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# GCSE

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

8700/C Spoken Language  
Report on the Examination

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8700/C  
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## Introduction

The verifying panel would like to offer their thanks and appreciation to all those teachers who ensured that students were supported effectively in completing this important element of the GCSE English Language programme. The November series has a unique quality in that a large proportion of students are those who have come to study in the UK and for whom English is not their first language. We are always impressed at the progress they have made in their vocabulary and fluency and it is always fascinating to hear of their backgrounds and journeys. Alongside this cohort, we are also privileged to hear from many mature students following college courses whose life experiences, both academic and professional, are rich and varied and whose topic choices and perspectives are usefully informed by these.

The nature of the cohort does bring its own challenges in relation to meeting the expectations of the spoken language endorsement in that the choice of topic/task often starts and ends with their experience without proper consideration of whether that will allow them to present to their advantage. Some students presented an account of their journey to Britain, their life story, a tourist type guide to their home country or their observations on how life in Britain is different. Such topics did not readily permit them to engage with challenging or sophisticated ideas, and so could only be verified at Pass level. Where students were encouraged to be more specific, for example considering educational experiences and using a comparative model requiring the expression of opinion, the necessary depth of detail was seen and achievement stronger.

These students will surely have their own opinions and experiences of the more typical range of topics, for example, social media and climate change, to name the most frequent topics seen this series. The full independence in choice of topic is central to this component. Students may well benefit from being able to concentrate on a specific issue related to society with the added benefit of their own wider experience to provide exemplification and influence their audience.

## Assessment

Verifiers were able to support the application of the standard in the majority of centre samples seen. Where centre assessments were not fully supported, 3 key aspects of the criteria either singly or in combination were seen to be significant: ideas and their development, manner of delivery and engagement with the audience, and questioning. On occasion, the samples submitted suggested that not all centres are undertaking the required internal standardising informed by the published standard. Centres are reminded that the standardising examples are an inter-board resource and should be referenced before assessing their students.

There are instances where the requirement in the criteria to employ 'spoken Standard English' was perhaps not fully understood leading to under-awarding. Where a candidate speaks clearly and intelligibly using language which is appropriate, this criterion is fulfilled, and occasional lapses in grammar and pronunciation are acceptable especially where English is a second or even third language.

It is to be reiterated that pair and group work or one-to-one interviews are inappropriate for this component; all students must give an extended individual presentation. Where this is challenging for particular students, extended discussion can serve as a support, but there should always be a prepared opening statement from the student to meet the requirement of planning and research

embedded in the specification. This approach is effectively modelled in the Pass level recordings for Josh and Holly in the standardising materials.

## **Topics and Tasks**

The consequence of the observed narrow task range was that there were a significant number of recordings where the skill potential shown by students was not effectively realised against the criteria. Frequently, this was due to the lack of development of ideas and issues arising from the topic and experience they were exploring and the absence of a clear purpose for their presentation. Many were focused on sharing information, often against a long list of categories such that none were fully explored, which is inevitably going to limit the challenge and depth of their talk. For example, where a hobby, passion or experience are in focus, understanding how to make this significant for the audience is an important first stage in the preparation of the presentation which is intended to showcase ideas and influence thinking.

Centres are reminded of the importance at the required teacher approval phase, of referencing the wider frame discussed in section 2 of the new AQA NEA Guidance document to encourage students to identify issues arising from their chosen interest area in order to show proper research and ambition in their talks. It is also the case that the absence of an externally focused purpose often impinges on the clarity of structure and choices of strategies to engage their audience through the choice of examples and vocabulary used. For example, where a talk on 'Nigeria', is focused on detailing social/cultural issues such as transport, cultural practices and politics, or corruption, poverty and inequality, ideas and issues can be addressed on an appropriately challenging or sophisticated level with an inevitably positive impact on vocabulary and on the challenge in subsequent questioning.

It is appropriate to reiterate the advice given in the June report in relation to topics and tasks. Knowledge and information are not the same as ideas or issues and this is often where disagreement in assessment at higher levels arose. For students to match the 'challenging' and 'sophisticated' descriptors, they need to show that they can use information effectively to inform and shape their ideas around a topic, that they can explore, interrogate an issue and present interpretations and solutions. That topic needs to offer scope for such independent enquiry and go beyond the reporting of personal experience to offer relevance to a wider audience through objective exploration. It necessarily follows that talks targeting Merit or Distinction do need to be substantial, to show depth of detail and reasoning.

