



Common questions about National 3, National 4, National 5 and Higher Modern Languages

SQA has developed this document in consultation with colleagues in Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT). The information contained in the document will be updated on an on-going basis, and SQA will continue to work with SCILT in order to provide further clarification as required.

SQA worked with SCILT to produce the original version of this document which was published on SQA and SCILT websites in late 2013. This issue contains further information and clarification where appropriate, and has been updated in January 2015, **including questions relating to the new Higher.**

Section A

General questions

Can candidates give an oral rather than a written response to the Unit reading and listening assessments?

Yes, but for evidence purposes the assessor is required to keep a written record or checklist to indicate that the candidate has completed the activity satisfactorily.

If a candidate fails to meet the standard required to pass a Unit assessment, can the candidate be re-assessed?

The candidate can be re-assessed on one occasion (or two occasions in exceptional circumstances). However, depending on the circumstances, it is not always necessary to use a different instrument of assessment. For example, failure to address the overall purpose question may result in the candidate being re-assessed in that element only.

Will employers understand the standards required for the new qualifications at National 4, National 5 and Higher?

Yes, SQA has engaged with employers to ensure that they understand the requirements of the new qualifications at each level.

How long should candidates be given to complete Unit assessments?

Time restrictions are not normally a feature of Unit assessment and centres need to determine this with reference to the specific situation of their candidates.

Candidates can access audio recordings themselves, and should be allowed to listen to them as often as they require. However assessors should exercise judgement, as it is unlikely that candidates would benefit from more than two or three playings.

In what way will writing be assessed?

Approaches to the assessment of writing should encourage candidates to use a range of resources in order to synthesise effectively from these resources. Such an approach builds skills that do not rely heavily on rote memorisation. This methodology allows a candidate to access a range of materials that will have been developed during class activities (discussion of discourse markers, connectives, useful conjunctions, high frequency phrases etc, where and if appropriate). Such activities are supportive in nature, and will be used judiciously depending on the candidate's level and the purpose of the assessment (for instance where the focus in a Unit assessment may be predominantly on formative aspects, or where activities focus more on strategies for retention for the purposes of external assessment). For National 5 and Higher, a piece of evidence which has met the Assessment Standards for the Unit may serve as the basis for further development in the skills/strategies required for the additional challenge of the external assessment (eg feedback/correction/suggested additions).

Section B

National 3 and 4

Do assessments need to be linked thematically?

Assessments do not need to be linked thematically. None of the assessments need to be combined. They can all be done independently of each other. However, assessors may find it helpful to combine assessments, where possible.

How are Unit assessments marked?

Unit assessments should be marked according to the 'judging evidence' tables, available within Unit assessment support packs, on the SQA secure website. Candidates should, for instance, identify the overall purpose of the reading or listening text and be able to extract the main points of the passage.

Assessors should exercise their professional judgement in determining whether a candidate has written enough detail to satisfy the requirements of each Assessment Standard.

How should evidence be recorded?

Detailed notes should be retained for talking (similar to the Grade Related Criteria at Standard Grade). Audio/video recording of each candidate's performance is not mandatory for the Unit assessments, but it may be good practice to retain the evidence from each class for verification purposes. Audio/video recordings will also assist centres with Internal Verification activities. In addition, at National 5 and Higher, recordings for the performance element must be available for verification purposes. Reading, listening and writing scripts should also be retained for verification purposes. Templates have been provided by SQA for this purpose.

Section C

National 4: Added Value Unit

How is reading assessed for the Added Value Unit?

A minimum of two texts should be used. These can be selected from a range provided by the assessor. Candidates are required to show their understanding of the content of the texts by demonstrating comprehension. Comprehension can be demonstrated in various ways (ie gap fill task; questions in English: written or oral summary in English of main points of text).

Candidates should be judged on their ability to extract main points of the passages. There may be evidence of some misunderstanding but it will not be serious.

Candidates may use a dictionary.

How is talking assessed for the Added Value Unit?

