



# Common questions about National 2 to Higher ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

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# General questions

## Are candidate exemplars available?

Understanding standards packs containing candidate exemplars for unit assessment and coursework performance are available on SQA's secure website.

Past papers for listening, reading and writing are available on the [ESOL subject pages](#) of SQA's website.

Further information on understanding standards is available on our web page: [www.sqa.org.uk/understandingstandards](http://www.sqa.org.uk/understandingstandards)

## Are existing learning and teaching materials still relevant?

Yes, lots of existing materials are still very relevant for delivering the new qualifications. Many of these are listed in Appendix 2 of the course and unit support notes on the NQ ESOL subject pages of SQA's website. The course and unit support notes have recently been updated to include a new Appendix 1 which contains Illustrative Language Tables for each level. Additional sources for resources have been added to Appendix 2.

SQA's ESOL learning and teaching materials have been re-labelled to match the NQ units and can be found on the [ESOL subject pages](#) of SQA's website for each level from National 2 to Higher. The SQA formative e-assessment materials are also available on this link. The e-learning materials are in the process of being updated.

Education Scotland's website contains ESOL materials created for the new National Qualifications.

## If a candidate fails to meet an assessment standard required to pass a unit assessment, can the candidate be re-assessed?

SQA's guidance on re-assessment is that normally there should be one or, in exceptional circumstances, two re-assessment opportunities. However, depending on the circumstances, it is not always necessary to use a different instrument of assessment. For example, failure to address the overall purpose question may result in the candidate being re-assessed for that assessment standard only. An appropriate question(s) could be devised using the original assessment text to address that particular assessment standard.

## How long should candidates be given to complete unit assessments?

Time restrictions are not normally a feature of unit assessment and centres need to determine this with reference to the unit assessment support packs and the specific situation of their candidates. However, assessors should exercise judgement. For example, for listening assessments it is unlikely that candidates would benefit from listening more than twice to a recording.

In speaking assessments, the approximate timing guidelines are given to support the candidates so that they do not either exceed or fall short of the time limit. A conversation that is too long or too short does not automatically mean that the candidate will not pass the

outcome. However, it may mean that a candidate makes unnecessary errors or cannot fully demonstrate their speaking skills and this may have an impact on achievement of the assessment standards.

In writing assessments candidates should be allowed sufficient time to write and be able to redraft their work, if necessary. The redrafting process is important to develop writing skills and improve self-correction. Underlining of errors by assessors can be used effectively and candidates can also be given feedback relating to achievement of the assessment standards.

## **Approaches to unit assessment**

### **Do assessments need to be linked thematically?**

No. None of the assessments need to be combined and can all be done independently of each other. However, assessors may find it helpful to link assessments thematically and/or combine assessments, where possible.

### **Could all four skills be assessed within one context, eg technology?**

Yes, and this is the model used in many of the unit assessment support packs.

### **Can I mix and match the assessment tasks from different unit assessment support packs?**

As long as the assessment standards are applied and met there is no issue with using assessments from different packages. You are able to use unit assessment support packs in their entirety or mix and match, eg using speaking from one, writing from another. The important thing is that all of the assessment standards are matched with appropriate evidence.

### **What does combined assessment mean?**

A combined assessment is where assessment tasks are integrated with the aim of reducing time spent on assessment. Four approaches to combined assessment are exemplified in SQA's unit assessment support packs.

### **When should a combined assessment allow for one piece of evidence for one outcome to show achievement across both units?**

Although this would not necessarily be the norm it may be possible for particularly strong candidates. For example, a candidate who can complete a detailed reading comprehension, which uses general and specialised vocabulary, in an everyday context as well as in an ESOL for work or study context, may be able to show achievement of both units by completing one reading assessment. This, of course, could be true for the other skills also. The important thing is that evidence is retained for each unit which shows achievement of the assessment standards in both contexts. In the unit assessment support packs, as mentioned above, this is only demonstrated at National 5 and Higher level. The 'What this pack covers' section in the unit assessment support packs details whether an assessment task can cover both units or not.

