

# **Consultation on the Removal of Speaking and Listening Assessment from GCSE English and GCSE English Language**



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## **Introduction**

This consultation is about GCSE English and GCSE English language. We want to make changes to the way in which the speaking and listening component of the qualification contributes to a student's overall result, and the way in which achievement in speaking and listening is reported.

We are proposing that performance in speaking and listening will no longer contribute to the overall mark and grade achieved by a student. Instead, results will be calculated from the other component parts of the qualification.

If these proposals are implemented, then from 2014 students would achieve GCSE grades calculated without reference to their speaking and listening performance. Speaking and listening skills would continue to be assessed as they are now, but students' performance in speaking and listening would be assessed and reported separately – and would be shown as an endorsement on students' GCSE certificates.

For teachers, the proposed change would not require any changes to the way speaking and listening is taught or assessed. For candidates and other users of the qualification, this arrangement would provide more detail of individual achievement, as individual GCSE certificates would show the GCSE grade and the results of the speaking and listening assessment separately.

For schools, it would mean that the grade used for accountability purposes would not include the speaking and listening component of the qualification. The reason we are proposing this change is to make the qualifications more robust, and more resistant to pressure from school accountability systems.

Overall results in these qualifications will fall if these changes are implemented without any further action on our part, because students generally do better in speaking and listening than in the rest of the qualification. The proportion of candidates attaining grades A\*–C would drop noticeably. We are proposing to use a comparable outcomes approach to setting standards, to smooth the transition and to ensure like-for-like results. We believe that to be the most ethical and the fairest approach.

The changes we are now proposing are our last planned actions to strengthen these qualifications pending their replacement with new qualifications in due course. However, we will keep them under review and consider further actions if necessary, to ensure fair outcomes and protect standards.

## **Background**

### **The current qualifications**

GCSE English and GCSE English language were new qualifications introduced for teaching from September 2010. Students can choose between English, which covers the National Curriculum Programme of Study for English, and English language, which has to be taken alongside English literature to cover the Programme of Study. Previously, students had only one option – English, taken with or without English literature.

The previous GCSE English qualification comprised 40 per cent coursework and 60 per cent written papers. The new English/English language qualifications have 60 per cent controlled assessment (20 per cent speaking and listening, and 40 per cent reading and writing) and 40 per cent written papers.

### **The case for change**

GCSE English and English language results are extremely important to students. They are also important to schools, as results in these subjects are central to how schools are judged. In practice, these new qualifications have proved to be poorly designed in a number of ways. More detail is available in our August and November 2012 reports<sup>1</sup>.

We thought it essential to strengthen these qualifications, because otherwise there is a real risk that they will not result in fair outcomes. We required exam boards to postpone grading the January 2013 units until summer 2013, and we have made the qualifications linear (rather than modular) from summer 2014. Student achievement in these GCSEs is assessed predominantly by controlled assessment, and to strengthen those arrangements immediately, we tightened the moderation tolerances<sup>2</sup> for November 2012 onwards.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/news/poor-design-gcse-english-exam-grade-variations/](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/news/poor-design-gcse-english-exam-grade-variations/)

<sup>2</sup> The tolerance is the allowed variation between the teachers' marks and the moderator's marks for a school. If teachers' marking is within tolerance, their marks are not adjusted. If teachers' marking is outside tolerance, then the exam board is likely to adjust their marks.

In our November 2012 report, we expressed particular concerns about the effectiveness of the moderation of controlled assessment in the speaking and listening component, the subject of this consultation.

Speaking and listening assessments are ephemeral. Only a third of schools are visited by exam board moderators in any academic year. Exam boards have put in place some additional controls to identify schools and colleges where marking of speaking and listening appears to be out of line with performances in other units, but this can only be done after results have been issued.

We do not believe that the current arrangements for speaking and listening can produce fair outcomes for students overall. We have considered with exam boards whether more enhanced moderation or other physical controls (such as recording assessments) would ensure valid and manageable assessment of speaking and listening, but there are no practical arrangements that we consider we can make to ensure assessment of speaking and listening is sufficiently resilient. Therefore, we are proposing a different approach – to remove speaking and listening from the pressures of the accountability measures.

