

May 2013 subject reports

## Italian ab initio

### Overall grade boundaries

#### Standard level

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 12	13 - 29	30 - 43	44 - 58	59 - 73	74 - 86	87 - 100

### Internal assessment

#### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 11	12 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 21	22 - 25

#### Individual oral

Please ensure that the visual stimuli presented to the candidates are directly linked to the target culture. Words should only appear on the visual stimulus if they are a natural part of the scene, for example, shop or street signs. Any such words should be in the target language.

Introductions, even if they do not form an official part of the oral, should take place in the target language. The candidate should introduce himself/ herself in the target language giving name and candidate number.

Teachers are reminded to 'guide' candidates through the oral by informing them of when one Part is over and when another is about to begin.

In order that candidates can access the upper markbands for both criteria, teachers are encouraged to intervene if necessary and move the candidate on in order that the three parts are completed in timely fashion.

Teachers are reminded to ask the two compulsory questions on the Written Assignment after the description and follow-up questions on the visual stimulus. It is important to ask these questions because the student will possess the necessary vocabulary to handle both open ended and more direct questions on the Written Assignment and thus stands a better chance to access the higher markbands in Criterion B, interactive and receptive skills.

The style of questions chosen by the teacher is important and must be one which allows stronger candidates to access the upper markbands while allowing weaker candidates to feel comfortable throughout.

## The range and suitability of the work submitted

For moderation purposes centres submitted where possible a suitable range of candidates' work. The overall quality of the recordings has definitely improved and only a very small number had background noise. It is rare nowadays that a candidate's voice is barely audible.

Occasionally a moderator does not receive all the necessary material but the administrative team at IB are always on hand to sort out any problems.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

This year the exam was marked using two sets of criteria as opposed to the three used in previous years. Criterion A covered the productive skills – pronunciation, use of vocabulary and grammar – and was marked out of 10 and Criterion B assessed the interactive and receptive skills with the mark range being from 0-15. The maximum mark was therefore 25. The language in which the two sets of criteria was expressed was simple and straightforward. Another innovation came at the end of Part one when the teacher-examiner asked the candidates two questions on their written assignment.

As usual, this year provided a good range of performances. The excellent candidates handled all three parts of the exam with ease and spontaneity. They had the range of vocabulary to be able to deal with a variety of topics and a knowledge of grammar that enabled them to communicate both basic and more complex ideas. The good teacher-examiner acted as the catalyst for them to showcase their ability. Excellent candidates do make mistakes but full marks can still be awarded for a high level performance. The weaker candidates inevitably commit more errors, getting adjectival and noun endings wrong, they are less sure of their verbs and not always able to use past tenses. To get into the higher bands of criterion A candidates should demonstrate that they are able to use more than just the present tense, although it is also vitally important that teacher-examiners ask some questions to try and elicit the use of past tenses. Unfortunately this is not always the case. The tendency of the weaker candidates is to produce, as one would expect a rather mixed performance, some reasonable passages, some very poor ones. Often a telling sign is when their description of the visual, which they have had time to prepare, is very brief and the examiner has to intervene after a minute or so. The examiner is obliged to prompt a lot and re-ask and rephrase basic questions. Weaker candidates are rarely able to take the initiative as they do not have the linguistic tools to do so.

Many teachers do a very good job of examining and assessing their candidates. The comments they make about performance should serve as a guide to the marks they award. In general there is a correlation between the marks and the comments. On occasions the comments are not an accurate reflection of the marks and this can go both ways. Some comments are glowing and high marks are awarded when the performance of the candidate is very average or even poor. Other times the comments are very complimentary yet the marks do not match up and are lower than one would expect. The moderators of course have to make up their own mind but the comments can be very helpful or unhelpful as the case may be. Under Criterion B a teacher-examiner should realise when a number of questions have to be repeated or rephrased because a candidate is struggling to comprehend and/or

slow to respond. It is unlikely therefore that this candidate is going to be in the 10-12 or 13-15 category and more likely to fall into the 4-6 or 7-9 category. This is going to be particularly relevant when the questions asked are more basic and straightforward. In the same way it would be unlikely for a candidate who only uses the present tense to be placed in the 7-8 or 9-10 bands under Criterion A.

## Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates need to prepare themselves for the oral. Teachers need to do the same irrespective of the number of times they have conducted the exam. They need to think of what kinds of questions they can ask, focusing especially on more open-ended questions. The role of the teacher-examiner is to get the best out of each candidate and most examiners do this. Some, however, can be too domineering and interrupt and say too much, understandable perhaps with very weak candidates who are struggling but not with very good candidates. Below are suggestions that are intended to help with the conduct of the exam.

1. Please do not correct the candidates or spoon feed them with words or ideas. Perhaps this might lead teachers into thinking that the candidate has produced them when in fact they have mimicked the teacher.

2. It is better to have a selection of visuals in which something is actually happening. At least the candidate has something to describe. A fruit stall in a market for example is rarely going to produce anything above the mundane. A candidate can say 'Posso vedere mele, arance, banane'. Given the time they have they could probably count them as well. A really good candidate could go into the history of bananas or why they are good for us or why it is not environmentally friendly to transport bananas thousands of miles from one country to another. Of course all this might not be necessary if the selected visuals actually have scenes containing various activities. There is perhaps no need to dwell further on this point.

3. Teachers should allow the candidate to describe the visual without interruption. Weaker candidates might have very little to say and stop after about a minute. This means that the teacher-examiner has time to ask a number of follow-up questions to elicit information that has not been mentioned. There is no set rule about how many questions should be asked but some teachers ask just two or three when there is the time and opportunity to ask far more. Remember that the assessment must not exceed 10 minutes.

4. Now that teachers have to ask their candidates two questions on their Written Assignment, it is much more obvious when Part one ends. This was not always the case in previous years. Some teachers asked more than a couple of questions on the Written Assignment and consequently took up too much time and this meant that very little time was left for the general conversation – Part three. The worst case scenario was where only one general topic was discussed in Part three instead of at least two or three. One topic is certainly not enough. Some candidates may perform better on some topic areas than on others. You would expect candidates to prepare for certain questions but do not allow them to trot out pre-learned speeches especially when the latter half of the speech is no longer relevant to the question that has been asked.

5. Some teachers continue to ask far too many closed questions in both parts of the exam. Everyone does it occasionally but it is not difficult to ask even the weakest candidates some basic open-ended questions. To score marks they have to produce something of their own, reiterating the words of the teacher serves no purpose.

6. The majority of teachers do respect the time allocated to each part of the exam. Now and again an oral goes on for 12-13 minutes, which is far too long.

## Further comments

Moderators make every attempt to be sympathetic to the candidates but they cannot make allowances for an infringement of the guidelines and/or poor examining technique. They can only assess what they hear and should point out any matters of concern in their feedback to the centres.

## Written assignment

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 15	16 - 17	18 - 20

### Written assignment

#### Choice of topic

The topic selected for the written assignment **must** come from the prescribed topics as detailed in the guide:

<b>Individual and society</b>	<b>Leisure and work</b>	<b>Urban and rural environment</b>
Daily routines	Employment	Environmental concerns
Education	Entertainment	Global issues
Food and drink	Holidays	Neighbourhood
Personal details, appearance and character	Media	Physical geography
Physical Health	Sport	Town and services

Relationships	Technology	Weather
Shopping	Transport	

Teachers should guide students to choose topics which are sharply focused and manageable in the number of words available (200 -300).

The topic should be clearly stated in the title of the written assignment. It is recommended that the target culture (country /countries) is mentioned in the title.

Students must select a target culture where the target language is spoken.

Teachers are reminded that the topics selected by students for the written assignment can overlap but each title **must** be different.

## Presentation

The written assignment consists of:

- Title
- Description
- Comparison
- Reflection
- Bibliography

The headings (Description, Comparison and Reflection) should be used to structure the text. The three questions which form the basis for the section Reflection should also be written out fully.

All written assignments must be hand-written in ink.

When quoting from a source, almost all ab initio languages use the same convention of either speech marks or footnote notes:

1. ...and confirmed according to J Fotheringham: “cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France”.
2. ...and confirmed because cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France.<sup>1</sup>

## Word count

The word limit **must** be respected. There is a 2 mark penalty in Criterion E, Language if less than the minimum number of words or more than the maximum number of words has been written.

