



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	ESOL
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

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, but the number of centres continued to rise — up two from 2012 at 84 centres. There were 16 new centres and 17 returning centres.

A comparison between component average marks in 2013 and 2012 shows that candidate performance in Speaking remained the same, with Listening and Writing showing a rise, and Reading a slight fall.

	Component 1 Listening /25	Component 2 Reading /25	Component 3 Writing /25	Component 4 Speaking /25
2013	15.2	13.7	14.5	18.5
2012	12.4	14.4	12.9	18.5

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 2.47/5 (2012, 2.55/5).
- ◆ In Part 2, 49% of candidates chose to answer Task 1, Everyday Communication; 20% chose Task 2, Work; and 31% chose Task 3, Study. The average score out of 20 for Task 1 was 11.72, for Task 2 12.69; and for Task 3 12.20.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening

- ◆ Most candidates knew how to approach MCQ and T/F questions.
- ◆ Stronger candidates were able to answer the 'not more than three words' questions both factually and grammatically correctly.

Reading

- ◆ Stronger candidates knew how to scan and select information for matching questions 7–10.
- ◆ Stronger candidates knew how to read and understand gist and detail so as to complete the gaps in Q11.
- ◆ Most candidates knew how to approach Q12 Matching.

Writing

Candidates who answered Work or Study options performed slightly better than those who chose Everyday Communication, possibly because they were able to use their own experience in their answers.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening

- ◆ Many candidates found Recording 3 slightly more demanding than Recordings 1 and 2.
- ◆ Weaker candidates did not know how to answer the 'not more than three words' questions with correct grammar. Note that MIs made allowances for this.
- ◆ The spelling of 'unanimous' in Q12iii posed some difficulty for candidates, but markers were advised to accept a wide range of spellings as long as the word was recognisable.

Reading

- ◆ Many candidates found Q3 demanding and were not able to select the appropriate information for the answer
- ◆ Many candidates found Q11 demanding. This, however, is as expected; the level of difficulty here is balanced by Q12 where 10 points are more easily accessible in the Matching task.

Writing

A few candidates did not know what is expected in Part 1 Error Correction and answered it in the form it took in the Specimen Paper (2005), where some lines were correct and some contained an error.

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 Listening and Writing and only a slight drop in Reading. This seems to indicate that candidates are well prepared for the exam.

Centre estimates showed a slight overestimation for A–C, at 88.7%, with actual performance being 82%.

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

Listening practice incorporating both listening for detail and identifying grammar clues may help candidates in the 'not more than three words' questions. The grammar areas most often involved are comparatives/superlatives and adjective/nouns +preposition.

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

There is evidence of good practice in layout and structure in the essays, with a clear introduction, appropriate paragraphing and a conclusion. However, candidates should be encouraged not to repeat all the rubric in the introductory paragraph — markers will not mark this; rather, candidates should attempt to use their own words here.

**Statistical information: update on Courses
Intermediate 2**

Number of resulted entries in 2012	786
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	698
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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 100				
A	27.7%	27.7%	193	70
B	26.5%	54.2%	185	60
C	20.6%	74.8%	144	50
D	6.3%	81.1%	44	45
No award	18.9%	100.0%	132	-

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.