Course report 2022

Subject	ESOL
Level	National 5

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	1005

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	28.7	Cumulative percentage	28.7	Number of candidates	290	Minimum mark required	68
B	Percentage	26.9	Cumulative percentage	55.6	Number of candidates	270	Minimum mark required	58
C	Percentage	22.7	Cumulative percentage	78.3	Number of candidates	225	Minimum mark required	48
D	Percentage	13.4	Cumulative percentage	91.7	Number of candidates	135	Minimum mark required	38
No award	Percentage	8.3	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	85	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics page of SQA's website.

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Listening

This question paper performed as expected, and enabled candidates to perform to the extent of their ability and markers to award marks in line with national standards.

Candidates listen to and answer questions based on one monologue and two spoken interactions. A range of question-types test listening comprehension, including multiple choice, gap-fill and pick-list, for example 'Which two statements of the following five are correct?'.

Question paper: Reading

This question paper performed as expected, and enabled candidates to perform to the extent of their ability and markers to award marks in line with national standards.

The questions assess understanding, application and analysis skills across three texts. A range of question-types test these skills, including gap-fill, multiple choice, pick-list, short-answer and matching.

Question paper: Writing

This question paper performed as expected, and enabled candidates to perform to the extent of their ability and markers to award marks in line with national standards.

Performance: Speaking and Listening

The performance: speaking and listening, as set out in the National 5 ESOL Course Specification and the coursework assessment task, consists of a conversation on a topic from everyday life, work or study.

Overall, the performance functioned as expected, enabling candidates to perform to the extent of their language ability.

In the sample verified, where centres used assessment briefs from SCQF level 5 unit assessment support packs or prior verified centre-produced assessment briefs, the difficulty of the topic and the scaffolding provided was as expected for this level. Some centres produced their own assessment brief, with an appropriate level of challenge, to take account of personalisation and choice.

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Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Listening

Candidates answered more accurately on the text on homelessness than on the texts on the 4-day week and student complaints.

While in 2019, candidates tended to perform better in the multiple choice questions, there was no such pattern this year. Some multiple choice questions were found to be demanding but others not, and this was also the case with gap-fill questions. The most successfully answered questions were 1(a), (b) and (c), 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9(b), 11, 12, 13, 17, 18 and 19.

Question paper: Reading

Candidates answered more accurately on the texts on women's work at home and teenage sleep patterns than they did on the food waste text.

Candidates tended to perform better in the four matching questions but, unlike in 2019 where they performed better in multiple choice questions, there was no clear pattern: some multiple choice and some gap-fill and short-answer questions were answered better than others in the same category. The most successfully answered questions were 1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30 and 31.

Question paper: Writing

In the everyday life task, most candidates supported and developed good ideas about the problems with the local park and how it could be improved. They also did this for the work task on making a workplace more environmentally friendly, and for the study task on the value of homework. Some candidates engaged in detail, with an impressive range of vocabulary, on aspects of their local park needing improvement. Some candidates also engaged well with detail in the question on greening the workplace.

Across the three tasks, most of the candidates showed an adequate or better range of grammar (using a variety of subordination and of tenses). Most also showed an adequate or better range of vocabulary (using a variety of words relevant to the task but not included in the task instructions).

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Performance: Speaking and Listening

A range of marks across the bands was seen at verification, with many candidates performing well and fully demonstrating their English language skills.

Speaking

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. In most cases the conversation was well balanced, so that sufficient evidence of each candidate's language skills was provided. They developed the conversation well with a good focus on the importance of their interaction.

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 with each other, showing well-developed speaking and listening skills in relevant contexts. They were well-prepared for this type of task and appeared comfortable being audio or video recorded.

Listening

Candidates who achieved full marks for listening, demonstrated that they had understood in detail what was said clearly, and listened attentively to their partner(s) and responded with a degree of fluency and with a level of spontaneity which fully supported the conversation.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Listening

Some candidates were not able to complete gap-fill questions within the 'no more than three words' limit. Questions that candidates found more demanding were 3, 9(a), (c) and (d), 10, 14, 15 and 16.

Two sets of questions relating to a particular text concluded with a multiple choice question testing global understanding of the whole text. One of these was found to be demanding (question 10) and the other less demanding (question 19).

Question paper: Reading

The questions that candidates found most demanding were 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27 and 32. There was no particular pattern to the question types.

Three sets of questions relating to a particular text concluded with a multiple choice question testing global understanding of the whole text. Two out of the three questions were found to be demanding (questions 11 and 32).

Question paper: Writing

Across the three tasks, some candidates lacked consistent punctuation, had a number of serious misspellings (to the extent of making the message hard to follow) and made many grammar errors (again affecting comprehensibility). Grammatical errors often related to

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issues with sentence structure, tenses, singular-plural agreement, and missing words, for example the verb 'to be'. There were also errors with affixes.

