

GCSE English Language: Decisions on Requirements and Guidance



In June 2015 we published a consultation about possible changes to the rules and guidance for reformed GCSEs (graded 9 to 1) in English language¹. The proposals focused on the arrangements for assessing, marking and certificating the spoken language aspect of the new qualification.

The consultation set out revised requirements and guidance that we proposed should apply to all reformed GCSEs in English language, and followed on from our earlier policy consultations for this subject.²

We have reviewed the responses to our June 2015 consultation and are now announcing our decisions. We are also publishing a more detailed analysis of the responses alongside this document.³

Requirements and guidance

We proposed that the Conditions and requirements should provide for spoken language to be assessed other than by exam (i.e. by non-exam assessment) and that, in line with the subject content, a student's ability to make a presentation in a formal setting, to listen and respond to spoken language from an audience, and to use standard English effectively in speeches and presentations should be assessed.

We proposed that students should be assessed using the common criteria developed in conjunction with the exam boards and tested in a trial involving a range of schools to ensure that they could be applied accurately and consistently.

We proposed that exam boards must require from each school a statement confirming it has taken reasonable steps to make sure that each of its students has completed the spoken language assessment.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-english-language

² <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141110161323/http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/gcse-reform-june-2013/>

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-english-language-assessment-of-spoken-language-skills

³ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-english-language

We proposed that each school should make an audiovisual recording of a sample of its students taking their spoken language assessments to enable exam boards to monitor how well schools were applying the criteria for the three grades.

We proposed requirements around marking and certificate arrangements.

We received 51 responses to the consultation. Respondents raised a number of issues about the assessment arrangements. In particular, they raised concerns that the formality of the assessment and the size and nature of the audience could disadvantage some students. We deliberately built into our draft guidance on presentation formats and audience size and composition the flexibility to accommodate different approaches. We do not consider it appropriate to amend the guidance on presentation formats and audience size and we will introduce the guidance as proposed.

Many respondents raised concerns and questions about the recording of students taking the spoken language assessment. A number of respondents mistakenly thought that all students (rather than a sample) would have to be recorded. Those who recognised that we had proposed a sampling approach asked for clarification on how the sample would be constructed.

We have amended our guidance on the way an exam board should monitor schools' marking. We have set out our expectation that an exam board will give guidance to schools on how their sample is constructed. We suggest that the guidance will address how the sample will enable the exam board to identify whether a school is correctly applying the criteria for Pass, Merit and Distinction. As we do not intend that all students should be recorded, the concerns raised by some respondents about the inappropriateness of recording some students for safeguarding or cultural reasons should reduce.

Some of the exam boards that responded to the consultation raised concerns that the provision in the draft Conditions for exam boards, as well as schools, to mark the spoken language assessment would lead schools to believe that they could opt for exam board marking. This is not the intention behind the provision and we accept that for reasons of costs and manageability, the spoken language assessment will be conducted and marked by schools. Nevertheless, it is possible that exam board marking might, exceptionally, be appropriate, for example following a finding of malpractice in a school's conduct and marking of the assessment, an exam board might not be confident in a school conducting and marking the assessment. We do not therefore intend to amend our Condition on marking.

We received some comments on the criteria for Pass, Merit and Distinction. These criteria have been finalised following a trial by exam boards of their use in 28 schools. We recognise that teachers will have to exercise judgement when assessing their

students, and in light of the trial we believe that the criteria will enable them to do so effectively. We will adopt the criteria on which we consulted, but we will keep them under review.

We were asked to confirm whether students will be able to use prompt cards, notes and presentation slides when making their presentation. None of our proposals would prohibit this.

Clarification about the use of British Sign Language and sign-supported language in the spoken language assessment was sought. As British Sign Language is a language in its own right (that is, not English), we have used the powers we have from the Equality Act 2010 to specify that BSL should not be used as a reasonable adjustment when the use of English language is being assessed. Sign-supported language uses the vocabulary and word order of English. We have not made a specification about its use, so an exam board may decide to allow the use of sign supported English as a reasonable adjustment, including when the use of English is being assessed. We keep under review the use of reasonable adjustments and we will continue to consider the approaches to the use of both British Sign Language and sign-supported language.

A number of issues were raised about the accessibility of the spoken language assessment to disabled students and those with specific communication needs. Three groups that represent the interests of these students responded to the consultation. They have offered to meet with the exam boards to consider how the assessment might be managed so as to enable the spoken language skills of all students to be assessed properly and fairly. We have asked the exam boards to arrange such a meeting.

The responses to the consultation have not caused us to change our proposed requirements on centre statements or certificates.

Other issues

Many of the responses to the consultation revisited issues on which we have previously consulted and announced our decisions, such as the use of two grades to report the outcomes of GCSE English language – one for the written exams and one for the spoken language assessment. We were not seeking views on this approach in this consultation and our earlier decision on this stands.

Accreditation of GCSE English language qualifications

We noted that our proposals had the effect of changing the accreditation criteria for GCSE English language qualifications that we have already accredited. We proposed that we should not require exam boards to submit their existing qualifications for re-

accreditation – but rather that existing qualifications would need to comply with our new rules. Exam boards' specifications and assessment strategies for these qualifications would have to be revised to that effect.

Respondents largely supported this approach.

We have therefore decided to confirm this proposal, and we will publish a formal determination under section 140(8) of the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to give effect to that decision.

Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published revised versions of *Subject Level Conditions and Requirements*⁴ and *Subject Level Guidance*⁵ for GCSE English language.

New English language GCSEs will be taught in schools from September 2015.

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-english-language

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-english-language