



# NQ Verification 2021–22 Round 2

## Qualification Verification Summary Report

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### Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	ESOL
Verification event/visiting information	Visit
Date published:	June 2022

#### National Courses

C827 75 National 5 ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening  
C827 76 Higher ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening

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### Section 2: Comments on assessment

#### Assessment approaches

Most centres that were verified had used appropriately selected assessment briefs and provided these within the evidence available for verification visits. SCQF level 5 and/or SCQF level 6 speaking tasks from unit assessment support packs were used well as an assessment brief for candidates and these were often personalised. This ensured an appropriate level of challenge in the task. Some centres produced their own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice, and some centres had combined these with topics that candidates encountered in other subject areas. Facilitating candidate personalisation and choice when deciding on contexts and broad topics is good practice.

Overall, stipulated timings were adhered to and most centres using tasks from unit assessment support packs had adjusted timings on the assessment brief to take account of the 15 minutes preparation time for the performance.

The majority of centres assessed candidates in pairs rather than small groups. Most pairings were well matched and candidates worked together effectively to maintain the conversation/discussion. In most cases the conversation/discussion was well balanced, so that sufficient evidence of each candidate's language skills was provided. They developed the conversation/discussion well with a good focus on the importance of their interaction.

In some centres, when individual candidates were assessed, the conversation/discussion benefitted from the candidate being paired with an interlocutor who did not direct or dominate the conversation/discussion. This allowed the candidate the opportunity to fully demonstrate their English language skills.

It was clear that some 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, and in considering and responding to their partners' comments. These candidates were very comfortable having conversations/discussions with each other which indicated that the development of speaking and listening skills during the course had been thorough and addressed in relevant contexts. They had been well-prepared for this type of task and appeared comfortable being audio- or video-recorded. Their performances benefitted from this.

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 a few such recordings, candidates introduced themselves, indicated the assessment task and discussion topic chosen, then referred to each other by name in the initial stages of the conversation/discussion. Along with supporting the verification process by helping to identify candidates more easily on the recording, this approach is also supportive to candidates by allowing them the opportunity to participate orally prior to their performance and by reducing the level of formality associated with assessment. Where candidates did not wish to be seen on video, one centre had an innovative approach — placing a whiteboard with the task and candidate names and date in front of the camera while recording the conversation/discussion with the candidates slightly off screen.

Some centres provided evidence of good practice in their approach to assessment in the use of assessment paperwork. This included highlighted/annotated bands on the 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 and marks and to aspects of the candidate's own performance. Providing the opportunity for candidates to see clearly both their strengths and where there is need of further skills development is supportive to good learning and teaching.

Other aspects of good administration in the approach to assessment, which also helped the verification process, included: clearly labelled recordings available for the visits and the inclusion of Scottish Candidate Numbers which helped identify candidates.

### **Guidance for centres on approaches to assessment**

Where a centre-produced assessment brief is used, centres should ensure that the topics and contexts chosen are wide ranging and specific enough to allow

candidates to fully demonstrate the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve a high mark for the six assessed aspects of performance at National 5 / Higher level. Centres may send their centre-produced assessments in for prior verification by using the SQA prior-verification service:

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/74666.html>

When producing their own tasks, centres could refer to the relevant page of the course specification. For example, page 12 of the Higher Course Specification document, accessible at:

[https://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/HigherCourseSpecESOL.pdf](https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/HigherCourseSpecESOL.pdf)

### **Setting the brief**

The brief must provide four or five bullet points relating to the topic or an aspect of the topic that can be addressed during discussion. It must provide sufficient challenge for the candidates to fully demonstrate a range of detailed and complex language appropriate to the level.

Centre staff should be aware that a task which is not aimed specifically at the level being assessed could disadvantage a candidate and either provide insufficient or too much challenge. Although candidates may be learning in multi-level ESOL/EAL groups, it should be possible for the centre to select or adapt a task at one level to make it more or less demanding for another level. The most recent National 5 and Higher Performance Webinar (January 2022) available on the SQA secure site addresses this and supports centre staff in making decisions in relation to the task.

The preparation time should be used well so that candidates are clear about what they should include in the conversation/discussion and assessors should check that they understand all the bullet points in the assessment brief. In some centres candidates went off topic during the conversation or discussion and did not make full use of the bullet points on the assessment brief.

It would greatly assist verification if centres could clearly indicate on the assessment brief if it is an SQA unit assessment support pack task, an adapted SQA unit assessment support task, a centre-produced SQA prior verified task, an adapted centre-produced SQA prior verified task, or a centre produced task that has not been prior verified.

