

**Findings from the Review of English for  
Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)  
Skills for Life (Entry Level 1–3  
Speaking and Listening)**



September 2012

Ofqual/12/5202

# Contents

Executive summary .....	2
Introduction.....	2
Background .....	3
Methodology .....	4
Key findings.....	4
Ascentis .....	4
Cambridge ESOL.....	5
EDI.....	5
Pearson.....	5
Conclusion.....	7
Appendix A: Schemes of assessment .....	8

## Executive summary

During 2011 we conducted a standards review of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life Entry level qualifications. We did this because of the risks in the system associated with the delivery of these qualifications.

Although we found that suitable progression is offered between the levels, we also found that some awarding organisations did not fully meet the current qualification criteria requirements that were originally set out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 2004. Specifically, we found that some qualifications did not meet all the level descriptors of the *National Standards for Adult Literacy*.

We told the relevant awarding organisations about these issues and they assured us that they have now put these right.

We have decided to review and revise the ESOL Skills for Life qualification criteria to ensure they fully meet the requirements of both learners and users. Since the ESOL Skills for Life Criteria was put in place by QCA, there have been changes. ESOL Skills for Life are now being used to support immigration applications, which they were not originally designed to do so. Importantly, Ofqual now has our 'General Conditions of Recognition', a comprehensive set of requirements that every recognised awarding organisation and every regulated qualification must meet. In the light of these changes, we decided to review the current regulations to make sure that they are fit for the new purposes of ESOL qualifications.

We will consult on the draft criteria before they are published. Awarding organisations will need to develop new qualifications that meet the new criteria.

Current ESOL Skills for Life qualifications have an operational end date of 31st August 2012. We have agreed an extension until 31st August 2013 to allow time for qualification re-development against new criteria to take place.

## Introduction

We are the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and tests in England, and of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Our work ensures that children, young people and adult learners get the results their work deserves, that standards are maintained and that the qualifications that learners receive are correctly valued, both now and in the future.

Awarding organisations operate within a regulatory framework that is set out in the *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2012). Awarding organisations that offer

ESOL Skills for Life qualifications are also required to comply with *The Criteria for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Qualifications* (Ofqual, 2011). These criteria were extracted without change from the *statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA, 2004) that we withdrew in 2011.

Section 3 of these criteria requires awarding organisations to ensure that these qualifications *meet the requirements of the National Standards for Adult Literacy and demonstrate a clear relationship to the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum*. The core curriculum describes what a learner needs to do to meet the national standards.

We carry out a programme of monitoring activities to assess the performance of awarding organisations against the regulatory criteria. These activities include standards reviews, comparability studies and scrutiny.

In 2011 we conducted an ESOL Skills for Life comparability review to determine whether the Entry level Speaking and Listening qualifications:

- have been correctly levelled, and have a comparable level of demand
- meet the *National Standards for Adult Literacy* and show a clear relationship to the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum
- support adequate progression between levels

## **Background**

The primary use of ESOL Skills for Life (Entry 1–3 Speaking and Listening) qualifications is for applications for UK citizenship or settlement through the UK Border Agency (UKBA). This requirement was introduced in 2004, and since then the number of learners taking an ESOL Speaking and Listening Entry level qualification has increased significantly, from 77,830 learners in 2004–5 to 195,639 learners in 2009–10.

Over recent years we have seen an increase in cases of centre malpractice relating to these qualifications. The volume was such that we wrote two open letters to awarding organisations offering ESOL qualifications clarifying our expectations regarding effective quality-assurance arrangements for assessment and the need for vigilance in this high-risk area. Our requirements regarding malpractice are set out in condition A8 of the *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2012).

Within scope of this study, we reviewed all accredited ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening qualifications at Entry levels 1, 2 and 3 awarded by Ascentis, Cambridge ESOL, City & Guilds, EDI, English Speaking Board (ESB), National Open

College Network (NOCN), Pearson and Trinity College London (TCL). Details of the specific schemes of assessment are set out in Appendix A.

## **Methodology**

The review included a detailed analysis of specifications and assessment materials of all accredited ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) Entry level qualifications. Our subject experts used level descriptors to judge whether each qualification was at, above or below the required level.

The reviewers also mapped qualification coverage against the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum and the level descriptors of the *National Standards for Adult Literacy* to determine the level of coverage.

## **Key findings**

Although suitable progression is offered between the levels, we found that some qualifications did not assess a sufficient range and breadth of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum to allow candidates to meet all of the level descriptors that define the *National Standards for Adult Literacy*.

