



Course Report 2015

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Level	Higher (new)

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper: Listening; Reading and Writing

Section A, Listening

The purpose of this question paper is to allow learners to demonstrate challenge and application in the skill of listening for information. The question paper gives learners an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ ability to understand detailed and complex language spoken in English
- ◆ ability to identify and show understanding of the overall purpose, main points and aspects of detail
- ◆ ability to identify and show understanding of opinions and/or attitudes

Learners listen to one monologue and one spoken interaction, then answer questions in English and respond in English. Listening comprehension is tested using a range of question types such as multiple choice and gap-fill.

This section of the question paper has 20 marks. Marks are awarded for what is correct and credit is given according to the accuracy and relevance of responses.

Sections B and C, Reading and Writing

The purpose of these sections is to allow learners to demonstrate challenge and application in the skills of reading and writing. The question paper gives learners an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

Reading:

- ◆ ability to understand detailed and complex language written in English
- ◆ ability to identify and show understanding of the overall purpose, main points and aspects of detail
- ◆ ability to identify how detailed vocabulary, language features and text structures are used to convey meaning
- ◆ ability to identify and show understanding of opinions and/or attitudes

Writing:

- ◆ produce written English using detailed and complex language to convey meaning
- ◆ use structures and vocabulary, as appropriate to task
- ◆ use appropriate features of grammar, spelling and punctuation
- ◆ use conventions of style and layout appropriate to task

The question paper for Reading and Writing has 50 marks.

In **Section B**, titled 'Reading', candidates answer questions on two texts. Questions and responses are in English. Reading comprehension is tested using a range of question types such as multiple choice, gap-fill and short answer.

This section has 25 marks, which are awarded for identifying, explaining and showing awareness of features of text, opinions and/or attitudes and key aspects of detail.

In **Section C**, titled 'Writing', candidates produce two written texts. They choose one title from the context of everyday life and one from the contexts of either work or study. Candidates produce approximately 150–200 words for the everyday life writing task and approximately 250–300 words for the work or study writing task.

Candidates are assessed against criteria including addressing content and organisation, vocabulary and spelling, grammar and punctuation. This section has 25 marks, which are awarded for using appropriate structures, vocabulary and language features to convey meaning.

The structure and language used for each writing assessment should be appropriate to the task, eg an e-mail for an everyday life task; a report for a work-related task; or an essay for a study-related task.

Ten marks are available for the everyday life writing assessment task and fifteen marks are available for the work or study writing task.

Each title has some limited support for guidance.

Overall the aspects of assessment in the question papers were addressed successfully.

Component 2: Performance

This component allows candidates to demonstrate challenge and application in the skills of speaking and listening. Candidates will have a discussion in English on a chosen topic, responding to questions and initiating and supporting the interaction throughout, as appropriate. The chosen topic can be from everyday life, work or study contexts, and the discussion can be with one other person or in a small group.

The discussion will last 8–10 minutes if conducted in a pair or longer if in a small group.

Candidates have 15 minutes to prepare for the discussion independently.

The performance will give candidates an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ ability to communicate orally in English using detailed and complex language to convey meaning
- ◆ ability to use structures and vocabulary, as appropriate to task
- ◆ ability to maintain interaction as appropriate to task, showing understanding of spoken English

The candidate's performance is described in terms of the following six main aspects for speaking and listening:

- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas/opinions
- ◆ effectiveness and relevance of contribution
- ◆ accuracy and appropriateness of general and specialised vocabulary in context
- ◆ accuracy and use of structures, including complex structures, to communicate
- ◆ effectiveness of pronunciation
- ◆ understanding spoken English

A total of 25 marks can be awarded for the speaking element, and total of 5 are available for the listening element.

A combined total of 30 marks can be awarded for Component 2, which is 30% of the overall marks for the Course assessment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper: Listening, Reading and Writing

In general, candidates appeared well prepared for the exam. There was evidence that most candidates were familiar with the demand of the question paper and the question types.

Average marks for each component were high.

Section A, Listening question paper

The majority of candidates were able to complete the listening assessment with relative ease. Candidates performed particularly well in recording 1 (dialogue).

Section B, Reading question paper

Candidates generally performed well in both texts and knew how to deal with the question types.

