter of degree, but even taking a very positive approach, it is difficult to award marks for relevant content if issues raised in the title are not discussed in the body of the text. Allowance is made for awkward wording or occasional lapses, but candidates should be encouraged to make changes if the original title ends up at odds with the content.
- ◆ There is no requirement to include modern comparisons unless these are integral to the theme of the dissertation.
- ◆ To demonstrate effective use of primary sources, good candidates will generally consult at least five such sources. However, what is considered appropriate will necessarily vary according to the nature of topic. An analysis of attitudes towards Cleopatra would be expected to range more widely than, for example, a study of Virgil's similes. However, even where the focus is on a single author and/or text, it is usually possible to include others by way of comparison or counter-example.
- ◆ Greek writers can be cited, as can archaeological and other physical remains, provided the requirement to use Latin is met.
- ◆ However, whilst quoting in Latin is a requirement, it is not in itself sufficient for top marks. Quotations also need to be carefully selected, accurately translated, and quoted at an appropriate length — large chunks should be avoided. Above all, there needs to be some sign of engagement with the Latin. This might involve drawing out an implication or commenting on a significant word choice or rhetorical device. In other words, the Latin should be integral to the argument and not appear like an added extra.
- ◆ Ideally too, there should be some sign that the candidate is aware of date, genre and potential bias, especially when dealing with a historical topic.
- ◆ To gain full credit for the secondary sources listed in their bibliography, candidates must refer to these sources in the course of their discussion. Quotation is not required or even desired, but candidates need to indicate where their information comes from, so that their claims can be verified and substantiated. This can best be done by citing the relevant secondary sources in footnotes or endnotes, using standard referencing conventions.
- ◆ Good candidates will generally use ten or more secondary sources, including both books and articles, whether accessed online or in print. However, quality is taken into consideration as well as quantity. A total of ten secondary sources dominated by generic websites and works of general interest will not attract as much credit as a similar total that also includes scholarly works and specialised academic texts. The aim is for candidates to demonstrate an awareness of the research and scholarship surrounding their topic.
- ◆ Again, issues of availability and access are taken into account, but where candidates have easy access to well stocked libraries they should be encouraged to make the fullest possible use of such resources.

- ◆ No matter how well researched, a dissertation cannot achieve high marks without detailed analysis and a developed argument. Credit is available here for a clear, programmatic introduction, a logical and coherent structure and a valid conclusion based on evidence and sound reasoning.
- ◆ When compiling the bibliography, primary and secondary sources should be clearly differentiated. Primary sources should be cited by author and work and not just, as often happens, by the reference used in the dissertation. Where a Latin text has been accessed online, it is still important to cite the author and the work, as well as the name of the website, the web address and the date last accessed.
- ◆ Finally, the word count should exclude quotations, footnotes, captions, bibliography, and contents page.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	79
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	54
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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	51.9%	51.9%	28	119
B	27.8%	79.6%	15	102
C	9.3%	88.9%	5	85
D	5.6%	94.4%	3	76
No award	5.6%	-	3	-

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.