



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	ESOL
Level	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

A comparison between component average marks in 2009 and 2010 shows that candidate performance in Speaking Component 1 showed a slight fall, as did candidate performance in Component 2.

	2010	2009
Component 1 (Speaking)	18.4/25	18.7/25
Component 2 (Listening, Reading and Writing)	47.8/75	48.3/75

The only changes to the format of the papers from 2009 were to reduce the number of choices in multiple-choice questions (MCQs) from four to three in Reading (for Listening in 2011), and to include matching and true/false in Listening.

Listening

Although the pace and quality of recordings for the Listening paper were satisfactory there were some comments about the 'flatness/artificiality' of delivery. This was raised at Grade Boundary meeting. The tone to indicate the start of each recording was present.

Writing

Part 1 – Error Correction - showed a good spread of marks with the average score being 3.44, slightly up on 2009.

In Part 2 – Everyday Communication - the average score was 4.96 (out of 8)

In Part 3, 55% of candidates chose to answer Task 2 – Work, and 61% chose Task 3 – Study. The average score for Task 2 was 6.60 (out of 12) and for Task 3, 7.34.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening Q 2, 8, 11, 14 were answered well.

Reading Q 2, 6 and 9 were answered well.

Writing Part 1: error correction

This was much better done than in previous years.

Writing Parts 2 and 3

Work and Study writing choices were based on interpretation of statistics, and some candidates managed to summarise the statistical findings clearly. They did not just repeat the statistics; they drew conclusions from them. Furthermore they dealt with each table horizontally rather than vertically, that is, the focus of each paragraph was (Work) Flexible hours, Working from home, etc, (Study) University 1, University 2, etc, rather than the column on the left.

Areas which candidates found demanding

When setting the papers setters had in mind the 2008 benchmarking exercise, mapping ESOL Higher against the Common European Framework. The result of this exercise was that it was felt the level of Higher had to be raised slightly over the subsequent two or three years. In the event, candidates coped well with the texts, and performance in Component 2 was only slightly down on 2009.

Listening

This was very poorly answered, with most candidates identifying 'skating' but not 'skating abroad'. This may have been guesswork since the answer depends on an understanding of 'not promising', which in the text is 'inauspicious'.

In 2011 the texts will be re-ordered so that the monologue occurs first, on the supposition that one voice is easier to tune in to than two or three.

Reading

Questions 1 and 7 were challenging. Text 2 proved suitably demanding for Higher, with Questions 10 and 13 (ii) challenging (the latter could have been due to a lack of understanding of 'swayed'). However, 13 (v) and 13 (vi) were better answered, indicating that candidates had understood the twist to the story.

Writing

In Part 3, Task 1, Work, some candidates misunderstood the rubric and interpreted the statistics as if they were actual work patterns and not the result of a survey about attitudes.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Candidates were well prepared and at the appropriate level. Centres should be commended for the very high percentage of candidates achieving grade A. In general candidates performed better than centre estimates.

Marking instructions, as well as past papers, are on the SQA website. These indicate the range of possible answers and the sorts of decisions markers have to make as to what is acceptable or not.

Reading

Where the rubric says, 'Which word in...' candidates must only use one word. In Questions 13 (vii) and (viii), 'huddle of people' and 'dreading the ordeal' are common collocations but were not accepted.

Writing Part 1: Error Correction

There are still a few candidates who answered this according to the format of the Specimen Paper and 2007 exam. Centres need to ensure that teaching staff are aware of the format of this question – there are no correct lines!

As a result of discussion last year about the appropriateness of this task as a test of writing, it was concluded that the task discriminates well between candidates, with a good spread of marks, and therefore the question should remain for the foreseeable future.

Writing Parts 2 and 3

Where the questions contain information in bullet points as a guide to candidates, it is important that candidates do not simply repeat the bullet points. They are expected to provide support for each point made – the more developed the support the better, in terms of marks.

Some markers commented that maybe too much information was given in the rubric and bullet points (Everyday Communication task), and that this might have limited the candidates' responses.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	436
Number of resulted entries in 2010	591

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	36.4%	36.4%	215	70
B	23.7%	60.1%	140	60
C	16.1%	76.1%	95	50
D	4.2%	80.4%	25	45
No award	19.6%	100.0%	116	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.