Candidates' performances must not be scripted, read out, memorised or rehearsed. Although candidates can have information about the context and broad topic area of the performance, the assessment brief must only be given to candidates at the start of the assessment. The assessment conditions then allow candidates 15 minutes preparation time, on their own, before taking part in the conversation/discussion. Candidates should be discouraged from using this time to script dialogue as a small number of recordings available for visiting verification suggested had taken place. This disadvantages candidates from demonstrating their speaking and listening skills, particularly, in speaking: the ability to initiate with spontaneity, show sensitivity to the norms of turn-taking and

produce features of spoken English; and in listening: to respond with fluency and spontaneity.

Where assessors take on the role of interlocutor or students/pupils with a more advanced level of English, to avoid disadvantaging candidates it is important that participation in the conversation/discussion is balanced, especially with regards to turn-taking. In a small number of cases, assessors took on the role of interviewer, disadvantaging candidates from displaying fully their ability to take part in a conversation/discussion. Using peer interlocutors when there is not a suitable candidate pairing, and where this is possible, is good practice. Candidates can also be paired with a candidate who has already been assessed and is not being re-assessed.

The centre should ensure that candidate pairings or groups facilitate a balanced conversation/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 with a different assessment brief.

### **Assessment judgements**

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

In some of the samples provided for verification, there was a good range of abilities amongst the candidates selected, allowing centres to clearly demonstrate sound assessment judgements across the range of marks available.

In addition to recording the marks for speaking and listening on the correct candidate assessment record, a number of centres had included as evidence of assessment highlighted/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 proved excellent practice and informs both the internal and external verification processes, making clear the basis on which marks were awarded. The candidate assessment record for the performance can be found on the NQ ESOL National 5 and Higher pages of the open SQA website under the heading of Coursework. Select the link to the Coursework assessment task.

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 will determine if the candidate is at the top, in the middle, or at the bottom of the band.

## **Guidance for centres on assessment judgements**

The overall marks awarded for each candidate's performance must be recorded on the Verification Sample Form. For verification of assessment judgements to proceed, the breakdown of marks awarded for speaking and listening must also be recorded on the National 5 or Higher ESOL Performance: Speaking and Listening candidate assessment record.

A few centres had avoided awarding marks at the top of the highest band (25) for speaking. When a candidate is performing at the top of the highest band for speaking full marks of 25 can be awarded.

It was clear that a few centres had awarded marks based on specific parts of a performance rather than the performance in its entirety. Where a task from a unit assessment support pack was used as the assessment brief, assessment judgements and marks awarded should be based on the performance marking instructions contained in the course specifications. Judging evidence tables from a unit assessment support pack must not be used or submitted.

Centres should ensure that marks awarded for listening are based on the description of performance contained in the detailed marking instructions and are independent of assessment judgements made of candidates' speaking performances. This is particularly important and especially when groups of three or more candidates are being assessed. There was a tendency for some assessors to award full marks to each candidate for the listening performance without basing this on the descriptions of performance.

To obtain full marks of 5 for listening at Higher a candidate's listening skills must demonstrate that they understand fully and in detail what is said clearly, and/or listen attentively to participant(s) and respond with a high degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity which effectively develops the discussion.

To obtain full marks of 5 for listening at National 5 a candidate's listening skills must demonstrate that they understand in detail what is said clearly, and/or listen attentively to what is said and respond with a degree of fluency and spontaneity which fully supports the conversation.

There was evidence that some candidates had been marked leniently for speaking in terms of range and accuracy of detailed structures at National 5, and detailed and complex structures at Higher. This resulted in assessors awarding a mark higher than is in line with national standards. Assessors could refer to the exemplars and commentaries available in the Understanding Standards packs on the SQA secure site to become more familiar with marking this aspect of 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 discussion or conversation required.

### Section 3: General comments

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 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 processes across centres and across and between local authorities. This can be particularly important in centres where there are few or only one member of staff involved in delivery of ESOL but is good practice regardless of the number of staff involved.

Some centres did not provide any evidence of internal verification. This must be submitted along with the candidate evidence for external verification events and made available for verification visits.

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 the SQA Internal Verification Toolkit ([www.sqa.org.uk/ivtoolkit](http://www.sqa.org.uk/ivtoolkit)) 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.

A small number of centres submitted incorrect evidence of assessment for external verification, for example unit assessments for the ESOL performance. Centres should pay close attention to the materials required for external verification of the ESOL performance and if unsure about what to submit, contact NQ Verification for guidance.