

NQ ESOL Verification Summary 2025–26

Verification information

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification activity	Event
Round	1
Date published	July 2026

National Units verified

Unit code	Unit level	Unit title
H997 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Listening and Speaking
H998 72	National 2	ESOL for Everyday Life: Reading and Writing
H999 72	National 2	ESOL in Context: Listening and Speaking
HA1R 72	National 2	Preparation for Literacy
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

Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

Overall, the approach to assessment taken by centres was valid and accepted. Most centres submitted evidence using our ESOL unit assessment support (UAS) packs, and some used centre-produced assessments. We encourage centres to produce their own assessment tasks to allow for greater personalisation and choice. We recommend that centre-produced assessments are submitted to Qualifications Scotland's free [prior verification service](#) to check that the assessments are valid, reliable and practicable.

Most centres provided detailed candidate assessment records, which explained the assessor's decision making process.

Outcome 1 (reading)

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

For re-assessment of outcome 1 (reading) and outcome 3 (listening), it is not always necessary to use a different text and task for re-assessment. An appropriate question or questions could be devised using the original assessment text to address the assessment standard that has not been met. However, asking a candidate the same 'true or false' question, or reading out the same question for the candidate to choose a different option is not appropriate for re-assessment.

Assessors could check responses orally, for example where candidates write more than the required number of words, when something is unclear, if a question has been left blank, or a candidate has misunderstood a question.

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 more than one assessment standard, 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.

For external verification, centres must submit the final version and any drafts. These should clearly show a progression of the candidate's own work. Alternatively, centres should indicate that all assessment standards were met on the first draft. Centres can record this on the candidate assessment record. More detailed guidance is in the [ESOL common questions](#).

For National 2 reading and writing units, during the drafting process assessors should underline errors where the candidate has not met assessment standard 2.1 'Applying the rules of upper and lower case accurately' in the text and in the candidate's personal details.

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.

If an audio and/or video recording is not retained, the centre must ensure that they make and retain detailed observation notes for the speaking (and listening) assessment, which relate to each assessment standard.

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, if possible, to pair candidates with peers.

Most centres interactions were well set up. It was evident that candidates were familiar with being recorded and seemed at ease when interacting with the interlocutor.

During the recording of an interaction, only people directly involved in the assessment should be present in the room. More information on setting up speaking assessments is in the [ESOL common questions](#).

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), they should record this to show clearly the basis on which they have made assessment judgements. Written records of assessors' comments ensure 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.

Re-assessment of a speaking assessment, or a speaking and listening combined assessment, where the candidate has already seen the questions and has practised using that vocabulary, must be carried out using a different assessment brief.

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.

In most centres the assessor and internal verifier had made effective use of the information on judging evidence to support assessment judgements, annotating which answers were correct or incorrect and providing commentary on the candidate assessment records. Some centres included constructive and accurate comments on the candidate assessment record, which helped to explain the judgement and allowed candidates and the internal and external verifiers to understand clearly how the assessment judgements had been made.

In a small number of centres, the internal verifier's comments on assessment standards not met, ensured that the final judgements submitted on the verification sample form were accurate. This demonstrated the effectiveness of the internal verification process in those centres.

In a few centres, not all assessment judgements were in line with national standards. The assessment evidence submitted for some candidates was insufficient to support the assessor judgement that candidates had met all the assessment standards. Assessors should refer to the column 'making assessment judgements' in the judging evidence table in our UAS packs when making judgements for each assessment standard.

General comments

Internal verification

Some centres provided detailed evidence of the internal verification process. These showed how assessment judgements were reached for individual outcomes and units by including supporting comments on assessment standards and highlighting or annotating judging evidence tables. These documented clearly that dialogue had taken place between the internal verifier and the assessor. 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 ensures that assessors are fully supported throughout internal assessment.

External verification

Centres should ensure they are aware of the materials required for external verification of units. If you are unsure what to submit, please check our [external verification web page](#) for information and use the contact form if you have any questions. Verification cannot proceed if centres submit incorrect evidence, or evidence for candidates who have already been certificated.

NQ ESOL Verification Summary 2025–26

Verification information

Subject	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Verification activity	Visit
Round	2
Date published	July 2026

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

Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

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

Most of the centres verified chose to use centre-devised assessment briefs, which were mostly from centre-produced prior verified assessment briefs available on our secure site. Some centres produced their own assessment briefs, with an appropriate

level of challenge and scaffolding. Fewer centres used SCQF level 5 and/or level 6 speaking tasks from UAS packs.

