



Course Report 2017

Subject	ESOL
Level	National 5

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper: listening; reading and writing

The question paper component performed as intended and notional grade boundaries were set.

Listening

This section performed as intended, slightly more demanding than 2016, and enabled candidates to perform at all levels of ability. Marks were awarded in line with national standards.

The purpose of this section of the question paper is to allow candidates to demonstrate challenge and application in the skill of listening for information. This question paper gives learners an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding from across the course:

- ◆ understand detailed language spoken in English
- ◆ identify and explain the overall context, main points and aspects of detail
- ◆ identify and explain clearly expressed opinions or attitudes

The Listening paper has a total of 20 marks, which is 20% of the overall marks for the course assessment. Candidates listen to and answer questions based on one monologue and one spoken interaction. Listening comprehension is tested by a range of questions including multiple choice, gap-fill and pick-list — for example ‘Which two statements of the following five are correct?’

Reading

The reading section performed as intended and enabled candidates to perform to the extent of their ability, and enabled markers to award marks in line with national standards.

The purpose of this section of the question paper is to allow candidates the opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ understand detailed language written in English
- ◆ identify and explain the overall purpose, main points and aspects of detail
- ◆ identify and explain how vocabulary, language features and text structures are used to convey meaning
- ◆ identify and explain clearly expressed opinions or attitudes

This section has 25 marks. These 25 marks are awarded for identifying, explaining and showing awareness of features of text, opinions or attitudes and key aspects of detail. The questions for reading assess understanding, application and analysis skills. These skills are

tested by a range of questions including gap-fill, multiple choice, pick-list, short answer and matching.

Writing

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

This section has 25 marks. These 25 marks are awarded for using appropriate structures, vocabulary and language features to convey meaning. Candidates produce two written texts. They choose one title from the context of everyday life and one from the contexts of either work or study. Each title has some limited support for guidance.

The purpose of this section of the question paper is to allow candidates the opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ produce written English using detailed language to convey meaning
- ◆ use structures and vocabulary as appropriate to task
- ◆ use appropriate features of grammar, spelling and punctuation
- ◆ use conventions of style and layout appropriate to task

Candidates are assessed against criteria including addressing content and organisation, use of language, accuracy and appropriateness to purpose and audience.

Component 2: performance – speaking and listening

This internally-assessed course component functioned as expected at National 5 level. The parameters of this task do not change from year to year.

The performance, as set out in the Course Assessment Task document, consists of a conversation on a topic from everyday life, study or work. The conversation should last 5–6 minutes if conducted in a pair, or longer if in a small group. There are 30 marks for this component; 25 marks are allocated to speaking and 5 marks to listening.

The Course Assessment Task states the length of the conversation and the assessment conditions, and also provides guidance on the aspects to be assessed. The level of demand of the actual task undertaken by each candidate depends, to some extent, on the topic selected by the assessor or candidate and the assessment brief provided by the assessor. This allows topics to be selected that have been covered in the learning programme, and/or topics of personal interest to candidates. The topic selected and brief provided for candidates by assessors are key factors in defining the level of challenge presented for the discussion.

Some minor revisions to the marking instructions were implemented for session 2016–17. This improved differentiation between the bands and brought the terminology used in line with the marking instructions at Higher level. There was no change to standards. From the performances sampled, overall, it was evident that the marking instructions provided sufficient information for assessors to accurately identify appropriate bands and marks for

candidates. Where centres had adopted the general marking principles outlined in the Course Assessment Task, marks were generally awarded in line with national standards.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper – listening; reading and writing

Listening

In general, candidates seemed well prepared for this section; they performed particularly well in the pick list Question 4, in multiple choice questions 1,2,3 and 6, and in gap-fill question 9 (iv).

Reading

Candidates did well in the short answer questions 11, 12,19–21, some of the gap-fill questions 1–5,13 and 15, most of the multiple choice questions 7, 9,10, 22 and 23 and the pick list 18.

