



Course Report 2015

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages (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 examinations. 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 and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Section A, Listening

The purpose of this section 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

Section A 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?’

Sections B and C, Reading and Writing

The purpose of these sections of the question paper is to allow learners the opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

Reading:

- ◆ 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

Writing:

- ◆ 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

Section B and C has a total mark of 50 marks which is 50% of the overall marks for the Course assessment.

Section B, Reading

This section has 25 marks.

The questions for reading assess understanding, application and analysis skills. These 25 marks are awarded for identifying, explaining and showing awareness of features of text, opinions or attitudes and key aspects of detail. These skills are tested by a range of questions including gap-fill, multiple choice, pick-list, short answer and matching.

Section C, 'Writing'

This section has 25 marks.

- ◆ Learners 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.
- ◆ Candidates are assessed against criteria including addressing content and organisation, use of language, accuracy and appropriateness to purpose and audience.
- ◆ These 25 marks will be awarded for using appropriate structures, vocabulary and language features to convey meaning.

Component 2: Performance

This component allows candidates to demonstrate challenge and application in the skills of speaking and listening. Candidates participate in a conversation/discussion in English on a chosen topic from everyday life, work or study contexts. The conversation/discussion can be with one other person or in a small group.

The conversation will last 5–6 minutes if conducted in a pair, or longer if in a small group.

Candidates have 15 minutes to prepare on their own for the conversation/discussion.

The performance gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate the following skills and knowledge:

- ◆ communicate orally in English, using detailed language to convey meaning
- ◆ use structures and vocabulary as appropriate to task
- ◆ maintain interaction as appropriate to task
- ◆ show understanding of spoken English through their responses to their partner or members of a small group

The candidate's performance is described in terms of the following seven main characteristics for speaking and listening:

- ◆ Organisation, development and communication of ideas/opinions
- ◆ Effectiveness and relevance of contribution
- ◆ Ability to initiate, maintain and support development of the interaction
- ◆ Accuracy and appropriateness of general and specialised vocabulary in context
- ◆ Use of structure to communicate
- ◆ Effectiveness of pronunciation
- ◆ Understanding spoken English

A total of 25 marks can be awarded for the speaking element, and a total of 5 marks is available for the listening element.

A combined total of 30 marks can be awarded for Component 2, which is 30% of the overall marks for the Course assessment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Section A, Listening question paper

The section was done well by the majority of candidates. Questions across both recordings had similar levels of difficulty.

Section B, Reading question paper

This section was done well by the majority of candidates. Questions on text 1 were generally better attempted than those on text 2.

Section C, Writing question paper

This section was done adequately but not as well as in 2014 (last year the average writing marks were approximately 65%; this year they were approximately 60%). There were no major differences between responses to the three different tasks, although responses to the ESOL for Everyday Life Task were slightly better than those to the ESOL in Context tasks. Most crucially, many of the responses last year provided good supporting detail for points made; this year there was, overall, less supporting detail.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates generally performed very well demonstrating their speaking and listening skills to the extent of their language competence. This was particularly evident where they clearly understood the requirements of the task and had an interest in the topic.

Overall the introduction of the listening element of the performance has improved the quality of the interactions between candidates and made them more responsive to their partners or others in a small group. This allows further development of points and greater opportunities to demonstrate a range of language skills during the conversation/discussion.

Conversations/discussions took place in the range of contexts, everyday life, work and study allowing further personalisation and choice.

There were a few small group discussions where one of the candidates found it harder to fully demonstrate their language skills because of the group dynamic.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Section A, Listening

Most candidates were able to respond accurately to:

- ◆ gap-fill questions
- ◆ multiple choice questions
- ◆ pick-list questions

Section B, Reading

Most candidates were able to respond accurately to:

- ◆ gap-fill questions, eg text 1 questions 2 and 4; text 2 questions 13-17
- ◆ vocabulary questions, eg text 1 question 11; text questions 9 and 10.
- ◆ multiple choice questions in text 2, eg questions 19, 20, 24, 25
- ◆ matching questions in text 1 (questions 5-8)

Section C, Writing

Part 1: Everyday Life Task

Most candidates were able to respond accurately and relevantly with sufficient supporting detail. Most showed a good standard of grammatical accuracy. Some brought quite original ideas to the tasks with information about the purpose of their charity and the benefits to the supermarket, therefore gaining credit for well-developed support for each point and for using a wide range of vocabulary.

