



## Course Report 2016

Subject	English
Level	National 5

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

### Component 1: Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Both 2016 question papers performed as expected, and Grade Boundaries were set as intended. In general, candidates were able to provide answers for all questions in the papers, and were able to complete the tasks in the time given.

A significant, and encouraging, number of candidates again accessed the top end of the mark range. The high number of candidates achieving A – C grades mirrors performance in 2014 and 2015. Only a small proportion of candidates achieved no award (fewer than 8%). This suggests that, in general, appropriate levels of presentation were achieved. However, in a small number of cases there was some evidence of 'over-presentation' where candidates were unable to provide responses that were relevant to the questions that had been set. Encouraging numbers of candidates achieved success at National 5 after having completed National 4 in a previous session.

Candidates again coped well with the high-tariff questions throughout the question paper in both Paper 1 and in the Textual Analysis section of Paper 2. There was clear evidence that candidates had been well prepared for the demands of these questions, especially in the Scottish Textual Analysis.

In Paper 1, feedback suggested that candidates found the passage on the film *Frozen* to be immediately accessible, relevant, and interesting. Candidates approached the questions with commitment, and, in general, succeeded in answering all questions. A small number did not complete questions 8 and 9.

### Component 2: Question Paper: Critical Reading

In question paper 2, candidates had been prepared thoroughly and effectively for both the Scottish Textual Analysis and the Critical Essay.

Performance was very similar across the options in the extract-based textual analysis, the questions proving to be of fairly equal demand. In terms of uptake, the most popular option, overall, was the poet Norman MacCaig. Second in popularity was the poet Carol Ann Duffy. There was an increase in uptake for drama again this year: *Sailmaker* was the third most popular choice overall. The poet Edwin Morgan was fourth, and then the drama text *Tally's Blood*. After that, the poet Jackie Kay was followed by the play *Bold Girls*.

Prose was the least chosen genre of the Scottish texts. The most popular writer in this sub-section was Anne Donovan, followed by the novel *The Cone Gatherers*. Comparatively few candidates chose Iain Crichton Smith or *Kidnapped*. Similar to the last two years, a very small number of candidates opted for *Gideon Mack*.

Some candidates opted to answer on Scottish texts for both the extract-based Textual Analysis and the Critical Essay, but most did not. The range of literature covered for Critical Essay was very similar to that of Intermediate 2 and Standard Grade Credit. Given that most candidates selected Poetry for the Textual Analysis, in the Critical Essay, Prose was the most popular option. Roughly equal numbers chose Drama and Poetry. There was a slightly increased uptake for Media, but the numbers selecting the Language section were extremely small.

The most popular literature selected for Critical Essay will be familiar: *Of Mice and Men*, *Lord of the Flies*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *An Inspector Calls*, *The Test*, *On The Sidewalk Bleeding*, *Glasgow 5 March 1971*. It is interesting to note, however, that markers were presented with quite a wide range of texts in their marking. Prose fiction included: Mark Hadon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, *The Lighthouse* by Agnes Owens, *Face* by Benjamin Zephaniah, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hoggeini, *All the Loved Ones* by Dilys Rose, *Greensleeves* by Alan Spence, *At the Bar* by William McIlvanney, *My Polish Teacher's Tie* by Helen Dunmore, *A Picture of Zoe* by Liam Stewart, *Superman* and *Paula Brown's New Snowsuit* by Sylvia Plath.

Non-fiction was represented mostly by the writings of George Orwell. Other texts included *Sudan's Cruel and Slow Starvation* by Hilary Andersson, *Spiritual Damage* by Fergal Keane, and *Gin Shops* from Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*.

Some markers observed that Shakespeare (mostly *Macbeth*) and Miller (*A View from the Bridge*) were chosen in roughly equal numbers by candidates who answered questions from the Drama section. Other Drama texts included *The Letterbox* by Ann Marie Di Mambro, *Educating Rita* and *Blood Brothers* by Willy Russell.

Poetry included Owen and Sassoon, Seamus Heaney, Roger McGough, Wole Soyinka, and some not previously seen, for example *The Terrorist He Watches* by Wislawa Szymborska.

Texts chosen for Media tended to be films rather than TV drama. Included were the films of Danny Boyle, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Psycho*, *The Dark Knight*, and *Jaws*. Examples of new texts in this area were the films *127 Hours*, and *Slow West*.

