



# Common questions about National 2, National 3, National 4, National 5 and Higher ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

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## Approaches to unit assessment

Note: responses to questions in this section apply to National 2, National 3, National 4, and freestanding units at SCQF levels 5 and 6.

### Can I mix assessment tasks from different unit assessment support packs?

As long as the assessment standards are applied, you can use assessments from different unit assessment support packs (UASPs). You can use UASPs in their entirety or mix assessment tasks, for example using speaking from one pack and writing from another. However, you may find it helpful to link assessments thematically, as shown in some UASPs, where all four skills are assessed on a topic, for example technology.

### What is combined assessment?

Combined assessment is when assessment tasks are integrated to simplify the process of assessing the four skills and linking assessments. There are several different approaches to combined assessment exemplified in the UASPs.

UASPs with a unit-by-unit approach, combine assessment across outcomes within a unit, for example where listening is assessed as part of the interaction in addition to speaking.

Some UASPs assess one outcome from ESOL for Everyday Life and one outcome from ESOL in Context. There is a separate assessment for each outcome, but on the same theme or topic showing how everyday life tasks can lead to tasks in a work or study-related context. If using this approach, the other three outcomes in **both** units must still be assessed.

At National 5 and Higher levels, some UASPs combine assessment across ESOL for Everyday Life and ESOL in Context units, removing the need to assess each unit individually. For example a reading task could provide sufficient evidence for achieving outcome 1 (reading) in both units because the language in the text is applicable to everyday life and work or study. Assessment tasks that cover both units need to have an appropriate depth and range of language.

At National 2, two units (a reading and writing unit and a speaking and listening unit) are combined into one UASP to assess all four skills in one topic area.

The assessor should complete a candidate assessment record, or similar document, which clearly indicates the unit, outcome, assessment standards and assessment judgements.

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

Strong candidates may be able to do this at National 5 and Higher levels. For example a candidate who can complete a detailed reading comprehension that uses general and specialised vocabulary in an everyday context, as well as in a work or study context, may be able to show achievement of both units by completing one reading assessment.

This is exemplified in a UASP at National 5 and Higher levels. The page 'What this pack covers' in the UASPs, details whether an assessment task can or cannot cover both units. Combined assessment must not be seen as a shortcut or quicker method of achieving two units in a reduced timeframe.

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

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

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

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

## **How should candidates use the preparation time for speaking assessments?**

You should ensure candidates know the most effective ways to use the allocated preparation time to consider their ideas for each of the bullet points and possible relevant specialised vocabulary. Candidates should apply note-taking skills and 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, it should be in a group of no more than three. You should give candidates an appropriate amount of extra time to allow each candidate the opportunity to meet the assessment standards.

Using video evidence supports both the assessment, and internal and external verification. If using audio recordings, you must ensure that candidates can be clearly identified.

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

Yes, however the interlocutor should not lead the conversation or interview the candidate but take part as an equal partner unless the task involves a particular roleplay, where there should be clear guidelines for the interlocutor. The candidate must 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. Where possible, using peer interlocutors is good practice, for example in a school setting, a native speaker learner who is not being assessed is willing to help and/or there is a small number of candidates.

## **How should I give candidates feedback on their written drafts?**

For outcome 2 (produce written English), candidates may draft written work before producing a final version. The following process ensures candidates receive sufficient but not excessive support between drafts. Assessors must only identify errors or slips on the writing by underlining and care should be taken not to indicate the type of error.

Candidates can produce a maximum of two drafts and a final version.

1. Candidate produces a first draft of the writing task (or a piece of writing the candidate produces independently during the learning and teaching process).
2. If the writing meets all assessment standards at that level, you should not make corrections on the candidate's work, but clearly identify it as a pass on the work at the first draft stage on a candidate assessment record. You can then give feedback relating it to the assessment standards.
3. If the first draft of the writing has not met all assessment standards, you should only underline errors that candidates need to correct in order to meet the assessment standards at that level. You can give feedback that relates to the assessment standards they have met and not met. You can record this at the end of the writing or on a candidate assessment record.
4. The candidate can then produce a second draft, taking account of your feedback on the assessment standards and the underlining to correct errors and slips. If needed, you can apply the process in points 2 and 3 to the second draft and the candidate can produce a final version.

