



# NQ verification 2023–24 round 1

## Qualification verification summary report

### Section 1: verification group information

Verification group name:	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification activity:	Mixed
Date published:	June 2024

### National Units verified

Unit code	Unit level	Unit title
H998 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Reading and Writing
H997 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Listening and Speaking
H24H 73	National 3	ESOL for Everyday Life
H24H 74	National 4	ESOL for Everyday Life
H24N 74	National 4	ESOL Assignment Added Value

### Section 2: comments on assessment

#### Assessment approaches

##### Units: National 2, 3 and 4

Most centres selected for verification submitted evidence that followed approaches to assessment, as set out in SQA's ESOL unit assessment support packs.

Some centres adapted assessments to candidates' needs, creating more personalisation and choice, and others used them as a model for producing their own assessments. A task from an SQA Communications unit was used to assess listening and speaking combined at National 3 level. The communications presentations produced evidence that met the assessment standards for outcome 4 (speaking) and there was a short question and answer session that meant candidates could meet the assessment standards for outcome 3 (listening).

Note: if centres use a task from a different unit, the assessment task should be available for verification, and centres should provide details of the assessment in the candidate assessment record.

A prior verified adapted task for National 3 was used to assess outcome 2 (writing). For the free-time activities, candidates had to write an email rather than produce a pamphlet. This approach enhanced an opportunity for personalisation and choice. The assessments selected by the centre were appropriate and useful for candidates.

Centres that wish to produce their own assessments may find it useful to look at the assessments in the unit assessment support packs on SQA's secure website. We recommend that centre-produced assessments are submitted to SQA's [free prior verification service](#) to check that the assessments are valid, reliable and practicable.

### **Outcome 1 (reading)**

Overall, the approach taken by centres to the assessment and re-assessment of outcome 1 (reading) was both valid and accepted.

Assessors should use their professional judgement to determine the most appropriate ways to generate evidence when a candidate has not met all the assessment standards. For re-assessment of one assessment standard, assessors could check responses orally, or use a different question on the same text. For re-assessment of all the assessment standards, or where a candidate has not produced sufficient evidence, assessors must use a different assessment task.

### **Outcome 2 (writing)**

All centres verified used the drafting process appropriately and in a way that supported candidates.

Centres should adhere closely to the assessment standards and encourage candidates to complete all first drafts of writing by hand. It may be appropriate at National 3 and National 4 level to create the final version electronically.

More detailed guidance on the drafting process is in the [ESOL common questions](#).

### **Outcome 3 (listening)**

Assessors should take advantage of the opportunity to check orally, for example where candidates write more than the required number of words or when something is not clear.

It is useful to check understanding when listening and speaking are combined in one assessment. In the judging evidence table for assessment standards 3.1 and 3.2, it states 'If this has not been clearly demonstrated by the candidate during the conversation, the assessor could check orally'.

When an assessor checks the candidate response orally for outcome 3 (listening), this should be recorded to show clearly the basis on which assessment judgements have been made. Written records of assessors' comments assure reliability, and support both assessors and candidates. Where the evidence clearly demonstrates that a candidate has met the assessment standards, it is not necessary to provide detailed comments.

## **Outcome 4 (speaking)**

Most centres submitted candidate evidence that was well-organised and included clearly identified audio or video recordings of high quality. Candidates appeared comfortable and well-prepared for their assessment.

In the evidence submitted, many centres combined the assessment of outcomes 3 and 4 (listening and speaking). Centres used an assessment task that combined listening and speaking in an interaction with another candidate. The candidates appeared well-prepared and responded to each other appropriately.

To help in identification and in the verification process, candidates should be paired with partners of a different gender and/or nationality or first language, where possible. When two candidates have similar voices and accents, it is helpful for the verification process to have written pointers to help identify which candidate is speaking. Some centres provided video-recorded evidence, which supported the identification of candidates. Where a candidate was paired with the assessor, the assessor participated effectively, and the result was a good example of a well-balanced interaction.

