



Qualification Verification Summary Report

NQ Verification 2018–19

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	June 2019

National Courses/Units verified:

Courses

C827 75	National 5	ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening
C827 76	Higher	ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening

Units

H998 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Reading and Writing
H997 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Listening and Speaking
H99A 72	National 2	ESOL in Context: Reading and Writing
H24H 73	National 3	ESOL for Everyday Life
H24H 74	National 4	ESOL for Everyday Life
H24N 74	National 4	ESOL Assignment — added value unit
H24L 75	SCQF level 5	ESOL in Context

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

National Courses: National 5 and Higher

Most centres verified had used appropriately selected assessment briefs and provided these within the evidence submitted for verification. National 5 or Higher speaking tasks from unit assessment support packs were used well as an assessment brief for candidates and these were often personalised. 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 on task topics and contexts supports the principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

Almost all centres assessed candidates in pairs rather than small groups. Most pairings were well matched and candidates worked together effectively to maintain the conversation/discussion. In some centres, when individual candidates were assessed, the conversation/discussion benefitted from the candidate being paired with an interlocutor who did not direct or dominate the conversation/discussion. This allowed the candidate the opportunity to fully demonstrate their English language skills.

In general, stipulated timings were respected and in many cases the discussion or conversation was well balanced, so that sufficient evidence of each candidate's language skills was provided.

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.

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. In a few such recordings, candidates introduced themselves, indicated the assessment task and discussion topic chosen, then referred to each other by name in the initial stages of the conversation/ discussion. Along with supporting the verification process by helping to identify candidates more easily on the recording, this approach is also supportive to candidates by allowing them the opportunity to participate orally prior to their performance and by reducing the level of formality associated with assessment.

Some centres provided evidence of good practice in their approach to assessment in the use of assessment paperwork. This included highlighted descriptions of performance and marks on the detailed marking instructions. In some cases, this was supported with the inclusion of further commentary recorded on the detailed marking instructions and/or on candidate assessment records, which referred both to the descriptions of performance and marks and to aspects of the candidate's own performance. Allowing candidates to see clearly both their strengths and where there is need of further skills development is supportive to good learning and teaching.

Other aspects of good administration in the approach to assessment, which also helped the verification process, included: clearly labelled recordings on CDs or memory sticks submitted as evidence and the inclusion of Scottish Candidate Numbers which helped identify candidates.

Assessment judgements

Guidance for centres on approaches to assessment

Where a centre-produced assessment brief is used, centres should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide ranging and specific enough to allow candidates to fully demonstrate the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve a high mark for the six assessed aspects of performance at National 5/Higher level.

After the assessment brief is first given, assessment conditions allow candidates 15 minutes preparation time, on their own, before taking part in the assessment. Candidates should be discouraged from using this time to script dialogue as a small number of recordings submitted for verification suggested had taken place. This disadvantages candidates from demonstrating their speaking and listening skills, particularly, in speaking: the ability to initiate with spontaneity, show sensitivity to the norms of turn-taking and produce features of spoken English; and in listening: to respond with fluency and spontaneity.

Candidates' performances must not be scripted, read out, memorised or rehearsed.

Where assessors take on the role of interlocutor, to avoid disadvantaging candidates it is important that participation in the conversation/discussion is balanced, especially with regards to turn-taking. In a small number of cases, assessors took on the role of interviewer, disadvantaging candidates from displaying fully their ability to take part in a conversation/discussion. Using peer interlocutors where possible is good practice.

The centre should ensure that candidate pairings or groups facilitate a balanced conversation/discussion 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 re-assessed in a different pairing or group.

Examples of good practice in assessment judgements

In some of the samples provided for verification, there was a good variety of abilities amongst the candidates selected, allowing centres to clearly demonstrate sound assessment judgements across the range of marks available.

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 of performance to determine marks within the bands for both speaking and listening.

In addition to recording the marks for speaking and listening on the correct candidate assessment record, a number of centres had included as evidence of assessment highlighted descriptions of bands and marks on the detailed marking instructions. In some cases, this was supported with the inclusion of further commentary recorded on the detailed marking instructions and/or on candidate

assessment records. This proved excellent practice and informs both the internal and external verification processes, making clear how marks were awarded.

