

**An investigation into the Standards of
Grade 12 English Home and First Additional
Language Examinations**

Independent Examinations Board

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Contents

Acknowledgements	6
Abbreviations.....	7
PART I: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	8
1.1 Research aims and questions	8
1.2 The rationale for the study	8
PART II: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES.....	9
2.1 Umalusi Home Language examination paper analysis instrument.....	9
2.2 The documents used in the analysis of the examinations	10
2.3 The structure of IEB Home Language and First Additional Language examinations.....	11
PART III: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	12
3 English Home Language	12
3.1 Compliance with the CAPS and/or relevant assessment body Instrument	12
3.2 Differences between required format and structure and the papers analysed	12
3.3 Mark allocations in Paper 1	12
3.4 Comparison of cognitive demand weightings specified and the percentage for the papers analysed	13
3.4.1 Weighting of cognitive demand in Paper 1	13
3.4.2 Weighting of cognitive demand in Paper 2	13
3.5 Distribution of levels of difficulty in the papers	14
3.5.1 Weighting of levels of difficulty in paper 1	14
3.5.2 Weighting of levels of difficulty in Paper 2	15
3.5.3 Combined weighting of difficulty of paper 1 and paper 2	15
3.5.4 Comparison of marks allocated to questions at each of different levels of difficulty in the optional questions	16
3.6 Comparison of the topic or content and/or skill weightings specified with the weightings for the examination papers	17
3.7 Quality of examination papers	17
3.8 Number of questions assessed as having invalid sources of difficulty of	

ease.....	17
3.9 Level and depth of subject knowledge	18
3.10 Difficulty of stimulus/source material	18
3.11 Other points regarding the standard of the examination.....	20
3.12 Recommendations for improving the quality and standard of English Home Language examinations	21
4. English First Additional Language results	22
4.1 Compliance with the assessment guidelines in terms of format and structure	22
4.2 Distribution of cognitive demand in the papers	24
4.3 Distribution of levels of difficulty in the papers	26
4.3.1 Weighting of difficulty level in Paper 1	26
4.3.2 Weighting of difficulty level in Paper 1	27
4.4 Other points regarding the quality of the examination	30
4.5 Level and depth of subject knowledge	31
4.6 Difficulty of stimulus/source material.....	31
4.7 Recommendations for improving the quality and standard of English First Additional Language examinations.....	32
References	34
Appendices	35

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Abbreviations

ASC	Assessment Standards Committee
DBE	Department of Basic Education
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CASS	Continuous Assessment
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FAL	First Additional Language
HL	Home Language
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NSC	National Senior Certificate
SACAI	South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute
SAGs	Subject Assessment Guidelines
SC	Senior Certificate

PART I: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.1 Research aims and questions

Umalusi has identified the need to evaluate the standards of English Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL) examinations associated with the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). The aim of the present study is to evaluate the quality and standards of the 2012 – 2014 Grade 12 HL and FAL examinations. Specifically, this study aims:

- to determine the degree to which IEB's 2014 HL examinations adhere to CAPS-based Subject Assessment Guidelines (SAGs);
- to determine the nature of the cognitive demands made in the 2014 HL examination papers in their own right and in comparison to the 2012 – 2013 examinations;
- to evaluate the degree of difficulty of the 2014 HL examination papers in their own right and in relation to the 2012 – 2013 HL examinations; and

In summation, the primary aim of the investigation is to determine whether the levels of difficulty and cognitive demand of the examinations in question are comparable across the three years. The research questions framing the study are:

- What are the standards of the NSC Home Language examinations administered by the IEB between 2012 and 2014?
- Are the standards consistent across the years, and if not, in what respects do they differ?

1.2 The rationale for the study

For Umalusi, studies of this nature are vitally important in that they (i) produce useful information which feeds into standardization process of the Assessment Standards Committee (ASC) and (ii) the results always assist in improving the quality and standard of the HL examinations.

PART II: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

2.1 Umalusi Home Language examination paper analysis instrument

Table 2.1 below presents the examination paper analysis instrument used to analyse the NSC examinations across all Home Languages. An important change that has been made to Umalusi's revised examination evaluation instrument is that the analysis of *the type of cognitive demand* of a question and analysis of *the level of difficulty* of each question are treated as two separate judgments involving two different processes. Prior to its implementation, the instrument had been discussed and critiqued at several Umalusi workshops with examination evaluators and moderators, and, based on the critique; refinements were made to the instruments. Generally, participants acknowledged that the instruments allows for greater comparability of standards across subjects and years because of the sameness of the framework used to think about question difficulty.

The abbreviation 'ID' in columns 4 and 6 stands for Invalid Moderators of Difficulty, which are those that impede the measurement of the construct. In other words, they do not contribute to the measurement of the construct/task under consideration.

Table 2.1: Table for recording team analysis of NSC exam papers

C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
Question	Mark allocation	Type of cognitive demand (1,2,3,4, OR 5)	Difficulty level (1, 2 3, 4 or ID)	Main sources of difficulty (content, stimulus, task and/or expected response)	Justify your difficulty level or ID rating	Content / skill/ topic assessed
1.1						
1.2						
1.3						
Etc.						
TOTAL	100					

Column 3: 1= lower order processes; 2= medium order processes; 3= higher order processes. **Column 4:** 1= easy; 2= moderately difficult; 3= difficult; 4= very difficult

All language teams used this instrument to conduct an item-by-item analysis of their respective languages papers. Once the level of cognitive demand had been established, the next step was to determine the degree of difficulty of a given question. The final step in the analysis was to compare examination papers over a three-year period (2012 – 2014) with a view to determining whether a comparable standard had been maintained over the years.

