Course report 2022

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages
Level	Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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 appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	695

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	33.8	Cumulative percentage	33.8	Number of candidates	235	Minimum mark required	66
B	Percentage	26.8	Cumulative percentage	60.6	Number of candidates	185	Minimum mark required	56
C	Percentage	22.5	Cumulative percentage	83.1	Number of candidates	155	Minimum mark required	46
D	Percentage	12.6	Cumulative percentage	95.7	Number of candidates	90	Minimum mark required	36
No award	Percentage	4.3	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	30	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Listening

Feedback from centres and markers suggests that this question paper was slightly more demanding than in previous years, which was intentional, and is now in line with that expected at Higher level. Analysis of the overall marks of candidates indicate that they performed better in this question paper than in the reading and writing question papers.

Text 2 was felt to be the most demanding of the three listening sections. The topics covered by the texts were felt to be appropriate and accessible.

There were slightly fewer questions than anticipated that fully challenged the A-grade candidates, although some questions were more difficult than expected.

Overall, the paper performed as expected.

Question paper: Reading

Feedback from centres and markers suggests that this question paper was more demanding than in previous years. Although the intention is to move the standard up slightly in terms of difficulty in line with CEFR C1, this year's paper was too demanding overall. Markers commented that text 2 appeared to be the most challenging text for candidates. The topics covered by the texts were felt to be appropriate and accessible.

The multiple matching questions identifying opinions (questions 9–11 and questions 20–22) appeared to challenge candidates more than anticipated and some short-answer questions in text 2 challenged many candidates. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

Question paper: Writing

All topics in the writing tasks allowed candidates to demonstrate a good range of grammar and vocabulary. Markers felt that topics were accessible to all ages. The writing tasks discriminated well between weaker and stronger candidates. Comments from markers and the marks awarded indicate that the cohort this year found this component challenging, particularly with engaging in the formality of writing and technical accuracy.

Task 1 again focused on writing for social media and online writing and candidates generally managed this well, although more work is needed in this area.

In the optional writing task, those who attempted the essay did slightly better than those who attempted the report question. Most candidates attempted the essay question with few candidates attempting the report.

Overall, the paper performed as expected.

Performance: speaking and listening

The performance functioned as expected, enabling candidates to perform to the extent of their language ability. Overall, the marks awarded for Higher were in line with national standards.

In the sample verified, where centres used assessment briefs from SCQF level 6 unit assessment support packs or prior verified centre-produced assessment briefs, the difficulty of the topic and the scaffolding provided was as expected for this level. Some centres produced their own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice, and some centres had combined these with topics that candidates encountered in other subject areas.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Listening
Candidates performed well overall. The questions that most candidates performed well in were question 3 (multiple choice), and questions 5(b), 11 and 15(c) and (e) (gap-fill).

Question paper: Reading
Question 1 and 3 were most successfully completed (both multiple choice questions).

Question paper: Writing
Candidates were generally better at writing in an informal rather than formal style.

Candidates had good ideas for all three questions and were able to add support for the bullet points provided, and add their own ideas in many cases.

Performance: speaking and listening
A range of marks across the bands was seen at verification, with many candidates performing well and fully demonstrating their English language skills.

Speaking
Most centres assessed candidates in pairs rather than small groups. Most pairings were well matched, and candidates worked together effectively to maintain the discussion. In most cases the discussion was well balanced, so that sufficient evidence of each candidate's language skills was provided. They developed the discussion well with a good focus on the importance of their interaction.

It was clear that some candidates had prepared well for the performance, and this was evidenced through their contribution to the topic, their competences in initiating and turn-taking, and in considering and responding to their partners' comments. These candidates were very comfortable having discussions with each other, showing well-developed speaking and listening skills in relevant contexts. They were well-prepared for this type of task and appeared comfortable being audio or video recorded.

Listening
Candidates who achieved full marks for listening demonstrated that they had understood fully and in detail what was said clearly, and listened attentively to their partner(s), and responded with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity that effectively developed the discussion.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Listening

Although there were no particular areas of the listening paper that candidates consistently found challenging. The questions that candidates found most demanding questions were 4, 5(d), 7(b) and 14. These included both multiple choice questions and short-answer questions.

Spelling was poorer this year than previous years, and candidates often struggled to complete their responses within the three-word requirement.

Question paper: Reading

There were no particular areas of the reading paper that candidates consistently found challenging. The questions that candidates found most demanding were 11, 12, 19, 22, 29 and 33. Again, this was a mix of question styles with many of them being short-answer questions. Many candidates struggled with following the instructions on the question paper and used more than the three words requested, or used their own words rather than using words from the text.

The issues with following the question rubric were discussed in the grade boundary meeting. As candidates have not experienced exams for a number of years and do not seem to have experience of these kinds of questions, a further adjustment of 2 marks was agreed for the contextual situation.

Question paper: Writing

Many candidates struggled with the genre and formality of writing, using language that was too informal in the work and study-related context tasks. In addition, candidates struggled with the genre of a blog in the everyday life question.

In part 2, report or essay writing, candidates did not appear to be familiar with the normal conventions and layout for a discursive report or an essay. There was a lack of paragraphing with some responses showing no evidence of paragraphing, which is penalised at this level.

In terms of cohesion, some candidates were trying to use different discourse markers and conjunctions but these were often used illogically or incorrectly. Many other candidates failed to use these at all.