## **Can candidates give an oral rather than a written response to the unit reading and listening assessments?**

Yes, but for evidence purposes the assessor is required to keep a written record or checklist to indicate that the candidate has completed the task and met or not met the assessment standards.

## **Can candidates use dictionaries for reading and writing in unit assessments?**

Yes, candidates can use dictionaries for all reading and writing unit assessments.

## **How should the preparation time be used for speaking assessments?**

Candidates should be trained in the most effective ways to use the allocated preparation time on their own 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. They must use this time to prepare on their own and should not, at this stage, discuss the task with anyone.

## **Can candidates be assessed in small groups for speaking?**

Yes, providing each candidate is assessed individually and individual records are kept. If candidates are assessed in small groups, rather than a paired discussion, they should be given an appropriate amount of extra time to allow each candidate the opportunity to meet the assessment standards. (Different conditions apply for National 5 — please see the assessment conditions for the National 5 ESOL Performance: speaking and listening in the [Course Specification](#).)

You should ensure that candidate pairings or groups facilitate a balanced conversation 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 assessed again in a different pairing or group.

Some assessments carried out in groups of three or more are not so successful and appear to disadvantage a few candidates by not providing individuals with the opportunity to fully demonstrate their language skills.

Using video evidence for groups of three and more supports both the assessment, and internal and external verification. Where audio recordings are used for such groups, it is often difficult to identify candidates throughout the performance.

## **Can candidates be assessed with an interlocutor for speaking?**

Yes, however the conversation should be conducted as a paired discussion not as an interview by the interlocutor. The candidate needs to have the opportunity to participate in the interaction as a fully equal partner and to contribute effectively and relevantly throughout.

Where assessors take on the role of interlocutor, to avoid disadvantaging candidates, it is important that participation in the conversation is balanced, especially with regards to turn-taking. Using peer interlocutors where possible is good practice.

Where candidates are paired with each other the assessor should not need to add to the conversation. If the assessor occasionally contributes to the conversation, this can impact on the candidates' initiation and turn-taking and detract from the interaction itself. It should be noted that with candidates at SCQF level 5 and Higher, it is not necessary for the assessor to take part in the interaction, and sometimes it can be detrimental to the interaction between candidates.

## How should candidates be given feedback on their written drafts?

For outcome 2, 'produce written English', candidates may draft written work before producing a final version. The following process is recommended to ensure candidates receive sufficient but not excessive support between drafts. Candidates can produce a maximum of two drafts and a final version. The process should follow the guidelines below:

- 1 Candidate produces first draft of writing task (or a piece of writing produced independently by the candidate during the learning and teaching process).
- 2 If the writing is judged to have met all assessment standards at that level, the assessor should not make corrections on the candidate's work but clearly identify it as a pass, either on the work or on a candidate assessment record. Candidates should be given feedback that relates to the assessment standards.
- 3 If the first draft of the writing is not deemed to have met all assessment standards, the assessor should **underline only** errors which require to be corrected in order for the candidate to meet the assessment standards **at that level**. Candidates should be given feedback that relates to the assessment standards they have met and not met. This can be recorded at the end of the writing or on a candidate assessment record.
- 4 The candidate then produces a second draft, taking account of the feedback on the assessment standards and, where possible, identifying and correcting errors based on **underlining only**. The process above in 2 and 3 is then applied to this piece of writing.
- 5 The final version, whether this is first, second or final attempt can then be word processed by the candidate showing no further changes.

For the purposes of external verification, **the final version and any drafts**, must be submitted. These should clearly show a progression which is the candidate's own work.

## Can the unit assessment in the support pack be amended before use?

Yes. Unit assessment support packs can be used as they are or they can be adapted to suit the needs of candidates, eg to allow more space for candidate responses. However, if the method used by candidates to provide evidence for the assessment standards is altered, then the unit assessment should be prior verified before use.

More information is available from the [Quality Assurance section](#) of our website.