For the purposes of external verification, centres must submit the final version and any drafts. These should clearly show a progression of the candidate's own work.

## **If I didn't use a UASP exactly as published, should I be concerned about verification?**

The UASPs provide examples of valid and reliable assessments that you can use as they are or adapt to take account of local areas or to facilitate personalisation and choice. Centres can also produce their own assessments. There are many centre-produced, prior verified assessments on SQA's secure site.

If you are in any doubt about the assessment that you adapt or produce, or if your approach is significantly different from the published UASP, SQA provides a free prior verification service that gives feedback on your assessment materials. You can find information on the [National Qualifications prior verification webpage](#).

## **If I want to change parts of the text in a UASP would this have to go through prior verification?**

If there were only minor changes to a text, for example changing the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh to the Lighthouse Museum in Fraserburgh, then you would not need prior verification. If you make more substantial changes to the text or questions, provided you keep the types of question and apply the same assessment standards, you do not need to request prior verification, although SQA strongly recommend it. You should update the judging evidence table to reflect any changes.

## **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
- ◆ SCQF level 6: detailed and complex

The UASPs exemplify the appropriate levels of demand in terms of language, word count of texts, and question types.

It may be useful to refer to:

- ◆ the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) as SQA's ESOL qualifications benchmark against this. You can find more information about this on the [ESOL subject page](#)
- ◆ the illustrative language tables (ILTs) found in the course specifications

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

You can find information and the prior verification request form on the [National Qualifications prior verification webpage](#).

## **How long should I give candidates to complete unit assessments?**

Time restrictions are not a feature of ESOL unit assessments, and you should use professional judgement to determine a reasonable amount of time to complete reading, writing and listening assessments. If a candidate is taking a very long time to complete an assessment, they may not have been entered at the right level.

In speaking assessments, the approximate time guidelines are to support 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 achieve the outcome. However, it may mean that a candidate makes unnecessary errors if overly long or cannot fully demonstrate their speaking skills if too short, and this may have an impact on achievement of the assessment standards.

In writing assessments, candidates should be allowed sufficient time to write and redraft their work, if necessary. The redrafting process, set out above, is important to develop writing skills and improve self-correction.

## **Are SQA learning and teaching support materials still relevant?**

Yes, you can find the paper-based materials, and the ESOL e-learning resources (practice assessments), on the ESOL subject page for each level under the 'Support materials' tab.

There are no plans to update these resources. The paper-based materials are available in Word versions that you can adapt or update.

Additional ESOL online learning and revision materials are available on the [Open courses section of SQA Academy](#). No login is required to access these, and learners can use these on phones, tablets and computers, and are available at levels:

- Higher (Advanced) CEFR C1
- National 5 (Upper Intermediate) CEFR B2
- National 4 (Intermediate) CEFR B1
- National 3 (Elementary) CEFR A2
- National 2 (Beginner) CEFR A1

# Making unit assessment judgements

## Are candidate exemplars available?

Understanding Standards packs (candidate exemplars) are available on SQA's secure site.

Further information is available on the [Understanding Standards webpage](#).

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

Yes, they must meet all the assessment standards to achieve an outcome and all outcomes to pass a unit. This applies to all units at all SCQF levels.

## How do I know that my assessment judgements are valid and reliable?

Your internal verification processes should support you as an assessor to make valid and reliable judgements. Using the judging evidence tables in the UASPs and the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site provides a good understanding of national standards at each level. There are recordings of webinars available on the Understanding Standards sites, both on [SQA's Understanding Standards website](#) and the secure site. You may find it useful to refer to these for further guidance.

As teachers and lecturers, you make assessment judgements all the time in teaching. When assessing units, you are applying your judgement to whether assessment standards have been met or not.

## What is the best approach to decide which, and how many, questions a candidate has to answer correctly to achieve a reading or listening outcome?

