NQ ESOL Qualification Verification Summary Report 2024–25

Section 1: verification group information

Verification group name:	**English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**
Verification activity:	Event
Round:	1
Date published:	June 2025

National Units verified

Unit code	Unit level	Unit title
HA1R 72	National 2	Preparation for Literacy
HW55 72	National 2	An Introduction to Beginner English Literacies 1
H997 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Listening and Speaking
H998 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Reading and Writing
H24H 73	National 3	ESOL for Everyday Life
H24L 73	National 3	ESOL in Context
H24H 74	National 4	ESOL for Everyday Life
H24L 74	National 4	ESOL in Context
H24N 74	National 4	ESOL Assignment Added Value

Section 2: comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

Most centres submitted evidence using SQA's ESOL unit assessment support packs. Some centres adapted the unit assessment support packs and others used centre-produced assessments. 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.

A small number of centres used naturally occurring evidence to assess all candidates at National 3 level. This demonstrated the use of reliability in devising appropriate prompts and resources for candidates to develop different abilities, while allowing for personalisation and choice.

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.

Please ensure candidates' responses are in pen — not pencil.

Outcome 2 (writing)

Most centres verified used the drafting process correctly. For the writing outcome, candidates may draft written work before producing a final version. The drafting process ensures candidates receive sufficient but not excessive support between drafts. Assessors must only identify errors on the writing by underlining and not indicate the type of error. Candidates must not use pencil or alter the drafts in any way.

Candidates can produce a maximum of two drafts and a final version. If the writing meets all assessment standards for the level, you should not make corrections but clearly identify it as a pass on the candidate's work at the first draft stage on a candidate assessment record. You can then give feedback, relating it to the assessment standards. 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. The centre may wish to provide lined paper for candidates to produce drafts. More detailed guidance is in the [ESOL common questions](#).

Please ensure candidates' responses are in pen — not pencil.

Outcome 3 (listening) and outcome 4 (speaking)

Many centres combined the assessment of outcomes 3 and 4. Most centres submitted candidate evidence that was well-organised and included clearly identified audio or video recordings of high quality.

Before the conversation starts, the assessor should check that candidates know the most effective way 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 or scripted sentences on the topic as a way of preparing. Some candidates had scripted questions on their assessment brief.

In most cases, where candidates were paired with an assessor for the conversation tasks, the results were well balanced, allowing candidates to demonstrate their

speaking skills effectively. However, it is good practice, where possible, to pair candidates with peers, even if they are at a different level of English-speaking ability.

In speaking assessments, the approximate time guidelines support candidates so that they do not either exceed or fall short of the time limit. A conversation that is too long does not automatically mean that the candidate does not achieve the outcome. However, it may mean that a candidate makes unnecessary errors if overly long and this may have an impact on achievement of the assessment standards.

ESOL assignment added value unit

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.

In the submitted evidence for the added value unit, candidates used PowerPoint and referred to their slides, when appropriate. The use of video recordings helps candidates focus more on presentation skills and maximise the skills they develop while doing the assignment.

Assessment judgements

Many centres provided some commentary in the candidate assessment record against the assessment standards. It is good practice to have a brief explanation as to why particular assessment judgements had been made.

Outcome 2 (writing)

Centres should ensure candidates cover all assessment standards in the judging evidence tables. Some candidates at National 3 level produced essay-type responses when the task demanded a notice, email or form. Therefore, they did not meet assessment standard 2.3. Candidates need to show sufficient evidence of using conventions of style and layout appropriately. Centres should refer to the 'Making assessment judgements' column in the judging evidence tables. Candidates may be able to achieve this assessment standard by completing a final (third) version of their original draft. 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.

Outcome 3 (listening) and outcome 4 (speaking)

In many centres, detailed notes of discussion between the assessor and internal verifier helped give a clear overview of the final assessment judgements.

Section 3: general comments

In a few centres, although the candidate assessment records stated that candidates met the assessment standards for outcome 4 (speaking), verification of this outcome was unable to take place as there was no recorded evidence of the actual language the candidates used, nor any details of their speaking partner. Although there were assessor comments against each assessment standard, in order to be able to verify these, examples of the language used is needed. Centres should refer to the ESOL common questions for further information.

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, showing how assessment judgements were reached for individual outcomes and complete units. Other centres provided evidence of cross-marking having taken place and/or the internal verifier having signed to confirm agreement with the judgements made.

As well as ensuring national standards are maintained, internal verification should ensure that assessors are fully supported throughout internal assessment. Internal verifiers and assessors may find SQA's Internal Verification Toolkit useful to ensure national standards are maintained, assessors are supported, and paperwork is not excessive. The toolkit is a suggested approach and SQA recognises that many centres will have well-developed processes in place.

External verification

On the Verification Sample Form, the 'Pass' or 'Fail' column should reflect the current position within a candidate´s evidence – whether this is complete or interim. The individual assessment judgements being made should also be detailed within the evidence.