The unit assessment support packs provide examples of valid and reliable assessments and can be adapted to take account of local areas or to facilitate personalisation and choice.

If you are in any doubt about the assessment that you have adapted or produced, or if the approach is significantly different from the published unit assessment support packs then you should use this service.

## **If I change the text in an assessment taken from a unit assessment support pack would this have to go through prior verification?**

Not if the changes are just minor, for example changing the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh to the Lighthouse Museum in Fraserburgh. If you make bigger changes to the text or questions, prior verification is strongly recommended.

## **If I am choosing a text to assess reading, how do I know it is at the right level?**

Remember the key language descriptors: National 2 — basic, National 3 — simple, National 4 — straightforward, SCQF Level 5 — detailed, Higher — detailed and complex. The unit assessment support packs exemplify the appropriate levels of demand in terms of language, word count of texts and question types. Again, if you produce your own assessment tasks we strongly recommend sending them to us for prior verification.

## **How do I submit an assessment for prior verification?**

You need to complete and submit a prior verification request form. You can access the form from the [Quality Assurance section](#) of our website.

The assessment, judging evidence table or similar document and records of internal verification must be submitted.

## **Making unit assessment judgements**

### **Do candidates have to meet all assessment standards for each outcome in the unit assessments to achieve a unit?**

Yes. Candidates need to meet all the assessment standards to achieve each outcome. Passing all outcomes for a unit means that they have been successful in achieving the unit. This applies to all units at all SCQF levels.

### **How are unit assessments checked for achievement?**

When using unit assessment support packs, the information in the judging evidence tables must be used to assess candidates. If you have adapted an assessment, the information in column four of the judging evidence table should be adjusted accordingly.

If you have produced your own assessment, you must also produce information on judging evidence to support the assessment process. There is no requirement to produce this in the same format but it should include the information from the first three columns of the judging evidence table and also contain information specific to the produced assessment as in column four of the judging evidence table.

You should exercise your professional judgement in determining whether a candidate has provided enough detail to satisfy the requirements of each assessment standard. In listening and reading assessments candidate responses should be accepted as long as the correct answer is comprehensible or has been checked orally. Errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation should not be taken into account.

## **What is the best approach to work out which questions, and how many questions, a candidate has to answer correctly in order to achieve an outcome?**

Candidates must show that they have provided sufficient evidence to meet all the assessment standards. It is worth noting that some questions, for example, in a listening assessment might not just be tied to one assessment standard: a candidate might meet an assessment standard in an answer to a range of questions. This is normally indicated in column four of the judging evidence tables in SQA's unit assessment support packs.

Column three of the judging evidence table provides concise advice on how the assessment standards should be achieved. Column four of each judging evidence table is essentially advisory: it is a suggested approach as to how the assessment standards might be met and supports reliability. ESOL unit assessment support packs have recently been updated to try to make sure, as far as possible, that there is more than one question in listening and reading assessments for each assessment standard.

## **How should internal unit assessment evidence be recorded?**

Examples of possible record-keeping approaches — candidate assessment records — are provided with the published unit assessment support packs and can be adapted to suit the needs of centres. There should be a record of the outcome of assessment that covers all the assessment standards.

Reading and listening tasks with the candidate's responses noted on them should also be retained for verification purposes.

For writing, the original draft(s) plus the final copy should be retained.

An audio/video recording of each candidate's performance of speaking (and listening) is not mandatory for the unit assessments, but it is recommended to retain audio/video evidence for verification purposes. Audio/video recordings will also assist centres with internal verification activities. If an audio/video recording is not retained you must ensure that detailed observation notes are made and retained for the speaking (and listening) assessment.

## **How does a candidate achieve a pass in a reading or listening unit assessment?**

Teachers and lecturers should base their decision on whether a candidate has given enough information to show understanding by referring to the judging evidence tables. In particular, the banner statement included in all judging evidence tables is useful to consider:

*Assessors should use professional judgement and a holistic approach in deciding whether candidates have achieved the assessment standards. Candidates do not have to answer every question correctly as they could demonstrate achievement of the assessment standards across questions.*

The assessment standards could also be met by producing a summary of a text or by note taking rather than producing answers to specific questions.

