



NQ verification 2022–23 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 2023

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 available for verification. Some centres produced their own assessment briefs with an appropriate level of challenge to take account of personalisation and choice, and some centres combined these with topics that candidates encountered in other subject areas. Topics covered included health and diet, film, music and current affairs.

Some centres used SQA SCQF level 5 and/or level 6 speaking tasks from unit assessment support packs as an assessment brief for candidates, and these were often adapted to suit the candidates. Centres 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. In some centres, candidates went off-topic during the conversation or discussion, and candidates should be reminded beforehand to make full use of the bullet points on the assessment brief. Candidates must always attempt to complete the task as stated in the assessment brief given to them. When producing their own assessment briefs, centres could refer to the 'Setting the assessment brief' information in the 'Course assessment structure: performance' section of the [National 5](#) or [Higher](#) course specification.

Centres must ensure that the assessment briefs are available to candidates during the assessment itself and are not taken away before the recording begins.

It would greatly help verification if centres could clearly indicate on the assessment brief whether 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.

Most centres assessed candidates in pairs rather than small groups. Most pairings were well-matched, and candidates worked together effectively to maintain the conversation (National 5) or discussion (Higher). In most cases, the conversation or discussion was well balanced, which provided sufficient evidence of each candidate's language skills.

Ideally, candidates undertake the performance in pairs, but it is possible to have up to three participants in the conversation or discussion. 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.

If assessors take on the role of interlocutor (or in some cases, learners with a more advanced level of English as a peer interlocutor), to avoid disadvantaging candidates it is important that participation in the conversation or 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 or discussion. Using peer interlocutors when there is not a suitable candidate pairing is good practice, where possible. Candidates can be paired with a candidate who has already been assessed and is not being re-assessed.

Advice on pairing ESOL candidates for their performance can be found in the [National 5 ESOL Course Specification](#).

Videos are available on [SQA's Understanding Standing website](#) on how the performance should be set up and conducted at Higher level. These can be shown to candidates.

The assessor must be present when candidates are carrying out the performance. In a small number of centres, candidates were left alone to record their conversation or discussion. This is not appropriate under the assessment conditions specified in the coursework assessment task.

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 if the assessment is overly long or cannot fully demonstrate their speaking skills if it is too short, and this may have an impact on which aspects of the performance are identified within the bands on the detailed marking instructions.

Most centres adjusted timings on the assessment brief to take account of the 15 minutes preparation time for the performance. 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 or discussion.

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, and in 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 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 or discussion. Along with supporting the verification process by helping to identify candidates more easily on the recording, this approach is 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. Some centres provided detailed examples of language used by the candidates, which helped to identify candidates as well as providing clear evidence for why particular marks were awarded.

Some centres provided evidence of good practice in their approach to assessment in the use of assessment paperwork. This included highlighted and/or 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.

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.

In addition to recording the marks for speaking and listening on the correct candidate assessment record, a number of 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 informed 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 in the coursework assessment task on the ESOL [National 5](#) and [Higher](#) web pages under the 'Coursework' tab.

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 on specific parts of a performance rather than the performance in its entirety.

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.

Centres must 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. 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.

Assessors could 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 discussion or conversation 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 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.

As well as ensuring national standards are maintained, internal verification ensures that assessors are fully supported throughout internal assessment. Internal verifiers and assessors may find the [NQ internal verification toolkit webpage](#) 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 have well-developed processes in place.

It is advisable for the assessor and/or internal verifier to be present during the verification visit and feedback. Visiting verification is aimed at supporting assessors and internal verifiers. The discussion that takes place during visiting verification feedback is important for both the external and the internal verification process.

It was clear from discussions during verification feedback that many assessors and internal verifiers had attended SQA's ESOL Understanding Standards webinars and found these very useful preparation for assessment of the performance at National 5 and Higher level.