In order to determine whether the standard of these examination papers was equivalent and had been maintained over the years, the raw scores allocated to levels of difficulty and cognitive demand in each paper were converted to percentages. For example, if the total mark allocated to Question 1 in Paper 1 was 10 and a particular team was of the view that the question required comprehension skill at the easy level, that question would be rated as a 10% easy comprehension question. In other words, the 10 marks were divided by 70 marks, the grand total for Paper 1, in order to reach a percentage. Percentages were used, because they have the advantage of allowing comparisons between scores allocated to cognitive skill and degree of difficulty in different papers.

2.2 The documents used in the analysis of the examinations

A comprehensive set of examination documents was collected for each Home Language. These included:

- CAPS-based Subject Assessment Guidelines for Assessment (SAGs) for Home Languages and First Additional Languages, and
- 2012 to 2014 IEB HL and FAL examination papers (Papers 1 - 2) and their associated memoranda and rubrics.

The next section discusses the design of HL exams. The section begins by highlighting what is examined by each of the components that make up the whole HL exam. Thereafter, the changes that were brought about by the introduction of CAPS-based HL examinations in 2014 are discussed.

2.3 The structure of IEB Home Language and First Additional Language examinations

Table 2.2 shows that the IEB language examinations are made up of two external papers, school-based continuous assessment tasks and orals. The external component (Papers I - II) is marked out of 200 marks, whilst SBA/portfolio and oral tasks contribute 200 marks towards the total.

Table 2.2: Design of IEB language examinations

	Content	Marks	Hours
External	Paper I: - Comprehension (30) - Summary (10) - Poetry (30) - Communicative language (30)	100	2½
	Paper II: - Literature (60) - Transactional writing (40)	100	2½
Internal	SBA/Portfolio	100	-
	Oral	100	-
Total for HL & FAL exam		400	

PART III: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

3 English Home Language

3.1 Compliance with the CAPS and/or relevant assessment body Instrument

The IEB covers the National core curriculum (NCS and CAPS). They have a comprehensive Subject Assessment Guideline which covers the major topic areas and the diverse content/skills which are stipulated in the National Curriculum Documents for English Home Language.

3.2 Differences between required format and structure and the papers analysed

The IEB complies with its own format and structure as set out in the Subject Assessment Guidelines. The document allows for a variation in mark allocations in various sections of Paper 1. If skills have been covered in the one section then they need not be repeated in another section. In Paper 1, Question 4 (Unseen Poetry) in 2012, two poetry texts as well as two other sources (one visual and one a collection of quotes) were given to the learners to consider. The 2013 paper varied slightly while the 2014 paper adhered more closely to the recommended mark allocations.

3.3 Mark allocations in Paper 1

Mark allocations in Questions 1 - 3 are consistent, but the mark allocations for Questions 5 and 6 vary every year, as do the number and variety of stimulus material.

Table 3.1: Comparison of marks allocated to various questions

	Q1 Comprehension	Q2 Summary	Q3 Seen Poetry	Q4 Unseen Poetry	Q5	Q6
						Combination of texts/ adverts and cartoons
Guide	25	10	15	15	25	10
2012	24	10	16	15	16	19
2013	25	10	15	15	23	12
2014	25	10	15	15	25	10

The quality of various texts and sources is of a high standard. The questions to accommodate various skills and levels of difficulty remain the same in all the papers every year that all a learner is faced with which is unfamiliar is the texts of reference.