NQ ESOL Qualification Verification Summary Report 2024–25

Section 1: verification group information

Verification group name:	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification activity:	Visit
Round:	2
Date published:	June 2025

National Course components verified

Course code	Course level	Component 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 of the centres verified used appropriately selected assessment briefs and provided these within the evidence submitted for verification.

Some centres used SCQF level 5 and/or level 6 speaking tasks from unit assessment support packs as assessment briefs; however, many more centres this year made use of centre-produced prior-verified unit assessment tasks at the appropriate level, which are available on SQA's secure site. Other centres produced their own assessment briefs, with an appropriate level of challenge and scaffolding.

Some centres provided candidates with a range of different topics to choose from, rather than one topic for the whole group being assessed. This is acceptable as it allows candidates to have topics they can fully engage with.

Centres offered candidates a variety of topics that allowed for personalisation and choice, enabling them to feel confident and engaged. Some topics candidates covered this year included: car manufacturing, sleep, multiculturalism, and crime. Centres with young adult candidates should ensure the assessment brief topics they use are appropriate for school candidates and not topics that are more suited to adult candidates.

If centres have National 5 and Higher candidates in the same class, although they may have the same topic for their performance, the assessment briefs should be different to take into account the level of language expected at the two different levels.

A small number of centres did not provide enough support in the bullet points in the assessment brief. Centres should provide scaffolding in the assessment briefs to allow for versatility of discussion and linguistic challenge. Centres could refer to the ESOL Understanding Standards webinars (in particular webinar 2022–23) on SQA's secure website for more information.

The assessment brief should have clear instructions for candidates 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.

Sometimes, it was not clear if the assessor was in the room when the recording of the performance was taking place. Information on the required supervision for the performance is in the 'Supervision, control and authentication' section of the National 5 and Higher ESOL course specifications.

Candidates must take the assessment independently. In a few centres, the assessor or interlocutor was prompting candidates. Centres may provide reasonable assistance prior to the formal assessment process taking place, for example discussing similar topics during learning and teaching; however, 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.

Most centres assessed candidates in pairs rather than small groups. Overall, candidates were well matched for the assessment and were very comfortable having a conversation or a discussion with each other. A few centres chose to assess the performance in groups of three, and this worked well when the centre had carefully considered the group dynamic beforehand. In most cases the interaction was well balanced and provided evidence of each candidate's language skills.

It was clear that many candidates had prepared well for the performance, and this was evidenced through their contribution to the topic, their competences in initiating and turn-taking, and in considering and responding to their partners' comments. These candidates were very comfortable having conversations or discussions with each other,

showing well-developed speaking and listening skills in relevant contexts. They had been well-prepared for this type of task and appeared comfortable being audio or video recorded.

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 a few centres, candidates were overprepared for the performance and used scripted dialogue or had rehearsed what they were 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 what their partner has said.

Assessment judgements

Overall, the marks awarded for National 5 and Higher were in line with national standards. 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.

In addition to recording the marks for speaking and listening on the correct candidate assessment record, some centres included, as evidence of assessment, highlighted and/or annotated descriptions of bands 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. This is excellent practice and both the internal and external verification processes made clear the basis on which marks were awarded.

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.

A few centres awarded marks based on specific parts of a performance rather than the performance in its entirety. Centres must take a holistic approach to the judgements, following the instructions in the [National 5](#) and [Higher](#) course specifications. These describe the general approach to identify the band which best describes the candidate's performance for each of the aspects of 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.

The illustrative language tables, in appendix 2 of the National 5 and Higher course specifications, can support teachers and lecturers in having a good understanding of the level of conversation or discussion required.

Section 3: general comments

Most 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, showing how assessment judgements were reached and marks awarded for the ESOL performance. Other centres provided evidence of cross-marking having taken place and/or the internal verifier signed to confirm agreement with the marks awarded.

There were examples of excellent internal verification with some centres establishing reciprocal processes with other centres throughout and between local authorities. This can be particularly important in centres where there are just a few, or even only one member of staff involved in the delivery of ESOL but is good practice regardless of the number of staff involved.

Many centres had benefitted from the series of webinars and events that have been offered by SQA over the past few years, and where assessors and internal verifiers had

participated in these webinars it was clear there was a good level of understanding of the assessment standards. Centres are reminded that recordings of these webinars are available on SQA's secure website.

Centres should ensure that candidate pairings or groups allow a balanced conversation or discussion 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 re-assessed in a different pairing or group at the time of the assessment, or at a later date, using a different assessment brief. If possible, it is good practice to use peer interlocutors when there is not a suitable candidate pairing. Candidates can be paired with a candidate who has already been assessed and is not being re-assessed.

Centres should provide candidates with guidance on how to use the 15-minute preparation time effectively, on their own, to consider the assessment brief, the points they want to make, and any useful vocabulary for the topic. This approach enables candidates to participate in the interaction with confidence. They must not attempt to script or rehearse the conversation or discussion.

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

Centres can support candidates to develop their skills by making use of the marking instructions throughout the course. Centres should provide candidates with feedback to identify their strengths and the aspects they need to further develop. Using the marking instructions provides them with consistent feedback on how they are progressing.