



NQ Verification 2015–16 Key Messages Round 2

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification event/visiting information	AVU and targeted Unit — Event IACCA — Event
Date published:	June 2016

National Courses/Units verified:

National 4

Added Value Unit: ESOL
Assignment H24N 74
ESOL in Context Unit:
H24L74

National 5

ESOL in Context Unit:
H24L 75

Higher

ESOL in Context Units:
ESOL in Work-related
Contexts (H4X6 76)
ESOL in Study-related
Contexts (H4X7 76)

C727 75 ESOL Performance — Speaking and Listening (National 5) internally assessed component of course assessment (IACCA)

C727 76 ESOL Performance — Speaking and Listening (Higher) internally assessed component of course assessment (IACCA)

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

National 4 Added Value Unit: ESOL Assignment

Assessment approaches

All centres had used the Added Value Unit (AVU) Unit Assessment Support pack (UASP) for the ESOL Assignment.

In all the centres verified personalisation and choice had been applied to the candidates' wide range of interesting topics covered in the ESOL Assignments, in

line with CfE principles. Some candidates had used topics and learning experiences from other subjects, eg Travel and Tourism.

It was clear that for most candidates the AVU stages had been carefully prepared and supported by the assessors for the topics that the candidates had chosen. There was clear evidence that the assessors, in the formative assessment process, had facilitated the development of all aspects of presentation skills. The candidates were familiar with the use of prompts (cue-cards), structuring and delivering the presentation and expanding on the topic by providing appropriate answers to relevant questions.

Documented evidence of appropriate support offered to candidates in the completion of the ESOL Assignment was helpful in the verification process.

One centre had adapted the layout of the ESOL Assessment Task, producing their own Project Log Book. This supported the planning process and the different stages of the assignment. It also helped the verification process.

Assessment Standard 1.1

Some centres had included candidate notes and copies of flow charts and diagrams created by the candidates for Assessment Standard 1.1. These clearly demonstrated that candidates had selected relevant information to meet this Assessment Standard. Many candidates had also clearly linked the information selected with the content of the presentation.

Centres are required to provide evidence of candidates selecting relevant information from the texts in order to prepare their oral presentation.

Candidates can ask for clarification on selecting relevant information from the texts and preparing for and making the presentation. The selection of information should, however, be done independently by the candidate and should be recorded, eg by making notes. Notes for the presentation should be used as prompts, limited to 4–5 bullet points, and should not be read out verbatim.

Assessors should refer to the UASP when giving guidance on preparing the ESOL Assignment.

This includes:

- ◆ suggesting or providing appropriate texts and ideas of what to include in the presentation
- ◆ supporting the preparation of notes for the presentation, limited to 4–5 bullet points

In some centres, candidates would benefit from more support at each stage of the AVU ESOL Assignment assessment task to ensure they meet the Assessment Standards. As stated in the UASP:

'Once candidates have decided what to include in their oral presentation, they can be given feedback on the selection of information shown in their notes.'

Assessment Standard 1.2

Overall candidates were well prepared for their presentations but in one or two cases they relied too heavily on their notes. One or two candidates made reference to a prepared script throughout their presentation, and their unfamiliarity with some of the language used meant that there were lapses in comprehension for both the candidates and the audience. The evidence suggested that the topics were well chosen and of personal interest to the candidates, but that notes from the selected information could have been handled more appropriately for the candidates' level.

Candidates should be able to demonstrate an ability to expand on notes and/or the content of their (PowerPoint) presentation so that main points are explained with reasonable precision.

There were examples of excellent PowerPoint slides used by candidates in their presentation.

For one centre, it would have benefited the verification process if there had been more detail in the assessor's comments. If the centre has provided only audio recordings of the presentations, the assessor's comments on the Assessment Checklist should be more detailed to demonstrate clearly that the candidates have achieved Assessment Standard 1.2.

Ideally, candidates should deliver their presentations in front of peers rather than just with an assessor.