## **What evidence needs to be submitted for external verification?**

Centres should refer closely to guidance provided by SQA about the sample and evidence to be submitted.

If your centre is selected for a unit or the National 4 Added Value unit, only the evidence requested on the checklist for this is required. It is not necessary to send evidence for other units or ESOL coursework performance marks. Likewise, if your centre is selected for ESOL coursework performance verification it is not necessary to submit evidence for units.

## **National 2**

There are seven units at National 2: three ESOL literacies units, two units which address reading and writing and two units that address listening and speaking.

### **Are the Access 2 Introduction to Beginner English Literacies Units 1 and 2 still valid?**

No, they were replaced in November 2017 by National 2 units with the same content.

The new unit specifications are available on the [National 2 ESOL subject page](#).

The unit assessment support packs are available from SQA's secure website and can be accessed by your SQA Co-ordinator.

Learning Support Materials for the ESOL Literacies units are available on the [National 2 ESOL subject page](#) under the 'Support materials' heading.

## **National 3**

### **Why are there only two units in the National 3 Course?**

There are seven units at National 2, to take account of the learning journey for a learner with little or no literacy. The skills-based units, reading and writing, and speaking and listening allow learners, at this early stage of developing English language, to achieve certification in the skills they are strongest in and allow more time for their less developed skills.

In the National 3 Course, each unit contains all four skills to ensure that reading and writing is developed along with listening and speaking skills. Each unit is worth 9 SCQF credit points.

Learning support materials for the National 3 units are available on the [National 3 subject page](#) under the 'Support materials' heading.

## **National 4 Added Value Unit — ESOL assignment**

### **Can the unit assessment in the support pack be amended before use?**

Yes. All unit assessment support packs are produced in Word format, to enable you to alter the layout of the assessment to suit your candidates, eg to allow more space for candidate responses. However, if you alter the method used by candidates to provide evidence for the assessment, then the assessment should be prior verified before use.

You can use the SQA-produced unit assessment support pack for the National 4 Added Value Unit, adapt the pack or produce your own assessment.

It is good practice for personalisation and choice to be applied to the ESOL assignment as a wide range of interesting topics could be covered, in line with Curriculum for Excellence principles. Candidates can also choose topics from other subjects, learning or work experiences, for example Art, Beauty Care, volunteering.

### **How could assessment standard 1.1 ‘Selecting relevant information from straightforward texts in English’ be assessed?**

For assessment standard 1.1 to be met the candidate should complete a task sheet (eg in unit assessment support pack) stating why they have chosen the topic and acknowledging at least two sources. There should be evidence that candidates have extracted appropriate information from the sources for the presentation, for example the candidate has made notes. They should be able to show that they have selected appropriate straightforward information in order to prepare a basic informative talk on the chosen topic.

Notes taken from the sources would clearly demonstrate that candidates had selected relevant information to meet this assessment standard. They should clearly link the information selected with the content of their presentation. They can ask for clarification on selecting relevant information from the texts and preparing for and making the presentation. The information should, however, be selected independently by the candidate and should be recorded eg in note form. Notes for the presentation should be used as prompts, limited to four to five bullet points.

You have to provide evidence of candidates selecting relevant information from the texts in order to prepare their oral presentation. Notes and copies of flow charts and diagrams created by the candidates for assessment standard 1.1 could be included in the evidence submitted for verification.

### **How could assessment standard 1.2 ‘Presenting findings orally, in English’ be assessed?**

The candidate should make a short presentation, lasting three to four minutes. The presentation can be supported by brief headings or by visual aids. It can be delivered to the whole class or to groups of candidates within the class. In some situations, the candidate may have to do a one-to-one presentation to the assessor although presenting to an audience is preferable.