## **Questioning**

Under-achievement was also seen to be consequent to the sometimes seen absence of challenge in the questions asked of students where hints of important ideas had been raised within the presentation. Where scope existed for teachers to encourage extension of the ideas raised to allow for developed, evaluative and reasoned answers, opportunities to extend the students' achievement were often frustratingly missed with the questioning reverting to the obvious and straightforward thereby denying students the opportunity to fully demonstrate their expert knowledge and thinking around the chosen topic. Closed questions were similarly limiting. Asking meaningful questions is addressed in section 5 of the AQA NEA Guidance document and is an

important aspect of students' cognitive development of benefit to all English programmes and to cross-curricular learning.

It must also be said that there were many examples where purposeful, challenging and extended questioning was seen with both students and teachers involved, particularly where Merit and Distinction levels were being awarded. The students who were presenting showed confidence and pride in their responses, clearly appreciating the interest being shown in their ideas and opinions.

The best and most meaningful questioning is progressive, the answers given by the candidate prompt the next enquiry thus building a chain of responses where detail is expanded and opinions challenged. This will take time, allowed for in the suggested 10 minute limit for an individual presentation, but it is both purposeful and rewarding in that it recognises the expertise and ideas of the student through genuine listening as would happen in a real discussion. These exchanges can often serve to secure a higher-level achievement as indicated by the response criteria, where the quality of answers moves from 'straightforward' through 'formally with detail' to 'elaborated' and 'perceptive'. This is particularly important where, as was again frequent this series, students are overly reliant on written scripts or PowerPoint slides and therefore do not show effective engagement with their audience in their presentation.

The effort invested in the preparation of the many PowerPoints seen was clearly evident such that it is clear that students will benefit from being reminded that it is the substance of their talk and the way they deliver that which matters; it is their performance which is assessed. Understanding how to use visual aids and notes merits consideration in order that the criteria relating to engagement with the audience is given proper attention. The presentation by Laura in the standardising materials offers a good example of how both of these aspects can be managed effectively.

### **Engagement and Audience**

It is interesting to note that, in this series, the majority of students were seen presenting to a teacher with no wider audience present, which again affects motivation to employ the range of engagement strategies so crucial to a successful presentation. Whilst it is accepted that numbers may be small for live work in this series, these students are very likely to be part of a class even if others are carrying forward their awards. It is important that students are given a proper opportunity to perform in line with the rubric and ethos of the endorsement and, as has been mentioned in previous reports, the act of being an audience, listening and processing the information and ideas and devising meaningful questions, supports the development of critical skills for all involved. Many presentations seen were of distinct interest and significance, be it personal, social or global, and were definitely deserving of a wider audience.

The AQA NEA Guidance document section 3, explores what it means to 'engage' both as a speaker and a listener and that this goes beyond the non-verbal aspects of talk to include the structure, verbal, visual and influential content of a presentation. Success in this stems from security of purpose, an agenda for talk based on consideration of 'why it matters', which then becomes the arc under which the presentation can be developed. This is a fundamental stage in the preparation for the endorsement and should form part of the teacher approval process such that students are primed to fulfil their potential.

## **Procedure**

Many entries for the November series are ‘carry forward’ and it is helpful for teachers to be able to quickly identify those students who are not eligible for this. The link below can assist in this:

[AQA | Exams admin | Non-exam assessment \(NEA\) | Carry forward of marks](#)

Where a candidate is re-sitting GCSE English Language and is therefore able to carry forward their endorsement grade, if that grade is NC – Not classified – it is to be hoped that they may be given another opportunity by completing a new presentation such that they may showcase their progress.

If a student is not carrying forward their level but submitting a new performance, then this must be sent to AQA for verification in accordance with the published deadline in order that students are not disadvantaged.

## **Further support**

Centres are reminded that they can access all necessary information about this endorsement from the AQA website where the new AQA NEA Guidance document, published in September this year, can be found. This aims to support teachers in all aspects of the endorsement, offering practical suggestions and classroom activities aimed at securing positive learning and assessment outcomes.

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/gcse/english-language-8700/assess/non-exam-assessment-guide-spoken-language-endorsement>

Where concerns have been identified affecting verification of a centre’s awards, letters explaining the issues found will be sent to centres in order to support review of practice to allow for future submissions to be fully verified.

## **Conclusion**

Once again, the panel would like to offer their thanks for the commitment and support shown to students in their work for this endorsement.

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.