



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject	ESOL
Level	Intermediate 2

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

550 candidates sat the exam, 148 fewer than in 2013, and the number of centres fell slightly — down nine from 2013 at 75 centres. The new CfE National 5 exam was launched this year, accounting for the drop in candidates and centres. There were 24 new centres and 9 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 in Speaking remained almost the same, with the other three components showing a rise. This seems to indicate that candidates are well prepared for the exam.

	Component 1 Listening /25	Component 2 Reading /25	Component 3 Writing /25	Component 4 Speaking /25
2014	16.3	14.4	15.0	18.4
2013	15.2	13.7	14.5	18.5

Comments from markers indicated the papers were fair and balanced. There were few candidates who had been entered before they were at the required level.

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 2.49/5.

In Part 2, 62% of candidates chose to answer Task 1 Everyday Communication, 17% chose Task 2 Work, and 21% chose Task 3 Study. The average score out of 20 for Task 1 was 12.71, for Task 2 12.56, and for Task 3 12.08.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening

There was an even spread over the three Listening passages, with none performing better or worse than the others.

Reading

Stronger candidates knew how to scan and select information for matching questions 3–6.

Candidates dealt well with the layout of Q10, with some achieving full marks.

Writing

Candidates who answered the Everyday Communication option performed slightly better than those who chose Work or Study, but there was not a great deal of difference. In general, writing was of a good standard.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening

Q4(ii) and 4(iii) - some candidates found these questions more demanding.

Reading

Some candidates found Q2(a) and 2(b) demanding and were not able to select the appropriate information for the answer. Also, the vocabulary questions 7 and 8 were not well answered

Writing

There were no issues in Writing.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Centre estimates showed an overestimation for A–C, at 91.2%, with actual performance being 81%.

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. Although this is the last year of ESOL Intermediate 2, the past papers will still be helpful in preparing candidates for ESOL National 5, since there are many common features in the two exams.

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

Listening practice incorporating both listening for detail and identifying grammar clues may help candidates in the 'not more than 3 words' questions. The grammar areas most often involved are comparatives/superlatives and adjective/nouns +preposition.

Candidates should be exposed to as much authentic non-simplified English as possible as the best means of preparation for the exam. The recordings for Listening are truly 'authentic', so candidates need as much exposure as possible to such language. Radio programmes and podcasts are a good source of listening materials.

Reading

Lexical practice such as 'find a word which means 'xxxx' in paragraph 1' etc could be useful. English is full of synonyms, and at this level there is usually much room for development. Practice in identifying parts of speech and therefore knowing which word class to look for should also help in questions dealing with vocabulary.

Writing Part 2

The general standard of writing at Intermediate 2 has steadily improved over the years and work done on layout, paragraphing and coherence has paid off. The only issues that arise from this particular diet are:

- 1 Candidates are good at addressing bullet points but less so at adding their own ideas. Centres can help candidates develop with this by giving them writing tasks where they themselves have to 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 to stimulate the imagination. This is also good preparation for Higher, where the Everyday Communication question now has bullet points.
- 2 Task 3: Study required a 'formal essay' response but some candidates were obviously more comfortable with more informal or idiomatic English. Centres could provide practice in helping candidates to be more aware of the range of formality and informality in style, lexis and grammar and in helping candidates to make appropriate choices.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	698
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	550
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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	34.7%	34.7%	191	70
B	24.5%	59.3%	135	60
C	21.8%	81.1%	120	50
D	6.9%	88.0%	38	45
No award	12.0%	-	66	-

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.