When the assessment task is a roleplay (lost or stolen mobile phone) an interlocutor should take on the part of the roleplay. In the centres verified, interlocutors were effectively managing their role ensuring candidates could participate fully.

## **ESOL assignment added value unit**

In line with the aims and principles of personalisation and choice, centres encouraged candidates to choose topics they were interested in. Centres video-recorded candidates and it was clear that they were familiar with this. The use of video recordings helps candidates focus more on presentation skills, and maximising the skills they develop while doing the assignment.

Centres should encourage candidates to use PowerPoint. If candidates are using slides, they should refer to their slides when appropriate; they should not just appear in the background. Candidates should not read from a script or from the PowerPoint slides, as they are being assessed on their presentation skills.

For this unit, candidates have to provide evidence of their reading, speaking and listening skills by:

- ◆ selecting relevant information from at least two straightforward texts in English, one of which must be written
- ◆ making an oral presentation on the topic in English
- ◆ understanding spoken English by responding orally in English to questions relevant to the topic

For the assignment, candidates should apply their language skills from the other two units at National 4 level to investigate their chosen topic in English.

## **Assessment judgements**

In most centres verified, assessors had a good understanding of the assessment standards. The assessment judgements were in line with national standards and assessor comments were clearly based on the assessment standards.

Centres should refer to the column 'Making assessment judgements' in the judging evidence tables in SQA's unit assessment support packs when making judgements for each assessment standard.

Some centres included adapted candidate assessment records for each outcome, which provided clear and detailed feedback.

Centres must make sure that results are recorded accurately and clearly to avoid any errors on the candidate assessment record and verification sample form.

## **Section 3: general comments**

### **Internal verification**

Some centres provided full and detailed evidence of the internal verification process. These documented clearly that professional dialogue had taken place between the internal verifier and the assessor. This showed how assessment judgements were reached for individual outcomes and complete units through the inclusion of supporting comments relating to assessment standards and highlighted or annotated judging evidence tables. Other centres provided evidence of cross-marking having taken place and/or the internal verifier having signed to confirm agreement with the judgements made.

Centres should pay close attention to the materials required for external verification of units. If unsure about what to submit, please contact NQ Verification for guidance. Verification cannot proceed if centres submit incorrect evidence, or evidence for candidates who have already been certificated.

On the verification sample form, the pass or fail column should reflect the current position within the candidate's evidence — whether this is complete or interim. Centres should complete it for each candidate as 'pass' or 'fail' only. This applies in situations where the candidate evidence is interim, for example a candidate who has completed two out of four outcomes successfully (for the Everyday Life unit) would be shown as 'pass' on the verification sample form, even though they are yet to attempt two more outcomes before completing the unit. The individual assessment judgements that have been made should be detailed in the evidence.



# NQ verification 2023–24 round 2

## Qualification verification summary report

### Section 1: verification group information

Verification group name:	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification activity:	Visit
Date published:	June 2024

### National Course components verified

Course code	Course level	Course title
C827 75	National 5	ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening
C827 76	Higher	ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening

### Section 2: comments on assessment

#### Assessment approaches

Most centres verified used appropriately selected assessment briefs and provided these within the evidence submitted for verification.

Many centres used SCQF level 5 and/or level 6 speaking tasks from unit assessment support packs as assessment briefs for candidates. Some centres provided candidates with a range of different topics to choose from, rather than one topic for the whole group being assessed. Centres should ensure the assessment brief topics they use from unit assessment support packs are appropriate for school candidates and not more suited to adult learners.

Centres offered candidates a variety of topics that allowed for personalisation and choice, enabling them to feel confident and engaged. Some centres made use of centre-produced prior-verified unit assessment tasks at the appropriate level, which are available on SQA's secure site.

