

## **ESOL Skills for Life (QCF)**

### **2016 Examiners' report**

#### **Introduction**

The second year of the Trinity Skills for Life (QCF) exams showed a marked increase in the pass rate over all skills and levels. Examiners (Speaking & Listening) and markers (Writing) were consulted in the compilation of this report, as well as monitoring reports of recorded exams, and statistical data. General trends, issues and strengths are noted below.

#### **National pass rates September 2015 – July 2016**

Level	Speaking and listening	Reading	Writing
Entry 1	85%	90%	83%
Entry 2	84%	80%	89%
Entry 3	86%	75%	74%
Level 1	87%	81%	76%
Level 2	84%	85%	74%

#### **Main challenges and successes**

The QCF mastery model, whereby candidates have to achieve every assessment criterion to pass the exam, proved to be a challenge in 2015, but results in 2016 indicate that this is no longer the case.

#### **Examiners' report by skill and task**

##### **Speaking and Listening**

At all levels, examiners report most candidates to be well-prepared. Candidates often come out of the exam 'with a smile', having engaged in an authentic and personal conversation with the examiner. However, the timing is rigorous, and Entry 1 in particular is very short, so candidates sometimes look surprised that it is over so soon.

##### **Speaking & Listening Task 1: Entry 1 to Level 2 – learner-led conversation**

The candidate-led task is proving to be extremely motivating, authentic and personal. At Entry levels, where candidates talk about a photograph or object, having the photograph on a phone is proving to be time-consuming. It is much more effective and time-efficient to have a print-out, and teachers are strongly encouraged to help their learners prepare a hard copy of their picture.

At Entry 1, weaker candidates recite a description rather than talk about their picture, and cannot manage the interaction when the examiner asks questions to initiate a more natural dialogue. They also try to use the past tense, which is not required at Entry 1. Teachers should ensure that the picture relates to the learners' daily lives, rather than a holiday snap, for example, so that the learner can achieve the task and talk about everyday things and activities. A minority of candidates have very little to say, and if they are not adequately prepared, it is difficult for the examiner to elicit the language required.

At Entry 2, a higher level of language is demanded than at Entry 1, but some candidates use Entry 1 grammar and lexis, without stretching themselves to use the language of the level. Similarly, at Entry 3, weaker candidates stick to Entry 2 language.

At Level 1, recipes remain a very popular choice for the description of a process. Learners should be encouraged to think of other things to describe, for example how they do something in their daily life, or how to create something.

Examiners note that candidate performance of the presentation and discussion at Level 2 Task 1 is increasingly well-achieved, with the stronger candidates demonstrating a keen understanding of the persuasive nature of the presentation.

### Speaking & Listening Task 2: Entry 1 to Level 2 – interactive listening

Most learners at all levels were well-prepared and performed well in this task, showing interest, asking questions, and interacting effectively. However, some candidates are being taught generic questions but not applying them appropriately. This means that they are not demonstrating active listening. Weaker or less well-prepared candidates have to be prompted to ask questions, rather than ask them naturally.

At Entry 2, the examiner shows a picture about a future plan, and less successful candidates find it difficult to understand that this refers to the future, not the present. Preparation would help with this.

### Speaking & Listening Task 3: Entry 2 to Level 2 – role play

Examiners report that centres are preparing their learners well for this task. Trinity is aware that the work-focus is not popular with all centres, and this is under review.

### Speaking & Listening Entry 1 – Level 2 – Group discussion

These continue to be performed well, with the group size of three being effective at engaging all the participants. At Entry 1, the group discussion is working particularly well. At Entry 3 and Level 1, where the group is expected to plan something together, examiners report that well-prepared candidates are managing this very successfully, and the task works well.

## Reading

The pass rates at all levels have increased this year.

## Writing

### Task 1: Entry 1 to Level 2 – the form

At Entry 3, the task and assessment criteria demand that the candidate uses at least two paragraphs in the open field of the form. Weaker performances include texts that are not coherent, with no ordering of events chronologically, and those that are made up of a series of short sentences.

The Level 1 form consist of three different fields, and candidates often put all the information first, so the second and third parts are relatively brief. By reading ahead and planning what to put in all the sections so they are balanced in length and content, candidates will fulfil both AC 1.1: Plan text, and AC 3.1: Complete a form.

The form at L2 is more demanding than at lower levels, with notes provided. Strong candidates effectively weave the notes into their writing but weaker ones simply copy the notes and do not give themselves the opportunity to demonstrate their own control of the language.

At both Level 1 and Level 2, more formal language needs to be used than at Entry levels.

### Task 2: Entry 2 and Entry 3 – article

Some candidates write about their teacher, or write letters to their teacher, whereas these tasks are in the form of an article for your teacher, about a topic in everyday experience. At Entry 2, strong responses contain compound sentences, using common conjunctions (and/but/or) which are required to achieve AC 1.2: Construct simple and compound sentences correctly. They also contain some common adjectives, which are necessary to achieve AC 1.3: Use adjectives correctly.

At Entry 3 the candidate needs to use complex sentences to achieve AC 2.4: Use grammar correctly. Strong performances included common conjunctions and relative pronouns.

**Task 2: Level 1 – report or article**

Strong performances of this task are those that address all parts of the question, keep to length, and demonstrate a range of functions and language of the level. This task is an opportunity for the candidate to use the language they know to entertain and/or inform the reader, and in order to perform this well, learners need to know how to organise and structure a report or article. Candidates who do not use sub-headings or formal report structure are not penalised, but those who demonstrate that they can structure texts sequentially and coherently according to genre are given credit for this (AC2.3).

**Task 2: Level 2 – review or article**

This task is often well achieved. However, where candidates write too little, or make it too simplistic, the assessment criteria cannot be fulfilled. For example, a review should not be completely positive or completely negative, as this limits the range of language that the candidate can use. Providing good and bad points allows for a range of conjunctions, structures, punctuation and vocabulary, and makes the review more entertaining and informative for the reader. Learners would also benefit from being taught the format of a review and article.

**Task 3: Entry 3 and Task 4: Level 1 – text message; Task 4: Level 2 – email or online message**

These tasks are opportunities for learners to show they can write informally and succinctly, keeping to the word count. Frequently, text messages and emails are too long, using all the space provided (allowance is made for candidates with large hand-writing), rather than conforming to the word count. Most candidates achieve this task very well, composing authentic, friendly and appropriate messages or emails, and the task is generally popular with centres and markers.

**Task 3: Level 1 and Level 2 – letter or email**

Strong performances of this task are those that address all parts of the question, are well organised, and keep to length.

**Planning text**

It is clear that the majority of candidates are well-prepared, and are fulfilling the 'plan text' criterion well. However, in some cases they are spending too long on the plans, and losing time that is better spent on completing the writing task.

**Conclusion**

The second year of Skills for Life (QCF) has seen an improvement in the pass rates, and a predominance of well-prepared and high-performing candidates. The work focus and the number of assessment criteria remains an issue for some centres, and both of these are currently under review.