3.4 Comparison of cognitive demand weightings specified and the percentage for the papers analysed

3.4.1 Weighting of cognitive demand in Paper 1

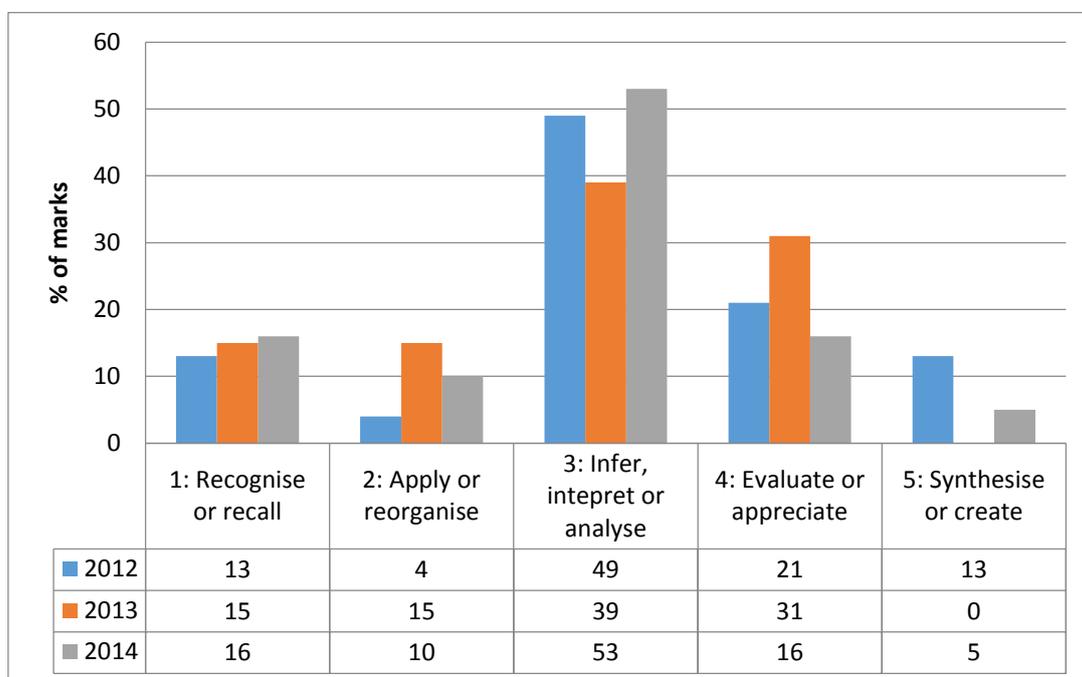


Figure 3.1: Comparison of weighting of cognitive demand in English HL Paper 1

In 2012, Paper 1, only 17% of questions fell into the lower order processes (Levels 1&2), 49% in the medium order processes (Level 3) and 34% were in the higher order processes (Level 4&5). Paper 1 of 2013 is a more accessible paper than the 2012 paper in terms of cognitive demand with 30% questions falling into Levels 1&2, 39% in Level 3, and 31% in Level 4. Paper 1 of 2014 is the most moderate in cognitive demand with fewer higher order questions than the previous two years. 53% of the questions were inferential comprehension. It can be seen that it is still a fairly challenging paper as it has only 26% easy questions.

3.4.2 Weighting of cognitive demand in Paper 2

In Paper 2 the candidate must answer two literature essay type questions, which are at a cognitive Level 5 and two pieces of transactional writing, both of which fall into the Level 5 cognitive demand.

	Lower Order	Medium Order	Higher Order
2012	-	-	100%
2013	-	-	100%
2014	-	-	100%

Table 3.2: Weighting of cognitive demand in English HL Paper 2

In Paper 2 all the optional questions are allocated the same number of marks. The cognitive demand of each optional question is at the same level. Overall, Paper 2 is weighted on the Level 5 (Synthesise and Create) which swings the combined papers into the challenging. The cognitive demand weightings and the weightings for the examination papers combined are mostly challenging.

3.5 Distribution of levels of difficulty in the papers

3.5.1 Weighting of levels of difficulty in paper 1

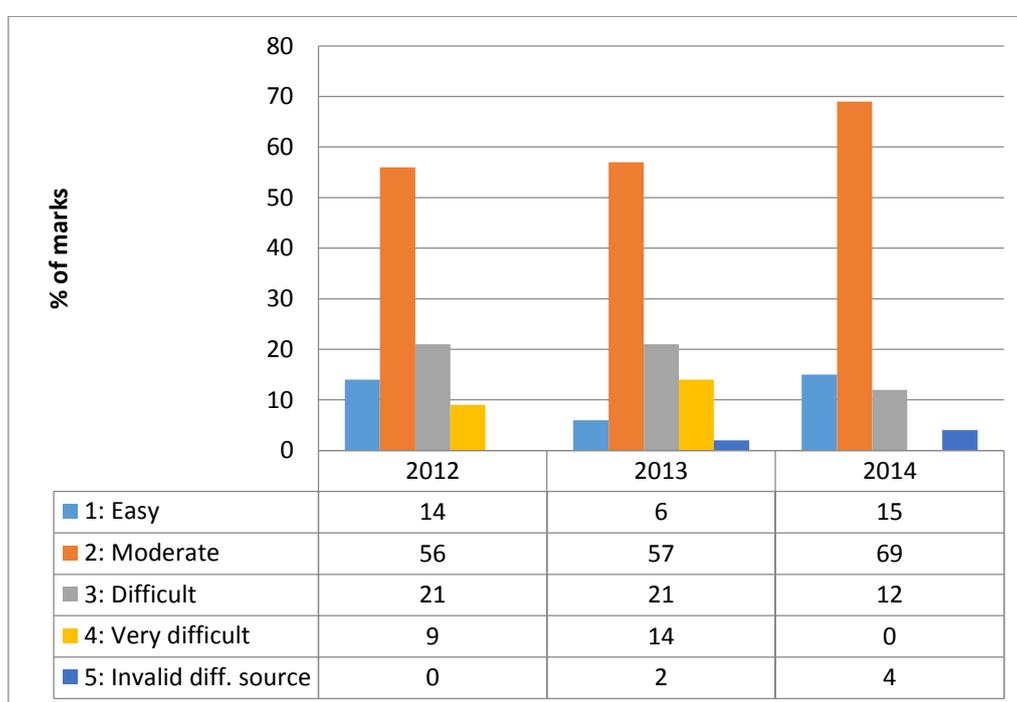


Figure 3.1: Comparison of difficulty level weighting in English HL Paper 1

The above statistics show that Paper 1 of 2014 is set at a more moderate level of difficulty than the previous two years. There are no questions which would be

considered very difficult in 2014, unlike Paper 1 of 2013 which had 14% of very difficult questions.

3.5.2 Weighting of levels of difficulty in Paper 2

	Easy	Moderate	Difficult	Very difficult / invalidly difficult	Total %
2012	-	29	71	-	100%
2013	-	29	71	-	100%
2014	-	29	71	-	100%

Table 3.3: Weighting of difficulty level in English HL Paper 2

There is a perfect correlation in the difficulty levels of Paper 2 across all three years. On Paper 2, the essay questions are all considered more difficult for the average candidate. This is not to say that an average candidate will not attain marks, but it is harder for them to get very good to excellent marks. Literature essays also present the highest cognitive challenge. The essays set all require a sound knowledge of the texts and engagement with the issues therein. This means candidates who write different options and have different set works are not going to be disadvantaged in the examination.