Part 2: ESOL in Context: Work or Study

In each task, most candidates wrote relevant and structured answers with supporting detail and an adequate range of grammar and vocabulary. Most of those selecting the study question paid close attention to the bulleted prompts.

Those selecting the work question generally followed the conventions of a report (eg beginning with information on the purpose, the audience and the writer), paid close attention to the information in the table, and finished the task with a sufficiently clear conclusion. A minority of candidates impressively made their own selections/categorisations of the tabulated information, achieving a very positive impact on the reader and usually demonstrating a wide range of vocabulary and grammar while doing so.

Component 2: Performance

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

Candidates mainly produced natural and spontaneous conversations/discussions.

In many of the conversations/discussions candidates were awarded marks in the top two bands for speaking and listening and were clearly demonstrating the following skills well in each element.

Speaking:

- ◆ ability to initiate, maintain and support development of the interaction
- ◆ contributing relevantly throughout the interaction
- ◆ demonstrating a range of general and specialised vocabulary appropriate to the topic
- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas and opinions
- ◆ effective production of English pronunciation features

Listening:

- ◆ Listening attentively to their partner and responding with a level of spontaneity which supported the conversation.

Overall, candidates who performed well contributed in an interesting and thoughtful way and demonstrated an enthusiasm for the topic and a genuine interest in what their partner(s) had to say.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Section A, Listening

- ◆ A small number of candidates had difficulty in following instructions on the maximum number of words in a response or the maximum number of boxes that could be ticked in a pick list question.

Section B, Reading

- ◆ Some candidates had difficulty in responding to questions on vocabulary (text 1 questions 10 and 11; text 2 questions 21, 22 and 23).
- ◆ A small number of candidates (fewer than last year) had difficulty in following instructions on the maximum number of words allowed in a response.

Section C, Writing

Part 1: Everyday Life Task

Some candidates had difficulty in providing enough supporting detail and relied too much on using the words in the task instructions, generally receiving marks of 5–6 but not demonstrating a wide enough range of grammar or of vocabulary to be marked in the 7–10 range. Some used too informal a style for a letter to a supermarket manager asking for donations.

Part 2: ESOL in Context: Work or Study

In the work task, some candidates went mechanically through all of the elements of the table, again (as in part 2) performing sufficiently well but not showing a wide enough range of grammar or vocabulary or providing enough support for each point made to achieve marks in the 11–15 marks range.

In the study task, some candidates wrote insufficiently formally and/or did not develop the bullet points in enough detail to score in the 11–15 marks range.

Component 2: Performance

There was some evidence that a few candidates found conversation/discussion in a small group more demanding than when paired with another candidate and were not able to fully demonstrate their skills.

Speaking

Some candidates participated well in the discussion but were not able to gain higher marks because of a limited range of structures and/or specialised vocabulary related to the topic.

Some candidates had not made good use of the preparation time and did not fully address the bullet points in the assessment brief. As a consequence, their discussions lacked organisation and cohesion, resulting in lower marks.

Listening

A few candidates had not taken on board the listening element of the discussion and persisted throughout in asking questions but not responding to the comments or questions of their partner. This resulted in a lower mark for listening.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres can access specimen question papers with marking instructions, along with guidance on the use of past paper questions for National 5 ESOL at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47411.html>

Component 1: Question paper

Section A, Listening

Candidates should be given practice in all of the question types in the 2015 paper.

With regard to gap-fills, it should be emphasised that the specified word limit (often three but occasionally lower) should be followed. With regard to the pick list, it should be emphasised if, for example, two correct answers are required from 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 (i) looks more like another word than it does the word in the answer key or (ii) is barely comprehensible, then no mark can be given.

Section B, Reading

Candidates should be given practice in all of the question types in the 2015 paper. They should be given particular practice in the skill of identifying the correct item of vocabulary in a particular paragraph, using both contextual and grammatical clues.

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 x 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.