For the purposes of the written assignment, a word is defined as having a space either side of it:

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<sup>1</sup> J. Fotheringham

It's a shame that = 4 words

It is most unfortunate that = 5 words

Quotes, the headings of each part, the three questions (Reflection) are **not** included in the word-count.

## Criterion specific comments

### Description

It is important that factual information on the **target culture** be included in this section. Information given on the student's own culture will not be awarded marks in this section.

The factual information should emanate from the research conducted by the student. Justifying why this topic has been chosen is **not** considered factual information.

### Comparison

A comparison may be made in a single paragraph using comparative language (*but, on the other hand, while, whereas, more than...*) or in two parallel paragraphs which treat the same elements in both cultures.

For the purposes of assessment, similarities and differences between the cultures chosen for the written assignment will be treated equally.

### Reflection

All three questions must be answered.

Students should not include any information that has already appeared in the two preceding parts (Description and Comparison).

In the third question: *What might a person from the target culture(s) find different about your chosen topic in your culture(s)?* the student is being asked to consider the chosen topic not in the context of the target culture but in his / her own culture from an "outsider's" point of view.

## The range and suitability of the work submitted

This session, the majority of candidates chose topics which were suitable (for example, an aspect of education, marriage ceremonies, food specific meals or linked to celebrations, leisure, sports). However, some candidates did not follow the required format but wrote instead an essay or an article on a topic. Understanding the criteria proved difficult for a few candidates and even candidates who used the correct headings or lay-out for the assignment did not always fulfill the requirements of the criteria.

One recurrent problem was that the focus of the assignment was the candidate's culture rather than the target culture. This may be due to the understandably limited knowledge of the target culture by candidates. This is why teacher's guidance in the choice of the topic is of the

utmost importance, so that a topic that links primarily with the target culture and that is not too broad to deal with in the required amount of words can be chosen.

Another frequent weakness regards the sources. Quite a number of candidates presented the minimum allowed quantity of sources in the target language. These were mostly articles downloaded from the Internet, which in some cases gave information that was inaccurate or out-of-date; in other cases candidates generalized wrongly correct information, because using too few sources did not give them enough context. Teachers should teach candidates what doing research means and tell candidates that the time they take in the process of selecting articles and sources will be "saved" later in the writing-up phase.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A, Description

A few candidates did not understand "relevant factual information" and wrote instead a general introduction to the topic or introduced a comparison. This section was frequently very short and many assignments contained no factual details. In order to receive one mark, "some factual information" must be used (at least two pieces of information) about the **target culture**. To receive three marks, "relevant factual information is used" (three or more pieces of information).

### Criterion B, Comparison

This section was generally well done with candidates providing many objective and pertinent points of comparison. Several candidates, however, repeated some of the elements from the section, Description. This may be acceptable if the candidate had just mentioned the point in the Description section and discussed it more in detail in the Comparison section. A more thorough planning of the essay would certainly help avoid this problem. A few candidates were weak in supporting their statements with substantial factual information.

### Criterion C, Reflection

In order to achieve high marks, the candidates had to reply to all three questions. This did not happen in a minority of cases. Many candidates gave thoughtful answers, identifying religious practices, historical events or climate, for example, as the contributing factors for differences. Other candidates did not - in actual fact - justify their statements ("There are differences because Italy has a different culture compared to Australia"), or were not specific enough ("These differences are due to historic reasons").

### Criterion D Register

Register was appropriate for the large majority of candidates: even those who had poor language levels, usually managed to fulfill this criterion, at least partially.

## Criterion E Language

The word count was generally adhered to. Language inaccuracies did not usually obscure meaning. The most common mistakes were in the use of the correct gender and number when agreeing nouns, adjectives and articles. The vocabulary regarding the topic was generally adequate.

However, there were some candidates whose language performance did not allow the reader to get the meaning of the text, in part or in full. One frequent problem regarded text coherence and cohesion. This is very important when candidates want to compare and contrast, like here. Learning linkers and comparative expressions and how to use them effectively is essential to draw up a clear, coherent text. Only the strongest candidates were able to use connectors effectively.

## Criterion F Formal requirements

In some cases essays a bibliography was missing or incomplete (fewer than two sources in the target language).

Although most candidates provided a bibliography with the minimum sources in Italian required, these had often not been appropriately selected. The impression is that in quite a number of cases the first article that came up when the topic was researched was included in the reference list, sometimes without even reading them properly.

## Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The skills necessary to carry out the task of the written assignment should be taught throughout the two years. Candidates should be encouraged in the first year to carry out some research on a topic covered in class. Candidates should be taught to consult a number of sources so that they can check the factual information they find in them. This can be learnt also using sources in their mother tongue. Candidates should learn how to compare similar information from different sources, in order to gain an understanding of the topic and insights in an intercultural perspective. Later in the year linking expressions should be taught and candidates encouraged to again carry out independent research to describe and compare a topic in two cultures.

In the second year the vocabulary necessary to express an opinion should be introduced and the task extended to include this third section. As candidates become more independent in reading in the target language, they should be encouraged to choose material that is appropriate for their reading levels and to use a method of selection similar to the one that they have experienced working with target language sources, checking more sources on the same aspect and fact. For example, if two texts on the Italian school system report different versions of a fact, more research must be conducted so that what the student chooses to state in his/her essay is certainly true.

As stated above, candidates should be instructed on how to draw up an appropriate bibliography or on how to quote a source correctly. The headings and sub-headings (Descrizione, Confronto, Riflessione...) in the assignment are going to be always the same for



everybody. Teachers should teach them to candidates. Finally, candidates should learn to be coherent, which means to justify their statements in a convincing way, to compare thoroughly the cultural aspects of their choice in the two different societies and to answer questions in a punctual and complete way.

## Paper one

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 6	7 - 13	14 - 17	18 - 23	24 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 40

### General comments

Candidates' performance was in line with previous years, even though on average the scores appeared to be better: this can be explained by the fact that the paper no longer contained Part D/Written Answer. Generally, candidates did best in straight forward multiple choice questions; stronger candidates did well in the true/false questions (Q12-Q17) and in the comprehension and confirmation questions (Q23-Q26).

### The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Text A illustrated typical meals in a basic and succinct way. Most candidates did well in this one – food again proving to be a very popular topic for young people!

Q1-Q3 were multiple choice questions, where candidates had to match a possible answer with the topic covered in the indicated paragraph. Whilst the majority of the candidates answered all the questions right, the number of candidates failing to correctly answer one or more questions was still relatively and surprisingly high.

Questions from 4 to 10 required candidates to complete sentences. Again, most candidates did well in this exercise, even though Q5 proved difficult (correct answer: 'dolce', adjective; we could not accept: 'un dolce', noun), as well as Q10 (correct answer: 'cappuccino', we could not accept 'una tazza di cappuccino').

Text B summarised the biography of a young, rising star pianist; music being another favourite topic for young people.

Q11 required candidates to 4 correct statements out of a possible 9. This provided mixed results, though the vast majority seemed to get at least two correct answers.

In Q12-Q17, candidates had to read a statement and decide whether it was true or false, and justify their choice. This section was the first major watershed between stronger and weaker candidates. Q15 threw up an interesting case in that some candidates put the focus on 'per

otto ore al giorno', instead of 'Da piccolo...'. Both interpretations are in fact correct, and the marking scheme was adapted accordingly.

To score points in Q18-22, candidates had to read the first half of a statement (5 in total), and then pick the second half out of 12 possible answers. This section also provided mixed results, proving difficult for stronger candidates as well.

Text C was a health and safety article about issues relating to working long hours at a desk. Q23-Q26 tested candidates on the comprehension of pronouns. This produced mixed results. Mistakes appeared mainly in Q23 and Q24. Q27-Q29 asked candidates to identify words or phrases within the text, that were synonyms to the words or phrases listed in the question. Most candidates did well with these 3 questions.

Text D provided information about tourist attractions in Italy. Q30 and Q31 asked direct questions to the candidates, and explained that they could to identify the answers in the first paragraph of Text D. Although most candidates did get full marks, it was still somewhat surprising to see the relatively high number of mistakes.

Q32 required candidates to add the letter listed against the name of one of six tourist attractions described in Text D, against a picture representing the tourist attraction. Again, most candidates did well in this question, right across the board from the weaker to the stronger ones – this suggests that there was, inevitably, an element of chance at play.

