



Course report 2019

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages
Level	National 5

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Listening

This question paper performed as expected, and enabled candidates to perform to the extent of their ability and markers to award marks in line with national standards.

Candidates listen to and answer questions based on one monologue and two spoken interactions.

A range of question-types, including multiple choice, gap-fill and pick-list (for example 'Which two statements of the following five are correct?') test listening comprehension.

Question paper: Reading

The paper was marginally more difficult than expected. This was taken into account during grade boundary setting.

The questions assess understanding, application and analysis skills across three texts. A range of question-types, including gap-fill, multiple choice, pick-list, short-answer, and matching test these skills.

Question paper: Writing

This question paper performed as expected, and enabled candidates to perform to the extent of their ability and markers to award marks in line with national standards.

Performance: Speaking and Listening

The performance, as set out in the National 5 ESOL Course Specification and the coursework assessment task, consists of a conversation on a topic from everyday life, work or study.

Overall, the internally-assessed performance functioned as expected, enabling candidates to perform to the extent of their language ability.

The candidate and the teacher or lecturer agree the topic of the conversation prior to the assessment taking place. The teacher or lecturer will then prepare an assessment brief on the topic or an aspect of the topic with some limited support for candidates. The flexibility in the selection of a topic is to allow for personalisation and choice.

In the sample verified, the majority of centres had opted to make use of a speaking assessment brief from an SCQF level 5 unit assessment support pack, for example the impact of technology and managing money.

A few centres adapted these, or produced assessment briefs to allow for a greater degree of personalisation and choice, for example a healthy lifestyle, life in Glasgow, travel, festivals and customs and challenges facing young people today.

A few centre-produced assessment briefs were too broad in scope and lacked sufficient scaffolding. However, where assessors teachers and lecturers had carefully considered the level of language that the brief would produce, and written bullet points that would support

the development of the conversation, they worked well. The majority of candidates engaged well with the topics and produced interesting conversations.

From the sample that was externally verified, it was evident that for most of the assessors and internal verifiers, the marking instructions provided sufficient information to accurately identify appropriate bands and marks for candidates. Where assessors adopted the general marking principles, the holistic approach outlined, and had a good understanding of the detailed marking instructions, marks were generally awarded in line with national standards.

In some centres, there was evidence that assessors did not have a good enough understanding of the detailed marking instructions and as a result, marks were not awarded in line with national standards for speaking. In most of these centres, assessors were being lenient across a range of aspects when awarding marks, and some were being particularly lenient when awarding marks for use of a range of structures and accuracy to communicate.

There was also a tendency to leniency when awarding marks for listening, with assessors awarding 5 marks when the candidate had only met the descriptions of performance for 4 marks or 3 marks.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Listening

Candidates generally tended to perform better in the multiple choice questions. The most successfully answered questions were 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 13. Candidates answered more accurately on the text on interviewing by Skype than on the other two texts.

Question paper: Reading

Candidates tended again to perform better in the multiple choice and the matching questions. The most successfully answered questions were 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19(i), (iii), 20, 24, 25, 27, 29(i), (ii) and (iii).

Question paper: Writing

In the everyday life task, most candidates supported and developed good ideas about the sporting event. They also did this for the work task on different kinds of training and for the study task on the impact of technology.

Some candidates engaged in impressive detail with the premise of the work task, and wrote convincingly about differing views among different parts of the workforce about what kinds of training would be best.

Some candidates showed an impressive range of vocabulary in the study task when detailing the negative effects of technology on students' mental and physical health.

Across the three tasks, most candidates showed an adequate or better range of grammar (using a variety of subordination and of tenses). They also showed an adequate or better range of vocabulary (using a variety of words relevant to the task but not included in the task instructions).

Performance: Speaking and Listening

Based on the speaking and listening performance sampled at external verification, the overall quality of the performance was high with many candidates obtaining marks in the top two bands.

These candidates performed particularly well in the following aspects:

Speaking

- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas/opinions
- ◆ use of structure to communicate
- ◆ accuracy and appropriateness of general and specialised vocabulary in context
- ◆ effectiveness of pronunciation

Candidates who performed well in the sample, used a range of detailed structures to communicate with an appropriate level of accuracy. They contributed effectively throughout

the conversation and engaged with the topic and their partner(s) contribution, developing their ideas and supporting the development of their partner's contribution.

Many candidates were also able to produce a wide range of general and specialised vocabulary during the conversation. This demonstrated that they were familiar with the broad topic area either through their own learning or because it had been covered well during the course.

The majority of candidates were able to accurately produce features of spoken English and their partner(s) were able to understand them with ease.