Writing

Most candidates showed the ability to write according to conventions of style and layout, with the exception of style in the Work task (see next section).

- ◆ The language exchange e-mail, Everyday Life task, was written in a friendly and informal style with appropriate paragraphing.
- ◆ The Work-based report was introduced as such with reference to purpose, and had appropriate subheadings. Most candidates correctly included recommendations.
- ◆ The Study essay was written in a formal style, and most candidates used discourse markers appropriately and had appropriate paragraphing.

The most able candidates were able to use their own ideas rather than merely lifting from the question.

- ◆ Some candidates who attempted the Everyday Life task showed inventiveness with questions about the language exchange partner, and good detail in explaining language-learning problems.
- ◆ In the Work-based report, some candidates were imaginative in exploring ways to boost morale.
- ◆ In the Study essay, some candidates made full and detailed justifications for prioritising particular subjects for school pupils.

Component 2: performance: speaking and listening

Overall, candidates did well in all aspects of the performance, generally obtaining marks in the higher bands. Many of the candidates sampled were awarded marks in the top two bands for speaking and listening, performing particularly well in the following aspects.

Speaking:

- ◆ communication of ideas and opinions
- ◆ effectiveness and relevance of contribution
- ◆ accuracy and appropriateness of general and specialised vocabulary
- ◆ effectiveness of pronunciation

Listening:

- ◆ listening attentively to their partner

Candidates mainly produced natural conversations and demonstrated good skills in maintaining the conversation. Most candidates listened attentively to what their partner said and responded in ways that supported the conversation.

The majority of candidates demonstrated that they had made good use of the preparation time and felt comfortable with the process of being recorded.

Overall, candidates who performed well contributed fully and demonstrated an enthusiasm for the topic and a genuine interest in what their partners had to say.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper – listening; reading and writing

Listening

Candidates generally found the gap-fill questions difficult, namely 5 (i)-(iv) and 9 (i)-(iii). They found some multiple choice questions 8, 10 and 11 more demanding, as well as the second pick list question 7.

Reading

Candidates found a few of the gap-fill questions demanding 6, 14, 16, 17. The last of these, involving the understanding of a passive, was the most difficult. Two multiple choice questions, 8 and 24, also proved difficult for some candidates.

Writing

Across all three tasks, many candidates made frequent errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

In the Everyday Life task, some candidates did not follow all instructions — they did not ask a variety of questions about the language exchange partner. In some cases, candidates lifted sentences from the bullet points rather than using their own words.

In the Work-based report, many candidates wrote in an informal style rather than with the formality appropriate for a report. Also, some candidates checked off each bullet point briefly and did not go into enough detail.

In the Study task, some candidates wrote repetitively rather than using each new paragraph for a genuinely new point.

Component 2: performance: speaking and listening

Some candidates in the sample participated well in the conversation but were not able to use the range of detailed structures appropriate at National 5 level. Candidates who performed less well made use of lists with little detail in both questions and responses. They therefore didn't demonstrate a sufficient knowledge of structures or show that they could produce them with an appropriate level of accuracy. Some of these candidates were able to show a range of general and specialised vocabulary, but were unable to express their ideas and opinions clearly.

A few candidates dominated the discussion and didn't listen carefully to their partner(s). This resulted in lower marks being awarded for effectiveness and relevance of the contribution as they were unable to show sensitivity to the norms of turn-taking.

A few conversations lacked organisation, which could have been a consequence of not having used the preparation time effectively to consider the topic and the points they wanted to make. These conversations tended to be repetitive or shorter than the time required.

On the few occasions in the sample when the conversation was carried out in groups of three or more, there was some evidence that a few candidates, usually one in a group, did not contribute or perform as well as they might have in a pair. The group dynamic may have had an impact on their ability to take part in the conversation effectively.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper — listening; reading and writing

Listening

Candidates should be given practice in all the question types in the question paper.

- ◆ For gap-fill, it should be emphasised that the specified word limit (often three but occasionally lower) should be followed.