The candidate should make a short presentation, lasting 1 – 2 minutes. The presentation can be supported by brief headings in English, the target language or by visual aids.

The presentation can be delivered to the whole class or to groups of candidates within the class, but candidates should be discouraged from a one-to-one presentation to the assessor.

Should the oral presentation be based on the reading texts?

The presentation does not need to make direct reference to the reading texts, but should be on a related theme. Candidates could be encouraged to incorporate words and phrases from the reading texts into their oral presentation

How is listening assessed for the Added Value Unit?

On completion of the presentation, the candidate will participate in a conversation, with a number of responses that provide evidence of listening for communication. This part of the assessment should last about 1 minute.

The candidate should be able to ask for help in the foreign language, where appropriate.

Should the questions for the listening section of the Added Value Unit be prepared in advance?

The questions should not be scripted in advance, but the candidate should be asked questions that have been covered previously in class. For example, a candidate may be asked questions which he/she has previously practised in class, but will be unaware of exactly which questions he/she will require to answer, or in which order the questions will be asked.

How long do candidates have to complete the Added Value Unit?

There is no stipulated time limit for the completion of the Added Value Unit. The time limit is at the discretion of the centre. The Added Value Unit should be part of a series of lessons, and can be done at an appropriate point in the course. It should be part of the on-going classroom work, and not be seen as a stand-alone test.

How much assistance should candidates be given in the preparation for the Added Value Unit?

Assessments should be completed in class time under some supervision and control but not necessarily in traditional “exam conditions”.

Candidates should be given reasonable assistance and support from the assessor to complete the Added Value Unit, but should be encouraged to work independently.

The amount of support a candidate requires, particularly in the listening/responding section, should be reflected in the assessor’s overall assessment of the candidate.

What evidence is the assessor required to retain?

Assessors should retain copies of candidates’ written responses to the reading texts. If the candidate has given oral feedback on the texts, detailed notes should be retained by the assessor.

For talking, assessors should retain a written summary or detailed checklist of responses or an audio/video recording, if desired. It is not mandatory to audio or video record the oral presentation.

Pieces of evidence should be named and dated.

What happens if a candidate does not pass the Added Value Unit?

Candidate should be given one re-assessment opportunity (two in exceptional circumstances).

What if a candidate passes the reading and talking presentation sections of the Added Value Unit, but not the listening part?

The candidate is not required to do the entire Added Value Unit again. The candidate should only be re-assessed in the section he/she did not pass. If the candidate did not secure a pass in listening, he/she would only be required to do that part again, but would need to be asked a different set of questions from the first attempt.

Section D

National 5

Could all four skills be assessed within one context, eg culture?

Yes, in theory, but this would not be deemed to be good practice.

Do assessments need to be linked thematically?

Assessments do not need to be linked thematically. None of the assessments need to be combined. They can all be done independently of each other. However, assessors may find it helpful to combine assessments, where possible.

How should evidence be recorded?

Reading, listening and writing scripts should also be retained for verification purposes. Speaking for the performance element must be recorded and retained for verification purposes.

Can the talking for the Using Language Unit be used for the Course talking performance?

Technically, this is possible. However, if this approach is adopted, it is a requirement to document how a candidate has met the Assessment Standards relating to talking in the Using Language Unit. This evidence may originate from preparation for the performance element, although it may be more beneficial for the candidate to undertake the Unit assessment independently during class time as an effective pathway towards the additional demand of the talking performance.

What percentage of the total mark does a candidate have to achieve in order to pass a Unit assessment?

There are no cut-off scores. Assessors will base their decision on whether a candidate has given enough information to show understanding by referring to the judging evidence tables. In particular, the banner statement included in all judging evidence tables is particularly useful to consider: ***Assessors should use professional judgement and a holistic approach in deciding whether candidates have achieved the Assessment Standards. Candidates do not have to answer every question correctly as they could demonstrate achievement of the Assessment Standards across questions.***

The extraneous rule (used at Standard Grade and Intermediate 1 and 2) no longer applies, neither for Unit nor external assessment.