Some candidates showed that they had used the preparation time well and it was evident that they felt confident with the process of being recorded.

Listening

Candidates achieved high marks in listening when they:

- ◆ showed that they had understood in detail what their partner(s) said
- ◆ asked for clarification when they didn't understand or weren't sure they had understood
- ◆ listened attentively and showed a genuine interest in the conversation
- ◆ responded in a way which fully supported the conversation

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Listening

Candidates generally had more difficulty in answering gap-fill questions, sometimes only using one word where two or three were needed to get the mark.

They performed less well on questions 1(a), (b), (e), 7(b), 14(c), (d), and 15.

Question paper: Reading

Candidates generally found more difficulty with gap-fill and short-answer questions than other question types. In terms of specific questions, they performed less well with questions 8, 9, 11, 16, 22 and 26. In terms of the three texts, they performed less well on text 1 on generation rent.

Question paper: Writing

Across the three tasks, some candidates lacked consistent punctuation, had a number of misspellings (sometimes to the extent of making the message hard to follow) and made many grammar errors (again, sometimes affecting comprehensibility). Grammar errors often related to issues with sentence structure, tenses, singular-plural agreement, and missing words such as the verb 'to be' or subject pronouns. There were also errors in word formation, for example where candidates used incorrect suffixes.

For the work and study tasks, many candidates used informal register when formal register was required.

In the everyday life task, some candidates did not take the opportunity to develop ideas about the competition that they were supposed to have won, or (most crucially) about the sporting event that they were going to see.

In the work task, some candidates paid insufficient attention to the details and wrote about a training programme as if it were set in stone, rather than specifically describing staff feedback and making recommendations on the basis of this.

In the study task, some candidates wrote about the impact of technology without relating this to learning. Others began with the requisite focus on learning but then lost their focus and began writing more generally.

Performance: Speaking and Listening

Some candidates performed less well across a number of the aspects assessed, showing that generally their language skills were at a lower level of competence.

Speaking

Some candidates had difficulty in expressing their ideas and opinions during the conversation. Although they were able to show a range of general and some specialised vocabulary, they were not able to use a range of structures, including some detailed structures, to clearly convey their ideas and opinions and so achieved lower marks.

Some conversations tended to be repetitive and did not explore aspects of the topic in any detail. This limited the range of language that they were able to demonstrate throughout the conversation. This could be because they did not have speaking and listening skills at an appropriate level for National 5. However, it is also possible that they had not had sufficient opportunity to take part in conversations where topics are explored in some depth and receive feedback on how to further develop their speaking skills. These candidates could not achieve marks in the top three bands because there was a level of hesitation and repetition which impacted on the interaction.

A few candidates dominated the conversation and did not achieve marks in the top two bands as they were unable to show sensitivity to the norms of turn-taking which supported the development of the interaction.

Listening

Some candidates did not listen attentively or carefully to their partner(s) during the conversation. These candidates were unable to comment on what their partner(s) had said and tended to respond with an unconnected point of their own throughout the conversation. This could be a consequence of not fully understanding the aspects of communication being assessed and the descriptions of performance, particularly the marks awarded for interactive listening.

A number of candidates were not able to achieve high marks in the listening as they had not fully understood what their partner(s) had said and did not ask for any clarification.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper: Listening

Centres should give candidates practice in all of the question-types in the 2019 question paper. With regard to gap-fills, it should be emphasised that the specified word limit (often three but occasionally lower) should be followed. Centres should take care to ensure that candidates are regularly practising gap-fills (ideally requiring a mix of one, two and three words in answers) as well as multiple choice questions.

Centres should encourage candidates to check the spelling of answers. Minor misspellings are accepted, but if the answer looks more like another word than it does the word in the answer key, or is barely comprehensible, then no mark can be given.

Candidates should also listen to a variety of authentic texts, for example from BBC news and TED talks, in order to practise listening at speed. For the more demanding gap-fills, some candidates gave no response. In class, teachers should on occasion stop a recording and ask what exactly has just been said in order to further practise gap-fill questions.

Question paper: Reading

Centres should give candidates practice in all of the question-types in the 2019 question paper. Care should be taken that time spent practising gap-fill and short-answer questions is comparable to that spent on multiple choice and matching questions. This will ensure that candidates can pick up a number of marks on gap-fill and short-answer questions as well as on the other question types. Teachers should also ask supplementary questions orally in class asking candidates to pick out particular words in texts, for example 'Which one word in the first paragraph shows that the writer doesn't like x'?