## **About this consultation**

We regulate GCSE English and GCSE English language qualifications in England, so this consultation covers England only. The Welsh Government regulates GCSE English language in Wales (GCSE English is not available in Wales) and has already made changes to the GCSE English language qualification being taught in Wales from September 2012. The Northern Ireland regulator, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), is currently reviewing the GCSEs and GCEs offered there. The rest of this document relates to England only, though we will keep the regulators in other parts of the UK informed about our plans.

We have carried out an equality analysis of these proposals, which is published separately.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-04-25-equality-analysis-speaking-and-listening-changes.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-04-25-equality-analysis-speaking-and-listening-changes.pdf)

The Government has proposed new GCSEs and it is intended that new GCSEs in English language will be taught from September 2015 onwards. But we need to strengthen further the current qualifications before new GCSEs are introduced. Our aims are to increase confidence in controlled assessment results and to increase validity of GCSE English and English language results. We are proposing to remove the speaking and listening component from the results calculations, so that:

- the speaking and listening component is reported separately on the GCSE certificate;
- the overall grade is calculated using only marks from the written papers and reading/writing controlled assessment units;
- the remaining units are re-weighted so that the qualification comprises 40 per cent reading/writing controlled assessment and 60 per cent written papers.

We do not envisage that these changes will require any material changes to what is to be taught for the current GCSEs. In particular, these changes do not imply any downgrading of speaking and listening skills. They remain part of the current Key Stage 4 National Curriculum. The proposed changes reflect the difficulty of assessing these skills securely under the current model.

We will review the responses to this consultation before making a final decision and we will implement any changes by imposing a new General Condition on exam boards offering these qualifications.

### **Timing of the changes**

These changes, if implemented, do not require changes to teaching or assessment. They change only the way the final results in each qualification are calculated. We propose that these changes are introduced for summer 2014, when students who are currently in the first year of a two-year course will take their assessments. We think it important that these qualifications are made sufficiently resilient as quickly as possible.

### **Impact on results**

Changing the weightings of the units will have an impact on how well individual students do relative to one another. Removing speaking and listening marks from the overall GCSE grade will have a greater effect on those students who might have performed better on one unit than on others. For example, students who would have gained a particular grade because of a strong performance in speaking and listening may achieve a lower grade. Conversely, students who would not have performed

well in speaking and listening may achieve higher grades, given that those grades will be based solely on the reading/writing controlled assessment and the written papers. This is likely to mean that the overall rank order of students will be slightly different from what it would have been. So even if the overall results look similar, it may be that there is greater variation in individual schools' results.

We and the exam boards have modelled the likely effect on results overall if these changes go ahead. We estimate that removing speaking and listening from the qualification would mean a drop of between 4 and 10 percentage points in the proportion of students achieving grades A\*–C, depending on the specification. The effect is likely to be greatest at the C/D borderline.

For these reasons we are proposing to use a comparable outcomes approach to setting standards in these revised GCSEs. Modelling by exam boards suggests that this might mean grade boundaries for grades A and C on the remaining units would have to be set 1 or 2 marks lower than would otherwise be the case, in order to achieve comparable outcomes, year on year.

We have set out each of our proposals in more detail in the next section, and we want to hear what you think about them. Consultation questions, and information about how to respond, are set out at the end of the document.

## **Our proposals**

### **Proposal 1: add a requirement for GCSE English and GCSE English language that the marks for speaking and listening no longer count towards the overall grade**

Currently the subject criteria for GCSE English and GCSE English language state that 20 per cent of the overall assessment must require learners to demonstrate their ability in speaking and listening. All exam boards do this by controlled assessment. We are proposing to change those requirements so that marks for speaking and listening no longer count towards the overall grade.