Assessment Standard 1.3

Centres had taken a variety of approaches to the question and answer section of the assessment. There were some excellent examples of questions presented by peers that were appropriate and relevant to the candidate's presentation.

Assessors should make sure candidates have the opportunity to respond to questions that are relevant to the topic, and that sufficient time is allowed for candidates to demonstrate understanding of a variety of questions. If questions from candidates' peers are unsuitable or inappropriate, assessors must provide relevant questions in order for candidates to show that they have achieved Assessment Standard 1.3.

In one centre the questions asked for Assessment Standard 1.3 could have allowed the candidates to demonstrate more effectively knowledge of the texts used for Assessment Standard 1.1. The questions asked mainly focused on the candidates' personal experiences rather than on the research they had carried out. The presentations were delivered to an assessor only — presenting to peers could have resulted in more natural questions, allowing the candidates to meet the Assessment Standards more effectively.

Assessment judgements

Overall centres had made judgements that were in line with national standards for each of the Assessment Standards.

There were good examples where centres had provided detailed commentary, using the assessment checklist, which was clearly matched against the Assessment Standards. This showed how assessment judgements had been made.

In one case, a centre had awarded a pass for the Unit where candidates had clearly met Assessment Standard 1.1 for the research carried out on the topic but the candidates had relied too heavily on scripted texts for Assessment Standard 1.2 and had not been able to demonstrate the use of straightforward vocabulary and expression relevant to the topic in a way that the audience could follow and where the main points were made clear.

In one centre the assessor judged there to be insufficient supporting detail, and not enough evidence of information gathered from the texts, in each case. However, from their presentations there was sufficient evidence that each candidate had identified and selected information, ideas and supporting detail from at least two texts, to meet Assessment Standard 1.1.

In general, candidate assessment records and evidence submitted were very well organised. In addition, one centre had adapted the candidate assessment record to incorporate the content of columns from the judging evidence table which supported the verification process.

National 4, 5 and Higher ESOL in Context Units

Assessment approaches

Overall, centres had submitted approaches to assessment making good use of the Unit Assessment Support Packs (UASPs). Some centres had used adapted and centre-produced approaches to assessment that took account of the Assessment Standards and guidelines in the UASPs.

The centres sampled had clearly demonstrated that they had fully applied and implemented CfE principles in their approach to assessment. The centres had adapted UASP assessment tasks effectively to use topics and contexts that were more appropriate for their candidates.

For adapted and centre-created assessment tasks, the centres must also provide an appropriate judging evidence table.

From the evidence provided, it was clear that almost all centres had embedded the practice of underlining errors in the drafting stage for Outcome 2, Writing. The drafting process is clearly outlined in ESOL Common Questions document http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/CQ_N3_N4_N5_Higher_ESOL.pdf.

For Outcome 2, Writing, some candidates had significantly changed the content and organisation of their writing tasks from the first draft to the second draft. It would have supported the verification process to see what feedback against the Assessment Standards had been given to candidates after their first draft.

For Outcome 1, Reading, and Outcome 3, Listening, where re-assessment was required, rather than re-assess a complete Outcome most centres used good practice and only re-assessed Assessment Standards that had not been met.

For Outcome 4, Speaking, in one centre the assessor occasionally contributed to the conversation, which impacted on the candidates' initiation and turn-taking and detracted from the interaction itself. It should be noted that with candidates at National 5 and Higher level it is not necessary for the assessor to take part in the interaction, and sometimes it can be detrimental to the interaction between candidates.

For centre-produced assessments or adapted UASPs, which are significantly different, SQA's free prior verification service can be used to ensure they are valid.

One centre had used an assessment task that had been prior verified for the NQ Intermediate 2 ESOL Unit (DV3611) to assess Outcome 4, Speaking. The adapted Judging Evidence Table for Outcome 4 did not refer to how this assessment task from NQ Intermediate 2 ESOL provided evidence for Assessment Standard 4.3 'Maintaining interaction, as appropriate'. NQ Intermediate 2 ESOL has the Performance Criteria 'Communication is maintained as appropriate to purpose'. The assessment task, which was a presentation, would have supported candidates better to achieve Assessment Standard 4.3 if it had included a question and answer session.

