



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	ESOL
Level	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

A comparison between component average marks in 2009 and 2010 shows that candidate performance in both Components 1 and 2 showed a slight rise.

	2010	2009
Component 1 (Speaking)	17.7/25	17.2/25
Component 2 (Listening, Reading and Writing)	47.8/75	46.9/75

The only changes to the format of the papers from 2009 were to reduce the number of choices in MCQs from four to three, and to include a matching task in Reading.

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 the grade boundary meeting. The tone to indicate the start of each recording was present.

Writing

Part 1, Error Correction, showed a similar spread of marks to 2009, with the average score being 2.46.

In Part 2, 50% of candidates chose to answer Task 1, Everyday Communication, with 33% choosing Task 2, Work, and 18% choosing Task 3, Study. This is a more even spread than in 2009. The average score for Task 1 was 13.21 (out of 20), 12.96 for Task 2 and 12.50 for Task 3.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening questions 2, 7, 9, 15 and 20 were answered well.

In the Writing section, as in 2009, Part 2, Everyday Communication, proved the most popular choice, chosen by 50% of candidates. Neither the Work nor Study options involved the interpretation of statistics, this year the format being based round bullet points.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening questions 1, 5, 6, 13 were demanding. Place names may have added to the difficulty.

From 2011 the order of texts will be changed and the first Listening will be a monologue. This may make the 'tuning in' process for candidates less taxing.

Reading part 4, cloze, continues to be demanding, namely 12 (ii), (iv) and (v). However, this is balanced by the slightly less demanding Part 5 matching exercise.

In Writing Part 1, Error Correction, again few candidates achieved full marks (five) for this question and the average score was 2.46. 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.

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.

Listening

When preparing candidates for a question where the rubric says 'which TWO of these things...?' (Question 4), encourage candidates to tick only two options. If they tick more than two, no marks will be awarded.

Reading

The instruction format is part of the accepted script layout, but it may occasionally be confusing, for example in Text 1, Part 2, where it reads 'Provide short answers...' but Questions 4 and 5 immediately following ask for only one word.

It is more important for candidates to read the question carefully, for example a question like Question 5, which asked candidates to find a plural word ('which word means 'dangers?'). The answer must be plural. Markers did not accept 'threat'.

Questions 6 and 7

Many candidates copied out full sentences which included the correct answer, and markers accepted this, but candidates should be encouraged to identify the correct information and include that rather than the whole sentence.

Writing

There are still a few candidates who answered Writing Part 1, Error Correction, 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!

Also, the rubric only says 'write the extra or missing word'. It does NOT say 'you must mark the correct place in the text'. If candidates annotate the text there could be confusion where, for example, the word to be omitted is 'the' but there are two instances of 'the' in the line and the candidate marks the wrong one. Markers, however, are instructed to ignore annotations to the text.

Writing Part 2

Candidates should be discouraged from simply copying the rubric or bullet points into their answer; they need to rephrase and also to include support for each point made.

There were several instances this year where candidates had spent so much time on drafting out a plan for their answer and/or first and last paragraphs that they did not have time to complete the answer. While it is good practice when preparing for writing in the Units to encourage careful planning and drafting, candidates need also to be prepared for writing under timed circumstances, when speed is of the essence.

Everyday Communication

The task was a reply to a letter offering a scholarship, asking a series of questions.

Candidates who got low marks for this simply wrote a series of questions without indicating a change of topic, eg 'Can you tell me if the scholarship covers the cost of travel from home? I also need to know about accommodation.'

Stronger candidates made a clear break between the topics, either through paragraphing or by introducing the new topic before they asked the question.

The word 'furthermore' is a linker. Is it equivalent to 'and'? Can it link unrelated topics? Does it include some emphasis relating to the previous point? Possibly this word is overused.

Work

There were some instances of candidates confusing 'trainee' and 'trainer'.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	475
Number of resulted entries in 2010	736

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	35.5%	35.5%	261	70
B	25.3%	60.7%	186	60
C	17.5%	78.3%	129	50
D	4.9%	83.2%	36	45
No award	16.8%	100.0%	124	—

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.