### **Proposal 2: re-weight the remaining components**

The current subject criteria specify that 40 per cent of the assessment should be external (set and marked by the exam board) and 60 per cent should be by controlled assessment (set by the exam board and marked by the teacher). If the speaking and listening marks no longer contribute to the overall grade, the weightings for the remaining units must change.

There are several options for re-weighting the assessment. These are set out in the table below.

<b>Option</b>	<b>Weighting of written papers</b>	<b>Weighting of controlled assessment</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>1</b>	60%	40%	This option would mean scaling up the marks for the written papers, and leaving the marks for reading/writing controlled assessment unchanged. It would return the proportion of internal assessment to the level it was with the previous GCSE.
<b>2</b>	50%	50%	This option would mean scaling up the marks for the written papers <b>and</b> for the reading/writing controlled assessment.
<b>3</b>	40%	60%	This option would preserve the current weightings and would mean that the marks for the reading/writing controlled assessment would be



			scaled up, and marks for written papers would be unchanged.
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Our proposal is to adopt option 1 from the above options. We believe this is the most appropriate option to achieve our aims to increase confidence in controlled assessment results and to increase validity of GCSE English and English language results. Written exams are more resilient to pressures on schools from accountability measures and therefore we are proposing to adopt the highest weighting for the written papers.

### **Proposal 3: add a requirement for exam boards to report speaking and listening achievement separately on the GCSE certificate**

Between 1988 and 1993, assessment of speaking and listening in English was through a separate 'oral communication' element, which was assessed by teachers on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest). This oral communication grade was reported separately on the student's certificate. Students had to achieve at least a grade 5 to be awarded a GCSE grade, and at least a GCSE pass to be awarded their oral communication grade. From 1994 onwards, speaking and listening became a part of the GCSE, with marks for speaking and listening contributing to the overall grade.

Speaking and listening is a requirement of the National Curriculum Programme of Study for English. This means that maintained schools in England are required to teach the skills of speaking and listening. We are not proposing that schools change their teaching as a result of these changes to the way the GCSE grade is calculated.

We are proposing to remove the speaking and listening marks from the overall qualification and instead to require exam boards to report speaking and listening achievement separately on the certificate, on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest, and ungraded below this). This is the same grading scale that was used when oral communication was reported separately from GCSE English grades 20 years ago.

We are **not** proposing to make achievement in speaking and listening a hurdle to GCSE achievement, so we are **not** proposing that students should have to achieve at least a grade 5 in speaking and listening to be awarded their GCSE grade. We have concerns about the reliability of the marks for speaking and listening because of the pressure on these qualifications. Making assessment of speaking and listening a hurdle would put the assessment under even greater pressure. We also believe that making speaking and listening a hurdle would disproportionately affect certain groups

of students and we are particularly keen to hear views on this aspect of these proposals.

We are not proposing to make changes to the current access arrangements, which allow students to be given an exemption from speaking and listening as a last resort if no other reasonable adjustments are available. Currently, where exemptions are used this is indicated on the certificate. If we remove speaking and listening from the overall grade and report it separately, then it would not be reported for students who had been granted an exemption.

#### **Proposal 4: to adopt proposals 1, 2 and 3 for first certification in summer 2014**

We believe the changes outlined in proposals 1, 2 and 3 can be put in place without changing the written papers or the reading/writing controlled assessment tasks. We are not proposing that exam boards change their written papers or their controlled assessment tasks, but that they should simply scale up the marks for the written papers. Nor are we proposing that schools alter the amount of time spent teaching particular aspects of the curriculum.

It is therefore possible to put in place the changes for those students entering for the qualification in summer 2014 and this is what we propose to do. This would mean those students currently in Year 10 expecting to take their qualification at the end of a two-year course (in summer 2014) would have this new assessment structure.

#### **Proposal 5: to use the comparable outcomes approach when awarding the first of these revised qualifications**

Since 2009, we have adopted a comparable outcomes approach when setting grade standards in new qualifications. This approach means that if the cohort of students taking the qualification is similar in terms of ability, then we would expect the outcomes – the proportions of students achieving each grade – to be similar. The aim of this approach is to minimise any advantage or disadvantage for students who are the first to sit a new qualification, given the difficulty of maintaining standards through a period of change.