Section C, Writing question paper

This was generally done well. The vast majority of candidates attempted both parts of the writing paper and very few produced writing that was too short.

There were no major differences between responses to the three tasks, although the average mark for task 2 study was slightly higher than the other everyday life and work tasks.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates generally performed very well, demonstrating their speaking and listening skills to the extent of their language competence. This was particularly evident where they clearly understood the requirements of the task and had an interest in the topic.

Overall the introduction of the listening element of the performance has improved the quality of the interactions between candidates and made them more responsive to their partners or others in a small group. This allows further development of points and greater opportunities to demonstrate a range of language skills during the discussion.

Many discussions took place in the context of everyday life on the topics of news and changing habits, allowing candidates to demonstrate a wide range of general and topic specific vocabulary.

There were a few small group discussions where one of the candidates found it harder to fully demonstrate their language skills because of the group dynamic.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper: Listening; Reading and Writing

Section A, Listening

Candidates performed particularly well in open-answer questions Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14 and Q15, which all required listening for detail.

Section B, Reading

Candidates performed particularly well in open-answer questions Q2, Q14, Q16 and Q17 and in multiple choice question 10, which all required reading for detail.

Section C, Writing

There was a good spread of marks in the writing tasks and overall candidates responded well.

Component 2: Performance

The majority of candidates demonstrated that they had made good use of the preparation time and felt confident with the process being recorded.

Candidates mainly produced natural and spontaneous discussions.

In many of the discussions candidates were awarded marks in the top two bands for speaking and listening and were clearly demonstrating the following skills well in each element.

Speaking:

- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas and opinions
- ◆ effectiveness and relevance of contribution
- ◆ accuracy and use of structures, including complex structures, to communicate
- ◆ effectiveness of pronunciation

Listening:

- ◆ listening attentively to their partner and responding with a degree of spontaneity which fully supported the discussion

Overall, candidates who performed well contributed in an interesting and thoughtful way and demonstrated an enthusiasm for the topic and a genuine interest in what their partner(s) had to say.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper: Listening, Reading and Writing

In the listening and reading papers there were a number of questions that were designed to be more demanding ('A' type questions), but which stronger candidates would be able to answer correctly. These are listed below.

Section A, Listening question paper

Candidates generally found the following questions more demanding:

- ◆ multiple choice questions Q9 and Q19, which both required candidates to identify the speakers' attitude
- ◆ open-answer question Q16, which required candidates to listen for detail

Section B, Reading question paper

Candidate performance was slightly poorer in the following areas:

- ◆ open-answer questions Q3 and Q6, which required close reading
- ◆ open-answer question Q7, where candidates had to find a phrase in the text to match a definition
- ◆ multiple choice question Q19, which required close reading

The general rubric for questions 6 – 9 required 'no more than 3 words'. This may have been misleading for question 9, which specifically asks for one word. Given the possible contradictory nature of the rubric, on this occasion some good answers with more than one word were accepted.

Section C, Writing

A small number of candidates misinterpreted part 1 (everyday life) and part 2, task 2 (study). For example, in the study question some candidates appeared to have little or no experience of EAL and wrote about general English or EAP lessons. They were not penalised for this.

Candidates generally need to focus on the purpose of the writing task and intended audience, which will determine the style.

Some candidates need to think more carefully about structure and paragraphing, and provide clear support for each point made. There were a number of scripts that showed no evidence of paragraphing, which was surprising at this level.

Component 2: Performance

There was some evidence that a few candidates found discussion in a small group more demanding than when paired with another candidate and were not able to fully demonstrate their skills.

Speaking

Some candidates participated well in the discussion but were not able to gain higher marks because of a limited range of structures and/or specialised vocabulary related to the topic.

Some candidates had not made good use of the preparation time and did not fully address the bullet points in the assessment brief. As a consequence, their discussions lacked organisation and cohesion resulting in lower marks.

Listening

A few candidates had not taken on board the listening element of the discussion and persisted throughout in asking questions but not responding to the comments or questions of their partner. This resulted in a lower mark for listening.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper: Listening, Reading and Writing

Centres can access 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>.

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 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 1 (everyday life local newspaper/magazine article) and part 2, task 1 (work report), although this generally did not have a significant impact on marks. 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.