If a UASP approach is being used, it should be the most up-to-date version published on the SQA Secure site. Information about updates to NQ ESOL UASPs can be found in the documents 'Languages National 3 to National 5 Notification of Changes' and 'Languages Higher Notification of Changes' on the National Qualifications — Notification of Changes web page <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/65989.html>.

Four approaches to combined assessment are exemplified in the SQA UASPs:

The **first approach** combines assessment **across outcomes** within a unit and can be found in some unit-by-unit approach to packs. Examples of this are where there is one assessment task for both speaking and listening. The listening is assessed as part of the interaction along with the speaking. An example of this can be found in the following UASP:

National 5

ESOL for Everyday Life – Listening and Speaking Package 1 Unit-by-Unit approach, August 2015 (theme – impact of technology)

The **second approach** is exemplified at National 2 where two units, ie a reading and writing unit and a speaking and listening unit are combined into one Unit Assessment Support pack for all four skills on the basis of a theme/topic.

ESOL for Everyday Life combined approach, June 2015 (theme – celebrations)

ESOL in Context combined approach, June 2015 (theme – a class trip)

In the **third approach** the UASP contains assessment of one outcome from ESOL for Everyday Life and one outcome from ESOL in Context. There is a separate assessment for each outcome, but on the same theme or topic. Using this approach, the other three outcomes in both units must still be assessed. Examples of this can be found in the following UASPs:

National 3

ESOL Listening and Speaking Package 2 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – customer complaint call centre)

ESOL Reading and Writing Package 2 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – employment with the royal mail)

National 4

ESOL Listening and Writing Package 2 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – customer complaint travel agent)

ESOL Reading and Speaking Package 2 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – a memorable trip)

The **fourth approach** combines assessment **across units**, removing the need to assess each unit individually. One reading task could provide sufficient evidence for achieving outcome 1 in both units. This approach is only exemplified at National 5 and Higher in the following UASPs:

National 5

ESOL Package 3 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – workplace technology and the Internet)

Higher

ESOL for Everyday Life and Work-related Contexts Package 2 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – procrastination)

ESOL for Everyday Life and Study-related Contexts Package 2 combined approach, August 2015 (theme – procrastination)

An appropriate candidate assessment record or similar document should always be used to clearly indicate the assessment judgements against the unit, outcomes and assessment standards. When using a combined approach to assessment across the units, as with the **fourth approach**, centres should use a candidate assessment record or similar document that reflects this approach to clarify the unit, outcomes and assessment standards met for each unit. Examples of appropriate recording documents can be found in the UASPs above.

It is important for centres to check the page, 'What this pack covers', before they use the assessment tasks so that they are clear about what outcomes are covered and for what units.

The ESOL Common Questions document, which contains information on approaches to assessment, was made available in October 2015. Centres could also refer to the SQA Guide to Assessment pages 11 and 12 on this link http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Guide_To_Assessment.pdf

Assessment judgements

Most centres' assessment judgements were in line with national standards and reliable, and were accepted.

Where centres had made use of UASPs, assessors had made effective use of the information on judging evidence to support assessment judgements for each candidate. On the whole, assessment judgements were clearly based on the Assessment Standards and candidates had been appropriately identified as pass or fail against these.

In one centre a question for Outcome 1, Reading, had been marked as correct, although it appeared to be wrong. It may be that the candidate's answer was checked orally but this had not been noted by the assessor. It would have been useful for the verification process to have seen evidence from the assessor to indicate how the candidate had met the Assessment Standard. There must be evidence that the candidate has been able to meet each Assessment Standard.

Understanding Standards packs are available on the SQA Secure site, which provide examples of candidate evidence with commentaries on the Assessment Standards that have been met/not met.

