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Guidance

GCSE subject-level conditions and requirements for English language and certificate requirements (2022)

Published 11 November 2021

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Introduction

About this document

This document is part of a suite of documents which sets out the regulatory requirements for awarding organisations offering GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) in 2022.

We have developed these requirements with the intention that GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) should provide:

- evidence of students' achievements against demanding and fulfilling content
- a strong foundation for further academic and vocational study and for employment
- a basis for schools and colleges to be held accountable for the performance of all of their students, if required

Requirements set out in this document

This document sets out the GCSE Subject Level Conditions for English Language (2022). These conditions will come into effect at 09:30 on 12 November 2021 for all GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) in English Language for Learners completing the qualification in 2022, except where the General Qualifications Alternative Awarding Framework applies. It also sets out our requirements in relation to -

- the interpretation of the subject content and assessment objectives for GCSE English Language - awarding organisations must comply with these requirements under Condition GCSE(English Language)1.1(c)
- spoken language assessments - awarding organisations must comply with these requirements under Condition GCSE(English Language)3.3
- certificates for GCSE English Language - awarding organisations must comply with these requirements under Condition I3.1 and Condition GCSE(English Language)4.3

With respect to GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) in English Language, awarding organisations must also comply with:

- our [General Conditions of Recognition](#), which apply to all awarding organisations and qualifications
- our [GCSE Qualification Level Conditions](#)
- all [relevant Regulatory Documents](#)

With respect to GCSE qualifications in English Language taken by Learners completing the qualification in 2023 and after, an awarding organisation must continue to comply with the [GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for English Language](#).+++

Subject Level Conditions

GCSE Subject Level Conditions for English Language

Condition GCSE(English Language) 1: Compliance with content requirements

GCSE(English Language)1.1

In respect of each GCSE Qualification in English Language which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must -

- (a) comply with the requirements relating to that qualification set out in the document published by the Secretary of State entitled '[GCSE English language: subject content and assessment objectives](#)', document reference DFE-00232-2013,
- (b) have regard to any recommendations or guidelines relating to that qualification set out in that document, and
- (c) interpret that document in accordance with any requirements, and having regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

Condition GCSE(English Language) 2: Timing of assessments

GCSE(English Language)2.1

Condition GCSE6.1 does not apply to any GCSE English Language qualification which an awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available.

GCSE(English Language)2.2

An awarding organisation must ensure that in respect of each GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available each Learner completes the Assessments by Examination to be taken for that qualification during the months of -

- (a) May and/or June, or
- (b) November,

in any single year.

GCSE(English Language)2.3

In respect of each GCSE English Language qualification that an awarding organisation makes available the awarding organisation must take all reasonable steps to ensure that each Learner who takes an Assessment by Examination during the month of November has reached at least the age of 16 on or before 31 August in the same calendar year as that assessment.

Condition GCSE(English Language) 3: Spoken Language Assessments

GCSE(English Language)3.1

In respect of a spoken language assessment for a GCSE English Language qualification that an awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available -

- (a) Condition H2 does not apply,
- (b) Condition GCSE4.1 does not apply, and
- (c) that assessment must not be an Assessment by Examination.

GCSE(English Language)3.2

In respect of each assessment cycle for a GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must -

- (a) require each Centre to provide a spoken language statement to the awarding organisation, and
- (b) treat any failure by a Centre to provide a spoken language statement to the awarding organisation in a timely manner as malpractice and/or maladministration (under General Condition A8 (Malpractice and maladministration)).

GCSE(English Language)3.3

An awarding organisation must ensure that in respect of each spoken language assessment for a GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available it complies with any requirements, and has regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

GCSE(English Language)3.4

For the purposes of this condition, a 'spoken language assessment' is an assessment, set by an awarding organisation, of a Learner's ability to -

- (a) demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting,
- (b) listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations, and
- (c) use spoken standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.

GCSE(English Language)3.5

For the purposes of this condition, a 'spoken language statement' is a true and accurate written statement made by a Centre to an awarding organisation which confirms that it has taken reasonable steps to secure that each Learner to whom that Centre has delivered the assessments to be taken in a particular assessment cycle for a GCSE English Language qualification which the awarding organisation makes available has completed a spoken language assessment.

Condition GCSE(English Language) 4: Marking and results

GCSE(English Language)4.1

In respect of each GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available an awarding organisation must calculate and publish the following two separate results for each Learner -

(a) a result for the Assessments by Examination to be taken for that qualification, and

(b) a result for the spoken language assessment.

GCSE(English Language)4.2

In respect of each GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must ensure that an Assessor does not have any regard to a Learner's -

(a) result for the spoken language assessment in calculating that Learner's final mark and result for the Assessments by Examination, and/or

(b) final mark or result for the Assessments by Examination in determining that Learner's result for the spoken language assessment.