Refer to the judging evidence table, specifically column four, and take account of the general guidance:

'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.'

Candidates must show that they have provided sufficient evidence to meet each of the assessment standards. Note: some questions, for example a listening question, might not be linked to just 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.

## **How do I record internal unit assessment evidence?**

You should use or adapt the candidate assessment record in the UASPs, or a similar document, to record assessment. If you don't use or adapt the candidate assessment record, you should ensure that the method you use to record assessment outcomes includes reference to all the assessment standards.

An audio and/or video recording of each candidate's speaking (and listening) assessment is not mandatory for the unit assessments, but we recommend retaining audio and/or video evidence for verification purposes. If an audio and/or video recording is not retained, you must ensure that detailed observation notes are made and retained for the speaking (and listening) assessment.

## **If a candidate fails to meet an assessment standard, 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. Centres may have a policy on this, which you should check.

For outcome 1 (reading) and outcome 3 (listening), it is not always necessary to use a different text and task. For example, failure to address the attitude question(s) 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 assessment standard.

## **Do candidates have to work through all the units at National 2?**

No, following initial assessment by the centre, candidates can be entered for the most appropriate unit.

### [National 2](#)

ESOL: Preparation for Literacy (HA1R 72)

ESOL: An Introduction to Beginner English Literacies 1 (HW55 72)

ESOL: An Introduction to Beginner English Literacies 2 (HW56 72)

ESOL for Everyday Life: Reading and Writing (H998 72)

ESOL for Everyday Life: Listening and Speaking (H997 72)

ESOL in Context: Reading and Writing (H99A 72)

ESOL in Context: Listening and Speaking (H999 72)



# National 4 ESOL assignment

Note: the National 4 ESOL Added Value Unit is reinstated as a mandatory course component for academic session 2023–24.

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

To meet assessment standard 1.1, the candidate should complete a task sheet (from a UASP or it can be centre devised) stating why they chose the topic and acknowledging at least two sources. There should be evidence that candidates have extracted appropriate information from at least two sources for the presentation, for example the candidate has made notes. At least one of the sources should be a written text in English but the other could be a video or audio recording on the topic. 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.

You should provide evidence of candidates selecting relevant information from the texts to prepare their oral presentation. Notes, 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 should assessment standard 1.2 ‘Presenting findings orally, in English’ be assessed?**

The candidate should make a short presentation, lasting 3–4 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.

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 they explain the main points with reasonable precision.

## **How should assessment standard 1.3 ‘Responding orally in English to oral questions relevant to the topic’ be assessed?**

On completion of the presentation, the candidate participates in a question-and-answer session, providing a number of responses that show they have listened and understood the questions. This part of the assessment should last approximately 3–4 minutes, and the candidates should answer a variety of questions.

## **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

ask the candidate follow-up questions to their presentation, but you may want to have some ideas ready in case there isn't a sufficient range of questions asked. If questions from candidates' peers are unsuitable, you must provide relevant questions 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 set time limit for the completion of this unit. The time limit is at the discretion of the centre. It can be part of a series of lessons and can be done at an appropriate point in the course following achievement of the other units. It should be part of the ongoing classroom work and not be seen as a stand-alone test.

### **How much assistance should I give candidates in the preparation for the ESOL assignment?**

Candidates should complete assessments in class-time under some supervision and control. You may give candidates reasonable assistance and support to complete the ESOL assignment but encourage candidates 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 do I need to retain?**

You should retain copies of candidates' notes from the sources selected. If the candidate only gives oral feedback on the texts, you should keep detailed notes.

For the presentation, and question-and-answer session, you should retain an audio and/or 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.

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

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

To reduce the possibility of candidates attempting the presentation with insufficient research or notes, you should support candidates at each stage so that you can highlight any issues, for example with the sources selected, before the candidate prepares their presentation.

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 you would need to ensure that they are asked a different set of questions from the first attempt.

If candidates don't show sufficient knowledge of their chosen topic, you should give one re-assessment opportunity (two in exceptional circumstances) on a different topic.