They should present their findings in a well-prepared and researched presentation. It is recommended that they do not write out presentations word for word when preparing. Although they might not read from a 'scripted presentation', there is a tendency to memorise what has been written down and this may include sections taken directly from the research sources.

When giving the presentation, candidates should not rely too heavily on their notes. They should only use cue-cards and/or PowerPoint notes when delivering their presentation. They should be able to demonstrate an ability to expand on notes and/or the content of their (PowerPoint) presentation so that main points are explained with reasonable precision.

### **How could assessment standard 1.3 'Responding orally in English to oral questions relevant to the topic' be assessed?**

On completion of the presentation, the candidate must participate in a question and answer session, providing a number of responses which show that they have listened and understood the questions. This part of the assessment should last about 3–4 minutes. They should answer a sufficient variety of questions appropriately for their audience.

### **Should the questions for assessment standard 1.3 be prepared in advance?**

The questions must always be relevant to the presentation and the candidate should be asked questions that allow them to show understanding of their chosen topic. Ideally peers will ask the candidate follow-up questions to their presentation but the assessor may want to have some ideas ready in case there isn't a sufficient range of questions asked.

A variety of approaches could be taken to the question and answer section of the assessment. You should make sure candidates have the opportunity to respond to questions that are relevant to the topic, and that sufficient time is allowed for them to demonstrate understanding of a variety of questions. If questions from candidates' peers are unsuitable or inappropriate, you must provide relevant questions in order for them to show that they have achieved assessment standard 1.3.

### **How long do candidates have to complete the ESOL assignment?**

There is no stipulated time limit for the completion of the Added Value Unit. The time limit is at the discretion of the centre. It should be part of a series of lessons, and can be done at an appropriate point in the course. It should also be part of the on-going classroom work and not be seen as a stand-alone test.

### **How much assistance should candidates be given in the preparation for the ESOL assignment?**

Assessments should be completed in class time under some supervision and control but not in traditional 'exam conditions'. Candidates should be given reasonable assistance and support from the assessor to complete the ESOL assignment, but should be encouraged to work independently. The amount of support a candidate requires should be reflected in the assessor's overall judgement of the candidate and noted in the candidate assessment record.

## **What evidence is the assessor required to retain?**

You should retain copies of candidates' notes from the sources selected. If the candidate has given only oral feedback on the texts, detailed notes should be retained by the assessor.

For the presentation and question and answer session, you should retain an audio/video recording or, if not possible, a written summary or detailed checklist of the presentation and a record of the questions asked and candidate responses. The evidence should be clearly named and dated.

## **What happens if a candidate does not pass the ESOL assignment?**

Candidates should be supported at each stage so that any issues, for example with the sources selected, should be highlighted before the candidate prepares their presentation. This support should reduce the possibility of candidates attempting the presentation with insufficient research or notes which won't support the delivery of the presentation.

If a candidate does not deliver their presentation well, perhaps because of nerves, they should be given the opportunity to present their topic again. If candidates fail to show sufficient knowledge of their chosen topic, they should be given one re-assessment opportunity (or two in exceptional circumstances).

If the candidate passes the research and presentation stages but does not pass the question and answer session, they would only be required to do that part again, but would need to be asked a different set of questions from the first attempt.

The candidate should not initially be required to do the entire ESOL assignment again. They can be re-assessed in the section they did not pass.

Please see the Understanding Standards packs on our secure website for examples of the ESOL assignment with commentaries on why candidates passed or failed.

## **National 5 question papers**

### **What is the time limit for the Reading question paper?**

The Reading question paper has an allocated time of one hour. Candidates need to organise how much time they allocate to each of the three texts and sets of questions.

### **What is the time limit for the Writing question paper?**

The Writing question paper has an allocated time of one hour and ten minutes. Candidates produce two written texts. They will respond to one task from the context of everyday life and one from the contexts of either work or study. The specimen question paper states, 'As a guide, you may wish to spend about 30 minutes on Part 1 and about 40 minutes on Part 2.'

### **Is there a penalty for exceeding the recommended word count in the writing tasks?**

No.