Most centres had taken a holistic approach to the judgements, following the instructions in the National 5 and Higher the general approach described in the marking instructions to identify the band which best described 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 main band selected. This will determine if the candidate is at the top, in the middle, or at the bottom of the band.

Guidance for centres on assessment judgements

The overall marks awarded for each candidate's performance must be recorded on the Verification Sample Form. For verification of assessment judgements to proceed, the breakdown of marks awarded for speaking and listening must also be recorded on the candidate assessment record.

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. Where a task from a unit assessment support pack was used as the assessment brief, assessment judgements and marks awarded should be based on the performance marking instructions contained in the course specifications. Judging evidence tables from a unit assessment support pack must not be used or submitted.

Centres should ensure that marks awarded for listening are based on the description of performance contained in the detailed marking instructions and are independent of assessment judgements made of candidates' speaking performances. This is particularly important when groups of three or more candidates are being assessed. In such assessments, there was a tendency for some assessors to award full marks to each candidate for the listening performance — even where it was not evident from the performance that a candidate understands fully and in detail what is said clearly, and/or listens attentively to what is said and responds with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity which effectively develops the conversation/discussion.

There was evidence that some candidates had been marked leniently in terms of range and accuracy of detailed structures at National 5, and detailed and complex structures at Higher. This resulted in a higher mark being allocated than is in line with national standards. Assessors could refer to the exemplars and commentaries available in the Understanding Standards packs on the SQA secure site to become more familiar with marking this aspect of performance.

The illustrative language tables in the Higher course support notes can support teachers and lecturers in having a good understanding of the level of discussion required.

Assessment approaches

Units: National 2, 3, 4 and SCQF level 5

Overall, centres submitted approaches to assessment making good use of the unit assessment support packs. Some centres had adapted them and others used them as a model for producing their own assessments. Submitting centre-produced assessments for prior verification will increase confidence that the assessments are valid reliable and practicable.

Outcome 1 (reading)

Overall, the approach taken by most centres to the assessment and re-assessment of outcome 1 (reading) was both valid and accepted.

Assessors should use their professional judgement to determine the most appropriate ways to generate evidence when a candidate has not met all the assessment standards. Checking responses orally or a re-assessment using a different question on the same text could generate sufficient evidence to meet the assessment standards.

When a candidate response has been checked orally or a different question has been asked for outcome 1 (reading) this should be recorded to show clearly the basis on which assessment judgements have been made. Written records of assessors' comments assure reliability and support both assessors and candidates. Where the evidence clearly demonstrates that a candidate has met the assessment standards, it is not necessary to provide detailed comments.

Please ensure that candidates' responses are in pen — not pencil.

Outcome 2 (writing)

It was clear from the evidence provided that most centres verified are using the drafting process appropriately and in a way that supports candidates.

Candidates who have met the assessment standards in their first draft should not be required to produce a second draft. There were a few examples of candidates producing drafts and final versions when they had clearly met the assessment standards in the first piece of writing. Detailed guidance regarding the drafting process can be found in the 'ESOL Common questions' document.

In a few centres, there was no evidence provided to show that candidates were allowed the opportunity to redraft their written work. The original draft(s), including any notes and comments from the assessor and the final version must be kept as evidence and submitted for external verification.

Please ensure that candidates' responses are in pen — not pencil.

Outcome 3 (listening)

The guidance in the unit assessment support pack is that candidates should normally listen to the recordings twice. Assessors should exercise professional

judgement if candidates are unable to meet the assessment standards by listening to the text twice and consider remediation followed by re-assessment using a different task.

When a candidate response has been checked orally for outcome 3 (listening) this should be recorded to show clearly the basis on which assessment judgements have been made. Written records of assessors' comments assure reliability and support both assessors and candidates. Where the evidence clearly demonstrates that a candidate has met the assessment standards, it is not necessary to provide detailed comments.

Please ensure that candidates' responses are in pen — not pencil.

Outcome 4 (speaking)

Most centres had submitted candidate evidence that was well organised and included clearly identified audio recordings of high quality for National 2, 3, 4 and SCQF level 5, outcome 4.

When the evidence is borderline for outcome 4 (speaking) it should include assessors' comments that show clearly the basis on which assessment judgements have been made. Written records of assessors' comments assure reliability and support both assessors and candidates. Where the evidence clearly demonstrates that a candidate has met the assessment standards, it is not necessary to provide detailed comments.

