



Course Report 2018

Subject	ESOL
Level	National 5

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Component 1: question paper: Listening

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

The purpose of this question paper is to allow candidates to have an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding from across the course:

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

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 25 marks which is scaled to 20 marks. This is 20% of the overall marks for the course assessment. Candidates listen to and answer questions based on one monologue and two spoken interactions. A range of questions are used to test listening comprehension. This includes multiple choice, gap-fill and pick-list questions, for example 'Which two statements of the following five are correct?'

Component 2: question paper: Reading

This question paper was slightly more difficult than expected. This was taken into account during grade boundary setting.

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

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

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 35 marks which is scaled to 25 marks. This is 25% of the overall marks for the course assessment. The questions for reading assess understanding, application and analysis skills across three texts. These 35 marks are awarded for identifying, showing awareness of features of text, opinions or attitudes, and key aspects of detail. A range of questions are used to test these skills. This includes multiple choice, gap-fill, pick-list, short answer and matching.

We have reviewed the timing of the Reading Question Paper and decided to extend by 10 minutes. This increases the duration to 70 minutes.

Component 3: question paper: Writing

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

The purpose of this question paper is to allow learners 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

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 30 marks which is scaled to 25 marks. This is 25% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

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.

Candidates are assessed against criteria including addressing content and organisation, use of language, accuracy and appropriateness to purpose and audience. These 30 marks are awarded for using appropriate structures, vocabulary and language features to convey meaning.

Component 4: performance: Speaking and Listening

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

There were minor changes to the assessment conditions for the performance from August 2017. Assessors must now provide candidates with an assessment brief and there should be no more than three participating in the conversation for the performance.

The performance, as set out in the *N5 ESOL Course Specification* and the *performance assessment task*, consists of a conversation on a topic from everyday life, work or study. The conversation should last 5–6 minutes if conducted in a pair, or slightly longer if in a group of three. This performance has a total mark allocation of 30 marks; 25 marks will be awarded for speaking and 5 marks will be awarded for listening. This is 30% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

The six aspects of speaking and listening being assessed are:

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

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.

From the sample that was externally verified, it was evident that for the majority of assessors, 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 cases, marks were not awarded in line with national standards. Some assessors were being lenient across a range of aspects when awarding marks, and some were being particularly lenient when awarding marks for accuracy and use of structures to communicate. It is important that marks are awarded in line with the national standards, particularly when awarding marks for accuracy and use of structures 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 in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper: Listening

There were no particular question types which candidates performed well, given that some gap-fill questions were clearly more difficult than others. This was also the case for multiple choice and pick-list questions. Candidates performed well in questions 1, 4, 5, 6, 8(i) and (ii), 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17(i) and (iii), and 18.

Component 2: question paper: Reading

As with listening, there was not a particular question type in which candidates performed well. Candidates gained higher marks on the first reading passage, which had a simpler matching task. Candidates performed well in questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9(i), (ii) and (iii), 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18(i), 19, 20, 25, 26(i), 26(ii), and 27.

Component 3: question paper: Writing

In the everyday life task, most candidates supported and developed good ideas about their school or college. Good support/development was also seen across the work task on improving the cafeteria, and in the study task on studying at home or away from home.

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

Component 4: performance: Speaking and Listening

Based on the performance: speaking and listening sampled at external verification, the overall quality of the performance was high, with many candidates obtaining marks in the top two bands. They performed particularly well in the following aspects:

Speaking

- ◆ organisation, development and communication of ideas/opinions
- ◆ effectiveness and relevance of contribution
- ◆ accuracy and appropriateness of general and specialised vocabulary in context
- ◆ effectiveness of pronunciation

Candidates who performed well in the sample, also used a range of structures with an appropriate level of accuracy, contributed throughout the conversation, and engaged with the topic. 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

Many of the candidates who achieved high marks in speaking were also awarded 5 marks for their interactive listening skills. They listened attentively, showing a genuine interest in

what their partner(s) had to say and responded in a way which fully supported the conversation.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper: Listening

Candidates had more difficulty in answering questions 2, 3, 7, 8(iii), 10, 12, 14 and 17(i). It should also be noted that a number of candidates did not attempt question 18.

Component 2: question paper: Reading

Candidates found more difficulty in texts 2 and 3, sometimes with the more complex matching questions in each passage. They performed less well with questions 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, 17, 18(ii), (iii) and (iv), 22, 23, 24, 26(iii) and (iv).

Component 3: 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 articles.

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

Component 4: performance: Speaking and Listening

A few 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

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

A few conversations tended to be repetitive and did not explore aspects of the topic in any detail. This may be because they did not have speaking and listening skills appropriate for the level, but it is also possible that they had not had sufficient opportunity to take part in conversations and receive feedback on these during the course. These conversations did not achieve marks in the top three bands because they lacked organisation and 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 or to other members of their group 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 listening.

A number of candidates did not 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: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper: Listening

Centres should ensure candidates practice all of the question types in the 2018 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 candidates tick three answers, 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 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 in order to practise listening at speed (for the more demanding gap-fill questions, some candidates gave no response).

Component 2: question paper: Reading

Centres should ensure candidates practice all of the question types in the 2018 paper. They should advise candidates to read the rubric of each question carefully and give 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, a verb), candidates should be discouraged from either attempting an answer before reading the text or from trying a 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.

Teachers and lecturers should also ensure candidates practice completing 35 questions in the time limit of 1 hour, and advise them on skimming and scanning techniques, as reading each text as a whole before answering the questions is likely to take up too much time.

Component 3: question paper: Writing

Teachers and lecturers should give candidates the chance to discuss the marking criteria used for this question paper, 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 2018, 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 the quality of their writing. Although 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 2018, poorer responses to the everyday life task 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 Understanding Standards 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 shows a variety of ways in which candidates have successfully expanded the prompts in the task with their own ideas.

In 2018, many candidates attempting both the study and work tasks 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 letter, formal e-mail, informal e-mail, report and essay.

Component 4: performance: Speaking and Listening

From the beginning of the course, candidates should focus on the development of their speaking and interactive listening skills. Sharing and using the aspects to be assessed and the descriptions of performance with candidates at the beginning of the course, is an ideal way for them to identify their strengths, the aspects they need to further develop, and their progress. This can also form the basis of formative assessment throughout the course and enable teachers and lecturers to give them consistent feedback regularly 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 consider how best to develop their spoken language to avoid listing items 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 (ILTS)'.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure they provide candidates with advice how to use the 15 minutes preparation time effectively on their own, how 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. Candidates should not attempt to script or rehearse the conversation.

Providing opportunities to practice conversations using assessment briefs with a sufficient level of challenge and recording the conversations is essential for National 5 candidates. Using or adapting the speaking tasks available in the unit assessment support packs, or modelling tasks on these, should provide candidates with an appropriate level of challenge.

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. 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). Early feedback on interactive listening skills should enable them to achieve high marks in the listening aspect.

Teachers and lecturers should make candidates aware that lengthy monologues or over-long turns during the interaction make it more difficult for their partner(s) to respond, and reduce 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.

Teachers and lecturers should make use of the understanding standards packs available on the SQA secure site for the performance at National 5. These provide detailed commentaries on audio/video recordings of candidate performances and show clearly the basis on which marks have been awarded.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	868
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	1035
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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	31.0%	31.0%	321	69
B	25.6%	56.6%	265	59
C	23.8%	80.4%	246	49
D	12.9%	93.2%	133	39
No award	6.8%	-	70	-

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 which 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.

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 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.