- ◆ For the pick list, it should be emphasised that where, for example, two correct answers are required from a selection of five options, and three answers are ticked, full marks cannot be awarded.

Candidates should also be encouraged 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, no mark can be given.

Reading

Candidates should be given practice in all the question types in the question paper.

- ◆ They should be advised 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 the specified number of words, unaltered, from the actual text. While it is useful to try to anticipate the grammar required for the answer (eg a noun phrase, a verb, etc), 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 will only be given for actual words from the text which make sense in the gap, so while there may be variants, these variants will be limited. The gap-fill question type was found to be the most difficult in the 2017 paper.

Writing

Candidates should be given the chance to discuss the marking criteria for this section and should be advised 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 to be encouraged in addition to specific exam preparation.

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 candidates can develop their own ideas. In some responses to the Everyday Life task, candidates lifted phrases from the bullet points rather than developing ideas. Originality is one way to achieve a positive impact on the reader.

To avoid running out of time, it is important that candidates practise a Writing paper at one sitting on more than one occasion so that they can get used to managing their time well.

Centres should make use of the Understanding Standards packs available on the SQA website for the Writing Section of the Course Assessment at National 5. These provide detailed commentary on writing tasks which show clearly the basis on which marks have been awarded. The candidate evidence scoring 7 or more out of 10 (Everyday Life task) or 11 or more out of 15 (ESOL in Context task) shows a variety of ways in which candidates have successfully expanded the prompts in the task with their own ideas.

Candidates attempting the study question generally did well in understanding the importance of appropriate style (formal/informal) as required. Those attempting the Work question did less well. An essay or a report should be formal, as should be a business-related letter.

Candidates should practise writing in the following genres: formal letter, formal e-mail, informal e-mail, report and essay.

Component 2: performance: speaking and listening

In the sample that was verified, it was apparent that many assessors had prepared candidates well for the performance. Candidates appeared comfortable with being recorded and confident in their approach to the performance. They had been supported to clearly understand the assessment brief and had made good use of the 15 minutes' preparation time to consider the topic and points for discussion.

Most candidates showed a range of general and specialised vocabulary, indicating that they were familiar with the broad topic area and had been appropriately supported to undertake the performance.

Candidates should be made aware of the need to demonstrate an appropriately wide range of detailed structures in their spoken English early in the course. The use of detailed structures is as essential as other communication skills if they are to achieve high marks in the performance. Giving candidates feedback on areas for development in their spoken English at a point in the course when they can focus on improvement will support them. To gain a further understanding of the range of structures that are appropriate at National 5, see Appendix 1: Illustrative Language Tables (ILTS) in the National 5 course support notes section of the course specification.

Candidates who achieve high marks for listening ensure that they listen attentively and respond to points made by their partners. Early feedback on listening skills will enable them to achieve high marks in the listening element.

When awarding marks for listening, close attention to the detailed marking instructions is required. To achieve a mark of 5, candidates' responses must fully support the conversation, and they must understand in detail what is said.

If assessing candidates in groups of three, consideration of the group dynamic is essential to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged. If you believe that a candidate has been disadvantaged, the candidate can be assessed again in a different pairing or group using a different conversation task.

Assessors should make candidates aware that lengthy monologues during the interaction reduce the opportunities for a natural conversation and appropriate turn-taking.

To prepare candidates for the performance in the coming session, assessors and internal verifiers should refer closely to the *National 5 ESOL Course Specification 2017–18 session (July 2017)* and the *Coursework assessment task for National 5 ESOL (July 2017)*. Both documents are available on the National 5 ESOL page of SQA's open website.

Assessors and internal verifiers may also make use of the understanding standards packs on SQA's secure website for the performance.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	869
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	868
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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 -				
A	40.1%	40.1%	348	70
B	25.2%	65.3%	219	60
C	20.4%	85.7%	177	50
D	4.7%	90.4%	41	45
No award	9.6%	-	83	-

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.