



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject	ESOL
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

714 candidates sat the exam, 86 more than in 2013, with entries from 103 centres, a decrease of 6 on 2013. There were 18 new centres and 17 returning centres (returning = centres who didn't enter candidates in 2013 but who had done so prior to 2013).

A comparison between component average marks in 2014 and 2013 shows that candidate performance across all skills shows a rise and a much higher number than previously attained grade A. This may indicate not only that candidates are well prepared for the exam, but that, across the skills and especially in Writing, they were stronger than expected.

	Component 1 Listening /25	Component 2 Reading /25	Component 3 Writing /25	Component 4 Speaking /25
2014	16.9	14.1	16.4	20.5
2013	14.2	12.2	15.8	19.9

There were no changes to the papers from 2013.

## Writing

Part 1 – Error Correction showed a good spread of marks with the average score being 3.38/5.

In Part 2 – Everyday Communication the average score was 5.3/8.

In Part 3, 40% of candidates chose to answer Task 2 – Work, and 60% chose Task 3 – Study. The average score for Task 2 was 7.29/12 and for Task 3, 8.10/12.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Listening

In general, candidates performed well and 'A' type questions were balanced by slightly easier initial questions, which helped the candidates 'tune in'. Markers felt the paper was fair and balanced, and that performance overall was in the average to good range, with few low-scoring candidates.

### Reading

The subject matter and style of both texts seemed appropriate for Higher, and few, if any issues were raised.

All candidates knew how to deal with the various question types.

### **Writing Part 3**

More candidates chose the Study option. The topic, Home Schooling, seemed to suit many candidates, both from college and school entrants; some produced excellent full marks answers. In fact the overall average mark (8.1/12) was high.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Writing Part 1**

Very few candidates got full marks in the Error Correction task, failing to identify the missing 'whose' in Q1.

### **Writing Part 2**

This is the second year where the format of the Everyday Communication task has been more general in nature, with no bullet points. However, the rubric did contain examples, which, unfortunately, many candidates treated as bullet points, working their way rather unimaginatively through each point and blind to any anomalies (eg a beach in a city-centre residential area).

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **General**

Centres estimates were slightly up on those of 2013, with A–C estimated for 93.8%, (2013 91.3%).

Where new centres are short on experience in accurately assessing candidates' levels, the Initial Assessment Pack on ESOL Scotland's website can provide valuable guidance on placement and level. There are also now eight 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 published 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 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. Now that the recordings for Listening are truly 'authentic', candidates need as much exposure as possible to such language. Radio programmes and podcasts are a good source of listening materials.

Lexical practice of the type such as 'find a word which means 'xxx' in paragraph 1', etc could also be useful. Practice in identifying the part of speech and in knowing appropriate synonyms would also be useful

Candidates need to be made aware that in questions in Reading of the type 'Which one word in para ... means ...' they must produce the word correctly spelled.

### **Writing Part 2 (Everyday Communication)**

(See comment above about candidates taking the rubric exemplars and using these as bullet points, thereby constraining their creativity.)

The format now used, without bullet points, requires candidates, within time and word count constraints, to demonstrate a competence in written English at Higher level. Stronger candidates will have the ability to think creatively and imaginatively. Centres can help candidates develop these skills and so prepare for this type of answer by giving them writing tasks where they themselves have to quickly provide their own 'bullet points' and so flesh out their answer. An intermediate stage could be where candidates are given some keywords, or where the topic is discussed prior to writing so as to stimulate the imagination.

One teacher/marker asked about opening/closing salutations in e-mails and letters. In questions requiring a letter as response there is usually an instruction in the rubric not to include addresses. There has, however, never been any instruction about opening/closing salutations. When preparing candidates, teachers should be aware that markers will focus more on content than layout.

### **Writing Part 3**

The issue of layout in report writing (Writing Part 3, task 1 (Report)) was raised by some markers. There may be several styles of report writing, and what is more important in preparing candidates for the exam is that candidates are made aware of a range of appropriate styles and that they can demonstrate clear paragraphing and logical progression, with, of course, clear and well-developed content.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	628
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	714
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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	47.6%	47.6%	340	70
B	21.4%	69.0%	153	60
C	18.3%	87.4%	131	50
D	4.1%	91.5%	29	45
No award	8.5%	-	61	-

## 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.