Course Report

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

Question paper: 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

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?'

Overall, the choice of stimulus material made this component slightly less demanding than intended. This was taken into account during grade boundary setting.

Question paper – Reading and Writing

Section 1 Reading

The purpose of this section of the question paper is to allow learners 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. 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.

This section enables candidates to perform to the extent of their ability, and assessors to award marks in line with national standards. However, one question proved slightly less demanding than intended. This was taken into account during grade boundary setting.

Section 2: Writing

The purpose of this section of the 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 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.

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

Component 2: Performance

The internally assessed course assessment functioned as expected at National 5. 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; 5 marks are allocated to listening and 25 marks allocated to speaking.

Candidates are assessed on these seven main characteristics:

♦ 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

The Course Assessment Task states the length of the conversation and the assessment conditions, and also provides guidance on the characteristics to be assessed. The level of demand of the actual task undertaken by each candidate is dependent, to some extent, on the topic selected by the assessor or candidate and the 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.

From the Performances sampled, 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

Question paper: Listening
In general, candidates seemed well prepared for this section; they performed particularly well in the pick list question (Q2) and also did well in multiple choice questions (Q3, Q7, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q13) and in gap-fill questions (Q1, Q8, Q11).

Question paper: Reading and Writing

Section 1: Reading
Candidates generally performed well in dealing with both texts, and demonstrated ability across all question types, doing best in the multiple choice questions (Q1–4, Q15-18, Q20) and in the short answer questions (Q 5–8).

Section C: Writing
Almost all candidates showed the ability to write according to conventions of style and layout:

♦ The e-mail to a friend (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 put recommendations at the end.
♦ The Study essay was written in a formal style, and most candidates used discourse markers appropriately and had appropriate paragraphing.

Candidates were often able to use their own ideas rather than merely lifting from the question.

The Everyday Life task frequently showed impressive inventiveness and imagination in describing how damage was caused at the friend's house.

In the Work-based report, some candidates were imaginative in detailing the faults of the work experience student.

In the Study essay, many candidates made full and detailed explorations of the advantages and disadvantages of virtual learning.

Component 2: Performance

Overall, candidates did well in all aspects of the performance, generally obtaining marks in the higher bands. The majority of candidates demonstrated that they had made good use of the preparation time and felt confident with the process being recorded. Most candidates also demonstrated a genuine interest in the topic and their partner's contribution.

Candidates mainly produced natural conversations and demonstrated good skills in maintaining the conversation. Overall there was a noticeable improvement in listening skills, with the majority of candidates listening attentively to what their partner said.

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
♦ relevance of contribution
♦ accuracy and appropriateness of vocabulary
♦ effectiveness of pronunciation

Listening:

♦ listening attentively to their partner

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

Section A: Listening
There were no question types which students had particular difficulties with, although some candidates' spelling was an issue in the gap-fills (Q1, Q8, Q11) where it was not clear what the intended word was.

Section B: Reading
In general, candidates found the gap-fill questions Q11 – Q14 more difficult.

Section C: 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 tell the friend how they spent their weekend.

In the Work-based report, some candidates wrote about a number of work experience students rather than the one particular work experience student specified by the question. A few responses did not give recommendations.

In the Study task, a few candidates did not give their own personal view on virtual learning as mandated in the task.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates who performed less well tended to do so across a majority of the characteristics assessed, showing that generally their language skills were at a lower level.

Some candidates participated well in the conversation but were not able to use an appropriate range of structures. Some candidates who performed less well made extensive use of lists with little detail in both questions and responses, and therefore didn't demonstrate a sufficient knowledge of structures or that they could produce them with an appropriate level of accuracy.

Some discussions 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 in the conversation. These conversations tended to be repetitive or shorter than the time required.

When the conversation was carried out in groups of three or four, 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 had an impact on their ability to take part in the conversation effectively.

A few candidates dominated the discussion and didn't listen carefully to their partner(s).