## **National 5 ESOL question papers**

The ESOL for Everyday Life and ESOL in Context units are no longer a mandatory part of the National 5 course. The course assessment consists of a listening question paper, a reading question paper, a writing question paper, and a performance: speaking and listening. For detailed information, please refer to the [National 5 ESOL Course Specification](#), and/or listen to the [National 5 ESOL course](#) audio presentation.

Centres decide how to enter candidates for the National 5 ESOL course and/or freestanding units at SCQF level 5.

### **Are candidates allowed to use dictionaries?**

No, candidates can't use dictionaries for any of the question papers.

### **Are candidates provided with a time to spend on the reading question paper?**

Yes, the reading question paper has an allocated time of 1 hour and 10 minutes. Candidates need to allocate an appropriate amount of time to each of the texts and sets of questions. There are three texts, so a suggested time to spend on each would be approximately 20–25 minutes.

### **Are candidates provided with a time to spend on the writing question paper?**

Yes, the writing question paper has an allocated time of 1 hour and 10 minutes. They are advised to spend about 30 minutes on the everyday life task and about 40 minutes on either the work or study context tasks.

### **Is there a penalty for going over the recommended word limit in the writing tasks?**

No, the word count is only a guide. Strong, longer answers are not automatically penalised, but candidates should consider the likelihood of more errors in significantly longer writing. Candidates should be aware that they need to complete two written tasks in the allocated exam time.

### **Can candidates use synonyms for reading questions that state 'no more than three words from the text'?**

No, these questions are designed to test detailed reading. Therefore, synonyms are not acceptable as responses to questions that state 'from the text'. Note: this is different from the listening paper, where synonyms are acceptable.

## **Which genres are covered in the writing question paper?**

For National 5, candidates should be familiar with the following genres:

- ◆ everyday life task: formal and informal email
- ◆ work task: a report
- ◆ study task: an essay

## **Does spelling matter in answers to listening or reading questions?**

Misspellings are not automatically penalised unless the mistake alters the sense of the word. However, spelling does matter in the writing paper.

## **National 5 ESOL performance: speaking and listening**

Please see the 'Course assessment structure: performance: speaking and listening' section in the course specification and the performance: speaking and listening assessment task on the [National 5 ESOL subject page](#), and Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site. Teachers and lecturers must give candidates an assessment brief and ensure the conversation takes place in a group of no more than three.

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

Yes. It is a conversation and not a presentation. The marking instructions for both speaking and listening are for a conversation where candidates must show ability to initiate, and sensitivity to turn-taking throughout the interaction. The marks awarded for listening take account of how well they listen and respond to what is said by their partner(s).

## **Does it have to be a paired conversation?**

Ideally, candidates do the assessment in pairs, but you can have up to three participants in the conversation. If choosing to assess in groups of three, candidates should have had opportunities to practise speaking tasks in groups and you should carefully consider the group dynamic.

## **Are candidates allowed to make notes in their preparation time?**

Yes, and they are allowed to refer to these notes during the recording of the conversation. The notes must not be in the form of a scripted dialogue.

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

Yes, you must record the conversation, either a video or audio recording is acceptable. You should try to make sure the recording device 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 can be seen in the marking instructions, task completion is included in the aspect that addresses 'effectiveness and relevance of contribution'. Candidates must attempt to complete the task as stated in the assessment brief given to candidates.

You can find examples of assessment briefs, with an appropriate level of challenge for National 5, in the SCQF level 5 UASPs. You can produce your own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice. You should include the assessment brief in the material submitted for external verification.

You should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide-ranging and bullet points specific enough in the assessment brief to allow candidates to fully demonstrate their language skills.

## **When can candidates know the topic of their conversation?**

Prior to the assessment and during learning and teaching, at a time of your choice, you can agree with the candidate a broad topic area for the conversation, for example technology, the environment, current affairs. The topic chosen must be from a language area that you cover with candidates during the course.

You then prepare an assessment brief on the topic or an aspect of the topic, which candidates should not have sight of until the time of the assessment.