Will candidates be given the reading paper and writing paper at the same time in the exam?

Question and Answer booklets for both will be issued at the same time. It is important for candidates to note that the time stated on the front cover of both booklets will be the same, and relates to the entire duration of the reading and writing Paper. Students need to organise how much time they allocate to each of the two sections.

What happens if a candidate is presented for National 5, but subsequently fails the final Course assessment?

There will be no automatic fall-back position. Candidates will only gain an award at National 4 if the assessor has retained evidence gathered throughout academic year, and the **candidate has completed the Added Value Unit**. SQA has published information on this (*Recognising Positive Achievement*) which can be downloaded at: www.sqa.org.uk/cfedelivery.

Section E

Higher

Do teachers need to cover all the topics listed on the development of the four contexts?

The Context development grid (Course Support Notes, p21)

http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/CfE_CourseUnitSupportNotes_Higher_Languages_ModernLanguages.pdf

is provided to suggest topic development in each of the contexts, in order to provide the opportunity for students (and teachers) to elicit *detailed and complex* language appropriate to the level. It is important to keep in mind that the new Courses are skills-based and not content-based. Topics should not be tackled in a tick-box way – they should be sampled.

Are materials which teachers have been using until now still relevant?

Lots of existing materials are still very relevant for delivering the new Higher. Again, and as above, the important aspect is that students are able to evidence *detailed and complex* language.

There is no mention of – for instance – “home area” on the suggested list of topics. Is it still relevant to teach such a topic?

This topic was covered in National 5, but can be appropriate at Higher, particularly in the contexts of learning and culture. For example, candidates may choose to go to a university which is not in their area as they want to live elsewhere. The key aspect is that the type of language used is appropriate to the level. The appropriate development of context and topic will assist in achieving this.

Do candidates have to pass all Assessment Standards for each Outcome in the Unit assessments to achieve a Unit award?

Candidates need to pass all the Assessment Standards to achieve each Outcome. Passing all Outcomes for a Unit means that the student has been successful in achieving the Unit. This is the same for Units at all SCQF levels.

How much support are candidates allowed in assessment of writing in the Using Language Unit?

Candidates should not have seen the actual assessment beforehand, but classwork and preparation activities will assist the candidate ahead of the assessment. Candidates are allowed reference materials - dictionaries and glossaries - and may have some written notes which should be brief. They should not have access to pre-prepared drafts. Assessment of the piece will be based on whether a candidate has met the Assessment Standards. The

piece could then be exploited further, and used as the basis for follow-up work in preparation for the additional demands of Writing for the external assessment or indeed for the purposes of re-assessment.

Will candidates be given the reading paper and directed writing paper at the same time in the exam?

Question and Answer booklets for both will be issued at the same time. It is important for candidates to note that the time stated on the front cover of both booklets will be the same, and relates to the entire duration of the reading and directed writing paper. Students need to organise how much time they allocate to each of the two sections.

How long will the listening monologue and the listening dialogue last?

The monologue will generally last between 1 and a half to 2 minutes and the dialogue generally between 3-4 minutes

Will the directed writing always be from the contexts of culture and employability?

No. The entire examination will sample all four contexts of society, learning, employability and culture, and the directed writing will include options based on two of the four contexts. If the reading samples the context of culture and the listening employability, the directed writing will sample the contexts of society and learning.

How is the directed writing assessed?

Directed writing is assessed holistically using the pegged-mark descriptors provided in the Marking Instructions. The pegged marking descriptors include detail relating to the three aspects of candidate performance: *content, accuracy and language resource*.

In the short essay, do candidates need to answer all the questions in a balanced way?

Questions in the stimulus serve as prompts. Candidates should attempt to touch on all of the questions but there is no requirement to answer all the questions in the same number of words, for instance.

How much support are candidates allowed in the performance of Talking?

Candidates are allowed five headings of up to eight words in English or in the target language, or visual aids.

General Curriculum for Excellence questions and answers can be found on the [frequently asked questions section](#) of SQA's website.