



Alternative Certification Model 2020–21: National QA Exercise Key Messages

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages
Level	Higher

This report provides information on themes emerging from the national quality assurance exercise, which is part of the Alternative Certification Model for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.

A sample of candidates' assessed work from selected centres was reviewed to determine whether assessment was in line with the national standard. The evidence submitted may have been partial or incomplete and is unlikely to have represented all of the evidence that will be gathered to allow the centre to determine a provisional result.

The centres selected for review in this subject and at this level have been provided with specific feedback on the evidence that they submitted. The comments below highlight key points about the assessment approaches and instruments used and the sampled centres' assessment judgements, for all centres delivering the subject at this level to reflect upon and make any appropriate adjustments.

Section 1: Comments on approach to assessment

Centres submitted a variety of evidence in terms of quantity and coverage of the skills of listening, reading, writing and the speaking and listening performance. There was a variety in the amount of evidence provided by each centre.

Many centres submitted partial evidence at this time, and this tended to cover two of the assessed skills. Few centres submitted evidence to cover all four skills. All centres provided at least one piece of evidence for each candidate for one of the skills. There was less evidence submitted for speaking and listening and writing than for reading and listening. Many centres commented that they planned to use the full SQA ESOL 2021 assessment resource to base their final provisional results on at a later point in the session.

Centres also submitted a range of different approaches on which to base their judgements. The majority of centres used either the SQA ESOL 2021 assessment resource or a centre-devised assessment. Some centres used SCQF level 6 unit assessment support (UAS) packs.

Overall, approaches to assessment replicated the level of demand, structure and approach of the Higher ESOL course assessment.

All centres that submitted evidence for the speaking and listening performance effectively used SQA resources from the UAS packs or SQA prior-verified assessments, which ensured an appropriate level of challenge. Almost all candidates were assessed in pairs rather than small groups and candidates worked together effectively and demonstrated engagement in the tasks.

All reading and listening assessments used were valid and appropriate, and centre-devised assessments were designed with an appropriate level of difficulty and allowed candidates to access the full range of available marks. Centres should note that some texts and questions in the reading and listening UAS packs for SCQF level 6 units do not provide as much headroom for awarding marks in bands A and B as the listening and reading question papers in the course assessment.

Most centres provided evidence of good practice in their approach to assessment by using assessment records. This included highlighted descriptions of performance in speaking and writing, and marks on the detailed marking instructions. In some cases, this was supported with further commentary recorded on the detailed marking instructions and/or on assessment records, which referred to the descriptions of performance and to aspects of the candidate's own performance. Overall, the approach to assessment was in accordance with SQA's guidance on gathering key evidence: [Higher ESOL: Guidance on gathering key evidence in session 2020–21](#).

Section 2: Comments on assessment judgements

Overall, for speaking and writing, centres' judgements were accurate and showed that the marking instructions have been applied effectively. However, there were some instances where marking instructions had been applied too leniently in terms of range and accuracy of detailed structures in both writing and speaking. On a very few occasions centres marked speaking too severely in terms of detail and support for points made.

Centres could refer to the exemplars and commentaries available in the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure website to become more familiar with marking these aspects of speaking and listening performance.

For both writing and speaking and listening, centres should also interpret the marking instructions in the context of C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference. Centres should bear this in mind when making their assessment judgements and carrying out internal quality assurance or moderation processes.

In terms of listening and reading, candidates were generally assessed accurately, fairly and consistently in accordance with national standards. However, centres should note that where a reading question is worth 2 marks for two points, it is possible to award 1 mark for one correct point. It is not necessary to get both points to award a mark. In the reading paper where a phrase is asked for, only the phrase should be written down, not the whole sentence. In both reading and listening, markers should be careful to note when questions have a word limit (for example, no more than three words) and not award marks for answers that exceed this word limit.

One aspect of good practice in the assessment judgements was clear evidence of internal moderation of marks through cross-marking and internal verification.

Another aspect of good practice was the evidence included that showed clearly the basis on which assessment judgements were made. For reading and listening, some centres helpfully noted when alternative answers had been accepted and the rationale for that.

There was clear evidence that teachers and lecturers are working hard to develop and to encourage the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for this course.