



External Assessment Report 2015

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

134 candidates sat the exam, 416 fewer than in 2014, and the number of centres fell to 19 (from 75 in 2014). This is the second year of the new CfE National 5 exam and the last year of Intermediate 2, which accounts for the substantial drop in numbers of candidates and centres.

Comments from markers indicated that the papers were reasonably fair and balanced. There were some candidates who had been entered before they were at the required level. Centres estimates recognised this (15.7% were estimated D or no award, and this was approximately in line with final grade boundaries).

There were no changes to the papers from 2014.

Writing

Part 1, Error Correction, showed a good spread of marks with the average score being 3.1.

In part 2, 51% of candidates chose Task 1 Everyday Communication, 17% chose Task 2 Work and 32% chose Task 3 Study. The average score out of 20 for task 1 was 10.2, for task 2 11.9, and for task 3 10.2.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Writing

In Task 1 (a blog on the virtues of days out with friends or family) the strongest candidates (some scoring a maximum 20 marks) wrote full, detailed answers with an abundance of good vocabulary, covering on the one hand the details of what the day out involved and on the other hand human feelings, wishes and character.

In task 2 (careers fair advice) the strongest candidates suggested how research on a careers fair could be done and what sort of questions could be asked. Answers in this task were the most clearly structured.

In task 3 (e-mail offering to be a volunteer student buddy) the strongest candidates sold themselves effectively by indicating enthusiasm for the role and giving examples of relevant experience.

Listening

Most candidates found the first two listening texts (questions 1–12) easier than the final text (questions 13–19), which had the most abstract ideas.

Reading

Most candidates scored full marks for questions 5–8 (matching) and did well on the first two questions (multiple choice). Most candidates scored above 50% on the matching tasks, but see below on this point.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Writing

Some candidates tended to repeat themselves in Task 1, finding different ways to say that days out were beneficial without clear reasoning and exemplification. There was also the problem of lack of structure — a blog can indeed be informal, but some lacked fundamental structure. Finally, some candidates in this task used only basic vocabulary (eg ‘nice’, ‘happy’, ‘relax’, ‘peaceful’ etc). National 5 writing requires more lexical range than this.

In task 2 some candidates covered the points given in the prompts without supplying sufficient supporting detail.

In Task 3 some misunderstood the question, writing as if they were applying for a permanent paid position and therefore listing skills and achievements that were not central to the work of a ‘buddy’.

Listening

Most candidates did not answer Q11 correctly (four-way multiple choice, each option containing two elements to consider) or Q13 (a gap-fill).

Reading

Candidates performance was poorer this year on the Matching questions (12i–12x), with fewer candidates scoring full marks. Questions 12ii, 12iv, 12vi and 12vi were found especially demanding, although more than half of the students got each question right.

The questions candidates found most demanding were 4, 9, 10 (short answer questions on the text about collecting) and 11i and 11v (gap-fill questions on the Titanic text).

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

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 numerous past papers to enable prelims to be constructed at the appropriate level. Although Intermediate 2 has now concluded, the 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, who should also be aware of the ESOL National 5 Writing marking exemplars in the 'Understanding Standards' materials on the SQA secure web.

Listening

Listening practice incorporating both listening for detail and identifying grammar clues may help candidates in the 'not more than 3 words' questions. Grammar areas include comparative/ superlative and adjective/ nouns plus preposition.

Candidates should be exposed to as much authentic non-simplified English as possible as the best means of preparation for the exam. Radio programmes and podcasts are a good source of listening materials.

Reading

Lexical practice such as 'find a word which means 'xxx' in paragraph 1' etc will be useful. This is only one example of a question which depends on synonyms — others include gap-fill and matching. Practice in identifying parts of speech and therefore knowing which word class to look for should also help in questions dealing with vocabulary.

Teachers should make sure that all candidates understand that long answers (eg two sentences lifted from the text) are never required. Candidates should follow instructions such as 'no more than three words', or specific instruction to provide a short answer. These questions are designed to require detailed understanding of specific words and phrases.

Writing: extended tasks common to Intermediate 2 and National 5

Candidates should practise writing to the required number of words in limited time, and emphasis should be put on avoiding the repetition of ideas — such repetitions limit the amount of marks that candidates can receive for lexical and grammatical range, impression on the reader, task fulfilment and coherence. Centres should encourage candidates continually to expand their vocabulary and use some less common words to show sufficient lexical range or better.

Some candidates write informally even when required to write a report or essay. Centres should 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 the right choices. Even where the required genre is informal, (blog/e-mail to a friend) the communication should be structured.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	550
Number of resulted entries in 2015	141

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	31.2%	31.2%	44	70
B	20.6%	51.8%	29	60
C	22.7%	74.5%	32	50
D	5.7%	80.1%	8	45
No award	19.9%	-	28	-

Assessments performed as intended. No reason to adjust Grade 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.