3.5.3 Combined weighting of difficulty of paper 1 and paper 2

Percentage: Weighting of levels of difficulty (Average of combined Papers)	2012	2013
	Easy	7
Moderate	43	43
Difficult	46	46
Very Difficult	4	7
Invalid Difficulty	0	1

Table 3.3: Average weighting of difficulty level in English HL Papers 1 and 2

The combined difficulty of the papers would suggest that the whole examination for English Home language would be considered moderate to difficult. The difficulty comes from the loading of essay type questions in Paper 2. However, the marking rubric/guide allows for learners to achieve marks at a moderate to lower level. It is felt that these statistics are not entirely a fair reflection of the difficulty level.

3.5.4 Comparison of marks allocated to questions at each of different levels of difficulty in the optional questions

The levels of difficulty in the optional questions in Paper 2 for 2012, 2013 and 2014 are comparable. Different optional set works have been given essay topics which deal with similar issues so that they are equally weighted in difficulty. It is clear that every effort has been made on the part of the examiners to keep choice questions of equal difficulty.

3.6 Comparison of the topic or content and/or skill weightings specified with the weightings for the examination papers

The IEB papers cover a wide range of content and skill appropriate to English Home Language. It must be remembered that the Oral components and the Creative Writing Components are assessed internally by each school. This means that significant content/skill for English Home Language is covered over the four assessments. The content and skills within language are inextricably interwoven despite the four topics being separated into different major skills. The IEB papers cover suitable content as indicated in the curriculum.

The combined papers cover a significant and suitable range of content/skill. The additional skills/content are covered in the SBA Portfolio and the Oral mark.

3.7 Quality of examination papers

Format, structure and layout: technical issues

The format, structure and layout of all the papers are user friendly and explicit. It is clear as to what is expected of candidates. The technical issues of the papers are a constant; a learner who uses past exams to prepare for their final examinations will not be met with surprise questions and layout.

The quality of various texts and sources are of a high standard. The questions to accommodate various skills and levels of difficulty remain similar in all the papers each year. The instructions are clear and unambiguous.

3.8 Number of questions assessed as having invalid sources of difficulty of ease.

2013 Paper 1 – one question = 2 marks (2%).

2014 Paper 1 – two questions = 4 marks (4%).

This analysis shows that the papers have been set well, especially with regard to the wording of questions. However, it is observed that the many sources and quotations added to questions tended to add to the difficulty of questions as the candidate has more material to read and absorb. There were sources offered which learners were asked to comment on (such as a Picasso sketch) which could cause an unintended

difficulty. Two questions on the Advert (5.5.2 and 5.5.3) have Invalid difficulty as both are ambiguous. It is not clear what is needed in order to answer the questions.

3.9 Level and depth of subject knowledge

The subject knowledge is covered extensively in all the papers. The cognitive levels and levels of difficulty are higher than the 40-40-20 ratings of Barrett's taxonomy. This is to be expected in English Home Language. The average matric learner should be familiar with the expectations of the papers as they have been challengingly consistent over the years. All the papers are consistent with expected levels and depth. The exception was the summary question on Paper 1 of 2012 which was far above the usual summary requirement in its cognitive demand and level of difficulty.

3.10 Difficulty of stimulus/source material

The number and length of source material in each of the papers are comparably consistent. The texts in Paper 1 2012, 2013 and 2014 are moderately challenging. They require in-depth understanding and interpretation by Home Language learners and they are 'new' texts for candidates. The unseen poems would be moderately/very difficult as they are also unfamiliar texts. The poems chosen for these questions are considered quite challenging and the learners are not offered a choice in this section. Particularly noted is 'The Tyger' as an unseen poem in Paper 1 of 2013. The unseen poem in 2014 was more accessible in terms of content and accessibility – 'Curse You, Nelson Mandela'.

The texts in paper 2 of 2012, 2013 and 2014 are familiar to the learners so they would be relatively accessible, though the source material for the literature essays is considered to be academically challenging.

3.10.1 Paper 1

Comprehension passages: moderately challenging for all three years. Summary: 2012, based on three sources which makes the task more challenging; 2013, based on one source; 2014, based on two short sources; candidates are required to write a basic summary in point form. The passages in 2014 are both accessible and the level of difficulty of the task is moderate which makes the task more accessible to candidates compared with Question 2 of 2012 and 2013.

Unseen Poetry: 2012 (Question 4) the source and questions are moderately to very challenging. There were two unseen poems which were moderately challenging including one visual and three quotations which comprised the stimulus for Question 4. In 2013 the source is considered extremely challenging (Question 4). Candidates were required to compare two challenging unseen poems.

In 2014 (Q4), the text is more accessible than 2012 and 2013. There is one contemporary poem for analysis. The subject matter is familiar to the candidates.

Advertising: In 2012 two adverts are used for language assessment. The quality of the source material is accessible. In 2013 four advertisements are included for assessment as well as a written source material – candidates have to engage with five different stimuli. In 2014, the source material is clear and accessible to candidates. However, in terms of the 'average' South African learner, the content of Text 3 (playing in the snow) of these adverts might be outside their frame of reference.

In 2012, 2013 and 2014 Question 5 and 6 are comprised of advertising and textual editing techniques.

3.10.2 Paper 2

Shakespeare: *Henry V* for 2012 and 2013 years, and *Hamlet* in 2014. These texts are moderately difficult, but the essay questions are difficult for all 'average' candidates.

