



External Assessment Report 2012

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

786 candidates sat the exam (10 more than in 2011), with entries from 82 centres (four more than in 2011). There were 27 new centres and 12 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 rose slightly, whereas performance in the Listening, Reading and Writing component shows a considerable fall.

	2012	2011
Component: Speaking	18.5/25	17.9/25
Component: Listening, Reading and Writing (Listening 12.4/25, Reading 14.4/25, Writing 12.9/25)	39.7/75	48.2/75

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 2.55/5 (2011 - 2.99/5).

In Part 2, 34% of candidates chose to answer Task 1 – Everyday Communication, 24% chose Task 2 - Work, and 41% chose Task 3 – Study. The average score out of 20 for Task 1 was 9.65, for Task 2 9.56 and for Task 3 11.38.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening

Recordings 2 and 3: Many candidates performed well.

Reading

Most candidates performed well. Note, however, that the average mark for Question 12 – Matching – was only 5.67/9

Writing

The candidates who chose the Study option – giving advice on exam preparation – performed better than those who chose the other two options. This would indicate perhaps that topics with which candidates are very familiar result in better writing, though it doesn't explain why those who chose another familiar topic – Everyday Communication, the local area – performed less well.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening

Recording 1. Questions 5ii, 5iii, and 5iv proved very demanding. The reason for this is not clear, though possibly the questions were too close together in the final paragraphs of the text. NR (No Response) occurred more frequently than usual.

Reading

Question 5. Most candidates found this demanding. There is no clear reason as to this — in fact the answer can be arrived at by a process of elimination.

Writing

The average for Error Analysis is slightly lower than last year.

The averages for both Everyday Communication and Work options were below 50%, indicating that candidates found them demanding. The questions themselves seem as straightforward as the Study option. However, in Everyday Communication, some candidates wrote a very general article about their area, rather than writing something that would be of immediate use to the target audience.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Comments from markers indicated that the cohort was weaker than usual, with some candidates not at the required level. This seems to be borne out by the drop in marks in the Listening, Reading and Writing component, and by the greatly reduced number of A and B grades.

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. Markers no longer 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 91.8%, with A and B being overestimated. This is the first time there has been such a wide discrepancy between centre estimates and performance.

Grade	Centre estimate %	Performance %
A	30.2	21.1
B	37.4	23.0
C	23.3	23.0
D	4.7	8.7
No award	3.5	23.2

The drop in performance in Listening, Reading and Writing by 8.5 marks from 2011 indicates that candidates found the exam demanding, and, given the averages for Writing, indicate that some candidates may have been wrongly entered.

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

The format of the Listening exam often requires candidates to write the answers — an added difficulty. Markers are generous when it comes to mis-spellings and incorrect grammar, especially in the ‘not more than 3 words’ questions, all of which require good ‘listening for detail’ skills. However, centres could be encouraged to give potential candidates lots of practice of word recognition, and sound discrimination (especially of vowel sounds), with accurate spelling/transcription.

Writing Part 2

Candidates should be encouraged to read the rubric carefully to identify the purpose, audience and genre. If candidates are writing a report or article they should be persuaded not to start with ‘Dear Manager ...’

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2011	776
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	786
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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	22.1%	22.1%	174	68
B	23.0%	45.2%	181	58
C	23.0%	68.2%	181	48
D	8.7%	76.8%	68	43
No award	23.2%	100.0%	182	-

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.