GCSE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Non-examination Assessment: Spoken Language
Report on the Examination

General comments

This was the first year of the Spoken Language endorsement, which forms a part of the reformed English Language GCSE (8700). In many ways this first year was hugely successful, and the Principal Verifier and his team thank the majority of centres who recorded samples and made them available for verification, all with a minimum of fuss. Above all it was reassuring to see that, although Speaking and Listening has been made into an endorsement, it obviously remains a vital part of the English curriculum. It was a real pleasure to see so many students talking with expertise on a wide range of topics, frequently with smiles on their faces, suggesting they were enjoying the chance to express their ideas.

Recording the sample

There was some trepidation on the part of teachers at the start of this new process as to how feasible it would be to make visual recordings of students, to store and label these recordings, and then to send them to be verified. In the event, the vast majority of centres did this without any real problems. Centres are reminded of the following points:

- Unless special circumstances are reported to AQA before the examination, student performances must be visible as well as audible.
- When checking sound quality you should play the performances on a computer which was not the one involved in the recording. This will allow you to check whether others will be able to see and hear them. For full details of technical requirements please check the [Instructions for conducting and recording audio-visual evidence for the Spoken Language Endorsement](#) which are available on the website
- Please label individual files in a way which includes candidate names and the level awarded. These two pieces of information, placed together, are vital for the verifier.

Sending the sample

Samples should be sent by first class post, not to be signed for. Taping the memory stick to a piece of card is a good way to ensure it is not lost in the mechanised postal system.

Some centres used DVDs. A single DVD with the whole sample is acceptable, but multiple DVDs are not helpful.

Tasks

As with all work that is teacher assessed, suitable tasks/topics lead to best practice and performance. Verifiers saw many examples of students in a single centre selecting their own topics from a whole range of areas including politics, social behaviours, culture, philosophy, the environment, health etc. At all levels of ability these topics, supported by helpful questioning (including from the teacher), led to engaging work.

Much less successful was a single task done by a whole class, or even in a few cases by a whole centre. The material seemed stale, the enthusiasm muted, and not surprisingly the audience seemed less than interested.

Centres which use literature, especially GCSE English Literature set texts, as a source for presentations should consider whether students' abilities, and the criteria requirements, are best shown in such work. It is especially hard to ask meaningful, challenging and open questions to a

student about a poem that they have just 'gone through' in class, or about a theme that they have repeated from class notes.

Assessment

Most centres were accurate enough in their assessments for their levels to be verified. There was some evidence, though, of variable accuracy of assessment within a centre. Some form of internal standardising within a centre must take place.

In some centres there was generosity at the Distinction/Merit and the Merit/Pass boundaries. Centres are reminded that *all* the criteria for each level must be met if the level is to be awarded. It is therefore highly unlikely, for example, that a Distinction can be awarded to a very short presentation (organises and structures his or her presentation using an effective range of strategies), or one on a very straightforward topic (expresses sophisticated ideas), or one with minimal questions (listens to questions/feedback, responds perceptively and if appropriate elaborates).

One particular problem noted by verifiers was the over-reliance on written scripts. All presenters have scripts, but a head down, monotone reading of a full speech cannot meet the needs of the audience and so at best can only be a Pass. Teachers should also be aware that, where a student substantially relies on written material, it is vital that they are then asked a range of challenging questions which make them present in a different way.

Questions are a required part of the overall presentation. They should arise out of what has been said in the first part of the presentation, rather than being pre-scripted.

Further Support

Each year some centres will receive a visit from an AQA verifier to help them with their future submissions. Centres will be informed of these visits in the autumn and should have available for review the recordings they made in the previous year.

Centres are reminded that the standardising examples are an inter-board resource. There are no plans at this stage to issue any more examples.

Centres can access all necessary information about this endorsement from the Spoken Language Endorsement page on the AQA website

Conclusion

This was a new system for teachers and verifiers so it is pleasing to note how well teachers and their students responded to the challenges. It would be helpful if all teachers of the 8700 specification could be given access to this report.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.