Some of the qualifications offered by Ascentis, Cambridge ESOL, EDI and Pearson did not meet all of the level descriptors of the *National Standards for Adult Literacy*. These awarding organisations were therefore not compliant with the *General Conditions of Recognition* (2011) in which condition D5.1 states that

An awarding organisation must ensure that any qualification which it makes available, or proposes to make available, complies with any requirement relating to that qualification which is set out in a Regulatory Document.

These awarding organisations have taken action to address these non-compliances. The specific findings and the related actions that awarding organisations have taken are set out below:

### **Ascentis**

At Entry level 2 the qualification did not allow learners to *ask questions to clarify understanding* (level descriptor SC/E2 4).

At Entry level 3 the qualification did not allow learners to *make requests and ask questions to obtain information in familiar and unfamiliar contexts* (level descriptor SC/E3 3).

Ascentis reviewed and revised its assessment material to meet these requirements. This change was implemented in October 2011.

## **Cambridge ESOL**

At Entry level 2 the qualification did not allow learners to *ask questions to clarify understanding* (level descriptor SC/E2 4).

Cambridge ESOL has revised its marking criteria to meet this requirement. This change was implemented in October 2011.

## **EDI**

We found that at Entry level 1 the qualification did not allow learners to *make requests using appropriate terms* or to *ask questions to obtain specific information* (level descriptors SC/E1 2 and SC/E1 3).

At Entry level 2 the qualification did not allow learners to *make requests and ask questions to obtain information in everyday contexts* or to *ask questions to clarify understanding* (level descriptors SC/E2 2 and SC/E2 4).

At Entry level 3 the qualification did not allow learners to *make requests and ask questions to obtain information in familiar and unfamiliar contexts* or to *listen to and respond appropriately to other points of view* (level descriptors SC/E3 3 and LR/E3 6).

EDI revised its assessment materials in January 2012 to meet these requirements.

## **Pearson**

At Entry level 2 the qualification did not allow learners to meet *ask questions to clarify understanding* (level descriptor SC/E2 4).

At Entry level 3 the qualification did not allow learners to meet *make requests and ask questions to obtain information in familiar and unfamiliar contexts* (level descriptor SC/E3 3).

Pearson conducted a review of its assessment materials and revised and replaced these in April 2012.

## **Conclusion**

Although suitable progression is offered between the levels, we were concerned that some awarding organisations were found not to meet the requirements set out in *The Criteria for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Qualifications* (Ofqual, 2011). Specifically, we found that some qualifications did not meet all the level descriptors of the *National Standards for Adult Literacy*.

In light of these findings we issued a number of non-compliances to some awarding organisations. These awarding organisations have now revised their qualifications accordingly.

Current ESOL Skills for Life provision has an operational end date of 31 August 2012. We have agreed an extension until 31st August 2013 to allow time for qualification re-development to take place against new qualification criteria that we are developing.



## Appendix A: Schemes of assessment

Each qualification is made up of one mandatory unit with 60 guided learning hours.

<b>Awarding organisation</b>	<b>Qualification number</b>	<b>Qualification title</b>
Ascentis	1004/884/4	Ascentis Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 2)
Ascentis	1004/885/6	Ascentis Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 3)
Ascentis	1005/720/1	Ascentis Level 1 Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life
Cambridge ESOL	1005/131/4	Cambridge ESOL Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 3)
Cambridge ESOL	10051326	Cambridge ESOL Level 2 Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening)
Cambridge ESOL	10051338	Cambridge ESOL Level 1 Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening)
City & Guilds	10048996	City & Guilds Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 1)
City & Guilds	10049009	City & Guilds Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 2)
City & Guilds	10049010	City & Guilds Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 3)

*Findings from the Review of  
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life*

EDI	50082024	EDI Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening (Entry 1)
EDI	50082036	EDI Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening (Entry 2)
EDI	5008205X	EDI Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening (Entry 3)
ESB	10036179	ESB Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 1)
ESB	10036180	ESB Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 2)
ESB	10036192	ESB Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 3)
NOCN	50115017	NOCN Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening (Entry 1)
NOCN	50115029	NOCN Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening (Entry 2)
NOCN	50115030	NOCN Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening (Entry 3)
Pearson	10050619	Edexcel Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 1)
Pearson	10050620	Edexcel Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 2)

*Findings from the Review of  
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life*

Pearson	10050632	Edexcel Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 3)
TCL	10045132	TCL Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 1)
TCL	10045144	TCL Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 2)
TCL	10045156	TCL Entry Level Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening) (Entry 3)

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation	
Spring Place	2nd Floor
Coventry Business Park	Glendinning House
Herald Avenue	6 Murray Street
Coventry CV5 6UB	Belfast BT1 6DN

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346