A similar number of centres to last year produced their own assessment briefs, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice. Some centres

combined these with topics that candidates encountered in other subject areas. Topics covered included artificial intelligence and online learning.

A small number of centres selected topics and contexts for the conversation (National 5) and discussion (Higher) that were not wide ranging enough or had bullet points that were not specific enough. This did not allow candidates to fully demonstrate the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve a high mark for the six assessed aspects of the performance at National 5 or Higher level.

The assessment brief should have clear instructions for the candidate on the topic or aspect of the topic to be discussed. There should be four or five bullet points relating to the topic that candidates could address during the interaction. Candidates must always attempt to complete the task as stated in the assessment brief.

Most centres assessed candidates in pairs. Overall, candidates were well paired for the assessment and were very comfortable having a conversation or a discussion with each other. Some candidates were paired with a peer, who was not being assessed, and it was clear that centres had taken a thoughtful approach to identifying an appropriate peer to act as interlocutor, allowing a balanced conversation and discussion to take place. If the performance is with another candidate or learner, the assessor should ensure that they are of a similar ability so as not to disadvantage any candidate. If choosing to assess in groups of three, candidates should have opportunities to practise conversations or discussions in groups, and centres should carefully consider the group dynamic. Candidates can be re-assessed, using a different assessment brief, if the original pairing or grouping was not appropriate, or the assessment brief was not suitable.

In some centres, the internal verifier or assessor acted as an interlocutor for candidates. In most centres, the interactions were handled very well, enhancing equal participation and allowing the candidates to demonstrate all skills required in the performance. The candidates were comfortable with the topic, suggesting they were well prepared, and they interacted comfortably with the interlocutor. There were some instances where the interlocutor acted as an interviewer rather than an equal partner in the conversation or discussion. To avoid disadvantaging candidates, if assessors take on the role of interlocutor (or in some cases, learners with a more advanced level of English as a peer interlocutor) it is important that participation in the conversation or discussion is balanced, especially with regards to turn-taking. Candidates should be made aware that they may have to initiate the conversation or discussion or show they can initiate by introducing new topics during the course of the interaction. Assessors should give candidates the opportunity to initiate either at the start of the communication or during the performance, for example by introducing new or associated topics when they speak. The conversation or discussion should be as natural as possible.

Most candidates used the performance preparation time well. After assessors give candidates the assessment brief, assessment conditions allow candidates 15 minutes preparation time before taking part in the assessment. After clarifying the assessment brief, the assessor should be present during the 15 minutes of preparation time to ensure that each candidate prepares alone, and no discussion of the topic and/or assessment brief takes place. Centres should discourage candidates from using their preparation time to script dialogue or to rehearse what they are going to say. This disadvantages candidates from demonstrating their ability to initiate with spontaneity and show sensitivity to the norms of turn-taking, as well as to respond with fluency and to support or develop what their partner

has said. In the performance, candidates may use their notes made on the assessment brief during the preparation time. However, the assessor should make candidates aware that frequent reference to notes during the assessment could interfere with the natural flow of the conversation or discussion.

Candidates must undertake the assessment independently. In a few centres, the assessor or interlocutor was prompting candidates. Although centres may provide reasonable assistance prior to the formal assessment process taking place, for example discussing similar topics during learning and teaching, the assessor should avoid giving assistance during the recorded performance. If candidates require prompting, it may be that they are not ready for assessment, or it may be that they have been entered for the wrong level of qualification. Only in exceptional cases should the assessor ask relevant questions to ensure the candidate has sufficient opportunity to demonstrate understanding of spoken English. For example, if questions asked by the other participant(s) were unclear, or insufficient to allow the candidate to demonstrate understanding.

Many candidates had prepared well for the performance, and this was evidenced particularly through their contribution to the topic, their competences in initiating and turn-taking, as well as considering and responding to their partners' comments. These candidates were very comfortable having conversations or discussions with each other, which indicated that the development of speaking and listening skills during the course had been thorough and addressed relevant contexts. They had been well-prepared for this type of task and appeared comfortable being audio or video recorded.