As candidates do not know the aspect and detail of the topic that will be in the assessment brief, knowing the broad topic area at an appropriate point in the course won't give any unfair advantage. The candidate may do some additional reading and/or listening around the broad topic chosen, which should not be discouraged. The marking instructions take into account how the task and bullet points are addressed and how candidates respond to their partner's questions and comments and interact with their ideas. If they attempt to produce memorised material and don't interact well, they will achieve low marks.

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

You should take a holistic approach to awarding marks, following the detailed marking instructions in the course specification to identify the band that best describes the candidate's performance. You then reach the mark within the band by identifying aspects of the performance, which may fall above or below the band. This determines if the candidate is at the top, in the middle, or at the bottom of the band.

You could use an annotated or 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.

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. 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 degree of fluency and spontaneity that fully supports the conversation.

You could refer to the recordings and commentaries in the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site to support your approach to the marking of speaking and listening.

## **Higher ESOL question papers**

The units are no longer a mandatory part of the Higher course, and the course assessment consists of a listening question paper, a reading question paper, a writing question paper and a performance: speaking and listening. For detailed information, please refer the [Higher ESOL Course Specification](#), and/or listen to the [Higher ESOL course](#) audio presentation.

Centres decide how to enter candidates for the Higher course and/or freestanding units at SCQF level 6.

### **Are candidates allowed to use dictionaries?**

No, candidates can't use dictionaries for any of the question papers.

### **Are candidates provided with a time to spend on the reading question paper?**

Yes, the reading question paper has an allocated time of 1 hour and 10 minutes. Candidates need to allocate an appropriate amount of time to each of the texts and sets of questions. There are three texts, so a suggested time to spend on each would be approximately 20–25 minutes.

### **Are candidates provided with a time to spend on the writing question paper?**

Yes, the writing question paper has an allocated time of 1 hour and 40 minutes. They are advised to spend about 45 minutes on the everyday life task and about 55 minutes on either the work or study contexts tasks.

### **Is there a penalty for going over the recommended word limit in the writing tasks?**

No, the word count is only a guide. Strong, longer answers are not automatically penalised, but candidates should consider the likelihood of more errors in significantly longer writing. Candidates should be aware that they need to complete two written tasks in the allocated exam time.

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

No, these questions are designed to test detailed reading. Therefore, synonyms are not acceptable as responses to questions that state ‘from the text’. Note: this is different from the listening paper, where synonyms are acceptable.

## **Which genres are covered in the writing question paper?**

For Higher, candidates should be familiar with the following genres:

- ◆ everyday life: emails, social media postings, blogs and articles
- ◆ work-related contexts: a report
- ◆ study-related contexts: an essay

## **Does spelling matter in answers to listening or reading questions?**

Misspellings are not automatically penalised unless the mistake alters the sense of the word. However, spelling does matter in the writing paper.

## **Why is paragraph referencing not used consistently throughout the reading question paper?**

Paragraph referencing is used, but not for each question. Questions follow the order of the text except for the last question, which addresses aspects of the text as a whole. To meet requirements for entry to university, the level of the Higher ESOL course assessment is set at C1 of the Common European Framework of Languages (CEFR).

To provide paragraph referencing for all questions would reduce the level of challenge of the question paper to below C1. This differs from National 5 where paragraph referencing is provided for all questions.

## **Higher ESOL performance: speaking and listening**

Please see the 'Course assessment structure: performance: speaking and listening' section in the course specification, and the performance: speaking and listening assessment task on the [Higher ESOL subject page](#), and Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site. Teachers and lecturers must give candidates an assessment brief, and ensure the discussion takes place in a group of no more than three.

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

Yes. It 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 throughout the interaction. The marks awarded for listening take account of how well they listen and respond to what is said by their partner(s).

### **Does it have to be a paired discussion?**

Ideally, candidates do the assessment in pairs, but you can have up to three participants in the discussion. If choosing to assess in groups of three, candidates should have had opportunities to practise speaking tasks in groups and you should carefully consider the group dynamic.