It should be noted that preparation time is not a time to rehearse the conversation with their partner but to prepare their thoughts on their own.

Where a conversation is conducted as an interview by the interlocutor, the approach does not always allow candidates the opportunity to meet assessment standard 4.3, maintaining interaction as appropriate.

In the evidence submitted there were some examples of combining the assessment of outcomes 3 and 4 (listening and speaking) where the assessor took on the role of interlocutor very effectively and the result was a good example of a well-balanced conversation.

Assessment judgements

In a majority of centres verified, assessors had a good understanding of the assessment standards. The assessment judgements were in line with national standards and assessor comments were clearly based on the assessment standards.

In some centres, not all assessment judgements were in line with national standards. For example, the assessment evidence submitted for some candidates was insufficient to support the assessor judgement that candidates had met all the assessment standards for outcome 4.

Outcome 1 (reading) and outcome 3 (listening)

For outcome 1 (reading) and outcome 3 (listening), most centres had made good use of the judging evidence tables and combined this with professional judgement against the assessment standards, accepting candidate responses that clearly met the standards.

In the assessment of reading, the assessor should check orally a candidate's answer if they appear to have lifted a sentence or a number of words from the text. For some questions on the assessment task sheet it states that the candidate should answer the question in no more than two words. Where answers provided for these types of questions go beyond the stated word limit, assessors should check orally which of the words in the original answer the candidate would keep to stay within the word limit and note this on the assessment task or on the candidate assessment record or similar document.

Outcome 2 (writing)

Most centres had used the drafting process very effectively and made appropriate judgements against the assessment standards at each stage of the drafting process. Clear and appropriate feedback was given to candidates at and this resulted in consistent and reliable judgements.

For the units at SCQF level 2, in some cases there was little evidence that the candidates had met assessment standards 2.1, 2.2 or 2.3, but candidates' responses had been judged as passes. There was no evidence to show that the candidates had applied the rules of upper and lower case accurately, had used basic grammar, spelling and punctuation sufficiently accurately to convey meaning, or had used basic conventions of layout as appropriate. When judging candidate evidence, assessors must relate their judgements to the assessment standards.

At SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5, in some cases the judgements didn't fully take into account assessment standard 2.2 using grammar, spelling and punctuation sufficiently accurately to convey meaning. Assessors who are unsure of national standards should refer to the exemplars and commentaries available in the understanding standards packs on the SQA secure site.

Outcome 4 (speaking)

Overall, assessment judgements were clearly based on the assessment standards and candidates had been appropriately identified as pass or fail against these.

There were some excellent examples of conversations and, for the ESOL assignment, presentations where candidates performed well. They engaged with the tasks and took an interest in what their partner was saying, responding appropriately with comments and questions. Many candidates appeared well prepared for the assessment and were also comfortable being recorded, demonstrating that they were familiar with this as an approach to developing their speaking skills.

In some cases, assessors had made judgements that were lenient and did not fully take into account the national standards at the appropriate SCQF levels, specifically for assessment standards relating to using structures and vocabulary (4.1) and communicating sufficiently accurately (4.2). Assessors who are unsure of national standards for a particular SCQF level should refer to the exemplars and commentaries available in the Understanding Standards packs on the SQA secure site.

03

Section 3: General comments

Internal verification

Some centres provided full and detailed evidence of the internal verification process. These documented clearly that professional dialogue had taken place between the internal verifier and the assessor, showing how assessment judgements were reached for units and marks awarded for the ESOL performance. Other centres provided evidence of cross-marking having taken place and/or the internal verifier signed to confirm agreement with the judgements/marks awarded.

Some centres did not provide any evidence of internal verification. This must be submitted along with the candidate evidence for external verification.

As well as ensuring national standards are maintained, internal verification should ensure that assessors are fully supported throughout internal assessment. Internal verifiers and assessors may find the [SQA Internal Verification Toolkit](#) useful to ensure 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.

A small number of centres submitted incorrect evidence of assessment for external verification, for example unit assessments for the ESOL performance. Centres should pay close attention to the materials required for external verification of units and the ESOL performance and if unsure about what to submit, contact NQ Verification for guidance.