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: artificial intelligence, climate change, bilingualism, and wedding traditions.

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 varying degree of challenge between B2 and C1 CEFR assessments.

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. 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. Centres could refer to the ESOL Understanding Standards webinars on our secure site for more information.

Candidates must take the assessment independently. In a few centres, the assessor or interlocutor prompted candidates. Centres may provide reasonable assistance prior to the formal assessment process taking place, for example discussing similar topics during learning and teaching; however, assessors 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. Guidance on reasonable assistance is in the [National 5](#) and [Higher ESOL](#) course specifications: 'The teacher or lecturer listens to the conversation and only if required, may in exceptional circumstances 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) are unclear, or insufficient to allow the candidate to demonstrate understanding, the teacher or lecturer could ask further questions.'

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. 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. The interactions were well balanced and provided evidence of each candidate's language skills. 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 or discussion to take place. 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 candidates to demonstrate all skills required in the performance. 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.

There were instances where candidates incorrectly used the assessment brief to prepare a presentation rather than simple notes to hold a discussion at Higher level. In other instances the performance at National 5 was incorrectly conducted as a one-way interview rather than a conversation. Centres must ensure that candidate pairings facilitate a balanced conversation or discussion, and that candidates are aware that they need to initiate the conversation or discussion or show they can initiate by introducing new aspects of the topic during the course of the interaction. Centres should refer to the [National 5](#) and [Higher ESOL](#) course specifications for guidance.

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 short, bullet-point style 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. Any notes that candidates use during the assessment should be produced during the 15 minute preparation time and should be brief in nature as stated in the [National 5](#) and [Higher](#) coursework assessment tasks.

Overall, 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 in the detailed marking instructions.

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 our documentation and centre-produced documentation for these purposes.

Video-recorded evidence supported the identification of candidates. Practising conversations or discussions on video throughout the year allows candidates to

become comfortable and confident speakers on video, which was evidenced by several centres this year. When candidates of the same first-language group and gender are paired it can be difficult to identify them on audio recordings. For some recordings, clear notes were provided as part of the evidence, which helped to identify each candidate throughout the interactions.

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.

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 our 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.

Where an assessment is conducted as an interview rather than a two-way conversation, this means that it is not possible for a candidate to display their ability to maintain and develop the interaction as specified in the detailed marking instructions. In a small number of cases, this resulted in the centre being too lenient in their judgement of candidates.

While within tolerance, a very small number of centres were slightly severe in their application of the marking information. We remind centres that a holistic approach to assessment should be applied and assessors should not penalise candidates too severely for infrequent minor errors. If appropriate, centres should not be afraid to award full marks. Taking a holistic approach to awarding marks and following the detailed marking instructions in the course specification to identify the band that best describes the candidate's performance, the centre could award a mark of 30 if a candidate is matched against all the criteria at the top of each band. Candidates do not need to produce a flawless performance to gain full marks, but one that meets

the criteria in the top band of each aspect of the marking instructions and demonstrates a high level of ability for the level.

The illustrative language tables, in appendix 2 of both 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.

General comments

In most centres, there was evidence of internal verification, with notes on performance from both the assessor and internal verifier. When the marks awarded by the assessor and internal verifier were slightly different, there were detailed notes of any discussion, and the amended marks were submitted. In some centres, colour coding used on the detailed marking instructions indicated marks awarded by both the assessor and internal verifier for each aspect of performance. Where these differed, professional dialogue had taken place, and the final band agreed on for each aspect of performance was highlighted in a different colour.

In a few centres, where the marks awarded by the assessor and internal verifier were different, there was no record of any discussion, and it was not clear how they had arrived at the final marks. It is good practice to use our [Internal Verification Toolkit](#) prior to submission.

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. If a centre does not have sufficient staffing to support ESOL internal verification and/or require assistance in finding a partner centre to help with this process, they may contact the ESOL Subject Implementation Manager for assistance.

Centres should ensure the marks that they record on the Visiting Verification Sample Form match the final marks recorded on the candidate assessment record. In a small number of centres there were issues in terms of standardising the process of recording marks and transferring these to the Visiting Verification Sample Form.