## **Can candidates use synonyms for reading questions which state ‘no more than three words from the text’?**

No, these questions are designed to test detailed reading. Therefore, synonyms are not acceptable. Please note that this is different from the listening paper, where synonyms are acceptable.

## **Which writing genres will be covered in the exam?**

For National 5, candidates should be familiar with the following genres: formal e-mail, informal e-mail, report, essay.

## **Are spelling errors penalised?**

Spelling errors in the listening or reading question papers will not automatically be penalised unless the mistake alters the sense of the word. Spelling does matter in the writing paper, however.

## **What is the recommended word count for the everyday life writing task in the question paper?**

The recommended word count for the everyday life writing task is 140–160 words as shown in the course specification.

# **National 5 coursework performance**

## **Where can I find information about the Performance: speaking and listening?**

Please see the course assessment structure: Performance section in the course specification and the coursework assessment task on the [National 5 subject page](#) for up-to-date details of the assessment conditions. Candidates must be given an assessment brief and the conversation should take place in a group of no more than three.

## **Does the performance have to be a conversation rather than a presentation?**

Yes. The instructions in the course assessment task explain that the assessment is a conversation and not a presentation. The descriptions of performance for both speaking and listening are about a conversation 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).

## **Does the assessment have to be a paired conversation?**

Ideally, the assessment is done in pairs, but you can have up to three participants in the conversation for the assessment. It can prove harder to award appropriate marks to each candidate in the group. If choosing to assess in groups, candidates should have had opportunities to practise speaking tasks in groups and you should carefully consider the group dynamic.

## **Does the performance need to be recorded?**

Yes. There must be a video or audio recording of the performance for verification purposes. You should try to make sure the recording device/microphone is placed in a position where participants can be clearly heard and background noise is not intrusive.

## **Is task completion important in the performance?**

Yes. As per the detailed descriptions of performance, task completion is included in the aspect which addresses 'effectiveness and relevance of contribution'. Candidates must always attempt to complete the task as stated, in the assessment brief given to candidates.

Examples of assessment briefs with an appropriate level of challenge for National 5 can be found in the SCQF level 5 unit assessment support packs. You can also produce your own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice. The assessment brief should be included in the material submitted for external verification.

You should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide-ranging and specific enough to allow candidates to fully demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve a high mark for the main aspects assessed in the performance at National 5.

## **How should the topic of their conversation be decided?**

The following statement can be found in the course specification:

*The candidate and the teacher or lecturer will 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.*

Ideally, to facilitate personalisation and choice, you and the candidate can discuss and choose the topic of the conversation. If this is the case, you will then go and prepare an assessment brief on an aspect of the topic, with an appropriate level of challenge. If you are using a task from a unit assessment support pack, you can still agree the broad topic area with the candidate, eg technology, news, finance. The topic chosen should always be from a language area that has been covered during the course. For example, a candidate can do some additional reading/listening around the topic of technology, but they will not know the detail/aspect of the topic that will be in the assessment brief. The assessment is based on how candidates respond to their partner's questions/comments and interact with their ideas. If they attempt to produce memorised material on technology and don't interact well, they will achieve very low marks.

## **What is the best way to mark the performance?**

You should take a holistic approach to awarding marks, following the instructions in the course specification 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.

You could use an annotated/highlighted copy of the marking instructions to show how the marks were allocated to each candidate. This is in addition to the candidate assessment

record. The combination of the two approaches to recording the marking process is excellent practice and informs both the internal and external verification processes.

If candidate speaking performance is clearly at the top of the 25–22 band, 25 marks can be awarded for speaking and where justified by the candidate's listening skills, 5 marks can be awarded for listening.

You should ensure that listening is treated as an aspect of performance and that marks awarded for listening are independent of marks awarded for speaking. If candidates are awarded high marks for speaking, this does not imply that high marks should be awarded for listening. For high marks in listening there needs to be evidence from the performance that a candidate listens attentively to their partner(s) and responds with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity that effectively develops the conversation.