Novels: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* or *The Native Commissioner* in 2012, *The Scarlett Letter* or *The Beneficiaries* in 2013 and 2014: moderately difficult texts with essay questions which are difficult for the 'average' candidate.

3.10.3 Comparison of levels of difficulty of source or stimulus material of the optional questions

The stimulus material of the choice questions in Paper 2 of 2012, 2013 and 2014 are on par with one another. The length of texts and levels of difficulty are no more challenging in one genre than the others. The texts studied by the learners pose the same challenge for all. Learners are supplied with a number of texts from various sources to use as reference points when answering the questions.

- There are **no** texts (source/stimulus material) in any examination paper that make very low demands on Grade 12 candidates.

3.11 Other points regarding the standard of the examination

The standard of the examinations is moderately challenging to difficult. This helps to maintain the standard which a Home Language learner is expected to attain. It is felt that in the global context these examinations would be considered a suitable standard.

3.11.1 Comparability of quality

The examination papers over the past three years have been of sound quality. It is felt that every effort has been made to produce examination papers that are well presented in format, layout and structure. It is considered a positive aspect that the same formula has been applied to the layout, instructions and numbering of the three papers in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Candidates will have seen past papers and it will add to their confidence in an examination when they are faced with something that looks familiar in structure.

3.11.2 Comparability of standards

Paper 1 of 2014 is considered to be less challenging overall than the previous two years. According to the analysis it is easier on both cognitive demand and level of difficulty than the 2012 and 2013 papers. This would suggest that the candidates of this year should have an advantage. However this paper, Paper 1 of 2014, is more aligned in cognitive challenge with the suggested guidelines of the CAPS. Despite it being easier than past years it is still considered to be of a good standard. Paper 2 of 2012, 2013 and 2014 all compare most equitably. These papers are of a high standard in terms of demand. Paper 2 of 2014 should have offered the candidates the same challenges as previous years.

3.12 Recommendations for improving the quality and standard of English Home Language examinations

The team has found the revised taxonomy for analysis an improvement on the use of either Bloom's or Barrett's taxonomies. Though it does not eradicate all debate about the placing of certain questions at the higher cognitive Levels of 4 (Evaluate or Appreciate) and 5 (Synthesise or Create), these levels are both higher order levels and that is certainly clear.

The level of perceived difficulty is also a useful area to apply in the analysis, though there is far more subjectivity when applying this judgement. However, as the team has persevered at being consistent in its combined conception of the 'average learner' and the level of difficulty of questions as they apply to such a learner, the analysis should be useful as a comparative tool to differentiate between the papers which have been analysed by the English Home Language PEA Team.

It may be useful to add a column into the excel spread sheet to do a separate analysis of the Invalid Difficulty questions. Sometimes the intended difficulty level of the question is more informative overall and then the Unintended Difficulties can be addressed as a separate issue.

There was initially a great deal of repetition within the instrument.

The edited instrument for analysis (repetition removed) is a good tool to apply to the analysis. One understands that there are areas in languages such as content coverage that cannot be readily pegged down.

4. English First Additional Language results

4.1 Compliance with the assessment guidelines in terms of format and structure

4.1.1 Technical issues

A number of inconsistencies in format and structure as well as layout of the examination papers were identified. First, in the 2013 and 2014 examinations one comprehension text was set in Section A instead of two or three texts as specified in the IEB examination and assessment guidelines. Second, in 2014 50 words were stipulated as the length of the point-form summary instead of 60-70 words specified in the assessment guidelines. The mark allocation in Paper 2 is different from that specified in the 2012-2013 assessment guidelines.

Paper 2 presented a number of technical difficulties. In all three years Question 4, which carries 20 marks, is an essay with a mind-map. In an essay question, candidates are required to make a critical value judgement and to express a personal viewpoint on socio-cultural issues using given criteria. This, however, is quite restricted due to the provision of the mind map which limits creativity.

In 2012, Question 6, carrying 10, marks required learners to design a form would have presented a task and stimulus difficulty – for candidates. The amount of guidance or scaffolding provided involved unravelling of the question. The requirements of the question should be bulleted in order to provide clear guidelines for the creation of such a form.

In the 2013 examination, Question 5, carrying 30 marks, requires candidates to write an e-mail. This question has a dense presentation of sources. The second part of the source is on the next page which candidates might not see. There is far too much information to process before answering the question.

4.1.2 2012 – 2013 examinations

In 2012 Paper 1 consisted of two texts with a total length of about 500 words, whereas in 2013 there was a single comprehension passage of 491 words. This was in contradiction with the stipulated two or three texts of 400-600 words. In both years Section B consisted of a summary text and Section C, one unseen and two seen

poems. Section D consisted of two questions on communicative language, based on a visual text (cartoon/advertisement) and on textual editing, set in context of a picture or short paragraph.

In Paper 2 candidates were required to answer four compulsory questions on one novel, *Mao's Last Dancer* and to write two transactional pieces. In Section A, candidates were required to write two paragraphs with a length of 180/160 words on character and plot and an argumentative piece based on a personal response to theme and character. The third question was an imaginative piece in dialogue form in which candidates were required to recreate a scene in the context of the novel. The fourth question was an essay of 250 words on character and plot based on a given mind-map. This structure and mark allocation is inconsistent with the stipulated three literature questions and mark allocations outlined in the examination structure elsewhere in this report.

