



GCSE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

8700/C: Spoken Language Endorsement
Report on the Examination

8700
June 2019

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Introduction

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. It was reassuring to see that Speaking and Listening remains an important part of the English curriculum, contributing to the wider subject by encouraging students to research real facts rather than invented ones, and to argue with passion and fluency about issues which matter to them and to the society they live in.

In many cases it was a real pleasure to see students talking with enthusiasm and expertise on a wide range of topics. Their use of rhetorical skills and their engagement with their audiences suggest that English can remain a subject in which young people can explore ideas and express them creatively.

A number of topics were frequently explored – this is not a criticism but an acknowledgement that 16 year olds are aware of things that are important. They frequently spoke about topics from real experience rather than from political distance and expediency, which made the talks all the more impressive.

Adults in FE classes also often spoke about social issues with the insights gained from practical experience in work.

Here are some of the most popular issues covered:

- *Mental Health* – often from a highly personal perspective
- *Knife Crime* – again with the experience of those who actually know about its impact
- *LGBT issues* – almost always with subtle understanding of the issues of sexual and social identity
- *Their own education* – their desire for more creativity and less constraint shone through here
- *Refugees and immigration* – often with specific and sometimes personal reference to Windrush/ Grenfell and other distressing stories
- *Work related issues* – especially from adults working in the NHS
- *More abstract topics* – there were more of these this year, some with a scientific basis, some with a social basis (for example the phenomenon of Fandom), some more philosophical (such as the nature of happiness and well-being)
- *Aspects of social media use* – when these were highly specific and making clear and persuasive points

At all levels of ability these topics, supported by helpful questioning (including from the teacher), led to engaging work. The teacher's role is to stretch students to the limit of their ability, to let them show how well they can do. Further questions, based on an initial response are always helpful. Questions should not be a cursory add-on. They are a vital part of the process and can sometimes take as long as the presentation itself.

Task Setting

As implied above, the best tasks are individually chosen through personal interest and research. Sometimes less able students need help, and maybe even a suggested task, but routine topics such as footballers' pay rarely allow students to move beyond Pass level.

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

Centres which use Literature, especially GCSE 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', or about a theme that they have replayed from class notes.

One or two centres are still submitting work from students working in groups. This makes it virtually impossible for individuals to be assessed on extended contributions.

Assessment

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

In some centres there was some 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*)

The issue of reading scripts was less prominent this year, with notes often used as support, but students showing awareness that they must at the same time engage with their audience – in the cases that we see filmed, the audience is both in the room and beyond the camera. A head down, monotone reading of a full speech cannot even achieve *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.

Some centres could look again at the criteria and standardising films at Pass before awarding NC. EAL students in particular can meet the criteria for Pass when they show sufficient evidence of the use of Spoken Standard English and respond to questions.

Recording the sample

The vast majority of centres submitted their recorded samples without any problems. The following points are a reminder for those whose submission this time was not as clear as it should be.

- Please label files in a way which included student names and the level awarded. These two pieces of information, placed together, are vital for the verifier.
- Unless special circumstances are reported to AQA before the examination, then student performances must be visible and 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 hear it.

Sending the sample

Samples should be sent by first class post, not to be signed for. Attaching a label to the USB memory stick allows it to be stored easily.

Centres are reminded that they must send the right number of students at each level, depending of course on the total entry and the numbers awarded at each level.

Centres should submit their USBs by the deadline date, in this case 7th May.

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 recordings made in the previous year should be available to be reviewed.

Centres are reminded that the standardising examples are an inter-board resource. There are no plans at this stage to issue any more examples. All necessary information about this endorsement can be obtained from the [Spoken language endorsement page](#) of the AQA website.

Conclusion

It is pleasing to note how well, in most cases, teachers and their students are responding to the challenges of this component.

It would be helpful if all teachers of the 8700 specification could be given access to this report.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.