



Who are SQA ESOL qualifications for? Programme placement guidance for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Learners

Introduction

This guidance can be used to support decisions about the most appropriate pathways for ESOL learners.

The term 'ESOL learner' is currently used for someone who is learning English as a **new** resident in an English-speaking country. SQA regards it as the responsibility of the presenting centre to allocate learners appropriately to learner programmes and qualifications.

Guidelines on allocation

If a learner has been receiving English as an Additional Language (EAL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support continuously since they started their secondary education in Scotland or the wider UK, this would be an indicator that an ESOL qualification may be appropriate. However, if they have not been receiving such support, or the support they have been receiving is **not** related to English being a second/other language, National Qualifications (NQ) in ESOL would not be appropriate.

Before they are entered for an SQA ESOL qualification, we would recommend that each learner be assessed by a **qualified EAL** or a **TESOL qualified teacher** for a clear picture of their current English language proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking. This would provide information on the specific needs of that learner and whether these are (or not) related to English not being their first language. The outcome of the assessment would form the basis of a decision about which type of support and which qualification is most appropriate for that learner.

The Scottish Government produced an initial assessment pack for qualified ESOL practitioners which may be useful and is available on the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/esol-initial-assessment-materials/>

There may be benefits for learners who have completed part of their education in Scotland or the wider UK undertaking the NQ ESOL qualifications, but these qualifications are not appropriate for learners who have had a complete Scottish or UK education or completed most of their education to date in Scotland or the UK.

SQA acknowledges that learners' circumstances vary widely and so there is no set limit for the length of time young people have been living and studying in Scotland or the UK. Learners will progress at different rates in their English language skills. Having completed a primary education in Scotland or the UK may not always mean the learner does not require further ESOL support at a secondary level.

Learners' ESOL literacy skills may also vary greatly when they begin studying ESOL in Scotland or the UK. Their first language may not have used the Latin alphabet and some may not have had the opportunity to become literate in their first language.

There are also other factors which may impact on the development of their English language skills. For example, their education in Scotland or the UK may have been interrupted if they returned to their country of origin frequently or for lengthy periods of time.

Guidance from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland positively encourages education providers to ensure that learners maintain their home language. Therefore, using a language other than English at home would not be sufficient reason alone for a learner to undertake an NQ ESOL qualification.

Further information can be found in *Learning in 2(+) Languages July 2020* on Education Scotland's website:

https://education.gov.scot/media/y5jfn5gg/learning_in_two_languages.pdf

If a learner is assessed to have developed an appropriate level of proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking in an academic context, they should be entered for a National 5 or Higher English qualification. A learner who has gained an NQ ESOL qualification at a lower level may develop the necessary skills in language and literature to progress to NQ qualifications in English.

Candidates who are successfully following a programme of study in National 5 or Higher English must not be presented for ESOL.