In addition, two transactional texts with a mark allocation of 30 marks and 10 marks each were examined as opposed to 30 marks each for both pieces as specified in the assessment guidelines. The 40% (Literature) and 60% (Transactional Writing) weighting was not adhered to. Furthermore, the list of transactional texts specified in the examination guidelines does not include all the types of texts examined. For example, 'designing a form' and a progress report were examined in 2012 and 2013, respectively, but had not been specified in the assessment guidelines.

Both examinations were not in compliance with the assessment guidelines in terms of format and structure. There were significant inconsistencies in the number and length of comprehension texts, number and types of literature questions, as well as mark allocation for and transactional texts specified in the examination guidelines.

The 2014 IEB examination guidelines are outlined in the *National Senior Certificate Handbook: Grade 12 (2014)*. Both the IEB Paper 1 and 2 have a duration of 2½ hours and a total of 100 marks.

4.1.3 2014 examinations

The 2014 examination format and structure is almost similar to that of the 2012 - 2013 examination but differs in mark allocation in Paper 2. In the 2014 examination guidelines the paragraph questions have a mark allocation of 15 marks each, 10 marks for dialogue and 20 marks for the essay with mind-map. The examination is consistent with the assessment guidelines in all respects, including length of texts and mark allocation.

The only deviation found in Paper 1 was the specification of the number of words for the Summary which is 50 words instead of the 60-70 words specified in the assessment guidelines. Again, the shorter piece, drawing up a programme (brochure), examined in Section B of Paper 2 is not specified in the assessment guidelines. The reduction of the number of words for the point summary could increase the difficulty level of the response as candidates may be challenged to write more concisely. Also, the inclusion of a transactional piece that is not specified in the assessment guidelines could unfairly disadvantage candidates as such a skill/content may have been considered unimportant or rarely assessed and therefore would not have been taught thoroughly enough to prepare candidates for the examination.

4.2 Distribution of cognitive demand in the papers

4.2.1 Weighting of cognitive demand in Paper 1

According to the IEB taxonomy creating, evaluating and analysing are categorised as higher order thinking skills but there is no clear indication of which of the other three cognitive skills are considered middle order and lower order cognitive skills. The weighting of cognitive levels is neither specified in the 2012-2013 nor in the 2014 assessment guidelines. Therefore, it will not be possible to make a comparison of the specified cognitive demand proportions against the weighting of examination papers analysed.

The following analysis of the weighting of cognitive demand was conducted to evaluate the 2012 - 2014 examinations.

In Paper 1 lower order questions (recall and application) were weighted at 64% in 2012, 62% in 2013 and 69% in 2014. Middle order questions (inference/interpretation)

were weighted at 31%, 26% and 27% over the three years, respectively; and higher order questions were weighted at 5%, 12% and 4% over the three years respectively. 2014 had the highest weighting of lower order questions in Paper 1 than the other papers with a variance of 6% from the weighting of the same cognitive level in 2013. 2013 had the highest weighting of higher order questions with a variance of up to 7% from 2014. Paper 1 of 2013 had a more even distribution of cognitive levels and was the only paper with a synthesis and creation level question and is therefore a good model of examination compared to the 2012 and 2014 papers.

4.2.2 Weighting of cognitive demand in Paper 2

As reflected on the graph, the Paper 2 examination is characterized by a low incidence of application and evaluation questions and a high weighting of synthesis and creation questions across the three years.

Figure 4.2: Comparison of cognitive demand weighting in English FAL Paper 2

The first paragraph question in all three examinations required reorganization skills as candidates had to relate events in the novel in a paragraph form while displaying understanding of plot, theme and characters in the novel. The second paragraph question required a personal response and therefore demanded evaluation skills as candidates had to justify their opinions on character's actions in relation to moral dilemmas or conflict in context of the text. The dialogue, essay and two transactional texts required candidates to generate ideas and create new texts and were thus categorized as synthesis and creation skills.

Although none of the questions were categorized as recall and analysis questions, it can be argued that the response to literature requires candidates to display recall and analysis skills but the format in which the responses are expected, that is in paragraph, dialogue and creative essay format, and the depth of content examined increases the cognitive demand to higher order level. Therefore, the examination had a high weighting of higher order thinking skills due to the depth of reading and writing skills candidates were required to demonstrate, namely, critical thinking and a variety of texts, shorter and simpler to longer and more complex forms, candidates were required to produce.

All three papers are comparable as the format and content of questions is consistent across the years analysed and the cognitive levels are equivalent throughout the three years.

4.3 Distribution of levels of difficulty in the papers

4.3.1 Weighting of difficulty level in Paper 1

Paper 1 comprised 5 compulsory questions for a total of 100 marks. Individual questions were rated on 5 difficulty levels as indicated on the table below.

Figure 4.3: Comparison of difficulty level weighting in English FAL Paper 1

The 2012 examination had the highest percentage of moderate and difficult questions at 53% and 15% respectively. The 2013 examination had an equivalent number of easy and moderate questions weighted at 39% and 8% difficult questions. The 2014 examination had the highest number of easy questions (44%) and the lowest number of difficult (5%). Based on the evaluation of Paper 1 the 2014 examination is rated the easiest and the 2012 examination the most difficult.

4.3.1.1 Questions judged to be invalidly difficult

The 2012 Examination did not have any invalidly difficulty questions while the 2013 and 2014 examinations each contained a number of invalidly difficult questions. In the 2013 examination the following questions were classified as ID, based on the expected response:

- 1.11.1 and 1.11.2 – Specific response required to the exclusion of possible alternatives/ misleading question
- 2 (summary) – The Passage is already summarised as it contains too many prompts.