There were also some texts that are more usually associated with Higher — *The Great Gatsby*, *Othello*, *1984*, *Catcher In The Rye*, *Heart of Darkness* — perhaps indicating a change of level for some candidates, or mixed-level teaching.

### **Component 3: Portfolio: Writing**

Centres are familiar with the requirements of a Portfolio of writing in English qualifications. Historically, Folios were features of both Standard Grade and Intermediate courses. Candidate performance here was very similar to that of last year.

For the 'Broadly Creative' piece, the most popular type of writing is that which deals with significant moments in candidates' own lives. It should be noted that writing that could be categorised as 'personal experience' (the type which was common in Standard Grade English) is perfectly acceptable at National 5: there is no requirement for the writing to contain explicit 'reflection,' as used to be the case for Intermediate 2. Some candidates

submitted pieces of short fiction, often set in war zones, or involving crime situations, or from the genres of science fiction or fantasy. A few candidates submitted poetry, drama scripts, or pieces written in Scots.

In 'Broadly Discursive' pieces, the most common approach is for candidates to take an issue-based topic, conduct research, and then to write about it in a persuasive or argumentative way. However, some candidates achieved success this year by writing information-based reports on topics that had caught their interest and which they had gone on to research. These included biographies.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

#### **Component 1: Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation**

Question 1: Most candidates were able to show their understanding in this reasonably straightforward opening question which did, however, require some inference.

Question 2: Candidates coped well with this question, which required the skills of analysis. Most were able to provide one example plus an appropriate analytical comment.

Question 4: Although this was a four-mark analysis question, candidates performed well, correctly identifying two examples of the writer's use of language, and accompanying each example with a relevant analytical comment.

Question 6: This was considered to be a challenging question, but many candidates performed very well with it, often achieving at least three out of a possible four marks. The challenge in the question was a requirement for candidates to infer meaning from 'Elsa is not just 'doe-eyed and partial to shiny dresses,' before going on to comment on the writer's use of language.

Question 7: Again, this was a fairly challenging question, but it was largely completed well by candidates. For two marks, a full explanation of 'why the Oscar evening was so memorable or such a success for Idina Menzel' was required. Many candidates did provide a full explanation, making two clear points in their answers.

#### **Component 2: Question paper: Critical Reading**

As was the case last year, candidates had been very well prepared for the extract-based textual analysis, and showed signs of having revised thoroughly. For the most part, they scored highly.

Most candidates performed well in the questions on the extracts in the Scottish Textual Analysis. Candidates were successful in their demonstration of understanding and analysis skills in this element.

In their response to the final 8-mark question in the Textual Analysis, many candidates successfully adopted a clear three-stage approach ie commonality, extract, elsewhere.

Most were able to support their points in both Textual Analysis and Critical Essay sections with direct quotation from, or clear references to, the texts they had studied.

Candidates did not appear to have difficulty in finding a suitable question from Section 2 Critical Essay. Essays were, in the main, full, detailed and relevant, met the required standards of technical accuracy, and displayed knowledge of the texts.

### **Component 3: Portfolio: Writing**

The vast majority of candidates had clearly worked hard on their portfolios and were able to submit two pieces of writing which demonstrated their skills in writing for different purposes. While acknowledging that candidates have the opportunity to re-draft and improve pieces, the standard of written English was often high.

Personal experience was handled in sensitive and mature ways, and ideas and opinions were often expressed with a degree of developed thought. Some candidates showed impressive engagement with current national and international affairs for example Scottish independence, EU referendum, the US presidential campaigns, conflict in Syria.

For the 'Broadly Creative' piece, more candidates attempted personal writing than creative writing; however, there was some very strong creative writing to be seen: short stories often had clearly established narratives and characterisation together with genre features.

Sufficient technical accuracy was achieved by the vast majority of candidates.

Virtually all candidates word processed their pieces, and the standard of presentation was again high. Most managed to use and to identify any sources used.

It was very encouraging to note that attempts to diversify — for example poetry or drama submissions — were often very successful.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation**

Question 3: For this question, the requirement was to give five things we learn about the Disney organisation in lines 11–25. The key focus was 'the Disney organisation.' Many candidates simply offered things we learned *in general* from lines 11–25.

Question 5: Although this question on structure was reasonably well done, a significant number of candidates struggled to achieve the second mark out of two.