In part 2, task 1 (work report), some candidates attempted to use report formats, most of which were appropriate. When preparing candidates for the exam it is worth bearing in mind that there is a range of appropriate reporting styles.

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. If the spelling changes the meaning, it cannot be accepted. For example, in Q6 'food meals' and 'food mails' were not accepted (correct answer: food miles). Candidates should not allow spelling to distract them from listening, but 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 difficult to read. Candidates should ensure that their work is legible and practise writing by hand in test conditions.

It's also possible to make alternative arrangements for some candidates to word process their responses.

Component 2: Performance

To prepare candidates, centres should continue to refer closely to the *Higher ESOL Performance Assessment Task* to ensure they are fully familiar with the task, ie a discussion, and the accompanying guidance and marking instructions.

Centres should note the instructions in the Course Assessment Task that the assessment is a discussion, and not a presentation with a follow-up question and answer section, especially when making use of UASP tasks. The Detailed Marking Instructions for both Speaking and Listening are for a discussion where candidates must show ability to initiate and show sensitivity to turn-taking. The marks awarded for Listening also take account of how well they listen and respond to what is said by their partner(s).

Centres should make candidates aware that lengthy monologues during the discussion reduce the opportunities for spontaneity, demonstrating their skills in turn-taking and responding to their partner(s) comments.

In addition to centres using speaking briefs from the UASPs, topics can be chosen by the centre to provide further personalisation and choice. When writing the brief for candidates for the Assessment Task, care should be taken to ensure that there is an appropriate level of challenge for Higher. It should allow candidates to fully demonstrate their English language skills, particularly in relation to:

- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas/opinions
- ◆ range of general and specialised vocabulary
- ◆ use of detailed structure to communicate

Some centres assessed candidates in small groups rather than pairs and where this was successful each candidate had sufficient time and supportive group members to be able to fully demonstrate their English language skills.

It is appropriate to extend the timing of the Speaking and Listening task for small groups, to allow each candidate to fully demonstrate their skills. Centres should also ensure that the discussion is well balanced and encourage a supportive approach from group members so that there is sufficient evidence from each candidate.

Candidates should be given the opportunity to become familiar with the centre's chosen method of recording the assessment (audio or video) early in the course, given recorded practice of discussions, and encouraged to record and discuss their interactions. Regular feedback to candidates on their progress in speaking skills and the areas for them to develop is essential.

Candidates should be trained in the most effective ways to use the allocated preparation time to consider their ideas for each of the bullet points and possible relevant specialised vocabulary. They should apply note-taking skills and at all times be discouraged from writing a lengthy text on the topic as a way of preparing on their own. They should not rehearse the discussion with anyone during the preparation time but prepare on their own.

Candidates should be made aware of the need to demonstrate a range of structures and specialised vocabulary early in the course, and should be advised that the development of

this is essential to being awarded high marks in the speaking. Guidance on how they can do this is an essential part of supporting candidates to achieve good marks in speaking.

Early feedback on formative assessment of listening skills will enable them to achieve high marks in the Listening element. Candidates who achieve high marks in the listening respond to and develop points made by their partner(s). They should be made fully aware of the need for sensitivity in turn-taking and advised that it is not appropriate to dominate the discussion.

Centres should make use of the Understanding Standards packs available on the SQA Secure site for the Internally Assessed Component of the Course Assessment (IACCA) at Higher. These provide detailed commentaries on audio/video recordings of candidate performances which show clearly the basis on which marks have been awarded.

As well as ensuring national standards are maintained, internal verification should ensure that assessors are fully supported throughout internal assessment. Internal verifiers and assessors may find the following link to the SQA Internal Verification Toolkit useful to ensure national standards are maintained, assessors are supported and paperwork is not excessive. The Toolkit is a suggested approach and SQA recognises that many centres will already have well developed processes in place.

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/71679.5825.html>

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	64
C	15.1%	92.2%	35	54
D	2.6%	94.8%	6	49
No award	5.2%	-	12	0

The intention was to set boundaries at notional levels, however, due to an unanticipated easing in both the Reading and Listening papers all boundaries were adjusted upwards by 4 marks.

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.