In the 2014 examination the following questions were classified as ID based on the expected response:

- 1.8 - There are two possible options provided in the multiple choice options (B and C). The question does not specify that the meaning should be explained in the context of the passage.
- 1.14 - Ambiguous question – the link between teens and adult risks are not clearly phrased.

4.3.2 Weighting of difficulty level in Paper 1

All six questions in Paper 2 are compulsory. Based on the following graph, the 2012 - 2014 examinations had 0% easy questions. In 2012 60% of the questions were rated as moderately challenging and 40% difficult. The 2013 examination had 30% moderate questions, 60% difficult questions and 10% very difficult. In 2014 90% of the questions were rated as moderately difficult and 10% were difficult. Based on this evaluation the 2014 examination was the easiest of the three examinations and the 2012 examination had the most balanced distribution of levels of difficulty.

Figure 4.4: Comparison of difficulty level weighting in English FAL Paper 2

Generally Paper 2 poses an increased challenge because of the extended writing required by each task as well as the analytical and or discursive nature of the

response. In 2013 the transactional tasks raised the difficulty level of the examination: the e-mail task (Question 5) was rated as difficult on account of the vast amount of information which the candidate is expected to process. First, the stimulus question has a very dense presentation which requires much unravelling by the candidate. In addition there are two visual attachments which form part of the stimulus – a newspaper clipping as well as an advertisement. Second, the question continues onto the next page, this means that there is the possibility that many candidates might overlook this part which is crucial to the written response; designing a report (Question 6) was rated as very difficult based on the concept and task. The concept is not prescribed in the curriculum and is unlikely to have been taught.

No questions were rated as having unintended difficulty in the 2012-2014 Paper 2 examinations. Paper 2 of 2012 is a good model for future examinations with respect to fair distribution of levels of difficulty as it would ideally accommodate 60% of candidates with average ability and 40% of candidates with above average ability.

4.3.2.1 Questions judged to be invalidly difficult

The table below indicates the questions found to have invalid sources of difficulty as well as the justification for the question being categorised as such.

Paper 1: 2013			
Paper	Item no.	Mark allocation per question	Source of difficulty (Stimulus, task, content/ expected response)
1(100)	1.11.1	2	Expected response
	1.11.2	2	Expected response
	2	10	Expected response
100 marks		14	
% of marks		14%	

Paper 1: 2014			
Paper	Item no.	Mark allocation per question	Source of difficulty (Stimulus, task, content/ expected response)
1(100)	1.8	1	Expected response
	1.14.1	2	Expected Response
100 marks		3	
% of marks		3	

Invalid sources of difficulty were evident in Paper 1 of 2013 and 2014 whereas none were found in 2012 and in Paper 2 in all three years. In 2013 there were 3 questions, carrying 14 marks (14%) in total, which were identified as containing unintended sources of difficulty, the most common being the expected response difficulty due to the requirement of a specific response to the exclusion of other possible alternatives. The summary question had an unintended source of easiness as the passage was already summarised in subheadings which then required candidates to paraphrase the given main points.

In 2014 there were 2 questions based on the comprehension passage, carrying a total weighting of 3%, which were poorly formulated or ambiguous thus potentially misleading candidates or making it difficult to give the expected response.

4.4 Other points regarding the quality of the examination

Overall, the quality of all three examinations was adequate. The texts used in Paper 1 from 2012 – 2014 were interesting and thought provoking, taking into account the language level of First Additional Language learners but also adequately challenging. The length of comprehension texts was inconsistent and mostly below the expected length of 600 words in 2012 and 2013. However, the texts were accessible, and topical, especially the 2014 comprehension text titled 'A healthy Teenager is a Happy

Teenager'. Instructions were clearly phrased, key words were printed in bold font and the quality of visual texts was good. However, a few technical problems which could have unfairly disadvantaged candidates were evident in Paper 1.

4.5 Level and depth of subject knowledge

Paper 2 of the IEB examinations reflects appropriate levels of depth of subject knowledge whereas Paper 1 shows less depth of subject knowledge. The reading level of texts used to assess reading skills and language in context and the variety of texts produced in the assessment of literature and writing skills create appropriate depth of assessment of subject knowledge especially literature study and writing. On the other hand, it seems that the assessment of advertising techniques and visual techniques assessed in the context of advertisements and cartoons in Paper 1 is superficial. The majority of questions based on these texts require application of grammatical knowledge such as identification and effect of punctuation marks, contractions/apostrophe, abbreviations, reported speech and pronouns. Few questions focus on features of advertisements or interpretation of visual clues like body language and facial expression. For example only 2 marks were allocated to the question on interpretation of humour in the cartoon in Question 5 of Section D in 2014 and 6 marks out of 30 marks in 2013 and 2012 respectively.

4.6 Difficulty of stimulus/source material

A total of 42 stimulus/source materials were used in the 6 papers that were written in the 2012-2014 examinations. Materials were either question/text and visual stimuli in the case of essay questions and textual stimuli in the case of contextual type questions. The table which follows shows an analysis of the stimulus/source materials according to levels of difficulty for each examination paper.

Examination		Difficulty Level		
		Easy	Moderate	Difficult
Paper 1	2012	4	4	0
	2013	5	2	0
	2014	6	3	0
Paper 2	2012	2	4	0
	2013	0	5	1

	2014	1	5	0
Total				

Figure 5: Number of stimulus/source material analysed as easy, moderately challenging and difficult.