ESOL Performance — Speaking and Listening National 5 and Higher Internally Assessed Component of Course Assessment (IACCA)

Assessment approaches

The general approach to the Course Assessment Task varies, with all centres verified making good use of this and the marking instructions contained within it.

If a unit-by-unit approach is taken, there are two speaking assessments required for the units, one for ESOL for Everyday Life and one for ESOL in Context. If a combined approach at National 5 or Higher is used, one assessment of speaking would meet the requirements of both units. Some centres reduce the amount of assessment overall for the course by combining a unit assessment with the Course Assessment Task and carrying out this assessment at an appropriate time of year. This is an acceptable practice where candidates are undertaking the course.

Centres adopting this practice should ensure that, for the unit assessment, only the Assessment Standards for speaking are applied when making assessment judgements. For the Course Assessment Task, candidates should be assessed, and marks awarded, using the marking instructions in the Course Assessment Task. Candidates can only do a particular speaking assessment task once, so if the centre is using one task for a unit assessment and the course assessment,

they should make sure that candidates have had the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills and are being assessed at an appropriate time in the year to maximise the opportunity of obtaining the best marks possible. When this practice is followed, centres should also ensure that the assessment conditions as stated in the Course Assessment Task are fully implemented.

Examples of good practice in approaches to assessment

Most centres verified had used a National 5 or Higher Speaking task from a Unit Assessment Support Pack as an assessment brief for candidates. This ensured an appropriate level of challenge in the task. Some centres produced their own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice. Allowing candidates personalisation and choice when deciding upon task topics and contexts engages candidates and supports the principles of CfE assessment.

Some centres assessed candidates in small groups rather than pairs and, on some occasions, 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, in order to allow each candidate to fully demonstrate their skills. Please also see guidance on approaches below.

It was clear that some candidates had prepared very well for the task and this was evidenced particularly through their contribution on the topic, their competences in initiating and turn-taking, and in considering and responding to their partners' comments.

It was also clear that some candidates were comfortable and familiar with the audio/visual recording process required as evidence, and their performances benefitted from this. It is apparent that more candidates are having the opportunity to practise recorded conversations and discussions.

Video-recorded evidence supported the identification of candidates. When candidates of the same first language group and gender are paired it can be difficult to identify them on audio recordings. As this is sometimes unavoidable, it is helpful if candidates refer to each other by name in the initial stages of the conversation/discussion. Before being assessed, candidates from one centre introduced themselves, the assessment task and discussion topic chosen. This approach is supportive to candidates by allowing them the opportunity to engage with each other and ease into their performance, and it reduces the level of formality associated with assessment.

Guidance for centres on approaches to assessment

Assessors should be aware that providing candidates with only a topic as a brief, with no scaffolding such as suggested bullet points, could disadvantage them in terms of the range and depth of the discussion. Models for appropriately challenging briefs can be found in the speaking tasks in the UASPs. The assessment brief should be included in the material submitted.

Where assessors take on the role of interlocutor, to avoid disadvantaging candidates it is important that participation in the conversation is balanced, especially with regards turn-taking. Using peer interlocutors where possible is good practice.

The centre should ensure that candidate pairings or groups facilitate a balanced conversation with opportunities for equal participation, taking into consideration candidate strengths and personalities. If the assessor believes that a candidate has been disadvantaged by a pairing or group, that candidate can be assessed again in a different pairing or group.

Some assessments carried out in groups of three or four were not so successful and appeared to disadvantage some candidates by not providing individuals with the opportunity to fully demonstrate their language skills. In addition, it proved harder to award appropriate marks to each candidate in the group. If choosing to assess in groups candidates should have had opportunities to practise these skills and the group dynamic should be carefully considered by the assessor.

Using video evidence for groups of three and more supports both the assessment, and internal and external verification. Where audio recordings are used for such groups, it is often difficult to identify candidates throughout the performance.

Assessors should try to make sure the recording device/microphone is placed in a position where background noise is not intrusive.

Assessors should refrain from adding comment during candidates' performances.