Centres may benefit from referring to the recordings and commentaries in the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site.

### **Can the conversation for the unit assessment be used for the course performance?**

It is less likely that candidates will be doing both the course and the units from session 2017/18 onwards but if this is the case, it is acceptable.

If you choose to do the coursework assessment task at a later stage of the course from the unit assessment then a different speaking and listening task would have to be used. The assessment should always be a conversation for the course component and not a presentation.

If candidates are doing a speaking and listening unit assessment task for their performance, they should be given the appropriate preparation time of 15 minutes. Candidates at National 5 can have sight of brief notes they have made on the task sheet but should be made aware that frequent reference to these may detract from the flow of the conversation.

## Higher question papers

### **What are the suggested time allocations for the reading and writing in the question paper?**

The recommended time for Higher Reading is about 40 minutes. The recommended time for Writing is about 35 minutes on part one and about 55 minutes on part two. Candidates need to organise how much time they allocate to each of the two sections.

### **Will there be penalties for going over the recommended word limit in the writing tasks for *Everyday Life* and *In Context*?**

No. However, during learning and teaching it is good to advise candidates to pay attention to the word count as responses to the tasks can be answered in approximately the number of words in the word count guidance. .

### **Can candidates use synonyms for reading questions which state ‘no more than three words from the text’?**

No, these questions are designed to test detailed reading. Therefore, synonyms are not acceptable. Please note that this is different from the listening paper, where synonyms are acceptable.

### **Which writing genres will be covered in the exam?**

For Higher, candidates should be familiar with the following genres: formal e-mail, formal letter, informal e-mail, report, article, essay.

### **Are spelling errors penalised?**

Spelling errors will not automatically be penalised in the listening and reading questions unless the mistake alters the sense of the word. However, spelling errors will be penalised in the writing paper.

## Higher coursework performance

### **Can the discussion for the unit assessment be used for the course performance?**

Yes. If this approach is adopted, centres must document how a candidate has met the assessment standards relating to speaking (and listening) in the unit candidate assessment record as well as showing how the mark has been awarded using the marking instructions for speaking (out of 25) and listening (out of 5).

The general approach to the coursework assessment task can vary. If a unit-by-unit approach is taken, there are two speaking assessments required for the units, one for *ESOL for Everyday Life* and one for *ESOL in Context*. If a combined approach at Higher was used, one assessment of speaking would meet the requirements of both units. Some centres reduce the amount of assessment overall for the course by combining a unit assessment with the coursework assessment task and carrying out this assessment at an appropriate

time of the year. This is an acceptable practice if candidates are undertaking the course. Centres adopting this practice should ensure that, for the unit assessment, only the assessment standards for speaking are applied when making assessment judgements.

For the coursework performance, candidates should be assessed, and marks awarded, using the marking instructions in the coursework assessment task. Candidates can only do a particular speaking assessment task once. If you are using one task for both the unit assessment and the course assessment, you should make sure that candidates have had the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills sufficiently. They should be assessed at an appropriate time in the year to maximise the opportunity of obtaining the best marks possible. When this practice is followed, centres should also ensure that the assessment conditions as stated in the coursework assessment task are fully implemented.

If you choose to do the coursework assessment at a later stage of the course from the unit assessment then a different speaking and listening task would have to be used.

### **Does the coursework performance have to be a discussion rather than a presentation?**

Yes. You should note the instructions in the coursework assessment task that the assessment is a discussion and not a presentation. The marking instructions for both speaking and listening are for a 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).

### **Does the performance need to be recorded?**

Yes. There must be a video or audio recording of the performance for verification purposes. You should try to make sure the recording device/microphone is placed in a position where participants can be clearly heard and background noise is not intrusive. You should also refrain from adding comment during candidates' performances.

### **Is task completion important in the performance?**

Yes. In the marking instructions if a candidate does not achieve the task then their mark goes below the pass mark. Candidates must always complete the task as stated in the UASP or centre-devised assessment. You should consider carefully whether the purpose has been achieved and ensure that there is attention to detail in awarding marks.