There were a varied number of stimulus/source materials in each Paper 1 examination: In 2012 50% of the 8 stimuli were moderately challenging and 50% easy. In 2013 and 2014 a greater percentage of stimuli were rated easy (74% were easy and 67% respectively). Only one source, found in Paper 2 2013, was rated as difficult in the three examinations. The difficulty level was often raised when there was a larger volume of reading and the inclusion of low frequency words, abstract imagery and idiomatic phrasing.

Paper 2 consisted of six stimulus/source materials in each examination. In 2012 67% of the stimuli were moderate and 33% easy, with no questions being rated difficult. In 2013 83% of the stimuli were difficult and 17% very difficult. There were no easy stimuli in the 2013 examination. In 2014 there was one easy stimulus and five moderately difficult stimuli due to high reading demand resulting from length and density of texts. Therefore, out of the three examinations, the 2014 examination had the least challenging and most accessible sources with 83% of texts rated as moderately challenging and 17% difficult.

4.7 Recommendations for improving the quality and standard of English First Additional Language examinations

The quality and standard of IEB examinations is considerably high and the examinations provide a good model for future examinations, not only for IEB schools, but for other examining bodies. The depth of analysis of literature texts enables the assessment of reading skills at a high academic standard. However, it is proposed that the length of comprehension texts be increased to 600 – 700 words and/or that more than one text be used to test comprehension in Paper 1. The format and structure of the examinations provide a good context for candidates to demonstrate a range of linguistic competences that are required for post-school level academic participation. On the other hand, the distribution of the levels of difficulty between

moderately challenging and difficult items accommodate candidates with average linguistic competence without necessarily compromising standards.

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Appendices

Table A.1: Typology of cognitive demand

Level of cognitive demand	Type of cognitive demand	Explanation of categorization. Question which require students:	Examples
Lower order processes	1. Recognize or recall	To locate, identify and retrieve any kind of explicitly stated information, ideas, facts or details in reading material provided, or from memory of previously learned or read material (for example, names of places), and recognition of the relevance of the information, ideas, facts or details in relation to the question.	<p>The contextual questions on Shakespeare's drama Romeo and Juliet: <i>Complete the following sentence by filling in the missing words. Write down only the question number and the words.</i> <i>Juliet sends the Nurse to Friar Lawrence's cell to take Romeo a ... and tell him to come to her that night and say ...</i></p> <p>The comprehension question: <i>Give two reasons why children become overweight. Refer to paragraph 3 (of the given passage).</i></p>
	2. Apply or reorganize	To use or apply a basic procedure (for example, a basic grammatical rule), to replicate a model or version (for example, a basic visual representation, a report, memo, invitation in a highly scaffolded way where students have to recreate rather than create), or to reorganize explicitly stated information , ideas, facts or details from reading material or from memory of previously learned or read material in a different way or form from what was presented (for example, to sort, classify, match, categorize, compare, contrast, summarise or paraphrase, or consolidate explicitly stated information, ideas, facts or details).	<p><i>Rewrite the following sentence in the passive voice starting with the given word: The 18-year-old had developed an illness causing paralysis. Start with: An ...</i></p> <p><i>Rewrite the following sentence so that it is grammatically correct. 'When wearing their apparently sprayed-on outfits, it gives them a false sense of being stylish.'</i></p>

<p>Medium order processes</p>	<p>3. Infer, interpret or analyse</p>	<p>To engage in more abstract (inferential) reasoning and interpretation, and use conjecture, background knowledge, clues or implicit information, ideas, facts or details in reading material provided or from memory of previously learned or read material as a basis of forming hypotheses, interpreting, inferring or analysing details, relationships or ideas (for example, the significance of a theme, the motivation or nature of a character) which are not explicitly stated in reading or other source material.</p>	<p>The contextual questions on Shakespeare's drama <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>: <i>Juliet sends the Nurse to Romeo. What does this show the audience about the relationship between Juliet and the Nurse?</i></p> <p>The question on an extract from the novel <i>Animal Farm</i>: <i>Refer to lines 12–13: 'the animals <u>crept silently</u> away.'</i> <i>What do the underlined words convey about the animals' feelings at this stage of the novel?</i></p>
<p>Higher order processes</p>	<p>4. Evaluate or appreciate</p>	<p>To make critical judgement (for example, on qualities of accuracy, consistency, acceptability, desirability, worth or probability) using criteria provided by other sources or authorities, or students' own values, experiences, or background knowledge of the subject.</p> <p>To show emotional and aesthetic or literary sensitivity or a reaction to the worth of psychological and artistic elements of reading material (including literary techniques, language, forms, styles, and structuring). (For example, commenting on the effectiveness of a poetic device or image).</p>	<p>The question on a <i>Madam and Eve</i> cartoon: <i>The cartoonist does not show the mother-in-law in any of the frames. Do you think that this is an effective technique? Justify your response.</i></p> <p>The question on an unseen poem, <i>An Abandoned Bundle</i> by M. O. Mtshali: <i>Discuss how the poet employs diction and imagery to reveal his state of mind to readers.</i></p>
	<p>5. Synthesise or create</p>	<p>To integrate ideas and information and relate parts of material, ideas, or information to one another and to an overall structure or purpose in a way that is relational.</p> <p>To engage in original creative thought and design and put elements together to form a coherent whole and make a new or unique product showing emotional, aesthetic or literary sensitivity.</p>	<p><i>You are selling a second-hand item (e.g. a Walkman, a CD player, an item of clothing). Create an advertisement which will be placed on the notice board at school.</i></p> <p><i>Write an essay of between 250 and 300 words titled 'As I looked at that photograph...'</i></p>