Section C, Writing

Candidates should be given the chance to discuss the marking criteria used for this section and advised that the highest marks require a good range of both grammar and vocabulary. 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. Originality is one way to achieve a positive impact on the reader.

Centres should make use of the Understanding Standards packs available on the SQA website for the Writing Component of the Course Assessment at National 5. These provide detailed commentaries 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 should also be reminded of the importance of appropriate style (formal/informal) as required. An essay or a report should be formal, as should be a business-related letter.

They should practise writing in the following genres: formal letter, formal email, informal email, report and essay.

Component 2: Performance

To prepare candidates, centres should continue to refer closely to the *National 5 ESOL Performance Assessment Task* to ensure they are fully familiar with the task, ie the conversation/discussion and the accompanying guidance and marking instructions.

Centres should take note of the instructions in the Course Assessment Task, which state that the assessment is a conversation/discussion and not a presentation with a follow-up question and answer section, especially when making use of UASP tasks. The Detailed Marking Instructions for both Speaking and Listening are for a conversation/discussion where candidates must show ability to initiate and sensitivity to turn-taking. The marks awarded for Listening also take account of how well they listen and respond to what is said by their partner(s).

Centres should make candidates aware that lengthy monologues during the conversation/discussion reduce the opportunities for spontaneity and demonstrating their skills in showing sensitivity to turn-taking and responding to their partner's comments.

In addition to centres using speaking briefs from the UASPs, topics can be chosen by the centre to provide further personalisation and choice. When writing the brief for candidates for the assessment task, care should be taken to ensure that there is an appropriate level of challenge for National 5. It should allow candidates to fully demonstrate their English language skills, particularly in relation to:

- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas/opinions
- ◆ range of general and specialised vocabulary
- ◆ use of detailed structure to communicate

The task must provide candidates with a choice of topics and ample opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of general and specific vocabulary for the topic chosen.

Some centres assessed candidates in small groups rather than pairs, and 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 to allow each candidate to fully demonstrate their skills. Centres should also ensure that the discussion or conversation is well balanced and encourage a supportive approach from group members so that there is sufficient evidence from each candidate.

Candidates should be given the opportunity to become familiar with the centre's chosen method of recording the assessment (audio or video) early in the course, and be given recorded practice of discussions and encouraged to record and discuss their interactions. Regular feedback to candidates on their progress in speaking skills and the areas for them to develop is essential.

Candidates should be trained in the most effective ways to use the allocated preparation time to consider their ideas for each of the bullet points and possible relevant specialised vocabulary. They should apply note-taking skills and at all times be discouraged from writing a lengthy text on the topic as a way of preparing on their own. They should not rehearse the conversation/discussion with anyone during the preparation time but prepare on their own.

Candidates should be made aware of the need to demonstrate a range of structures and specialised vocabulary early in the course, and be advised that the development of this is essential to being awarded high marks in the speaking. Guidance on how they can do this is an essential part of supporting candidates to achieve good marks in speaking.

Early feedback on formative assessment of listening skills will enable candidates to achieve high marks in the listening element. Candidates who achieve high marks in Listening respond to and develop points made by their partner(s). They should be made fully aware of the need for sensitivity in turn taking and advised that it is not appropriate to dominate the conversation.

Most centres had taken a holistic approach to the awarding of marks, 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.

Centres should make use of the Understanding Standards packs available on the SQA Secure site for the Internally Assessed Component of the Course Assessment (IACCA) at National 5. These provide detailed commentaries on audio/video recordings of candidate performances which show clearly the basis on which marks have been awarded.

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 following link to 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.

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/71679.5825.html>

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	210
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	683
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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 - 100				
A	47.4%	47.4%	324	72
B	29.1%	76.6%	199	61
C	12.6%	89.2%	86	51
D	1.9%	91.1%	13	46
No award	8.9%	-	61	-

Intention was to set the assessments to notional grade boundaries. The reading assessment was slightly easier than anticipated resulting in a two mark upward adjustment across all grade boundaries. Everyday life writing task was judged to be slightly more challenging than intended (1 mark) for C-grade candidates only. Overall, grade boundaries moved up two marks at the A and upper A boundaries and 1 mark at the C-boundary.