



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>ESOL</b>
Level	<b>Higher</b>

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

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

Candidate numbers increased this year. There were 36 new centres and 12 returning centres.

A comparison between component average marks in 2011 and 2010 shows that candidate performance in Component 1 increased slightly, and in Component 2 decreased slightly.

	2011	2010
Component 1 (Speaking)	19.1/25	18.4/25
Component 2 (Listening, Reading and Writing)	46.2/75	47.8/75

There were no substantive changes to the question papers.

## Listening

A suggestion was made that timings should be indicated beside each paragraph in the transcript, so that, if the back-up recording needs to be used, the invigilator knows where to start it. The Invigilators' handbook already provides sufficient guidance on procedure in such instances, and this ensures that candidates are not disadvantaged.

## Writing

Part 1 — Error Correction — showed a good range of marks, with the average score being 3.32/5, slightly down on 2010.

In Part 2 — Everyday Communication — the average score was 4.89/8.

In Part 3, 59% of candidates chose to answer Task 2 — Work, and 41% chose Task 3 — Study. The average score for Task 2 was 6.10/12 and for Task 3, 6.67/12.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

The change this year to central marking from marking from image caused no difficulty.

Listening Q 13 — Gist — was answered well.

Reading questions 8 and 12 were answered well.

## Writing Parts 2 and 3

The Everyday Communication task produced some strong responses. The Study task seemed to encourage better responses than the Work task, with some well argued and well written responses.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

The texts for Listening and Reading were slightly more challenging and, as a result, average performance in Component 2 was slightly down on 2010. Markers felt the papers were a fair test at Higher.

### Listening

4i, 7, 12i proved demanding, though markers could not pinpoint any particular reason for this, except in question 7, where the vocabulary might have proved challenging.

### Reading

Questions 4i, 7, 8 and 12i were demanding. Candidates should take heed of the rubric in vocabulary questions (4, 5, 11 and 12) where 'word or phrase' indicates a one-, two- or three-word answer.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Although most candidates were well prepared and at the appropriate level, markers identified one or two centres who were entering candidates at an inappropriate level. The statistics (pre-appeal) seem to bear this out, with 5.6% getting no award, slightly higher than the centre estimate, as is the case for grade D.

Centres should be commended for the very high percentage of candidates achieving grade A. As in previous years, candidates performed better at grade A than centres estimated:

Grade	Centre estimate %	Performance %
A	36.5	41.4
B	28.1	24.9
C	25.1	21.6
D	5.5	6.5
No award	4.8	5.6

Marking Instructions, as well as past papers, will be published on the SQA website.

Please remind candidates to answer in pen and not pencil.

### Reading

Candidates should take heed of the rubric in vocabulary questions. 'Word or phrase' indicates a possible one-, two- or three-word answer.

### **Writing Part 1 — Error Correction**

There are still a small number of candidates who answered this according to the format of the 2007 exam. Centres need to ensure that teaching staff are aware of the format of this question. There are no correct lines, and each one contains an error!

### **Writing Part 2 and 3**

Markers felt the Everyday Communication task was insufficiently challenging. Setters are aware of the difficulties in setting this task, in that with the low word count (140 words), it can be hard to find a topic that will produce an appropriate range of lexis and grammar. The two Writing tasks should be different but complementary, with Everyday Communication being more general, and Work/Study more specific.

Furthermore, some markers commented that the current six bullet points may provide too much information and this may restrict rather than facilitate candidate responses.

Some markers felt that some Work/Study responses showed a lack of awareness of style and register. Centres could emphasise the need for evidence of an awareness of key features of writing genres, for example the layout of a report appropriate to the task, or the inclusion of a 'thesis statement' in an essay. Such features, for example paragraph headings in a report, should not, however, be included in the word count.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	591
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	684
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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	34.6%	34.6%	237	70
B	20.3%	55.0%	139	60
C	17.7%	72.7%	121	50
D	4.5%	77.2%	31	45
No award	22.8%	100.0%	156	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.