## Paper two

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 9	10 - 13	14 - 18	19 - 22	23 - 25

### General comments

Although, this year Paper Two required the candidates to write less than in the past, as usual, it proved to be a challenging test for ab initio candidates. Written production tasks are bound to put candidates on the spot and force them to show their competence in using the language, by writing an original text freely. This is clearly difficult for candidates who have not studied a language for a long time.

This year's paper was well-received. The teachers' comments on the tasks and the topics chosen were largely positive, with 90% of teachers describing them as appropriate. Also the clarity of wording and presentation was praised in the G2s, with no negative comments.

As far as the comparison of 2013 Paper 2 with last year's paper is concerned, most teachers found it of a similar standard (57.9%); 15.8% said the paper was slightly easier than in 2012, whereas 10.5% of teachers considered it a little more difficult.

On the whole, the candidates' results were in line with the trend in the previous years, a mixed bag of marks, ranging from very poor to excellent results. Over 73% of candidates were included in bands 4-7 and more than half candidates obtained good (30.54%), very good (14.88%) or excellent marks (7.13%).

## The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

As mentioned above, the teachers who responded to the questions on this year's paper considered it at an appropriate level and showed to appreciate the nature and variety of the tasks. These gave all candidates the opportunity to put to fruit what they had learnt in their courses, using the vocabulary and structures included in the ab initio syllabus. The tasks suited all candidates, with one slightly more challenging question (Q3, section B) to offer stronger candidates the chance to prove their skills.

In **Sezione A** the two different tasks were more or less equivalent in terms of difficulty. Task 2 was perhaps slightly more popular than Task 1. Task 1 required the candidates to write a note to a friend. The candidates had to thank him for the party they had been invited to and let the friend know about the two things they liked most at the party. Finally, they had to ask to meet the friend and tell them where, when and what for.

Task 2 was an informal e-mail to an Italian friend who was supposed to visit the candidates the following week. They had to inform the friend about where they lived, how to get there and what the cheapest means of transport from the airport was. They also had to tell the friend what the weather was supposed to be like during her stay and advise her on what clothes to pack in her suitcase.

**Sezione B** gave candidates three options – , an article, a diary entry and a letter. Tasks 4 and 5 were easier, as they could be written using an informal register. As expected these two tasks were more popular than task 3 that was slightly more difficult. In task 4 candidates were expected to reflect on their experience as candidates of Italian and, more in general, on the importance of learning a second language. Task 5, instead, was a letter to an Italian friend whom they had to address in order to receive assistance, as they had decided to spend a year in Italy, before starting university.

As anticipated, task 3 was chosen by a lower number of candidates. Candidates were asked to draw up an article about the positive and negative effects of television. This meant being familiar with the format of an article and the ability to use a slightly more formal register. Also, candidates needed to think of some simple but effective data, which they had to arrange appropriately in the text.

The topics were appropriate, since most candidates who were able to write understandable Italian showed few difficulties to express relevant, and sometimes original ideas. This is a positive point, since it is worth noting that what the candidates write is at least as important as how they write it.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Writing creatively, as an ab-initio student, is far from easy, however, it is frustrating for examiners when candidates prove unable to string a few correct – or at least understandable – sentences together. Examiners do recognize the difficulty of such a task for candidates who have been learning Italian for only about 18 months, but awareness of this difficulty should be a spur to teachers to insist more on making their candidates practise their writing skills.

Careful training should be given in order to allow candidates to deal with each step involved with writing tasks, from the comprehension of rubrics (as it always happens, there were a number of poor candidates who misunderstood them), to the choice of the most appropriate task, in order to pick one that suits the candidate's level and, in particular, to identify the one task that requires higher language skills, not just on the basis of the topic. In fact, usually, there is at least one slightly more difficult task in Paper 2. This is done to provide stronger candidates with a suitable challenge and with a chance to prove their abilities and skills.

A further tendency that has been noted, especially among weaker candidates, is that of learning by heart a few common sentences and idiomatic expressions regarding basic topics (personal information about themselves, their school life, their family etc.) which these candidates write down, often with many mistakes, irrespective of the task of their choice. Memorisation of vocabulary or even of full sentences is valuable in second language learning, but it should be a means, not a goal. Teachers should train learners to use what they have memorised in a creative way, adapting structures and words to the topics on which they are required to write, rather than reproducing them indiscriminately, without taking the context into account.