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Question paper: Listening

Candidates should practise all question types for the question paper component. 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 that if, for example, two correct answers are required from five options, and three answers are ticked, candidates will not be able to access the full range of marks.

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, then no mark can be given.

Question paper: Reading and Writing

Section 1: Reading

Candidates should be given practice in all of 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. Candidates should strictly adhere to the stated number of words in gap-fill question types such as *'Complete each gap with no more than three words from the text'.* This requires candidates to take, in this example, three 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 2016 paper.

Focus should also be given to familiarising candidates with matching questions — a small minority of candidates in 2016 did not know how to answer these, simply putting ticks against question numbers.

Section 2: 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 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.

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. Candidates' responses to the Work task sometimes lacked development of ideas. Originality is one way to achieve a positive impact on the reader.

Centres should make use of the Understanding Standards packs — these are available on the SQA website for the Writing Section of the Course Assessment at National 5 (http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/Subjects/ESOL/National5). 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.

In 2016, candidates generally did well in understanding the importance of appropriate style, ie formal/informal, as required. An essay or a report should be formal, as should 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

To prepare candidates, centres should continue to refer closely to the *National 5 ESOL Course Assessment Task* to ensure they are fully familiar with the task, ie a conversation,

and the accompanying guidance and marking instructions. This document is available on SQA's secure website.

Some practitioners combine the course assessment performance in listening and speaking with a unit assessment. This is acceptable practice and reduces the overall amount of assessment required. However, assessors should take note of the following points.

When adopting this practice, assessors should ensure that for the unit assessment only the assessment standards are applied when making assessment judgements. For the performance, candidates should be assessed and marks awarded using the marking instructions in the course assessment task.

If candidates are being assessed for a unit and the performance at the same time, the centre should make sure that candidates have had the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills, and that they are being assessed at an appropriate time in the year to maximise the opportunity of obtaining the best marks possible in the performance. Assessors should also ensure that the assessment conditions as stated in the course assessment task are fully implemented.

Candidates can only do a particular speaking task once, so if candidates are assessed at different times for a unit and the performance, different tasks should be used.

Assessors should be aware that, for candidates to prepare adequately for the conversation, providing them with only a topic as a brief, with no scaffolding such as suggested bullet points, could result in a conversation that lacks depth and becomes repetitive. Candidates can choose topics that are of personal interest but the assessor should provide some bullet points/sub-headings that candidates can, if they wish, explore during the discussion. Models for appropriately challenging briefs can be found in the speaking tasks in the National 5 Unit Assessment Support packs on SQA's secure website.

In Verification Key Messages, at Understanding Standards Course events and in the National 5 Course report for 2015, guidance has been provided on developing briefs with a sufficient level of challenge by modelling them on speaking briefs available in the National 5 Unit Assessment Support packs. An assessment brief with an appropriate level of challenge will allow candidates to fully demonstrate their language skills.

If assessing candidates in small groups of three or four, consideration of the group dynamic is essential to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged. If you believe that a candidate could have performed better, 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.

Providing candidates with the opportunity to become familiar with the centre's chosen method of recording the assessment (audio or video) early in the course is advisable. They should be encouraged to record and discuss their interactions. Regular feedback to candidates on their progress in speaking and listening 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 relevant 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 discussion with anyone during the preparation time but prepare on their own.

Candidates should be made aware of the need to demonstrate an appropriately wide range of structures and specialised vocabulary early in the course. The development of this is essential to being awarded high marks in the speaking.

Early feedback on listening skills will enable them to achieve high marks in the listening element. Candidates who achieve high marks in the listening respond to points made by their partners.

Assessors 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. Assessors should also be familiar with the Round 2 Verification Key Messages that relate to the IACCA.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	683

Number of resulted entries in 2016	869

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	35.4%	35.4%	308	71
B	30.7%	66.2%	267	61
C	20.0%	86.2%	174	51
D	5.2%	91.4%	45	46
No award	8.6%	-	75	-

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.