Question 8: Most candidates had difficulty with this question. Often, marks were lost because both sides of an identified contrast were not explained. Many candidates were not able to provide/deal with two examples of contrast.

Question 9: Candidates were required to identify 'five things we learn' about Idina Menzel's personality from the passage as a whole. Most correctly identified some aspects of Menzel's personality, but many had difficulty identifying five.

Overall, the most common difficulty for candidates was in the need to demonstrate understanding through the use of their own words.

## **Component 2: Question paper: Critical Reading**

In the questions on the Textual Analysis extracts, some responses were too thin in terms of analytical comments.

Some candidates did not concentrate tightly on the key focus of the final question in the Scottish Textual Analysis.

In Critical Essay, some candidates did not provide a line of thought that was strongly relevant to the demands of the question selected. This is a key requirement.

In their analysis of references from texts in the Critical Essay, some candidates concentrated only on meaning, rather than analysis of impact.

Evaluative comments were often not fully realised in Critical Essays.

Time management was an issue for a small number of candidates.

A few candidates had difficulty with following the genre requirements of the paper. Some did not follow the instruction for Critical Essay that 'Your essay must be on a different genre from that chosen in Section 1,' and others selected a question from a section which did not match the genre of their selected text.

## **Component 3: Portfolio: Writing**

Some candidates found difficulty in ensuring that their discursive writing was sufficiently ideas/research based.

In broadly discursive writing, some candidates found difficulty in constructing a reasonably cohesive and coherent line of thought.

Some candidates did not acknowledge sources consulted.

In personal writing, some candidates relied heavily on an account of events at the expense of an exploration of thoughts/feelings/reactions.

A few candidates did not organise their responses using a clear paragraph structure.

A few candidates found difficulty in producing responses that were of sufficient length and development.

Some candidates did not adhere to the word limit.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation**

Candidates should read each question carefully to ensure that they follow the key demands of the questions.

Candidates should attempt to adhere to the requirement for own words where required to demonstrate understanding of important ideas in the passage. This is indicated in bold in questions where this is needed. Direct lifts of words/expressions from the passage will gain no marks here. Candidates should attempt to ensure that their full understanding is expressed.

In questions that require the analysis of the writer's use of language, the simplest model to follow is: reference plus comment. At National 5 level, appropriate references are rewarded with a mark, and a further mark is given for an appropriate analytical comment. Candidates should attempt to explain their analytical comments as clearly and as fully as they can.

The use of bullet points, etc, might assist candidates in the structuring of answers for high-tariff questions.

Wide reading, and, in particular, reading good quality non-fiction will greatly assist candidates to prepare for this part of the course assessment.

### **Component 2: Question Paper: Critical Reading**

Candidates should try to have a sense of the 'work as a whole' in terms of a play, novel, collection of stories or poems, while preparing for the final question in the Scottish Textual Analysis (key ideas, themes, etc).

Candidates should be aware of the three-part requirement of the final question in the Scottish Textual Analysis, ie commonality, extract, elsewhere.

Candidates should be reminded of the requirements for choosing a question from the Critical Essay section of the paper. This must be from a different genre to the Scottish Textual Analysis.

Candidates should be reminded to stay relevant to the question in their responses in the Critical Essay.

### **Component 3: Portfolio: Writing**

Candidates are reminded to work within stated word limits. The maximum is 1,000 words; there is no minimum length. A penalty will be applied to candidates who produce work that exceeds the word limit by more than 10%.

All sources used in preparation for pieces of writing must be declared. Time taken on the organisation and acknowledgement of sources improves presentation, assists markers, and helps to develop good study habits.

When submitting poetry, it is acceptable to submit more than one poem, but such poems must be related — a group of poems will be considered as one piece.

Clarity of structure, and the use of clear paragraphing, should be encouraged in candidates' writing.

A degree of personalisation and choice seems to be beneficial when considering topics for discursive writing. Furthermore, local issues often have powerful relevance for candidates.

In discursive writing, sufficient research should be undertaken so that the candidate's argument can be fully explored.

In creative writing, candidates should be aware of, and attempt to employ, the key features of the genre chosen.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	44794
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	45856
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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	36.0%	36.0%	16516	70
B	28.4%	64.4%	13019	60
C	22.4%	86.8%	10278	50
D	5.4%	92.2%	2462	45
No award	7.8%	-	3581	-

## 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.