Overall, stipulated timings were adhered to. In the Higher or National 5 performance, the approximate time guidelines are to support candidates so that they do not either exceed or fall short of the time limit. A conversation or discussion that is too long or too short does not automatically mean that the candidate achieves a low mark. However, it may mean that a candidate makes unnecessary errors, or the coherence of the interaction is hindered if the assessment is overly long. On the other hand, candidates may not fully demonstrate their speaking skills if it is too short. Either of these scenarios may have an impact on which aspects of the performance are identified within the bands on the detailed marking instructions.

### **Assessment judgements**

Overall, the marks awarded for National 5 and Higher were in line with national standards and assessors made good use of the detailed marking instructions for each of the aspects of performance to determine marks within the bands for both speaking and listening.

Most centres had taken a holistic approach to the judgements, following the instructions in the National 5 and Higher coursework assessment task, where the general approach described in the marking instructions is 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 main band selected. This determines if the candidate is at the top, in the middle, or at the bottom of the band. A few centres awarded marks based solely on specific parts of a performance rather than the performance in its entirety, which is not in line with assessment guidelines.

Most centres provided evidence of good practice in their approach to assessment in the use of assessment paperwork. This included highlighted descriptions of performance and marks on the detailed marking instructions. In some cases, this was supported with the inclusion of further commentary recorded on the detailed marking instructions and/or on candidate assessment records, which referred both to the descriptions of performance allocated marks and to aspects of the candidate's own performance. Centres made use of both SQA documentation and centre-produced documentation for these purposes.

Video-recorded evidence supported the identification of candidates. When candidates of the same first language group and gender are paired it can be difficult to identify them on audio recordings. In some recordings, clear notes were provided as part of the evidence, which helped to identify each candidate throughout the interactions, in addition to providing helpful commentary as additional evidence.

Centres should ensure that marks awarded for listening are based on the description of performance in the detailed marking instructions and are independent of assessment judgements made of candidates' speaking performance. This is particularly important when groups of three candidates are being assessed. In some assessments, there seemed to be a tendency for assessors to award full marks for listening to each candidate when it was not evident from the performance that a candidate had understood fully and in detail what was said clearly, and/or responded with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity which effectively developed the interaction.

While most marking decisions were in line with national standards, there were some inconsistencies. Assessors should refer to the exemplars and commentaries available in the Understanding Standards packs on SQA's secure site to become more familiar with marking the performance. There are examples of audio and video-recorded performances with commentaries, as well as recordings of standardisation and training webinars. The illustrative language tables in the Higher and National 5 course support notes can support teachers and lecturers in having a good understanding of the level of conversation or discussion required.

Centres must ensure to apply the marking information appropriately. When centres conduct the assessment as an interview rather than a two-way discussion, it is not possible for candidates to display their ability to maintain and develop the interaction as specified in the detailed marking instructions.



## **Section 3: general comments**

### **Internal verification**

Most centres provided full and detailed evidence of the internal verification process. It was documented clearly that professional dialogue had taken place between the internal verifier and the assessor, showing how assessment judgements were reached and marks awarded. Other centres provided evidence of cross-marking having taken place and/or the internal verifier having signed to confirm agreement with the marks awarded by the assessor.

Many centres collaborated with their local EAL service and conducted cross-centre internal verification with other ESOL or EAL teachers and lecturers, which greatly supported the verification process and resulted in samples for verification that had a high level of consistency. This is good practice and can hopefully be replicated in other areas.

Many assessors and internal verifiers attended the SQA ESOL Understanding Standards webinars and found these very useful preparation for assessment of the performance at National 5 and Higher level. In late 2024, there will be an SQA ESOL Understanding Standards event focusing on the delivery and marking of the performance task and allowing attendees the opportunity to ask subject specialists specific questions.