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

Yes, you must record the discussion, either a video or audio recording is acceptable. You should try to make sure the recording device 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 can be seen in the marking instructions, task completion is included in the aspect that addresses 'effectiveness and relevance of contribution'. Candidates must attempt to complete the task as stated in the assessment brief given to candidates.

You can find examples of assessment briefs, with an appropriate level of challenge for Higher, in the SCQF level 6 UASPs. You can produce your own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice. You should include the assessment brief in the material submitted for external verification.

You should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide-ranging and bullet points specific enough in the assessment brief to allow candidates to fully demonstrate their language skills.



## **When can candidates know the topic of their discussion?**

Prior to the assessment and during learning and teaching, at a time of your choice, you can agree with the candidate a broad topic area for the discussion, for example technology, the environment, current affairs. The topic chosen must be from a language area that you cover with candidates during the course.

You then prepare an assessment brief on the topic or an aspect of the topic, which candidates should not have sight of until the time of the assessment.

As candidates do not know the aspect and detail of the topic that will be in the assessment brief, knowing the broad topic area at an appropriate point in the course won't give any unfair advantage. The candidate may do some additional reading and/or listening around the broad topic chosen, which should not be discouraged. The marking instructions take into account how the task and bullet points are addressed and how candidates respond to their partner's questions and comments and interact with their ideas. If they attempt to produce memorised material and don't interact well, they will achieve low marks.

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

You should take a holistic approach to awarding marks, following the detailed marking instructions in the course specification to identify the band that best describes the candidate's performance. You then reach the mark within the band by identifying aspects of the performance, which may fall above or below the band. This determines if the candidate is at the top, in the middle, or at the bottom of the band.

You could use an annotated or 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.

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. 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 discussion.

You could refer to the recordings and commentaries in the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site to support your approach to the marking of speaking and listening.

## **Can a candidate be part of more than one discussion?**

Yes, if you make it clear which candidate is being assessed in the recording and that their partner is not being assessed.

Note: a candidate cannot be assessed again using an assessment brief that they have already had a discussion on. If the candidate's partner has already been assessed using the same assessment brief, their original recording must be the one that marks are awarded for.

## 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 all departments or faculties must follow, while others allow for a flexible approach. The main thing is that you arrange a situation in which other subject specialists are looking at, and reviewing, your assessment materials and judgements. In a subject department, this can be arranged in 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 that 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 or discussion. Newly devised assessments can be discussed and reviewed, for example in terms of level of demand or course coverage. SQA has produced guidance on internal verification. This guidance suggests templates that you can download and use to support an effective internal verification process. Further information is on the [NQ internal verification toolkit webpage](#).

### 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 more comfortable about making assessment judgements. You could exchange assessment materials, recordings and candidates' scripts physically or electronically, and monitor assessment judgements in this way. Further information is available on the [NQ internal verification toolkit webpage](#).

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

As part of the external verification process, verifiers do not expect you to include a centre-devised policy on internal verification along with your sample. There is an expectation, however, that evidence of internal verification is visible. This could take the form of annotated 'double marking', or 'cross marking', where a second assessor notes and comments on marks awarded or where assessment standards have been achieved.

Comments, rather than just a series of ticks or dates, make it very clear that a second assessor has reviewed an assessment judgement. If you have had meetings where you have verified assessment judgements, it would be helpful to include a brief note of the meeting along with your sample for external verification.

## **What evidence should be submitted for external verification of National 5 and Higher ESOL performance: speaking and listening**

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

The evidence that must be submitted for the National 5 and Higher ESOL performance: speaking and listening can be found on the [National Qualifications external verification webpage](#).

## **What evidence should be submitted for external verification of units?**

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

The evidence that must be submitted for units can be found on the [National Qualifications external verification webpage](#).

When a centre is selected for unit verification, only the evidence requested on the checklist is required. It is not necessary to send evidence for other units or National 5 or Higher ESOL performance: speaking and listening.

You will find general questions and answers about National Qualifications on our website at [www.sqa.org.uk/faq](http://www.sqa.org.uk/faq).