A speaking task from a Higher unit assessment support pack can be used as an assessment brief for candidates. This ensures an appropriate level of challenge in the task. You can produce your own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice. Allowing candidates personalisation and choice when deciding upon task topics and contexts engages candidates and supports the principles of curriculum for excellence assessment. However, you should be aware that providing candidates with only a topic as a brief, with no scaffolding such as suggested bullet points, could disadvantage them in terms of the range and depth of the discussion. Models for appropriately challenging briefs can be found in the speaking tasks in the unit assessment support packs. The assessment brief should be included in the material submitted for external verification.

You should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide-ranging and specific enough to allow candidates to fully demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve a high mark for the main aspects assessed in the performance at Higher.

## **What is the best way to mark the performance?**

You should take a holistic approach to the judgements, following the instructions in the coursework 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. You could use an annotated/highlighted copy of the marking instructions to show how the marks were allocated to each candidate. This is in addition to the candidate assessment record. The combination of the two approaches to recording the marking process is excellent practice and informs both the internal and external verification processes.

If candidate speaking performance is clearly at the top of the 25–22 band, 25 marks can be awarded for speaking and where justified by the candidate's listening skills, 5 marks can be awarded for listening.

You should ensure that listening is treated as an aspect of performance and that marks awarded for listening are independent of assessment judgements made of candidates' speaking performance. Where candidates are awarded high marks for speaking, this does not imply that high marks should be awarded for listening. For high marks in listening there needs to be evidence from the performance that a candidate listens attentively to their partner(s) and responds with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity that effectively develops the conversation.

Centres may benefit from referring to the recordings and commentaries in the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site. These can be used for standardisation purposes prior to assessment and during internal verification of the performance. It is also good practice for centres to identify their own exemplars for standardisation purposes.

## **Internal verification**

### **What is the best way to approach internal verification?**

There is no set, or required, way to approach this. Some centres have a policy that must be followed by all departments or faculties, while others allow for a flexible approach. The best approach is to create a situation where other subject specialists will look at, and review, your assessment materials and judgements. In a subject department, this can be arranged in fairly straightforward and supportive ways. It might be possible, for example, to form 'assessment pairs', pairing up two teachers to discuss assessment approaches and to check achievement.

Internal verification is not just about sampling, but a process which should support assessors throughout internal assessment. Centres need to make sure that all assessors are applying the same standards and know the best way to approach assessments. In a departmental meeting situation, a good sense of an assessment standard can emerge from a group

discussion of exemplars of candidates' writing, or watching video recordings of a conversation/discussion. Newly-devised assessments can be discussed and reviewed in terms of level of demand, course coverage, etc. SQA has produced guidance on internal verification. This guidance suggests templates which can be downloaded and used to support an effective internal verification process. Further information can be found at: [www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit](http://www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit).

## **I teach in a one-person department. How can I carry out internal verification?**

A link with another centre or a local authority group would be invaluable, and would enable you to feel much more comfortable about making assessment judgements. Assessment materials, recordings and candidates' scripts could be exchanged physically or electronically, and standards monitored in this way. Consult [www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit](http://www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit) for further guidance.

## **How do I make it clear that I have carried out internal verification?**

As part of the external verification process, verifiers will not expect you to include a centre-devised policy on internal verification along with your sample. There will be an expectation, however, that evidence of internal verification will be visible. This could take the form of annotated 'double marking', or 'cross marking', where a second assessor notes and comments on where assessment standards have been achieved. Comments, rather than just a series of ticks, will make it very clear that a second assessor has reviewed an assessment judgement. If you have had meetings where you have verified standards, it would be helpful to include a brief note of the meeting along with your sample for external verification.

National Qualification questions and answers can be found on the [frequently asked questions section](#) of SQA's website.

Questions and answers on the changes to National Courses can be found at [www.sqa.org.uk/nqchanges](http://www.sqa.org.uk/nqchanges)