In summer 2014, GCSEs in England, including English and English language, will become linear, so students must take all the assessment at the end of the course. Removing speaking and listening marks from the overall qualification would be a further change to these qualifications.

We are proposing to use the comparable outcomes approach for GCSE English and English language in the first awards of these revised qualifications without speaking and listening.

## **Next steps**

We will take a decision on basis of the responses to this consultation. If we decide to make the changes as set out in this document we will implement these through a new General Condition. We are aiming to publish details of our decision before the end of July 2013, so that schools and colleges can prepare for the new academic year. This will also allow time for exam boards to make the necessary changes to their qualifications.

For the purposes of this consultation, the following draft General Condition is based on our preferred option from the proposals set out above. This draft General Condition will be reviewed depending on feedback received.

### **Draft General Condition X**

X.1 For the purposes of assessment of GCSE qualifications in English and/or English language for award of qualifications in 2014, 2015 and 2016, paragraphs 11 and 12 of the GCSE Subject Criteria for English ('English Criteria') and paragraphs 13 and 14 of the GCSE Subject Criteria for English language ('English language Criteria') shall be revised as follows:

X1.1 Paragraph 11 of the English Criteria and paragraph 13 of the English language Criteria are revised to make the weighting for the speaking and listening assessment objective 0 per cent and the weighting for the remaining assessment objectives shall be adjusted in line with changes to the weighting of internal and external assessments.

X1.2 Paragraph 12 of the English Criteria and paragraph 14 of the of the English language Criteria are revoked and replaced with:

"GCSE specifications in [English language/English] must allocate a weighting of 60 per cent to external assessment and a weighting of 40 per cent to controlled assessment in the overall scheme of assessment."

X.2 An awarding organisation must not include marks for speaking and listening when determining a Learner's grade in GCSE English or English language.

X.3 An awarding organisation must report speaking and listening achievement separately on the GCSE certificate for English/English language in line with Ofqual's published requirements [to be developed in line with proposal 3].

## **Consultation questions**

This consultation is about proposed changes to GCSE English and English language for use in England.

We would like to hear what you think about our proposals so that we can put in place the appropriate changes to these qualifications.

We will publish the evaluation of responses to the consultation in summer 2013. In order for us to evaluate responses properly, we need to understand who is responding and in what capacity, so we are asking all respondents to complete our information page.

The evaluation will only consider those responses where the information page has been completed.

Please note that if you do not want any part of your response to this consultation to be published you must state clearly that your response is confidential.

The deadline for responses to this consultation is Friday 7th June 2013.

### **How to respond to this consultation**

Please respond to the consultation questions using one of these methods.

- Complete the online response form at <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/speaking-and-listening/respond/> .
- Email your response to [consultations@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:consultations@ofqual.gov.uk) – please include the consultation title in the subject line of the email.
- Post your response to GCSE English consultation, Ofqual, Spring Place, Coventry Business Park, Herald Avenue, Coventry, CV5 6UB.

## **Information pages: your details**

**Your name\*** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your organisation's name\*** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Organisation\***

- Awarding organisation for 14 to 19 general qualifications
- Awarding organisation for 14 to 19 vocational qualifications
- Awarding organisation for vocational and/or professional qualifications
- Awarding organisation for other kinds of qualifications
- School/college
- Private training provider
- Higher education institute
- Student
- Parent/carer
- Employer
- Other representative group/interest group
- Government body/organisation (national and local)
- Other (including general public)

### **School/college type**

- Academy and/or free school
- Comprehensive
- State selective
- Independent
- Special school

- Further education
- Sixth form
- None of the above (please state what) \_\_\_\_\_

**How many staff does your organisation employ (full or part time)?**

- Fewer than 50
- 50 to 249
- 250 or more

**Representative group/interest group type**

- Group of awarding organisations
- Union
- Sector skills council
- Employer/business representative group
- Equality group
- Other voluntary or community group
- None of the above

