



External Assessment Report 2012

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

Candidate numbers increased again this year. There were 27 new centres and 11 returning centres. There has been a change to calculating component average marks this year, with separate averages for Listening, Reading and Writing.

A comparison between component average marks in 2012 and 2011 shows that candidate performance in the Speaking component is almost unchanged, whereas performance in the Listening, Reading and Writing component shows a fall.

	2012	2011
Component: Speaking	19.9/25	19.1/25
Component: Listening, Reading and Writing (Listening 12.3/25, Reading 11.9/25, Writing 14.9/25)	39.1/75	46.2/75

There were no changes to the papers from 2011 to 2012. For the first time, however the recordings for the Listening exam used trained actors.

Writing

Part 1 — Error Correction, showed a good spread of marks with the average score being 3.36/5 (2011 - 3.32/5).

In Part 2 — Everyday Communication, the average score was 4.7/8.

In Part 3, 57% of candidates chose to answer Task 2 — Work, and 53% chose Task 3 — Study. The average score for Task 2 was 6.72/12 and for Task 3, 6.87/12.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening

Recording 3. Most candidates performed well, though in Question 14iii it is remarkable how many candidates wrote 'payed' for 'paid'.

Reading

Text 1. Most candidates performed adequately.

Writing

Many candidates performed well in the Error Correction task and in both Writing tasks. Higher marks were awarded in the Everyday Communication task for the way candidates dealt with the list of questions and with supporting detail. The Work task — a report on work experience — produced some excellent and imaginative examples, possibly because both school and FE based candidates may have participated in such a scheme.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening

Recordings 1 and 2. Candidates performed less well — NR (No Response) occurred more frequently than usual. Some items in Recording 2 were particularly demanding:

Questions 5, 8i and 8iv all proved demanding to candidates.

Reading

Questions 1ii, 13iii were not answered well, and there were several other questions in Text 2 which performed outwith the expected range. It is possible that Text 2 was just too literary for this level.

Writing

It may be that school-based candidates found the Study task — comparing different education systems — demanding since they are less likely to have had experience of another education system. Markers, however, felt that the task was a little weak in that it did not ask for opinions.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

There were no comments from markers about candidates being stronger or weaker than usual, and this seems to be borne out by the Writing marks. Markers did remark, however that candidates found reading Text 2 difficult.

It may be worth noting that, in the current e-marking system, markers no longer mark a 'candidate', but they mark Listening scripts separately from Reading/Writing scripts, so it may be harder for them to get an overall view of candidate performance.

Centres may wish to consider their estimates, which this year had the highest ever A - C estimate of 95.2%, with an A estimate of 40.7%. This is the first time there has been such a wide discrepancy between Centre estimates and performance.

Grade	Centre estimate %	Performance %
A	40.7	25.6
B	29.2	24.2
C	25.2	20.9
D	3.0	10.5
No award	1.9	18.8

The drop in performance in the Listening, Reading and Writing component by 7 from 2011 indicates that candidates found (parts of) the exam demanding.

It can be hard for new Centres to accurately assess candidates for the first time, but the Initial Assessment Pack can provide valuable guidance for centres and staff as to placement and level.

There are also now 6 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.

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. Radio programmes and podcasts are a good source of listening materials.

Writing Parts 2 and 3

Centres are reminded of the comment in External Assessment Report 2011 regarding the Everyday Communication task '*...not demanding enough ... The two Writing tasks should be different but complementary, with Everyday Communication being more general and Work/Study more specific. This may require a change in format to the Everyday Communication rubric.*'

The setting team have implemented this for 2013, with the Everyday Communication task being more general in nature, ie there are no bullet points, while at the same time it is still task specific.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	684
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	723
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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	25.6%	25.6%	185	68
B	24.2%	49.8%	175	58
C	20.9%	70.7%	151	48
D	10.5%	81.2%	76	43
No award	18.8%	100.0%	136	-

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.