



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	ESOL
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

There were slightly fewer candidates than in 2012, with entries from 109 centres, an increase of 7 on 2012.

A comparison between component average marks in 2013 and 2012 shows that candidate performance in Speaking is almost unchanged. Listening, Reading and Writing all show an improvement.

	Component 1 Listening /25	Component 2 Reading /25	Component 3 Writing /25	Component 4 Speaking /25
2013	14.2	12.2	15.8	19.9
2012	12.3	11.9	14.9	19.8

There were no changes to the papers from 2012.

Writing

- ◆ Part 1, Error Correction, showed a good spread of marks, with the average score being 3.42/5 (2012, 3.65/5).
- ◆ In Part 2, Everyday Communication, the average score was 4.93/8.
- ◆ In Part 3, 34% of candidates chose to answer Task 2, Work, and 66% chose Task 3, Study. The average score for Task 2 was 6.71/12 and for Task 3, 7.75/12.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening

- ◆ Most candidates knew how to deal with the various question types.
- ◆ Stronger candidates knew how to select information for the 'not more than 3 words' questions

Reading

- ◆ The subject matter and style of both texts seemed appropriate for Higher.
- ◆ Most candidates knew how to deal with the various question types.
- ◆ Stronger candidates knew how to make appropriate choice in the vocabulary questions

Writing Part 1

- ◆ Many candidates performed well in the Error Correction task.

Writing Part 2

- ◆ Candidates who chose the Study option performed slightly better than those who chose Work, possibly because they were able to use their own experience of online and face-to-face study in their answers.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening

- ◆ Many candidates found Recording 3 slightly more demanding than Recordings 1 and 2, with Q18 performing poorly (see comment below about statistical analysis).

Writing

- ◆ This was the first year where the format of the Everyday Communication task was more general in nature, with no bullet points. This requires candidates to be more imaginative and creative within the word count. Markers commented that weaker candidates found this more demanding.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Comments from markers indicated the papers were fair and balanced. Only a few markers commented that some candidates were not at the required level.

The Setting team feels the exam level is now closely aligned with CEFR, and at the right level of difficulty for Higher.

Component average marks (see above) show a rise on 2012 in all components. This seems to indicate that candidates are well prepared for the exam.

Statistical analysis now allows us to differentiate between questions that many candidates found demanding, possibly because the question is badly worded or the answer 'hidden' in the text, and those questions many candidates find demanding but which stronger candidates have answered correctly ('A' type questions). This is very useful, since markers may comment on a particular question being poorly answered in their marking workload, but when the statistics are consulted it shows that stronger candidates were able to answer it correctly, and therefore it is unlikely to be an inaccessible question.

Where new centres are short on experience in accurately assessing candidates' levels, the Initial Assessment Pack can provide valuable guidance on placement and level. There are also now seven years of past papers to enable prelims to be constructed at the appropriate level.

Marking Instructions, as well as past papers and previous external assessment reports, are on the SQA website. SQA Academy has a useful course 'Understanding how to mark writing in the external assessment', which can be of help to practitioners.

Listening and Reading

Centres should be aware of the range of vocabulary and topic required in both Listening and Reading, and of the possible complexity of language and argument. Candidates should be exposed to as much authentic non-simplified English as possible as the best means of preparation for the exam. Now that the recordings for Listening are truly 'authentic',

candidates need as much exposure as possible to such language. Radio programmes and podcasts are a good source of listening materials.

Lexical practice of the type such as 'find a word that means 'xxxx' in paragraph 1' etc could also be useful.

Writing Part 1

Candidates need to be reminded that in this task there are no 'correct' lines. Each line has either one word too many or too few.

Writing Part 2 (Everyday Communication)

The format now used, without bullet points, requires candidates, within time and word count constraints, to demonstrate a competence in written English at Higher level. Stronger candidates will have the ability to think creatively and imaginatively.

Centres can help candidates develop these skills and so prepare for this type of answer by giving candidates writing tasks where they have to quickly provide their own 'bullet points' and so flesh out their answer. An intermediate stage could be where candidates are given some keywords, or where the topic is discussed prior to writing so as to stimulate the imagination.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	723
Number of resulted entries in 2013	628

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	31.5%	31.5%	198	70
B	25.3%	56.8%	159	60
C	19.4%	76.3%	122	50
D	7.3%	83.6%	46	45
No award	16.4%	100.0%	103	-

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.