Punctuation was very weak this year with a significant group of candidates not using capitalisation or full stops. Handwriting was an issue with some candidates and a significant number of responses were difficult to read, with a handful being indecipherable.

Performance: speaking and listening

In some instances where candidates were paired with an interlocutor or had carried out the performance task as part of a group rather than a pair, there was an imbalance in the amount of spoken production from candidates.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ use the allocated time at the end of the listening test to check their spelling to ensure that the words they have written are relevant to the topic of the questions

♦ know that minor spelling errors are accepted in the listening paper as long as the word is recognisable and it is clear that they understand the meaning

♦ practise checking answers, especially in terms of spelling and context

♦ adhere to the word limit when a question asks for no more than X words

♦ are aware that they will not gain marks if they use more than the requested number of words. Even if they include the correct answer within this they will not gain the mark as it is not clear that they have fully understood the question

♦ use past papers to prepare for the different question types in the question paper

♦ use course books or authentic materials to practise all listening sub skills

♦ work on listening and predicting the next word or sentence, choosing the best summary and identifying paraphrases. Dictogloss tasks can help to develop listening skills

Question paper: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ check their spelling carefully, particularly if they finish before the end of the exam time. Words copied directly from the texts are expected to be spelled correctly

♦ practise checking answers, especially in terms of spelling

♦ understand that when the question asks for 'words or phrases from the text' they should choose words found in the text and not try to paraphrase for these questions

♦ do not copy complete sentences from the text. They need to be able to pinpoint the exact phrase to demonstrate they have fully understood it, rather than identifying the wider area of the text that fits the question

♦ adhere to the prescribed word limit when given in a question

♦ choose words and/or phrases directly from the text or paraphrase for more open questions

♦ when answering questions that ask for short answers, they are careful not to copy long chunks from the text as this suggests they have not understood the specific information the question asks for and will not gain the marks

♦ work on summarising and paraphrasing during class to help them with these types of questions

♦ focus more on identifying opinion and overall purpose of the text when developing reading skills in class

♦ pay attention to the correct number of boxes to be ticked in multiple choice questions

- if they change their mind about an answer, they should clearly score out the incorrect answer and highlight which answer they would like to submit
- use past papers to prepare for the different question types in the question paper and to get used to the speed at which they need to read the texts in the exam
- practise choosing and/or writing the summaries
- can identify and predict word class or type of word in a sentence
- practise speed-reading tasks focusing on overall meaning
- use authentic materials to identify inference and work on predicting meaning of vocabulary from context

Question paper: Writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- focus more on developing a range of writing skills and receive more guidance for particular writing tasks
- are able to use punctuation correctly. Lack of capitalisation or inconsistent use of full stops will significantly reduce the available marks for a piece of writing at this level
- spend time working on the structure of a paragraph and how and when a new paragraph should begin
- practise the use discourse markers, linking and signposting in longer writing tasks, especially the essay task in part 2. Clear and correct use of these features can improve a writing task considerably
- focus more on the purpose, genre and target audience of the written tasks, as style is important in the writing tasks at this level
- have opportunities to use online writing tasks such as authentic blog and social media posts, as this genre may be part of future question papers
- are not being overly prescriptive with some formats, for example reports, essays, or letters as this leads to candidates being restricted by some questions. This is especially true with reports as there is a range of appropriate reporting styles
- do not memorise fixed phrases out of context, which may then be used inappropriately
- spend more time on practising different essay structures, for example discursive and for and against essays, as well as focusing on the academic language style expected in an essay
- ensure their work is legible, and practise writing by hand under test conditions
- try to produce answers within the recommended word count and be aware of how much they have written so that time is not wasted on counting words. More is not always better and at times a longer piece of work receives fewer marks as candidates get tired
- focus on communicative quality and accuracy of their work
- are able to proofread and edit their work, and are advised to factor in time for this during the exam
- practise reading the questions carefully, fully understanding what is expected of them and fulfilling the task required, rather than trying to recycle previously completed writing tasks to fit the exam

Performance: speaking and listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ focus on the development of their speaking and interactive listening skills from the beginning of the course

♦ know what is required of them for the performance, introducing the six aspects of speaking and listening to be assessed, and the marking instructions

♦ make use of the marking instructions throughout the course to support them in developing their skills

♦ receive feedback to identify their strengths and the aspects they need to further develop

♦ use the marking instructions to provide them with consistent feedback on how they are progressing

♦ receive feedback that focuses on the aspects of listening being assessed, as well as those of speaking

♦ know that to achieve high marks for listening, they must listen attentively and develop points made by their partner(s)

♦ are given guidance in how to use the 15 minutes preparation time effectively, on their own, 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 discussion with confidence

♦ know they must not attempt to script or rehearse the discussion

♦ have opportunities to practise discussions, using assessment briefs with a sufficient level of challenge, and recording these interactions. This is an essential part of preparing for the performance. Using or adapting speaking tasks available in the unit assessment support packs, or modelling tasks on these, should provide candidates with an appropriate level of challenge

♦ pairings or groups facilitate a balanced discussion with opportunities for equal participation, taking into consideration candidate strengths and personalities

Teachers and lecturers are reminded that there are Understanding Standards packs available on SQA's secure site for the Higher Performance: speaking and listening. These contain audio and/or video recordings of candidate performances, and detailed commentaries with examples of candidate language. The commentaries and examples of language relate directly to the marking instructions.

Appendix 1: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report.