**Representative group/interest group name\*\***

\_\_\_\_\_

**Nation\***

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Other EU country (please state which) \_\_\_\_\_

Non-EU country (please state which) \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address\*** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did you find out about this consultation?**

Our newsletters or other communications

Via internet search

From our website

Via another organisation (please state which) \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please state how) \_\_\_\_\_

**May we contact you for more information?**

Yes

No

**Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?**

Yes

No

**We want to write clearly, directly and put the reader first. Overall, do you think we have got this right in this document?**

Yes

No

**Do you have any comments or suggestions about the style of writing?**

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\*Denotes mandatory fields

\*\*Please state name of group, if you are responding from a representative group



## **Questions**

### **Proposal 1**

1. To what extent do you agree that we should remove the requirement for speaking and listening marks to contribute to the overall GCSE English/English language grade?
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/no opinion

### **Any comments or suggestions?**

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### **Proposal 2**

2. To what extent do you agree that we should re-weight the assessment so that the weighting for the written paper(s) is 60 per cent and the weighting for the controlled assessment is 40 per cent (option 1)?
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/no opinion

**Any comments or suggestions?**

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**Proposal 3**

3. To what extent do you agree that we should require exam boards to report achievement in speaking and listening separately on the certificate?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

**Any comments or suggestions?**

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4. To what extent do you agree that students should **not** be required to achieve at least a 5 in speaking and listening to be awarded a GCSE?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

**Any comments or suggestions?**

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**Proposal 4**

5. To what extent do you agree that we should put in place these changes for summer 2014 awards?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

**Any comments or suggestions?**

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**Proposal 5**

6. To what extent do you agree that we should use a comparable outcomes approach to the first awards of these revised qualifications?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion





## About us

We regulate all academic and vocational qualifications in England, together with vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland, where those qualifications are provided by a body that is recognised by us to provide them.

We are a statutory body, created by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, as amended by the Education Act 2011. These Acts set out the legal framework within which we operate, they give us certain duties and powers to take specific forms of regulatory action, and they define the objectives that we must seek to achieve when we exercise those powers.

We regulate to secure standards of, and public confidence in, regulated qualifications. We also regulate to secure efficiency in the provision of regulated qualifications and to raise awareness of the range and benefits of regulated qualifications.

## How GCSEs are regulated

All regulated qualifications must meet our *General Conditions of Recognition*<sup>4</sup>. These demand some overarching requirements of qualifications and awarding organisations (exam boards) that offer them. For instance, qualifications must be fit for purpose and manageable, and exam boards must have in place clear and effective moderation arrangements.

As well as meeting the *General Conditions of Recognition*, GCSEs in English and English language must also meet the requirements of the *GCSE Qualification Criteria*<sup>5</sup>, the *GCSE Subject Criteria for English*<sup>6</sup> and the *GCSE Subject Criteria for English Language*<sup>7</sup>, and the relevant sections of the *GCSE Controlled Assessment Regulations*<sup>8</sup>. These regulations were put in place in 2007 and 2008 by the

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<sup>4</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-11-20-general-conditions-of-recognition-november-2012.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-11-20-general-conditions-of-recognition-november-2012.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-01-13-criteria-for-gcse-qualifications.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-01-13-criteria-for-gcse-qualifications.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-10-19-gcse-subject-criteria-english.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-10-19-gcse-subject-criteria-english.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-10-19-gcse-subject-criteria-english-language.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-10-19-gcse-subject-criteria-english-language.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-10-06-gcse-controlled-assessments-regulations.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-10-06-gcse-controlled-assessments-regulations.pdf)

*Consultation on the Removal of Speaking and Listening Assessment from GCSE  
English and GCSE English Language*

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), our predecessor body. They reflect the joint regulatory and development roles that QCA had.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us if you have any specific accessibility requirements.

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This publication is also available on our website at [www.ofqual.gov.uk](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk)

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