For the everyday life, work and study tasks, many candidates used informal register when a more formal or neutral register was required. Some candidates (across the three tasks) showed limited vocabulary. A few candidates lacked coherence: the relationships between sentences were not always clear.

In the everyday life task, some candidates lifted too many words from the task instructions. In the work task, some candidates misunderstood the specifics of the task and replaced the idea of one workplace needing to be greener, with a more general discussion of government policies to make life greener in general. In the study task, some candidates wrote about the idea of study in general, rather than the specific issue of homework. In this task, some candidates wrote a person-to-person piece, as if addressing a friend, rather than a general consideration in the form of an essay (see paragraph above on informality).

A few candidates did not manage to write responses of sufficient length, and there were some cases where handwriting legibility was poor.

Performance: Speaking and Listening

On occasion, the small group format created difficulties where candidates possessed different levels of ability, resulting in conversations that were slightly imbalanced. Candidates who are quieter or less confident may be better paired with sympathetic partners who will allow and encourage them to contribute more to the discussion.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ practise all question-types in the 2022 question paper
♦ know they must follow the specified word limit for gap-fill questions (often three but occasionally lower)
♦ regularly practise gap-fill questions (ideally requiring a mix of one, two and three words in answers) as well as multiple choice questions
♦ check the spelling of answers, especially using the time at the end of the recording to do so. Minor misspellings are accepted, but if the answer looks more like another word than the word in the answer key, or is barely comprehensible, then no mark can be given
♦ listen to a variety of authentic texts, for example from BBC news and TED talks, in order to practise listening at speed

In class, teachers and lecturers should, on occasion, stop a recording and ask candidates what exactly has just been said in order to further practise gap-fill questions.

Question paper: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ practise all of the question-types in the 2022 question paper
♦ take care that time spent practising gap-fill and short-answer questions is comparable to that spent on multiple choice and matching questions. This will ensure they pick up marks on gap-fill and short-answer questions as well as on the other question types
♦ are asked supplementary questions orally in class, asking candidates to pick out particular words in texts, for example 'Which one word in the first paragraph shows that the writer doesn't like x?'
♦ read the rubric of each question carefully, giving only one word when required, or a whole phrase when required:
  — the question-type 'Complete each gap with no more than x words from the text' requires candidates to take x words, unaltered, from the actual text. While it is useful to anticipate the grammar required for the answer (for example a noun, phrase or a verb), candidates should be discouraged from either attempting an answer before reading the text or from trying a rough synonym after skimming the text. A mark is only given for actual words from the text which make sense in the gap, so while there may be variants, these variants will be limited
♦ practise completing 35 questions in the time limit (70 minutes) and advise candidates on skimming and scanning techniques

Question paper: Writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ have opportunities to discuss the marking criteria used for this question paper
♦ know that the highest marks require a good range of both grammar and vocabulary as well as accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling
♦ have substantial formative work on accuracy in addition to exam practice
♦ know they should not copy verbatim the rubric or bullet points into their own answers
♦ see the questions as starting points from which to develop their own ideas. Originality is one way to achieve a positive impact on the reader
♦ practise writing in the following genres: formal email, informal email, report and essay
♦ are reminded an essay or a report should be formal, as should be a business-related letter
♦ have regular timed practice for the writing paper, producing handwritten responses rather than typed responses where possible

Performance: Speaking and Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ develop their speaking and interactive listening skills from the beginning of the course
♦ are aware what will be required of them for the performance, introducing the six aspects of speaking and listening to be assessed, and the marking instructions
♦ make use of the marking instructions throughout the course to support them in developing their skills
♦ receive feedback to identify their strengths and the aspects they need to develop further
♦ use the marking instructions to help provide them with consistent feedback on how they are progressing
♦ are given feedback that focuses on the aspects of listening being assessed, as well as those of speaking
♦ know that they must listen attentively and develop points made by their partner(s) to achieve high marks for listening. Early feedback on interactive listening skills should help them to achieve high marks
♦ are given guidance in how to use the 15 minutes 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 conversation with confidence
♦ know that they must not attempt to script or rehearse the conversation
♦ have opportunities to practise conversations using assessment briefs with a sufficient level of challenge, and record these interactions. This is an essential part of preparing for the performance
♦ are provided with an appropriate level of challenge, by using or adapting speaking tasks available in the unit assessment support packs, or modelling tasks on these
♦ pairings or groups facilitate a balanced conversation with opportunities for equal participation, taking into consideration candidate strengths and personalities

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Appendix 1: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report.

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