Centres should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide-ranging and specific enough to allow candidates to fully demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve a high mark for the main characteristics and aspects assessed in the performance at National 5 and Higher level.

Assessment judgements

Examples of good practice in assessment judgements:

Overall, the marks awarded for National 5 and Higher were in line with national standards, and assessors had made good use of Detailed Marking Instructions for each of the aspects/characteristics of Performance to determine marks within the bands for both Speaking and Listening.

Most centres had taken a holistic approach to the judgements, following the instructions in the Course Assessment Task to identify the band which best describes the candidate's performance. The mark awarded within the band is then reached by identifying aspects of the performance which may fall above or below the band. This will determine if the candidate is at the top, in the middle, or at the bottom of the band.

A number of centres had used and included an annotated/highlighted copy of the Detailed Marking Instructions to show how the marks were allocated to each

candidate. This was in addition to the candidate assessment record. The combination of the two approaches to recording the marking process proved excellent practice and informs both the internal and external verification processes.

One centre provided transcripts of performances along with extended commentaries. Although the commentary provided comprehensive explanation of the basis on which the marks had been awarded, a transcript and this amount of detail in the commentary is not necessary. Brief commentaries can be of great benefit in terms of feedback to candidates. The commentaries available on the SQA Understanding Standards website are lengthy and detailed to support training of assessors and verifiers.

Guidance for centres on assessment judgements

A few centres had been either lenient or severe in their marking of the Performance and would benefit from referring to the recordings and commentaries in the Understanding Standards packs on the SQA Secure site. These can be used for standardisation purposes prior to assessment and during internal verification of the Performance. It is also good practice for centres to identify their own exemplars for standardisation purposes.

Centres should always use a holistic approach to assessment of candidates' performances. It was clear that a few centres had awarded marks based on specific parts of a performance rather than the performance in its entirety. Assessors should refer to the General Marking Principles for the Performance on pages 2 and 3 of the ESOL Performance Speaking and Listening Assessment Task for a holistic approach to using the marking instructions.

A few centres seemed reluctant to award the top mark in the top band for Speaking. A number of centres awarded 24 out of 25 to a number of candidates but none were awarded 25 out of 25. Where candidate Performance is clearly at the top of the 25 – 22 band, 25 can be awarded.

Assessors should ensure that Listening is treated as an aspect of performance and that marks awarded for Listening are independent of assessment judgements made of candidates' Speaking performance. Where candidates are awarded high marks for Speaking, this does not imply that high marks should be awarded for Listening. For high marks in listening there needs to be evidence from the performance that a candidate listens attentively to their partner(s) and responds with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity that effectively develops the conversation.

03

Section 3: General comments

Internal verification

There was evidence that the internal verification process adopted by some centres is thorough, detailed and highly effective. Documented, professional dialogue between the assessors and internal verifiers had resulted in a sample

for verification that had a high level of consistency. Notes had been included justifying the assessors' and internal verifiers' decisions.

The majority of centres had submitted evidence of internal verification, and in most cases this had been effective in both supporting the assessor and in ensuring that approaches to assessment were valid and that assessment judgements were reliable and in line with national standards. Evidence of internal verification must be submitted along with the candidate evidence for external verification.

As well as ensuring that 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 in ensuring that 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 have well-developed processes in place.

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/ivtoolkit/>

Evidence for external verification

Centres should refer closely to guidance provided by SQA about the sample and evidence to be submitted.

If the centre is selected for the AVU or a targeted Unit, only the evidence requested on the checklist for this is required. It is not necessary to send evidence for other Units or ESOL Performance marks. Likewise, if a centre is selected for IACCA verification it is not necessary to submit evidence for Units.

Prior verification

Centres may produce their own assessments for the National 4 Added Value Unit, as well as the other ESOL Units, which allow candidates to meet the Assessment Standards. If these differ significantly from the UASPs, centres are strongly advised to submit them for prior verification. This should be requested before assessments are used with candidates.

If a centre has used a prior verified assessment, the verification certificate should be included with material submitted for external verification.