Centres should advise candidates to read the rubric of each question carefully, giving only one word when required, or a whole phrase when required. The question-type 'Complete each gap with no more than x words from the text' requires candidates to take x words, unaltered, from the actual text. While it is useful to try to anticipate the grammar required for the answer (for example a noun, phrase or a verb), candidates should be discouraged from either attempting an answer before reading the text or from trying a rough synonym after skimming the text. A mark is only given for actual words from the text which make sense in the gap, so while there may be variants, these variants will be limited.

Centres should give candidates practice in completing 35 questions in the time limit of 70 minutes, and advise on skimming and scanning techniques. Reading each text as a whole before answering the questions is likely to take up too much time.

Question paper: Writing

Centres should give candidates the chance to discuss the marking criteria used for this section and advise that the highest marks require a good range of both grammar and vocabulary as well as accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Therefore, substantial formative work on accuracy is required in addition to exam practice. In 2019, many

candidates supported and developed their points well but lacked accuracy in the three areas above.

With reference to all three tasks, candidates should be encouraged to show off the quality of their writing and though it is important to follow the task instructions, the words in these instructions should not merely be reiterated or rearranged, but should be seen as starting points from which to develop the candidate's own ideas. In 2019, poorer responses to the three tasks were sometimes over-reliant on lifted phrases from the bullet points rather than developing ideas. Originality is one way to achieve a positive impact on the reader.

Centres should make use of the understanding standards packs, available on SQA's website, for the writing question paper. These provide detailed commentaries on writing tasks which show clearly the basis on which marks have been awarded. The candidate evidence scoring 11 or more out of 15 shows a variety of ways in which candidates have successfully expanded the prompts in the task with their own ideas.

In 2019, many candidates attempting both the study and work questions generally did not use appropriate style (formal) as required. An essay or a report should be formal, as should be a business-related letter. Candidates should practise writing in the following genres: formal email, informal email, report and essay.

Performance: Speaking and Listening

Some assessors, teachers and lecturers would benefit from having a greater understanding of the national standards for speaking and interactive listening. If teachers and lecturers find the detailed marking instructions difficult to apply they should make use of the understanding standards packs for the National 5 performance: speaking and listening, available on SQA's secure site. These contain audio and/or video recordings of candidate performances, and detailed commentaries with examples of candidate language. The commentaries and examples of language relate directly to the marking instructions. Discussing candidate performances with the internal verifier or another ESOL teacher or lecturer who is familiar with the ESOL assessment of speaking and interactive listening will also be of benefit.

Teachers and lecturers should focus candidates on the development of their speaking and interactive listening skills from the beginning of the course. They should explain to candidates what will be required of them for the performance, introducing the six aspects of speaking and listening to be assessed, and the marking instructions.

Making use of the marking instructions throughout the course will support candidates in developing their skills. Centres should support candidates through feedback to identify their strengths and the aspects they need to further develop. Using the marking instructions with candidates will provide them with consistent feedback on how they are progressing.

There should be a particular focus on the need to demonstrate an appropriate range of structures, in their spoken English. This is essential if they are to achieve high marks in the performance at this level. Encourage candidates to review their speaking and listening skills and consider how best to develop their use of detailed structures when communicating. They should consider how they are linking their ideas and avoid providing lists of vocabulary. For more information on the range of language structures appropriate at National 5, refer to the

course specification appendix 1: course support notes and appendix 2: illustrative language tables.

When providing feedback to candidates it is important to also focus on the aspects of listening being assessed, as well as those of speaking. Candidates who achieve high marks for listening ensure that they listen attentively and respond to the points made by their partner(s) which fully supports the conversation. Early feedback on interactive listening skills should enable them to achieve high marks in listening.

Centres should provide training in how to use the 15 minutes preparation time effectively, on their own, to consider the assessment brief, the points they want to make and any useful vocabulary for the topic. This approach enables candidates to participate in the conversation with confidence. They must not attempt to script or rehearse the conversation.

If candidates are comfortable recording conversations throughout the course and analysing and receiving feedback on some of these, it removes the apprehension about being recorded for the performance.

Providing opportunities for candidates to practice conversations using assessment briefs with a sufficient level of challenge, and recording these conversations is an essential part of preparing for the performance. Using or adapting speaking tasks available in the unit assessment support packs, or modelling tasks on these, should provide candidates with an appropriate level of challenge.

Candidates must be aware that lengthy monologues or over-long turns during the interaction make it more difficult for their partner(s) to respond. This reduces the possibility of achieving high marks in listening and in speaking for effectiveness and relevance of contribution.

If assessing candidates in groups of three, consideration of the group dynamic is essential to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	1035
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	1048
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	25.4%	25.4%	266	69
B	26.1%	51.5%	274	59
C	26.4%	78.0%	277	49
D	15.6%	93.6%	164	39
No award	6.4%	-	67	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.