



## External Assessment Report 2015

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

A total of 442 candidates sat the exam in 2015, fewer than in 2014 due to the dual running of the current and new Higher exams. There were entries from 66 centres, of which nine were new centres and 11 returning centres (returning centres didn't enter candidates in 2014 but had done so prior to 2014).

Candidate responses encompassed a wide range of scores, and the 2015 exam appears to have been a fair test of range of ability. Overall the assessment components were on standard, though the level of demand seemed very slightly higher than in previous years. This was taken into consideration at the grade boundary meeting.

There were no changes to the structure of the components this year, though it should be noted that the current Higher will be completely replaced by the new Higher in 2016.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Paper 1: Listening

Many candidates performed particularly well in Recording 1, which is borne out by statistics. Recordings 2 and 3 were more demanding. It has been normal practice to make the first recording more accessible in order to help relax candidates and allow time to 'tune in'.

### Paper 2: Reading and Writing

#### Reading

Candidates generally performed better in text 2, an extract from a novel.

#### Writing

Part 1, Error Correction task, was handled well by many candidates and proved to be a good indicator of performance in the other writing tasks.

Part 2, Everyday Communication, was generally well handled by candidates, who were mostly able to generate their own ideas on the subject of fundraising.

Part 3, Work or Study-related task: the majority of candidates (62%) opted for task 2 (study).

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Listening**

Candidates generally performed less well in Questions 15 and 17, which were devised as discriminator type questions, assessing candidates' ability to identify speakers' opinion and/or attitude.

### **Reading**

Candidates' performance was on the whole poorer in open answer/short answer questions than in multiple choice type questions.

Many candidates struggled with Question 1 (iii) and (iv). Although the rubric stated that the answer had to be 'from the text', there were a number of candidates' own responses that markers felt were also acceptable.

Candidates found the short answers required for Question 4 (i), (ii), (iv) and Question 7 challenging. These were intended as discriminator type questions.

Question 11 required a degree of inference, which many candidates struggled with.

### **Writing**

In part 3, Work-related task 1, a significant number of candidates did not use an appropriate style when writing to their manager.

There was a certain amount of misinterpretation of Part 3, Study task 2, resulting in some candidates discussing the advantages of technology in general rather than in the context of education.

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

### **General**

Centres can access the new Higher specimen question papers with marking instructions, along with guidance on the use of past paper questions for Higher ESOL at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47905.html>.

Paper 2, Section C Writing, Part 1 (Error Correction) will no longer form part of the Higher exam from 2016.

### **Writing: content and organisation**

In the writing tasks, candidates need to pay particular attention to content and structure. They should be able to provide clear support for each point made and organise the points into a structure that shows logical progression.

Candidates should also pay close attention to purpose and intended audience before they begin to write. Candidates who paid little attention to these aspects tended to write in an inappropriate genre and style. This was particularly the case in part 2, task 1 (e-mail to manager). Although this generally did not affect marks awarded, centres should consider teaching different writing genres so that candidates are well equipped to structure a report, essay, letter, etc, and are aware of the differences between these genres.

## **Spelling**

In the listening paper minor spelling errors can be accepted for open answer questions as long as the word is recognisable and it is fairly clear that the candidate understands the word from the context. Although candidates should not allow spelling to distract them from listening, they should always check their spelling and answers in the time provided to do so.

In the reading paper candidates are expected to spell words from the text correctly, and it is advisable that they leave adequate time to check their spelling, along with their answers generally.

For the writing tasks, the highest level descriptor for writing can be awarded even if there are a number of basic slips and errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation, etc. These should not detract from the overall impression of the performance.

## **Rubric**

Candidates should pay close attention to the correct number of boxes to tick in multiple choice questions in the listening and reading papers. The number of correct answers for a multiple choice question can range from one to three. If a candidate changes their mind about an answer they should clearly score out the incorrect answer on the answer sheet.

Candidates should be instructed to strictly adhere to the word limit in open answer questions in the reading and listening sections, eg 'use no more than 3 words'.

Candidates should also try to remain within the recommended word count for the writing tasks. It is not advisable to throw away time in the exam counting words, and it is recommended that candidates be aware of the average number of words per line and per A4 page that they produce when writing by hand. More is not always better, and candidates should focus on the communicative quality and accuracy of their work. Candidates are advised to factor in time for editing and proofreading their written work and should be provided with opportunities to write tasks in test conditions in class.

## **Handwriting**

Handwriting was sometimes an issue and a significant number of scripts were challenging to read. Candidates should ensure that their work is legible and practise writing by hand in test conditions.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	232

## 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	47.4%	47.4%	110	74
B	29.7%	77.2%	69	59
C	15.1%	92.2%	35	49
D	2.6%	94.8%	6	44
No award	5.2%	-	12	-

The assessment proved slightly more difficult than expected resulting in a downward adjustment of 1 mark at all boundaries.

## 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.