GCSE(English Language)4.3

In respect of each spoken language assessment an awarding organisation must ensure that it complies with any Certificate Requirements which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

GCSE(English Language)4.4

In respect of each GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must ensure that -

(a) a Learner may use the result for a spoken language assessment which he or she has taken for a GCSE English Language qualification made available by the awarding organisation or another awarding organisation, and

(b) that Learner is not required to take a further spoken language assessment before being awarded the qualification.

GCSE(English Language)4.5

For the purposes of this condition, a 'spoken language assessment' has the same meaning as in Condition GCSE(English Language)3.4.

Condition GCSE(English Language) 5: Texts used in National Reference Tests

GCSE(English Language)5.1

In respect of each GCSE English Language qualification which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must ensure that the assessments for that qualification do not include questions or tasks which use texts or extracts from texts contained in any list specified by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

GCSE(English Language)5.2

An awarding organisation must agree to Ofqual's reasonable terms and conditions as to -

(a) the maintenance of confidentiality in the list of texts and extracts from texts specified by Ofqual under Condition GCSE(English Language)5.1, and

(b) the awarding organisation's liability should it fail to maintain such confidentiality.

Interpretation of subject content and assessment objectives

Requirements in relation to subject content for GCSE qualifications in English Language

The subject content for GCSE Qualifications (graded 9 to 1) in English Language is set out in the Department for Education's publication [GCSE English Language: subject content and assessment objectives](#) (the 'Content Document').

Condition GCSE(English Language)1.1(c) requires awarding organisations to interpret the Content Document in line with any requirements published by Ofqual.

We set out our requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(English Language)1.1(c) below.

Unseen texts

The Content Document states:

- “ All texts in the examination will be 'unseen', that is, students will not have studied the examination texts during the course. These unseen texts will be drawn from each of the three centuries referred to below.
- “ GCSE English language is designed on the basis that students should read and be assessed on high-quality, challenging texts from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Each text studied must represent a substantial piece of writing, making significant demands on students in terms of content, structure and the quality of language. The texts, across a range of genres and types, should support students in developing their own writing by providing effective models. The texts must include literature and extended literary non-fiction, and other writing such as essays, reviews and journalism (both printed and online). Texts that are essentially transient, such as instant news feeds, must not be included. The number and types of texts, and their length, are not prescribed.”

This means the following:

- In designing and setting the Assessments by Examination for a GCSE Qualification in English Language an awarding organisation must ensure that those assessments include questions or tasks relating to at least three unseen texts.
- One of those unseen texts must have been first published in the 19th Century (between the years 1800 and 1899), one must have been first published in the 20th Century (between the years 1900 and 1999) and one must have been first published in the 21st Century (during or after the year 2000).
- One of those unseen texts must be a literary fiction text, one must be a literary

non-fiction text and one must be a text comprising another type of writing (such as essays, reviews and journalism).

- There is no requirement in relation to the type of text that must be drawn from each time period.

So long as the above requirements are met, an awarding organisation may include questions or tasks in its assessments relating to more than three unseen texts. Those additional unseen texts may be of any type and published within any time period.

Synthesis

For the purposes of interpreting the Content Document the following definition shall apply and all related expressions must be interpreted accordingly.

‘Synthesis’ – bringing material together from more than one text to create new material.

Requirements in relation to spoken language assessments

Condition GCSE(English Language)3.3 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to spoken language assessments (as defined in Condition GCSE (English Language)3.4) for GCSE English Language qualifications.

We set out our requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(English Language)3.3 below.

Form of the spoken language assessment

An awarding organisation must ensure that each spoken language assessment is designed and set -

(a) to ensure that the only evidence that will be admissible in the assessment is a presentation by each Learner which -

- (i) takes place in a formal setting,
- (ii) takes place before an audience, and
- (iii) requires the Learner to have undertaken preparation prior to the assessment, and

(b) in such a way as to -

- (i) allow each Learner to demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the content outlined in the Content Document,

- (ii) allow each of the specified levels of attainment set out below to be reached by a Learner who has attained the required level of knowledge, skills and understanding, and
- (iii) facilitate the comparability of such assessments.

Marking of spoken language assessments

Evidence generated by a Learner in a spoken language assessment may be marked -

- (a) by a Centre
- (b) by the awarding organisation or a person connected to the awarding organisation, or
- (c) through a combination of (a) and (b).

In any event, the awarding organisation must demonstrate to Ofqual's satisfaction in its assessment strategy that -

- (a) it has taken all reasonable steps to identify the risk of any Adverse Effect which may result from its approach to marking spoken language assessments, and
- (b) where such a risk is identified, it has taken all reasonable steps to prevent that Adverse Effect or, where it cannot be prevented, to mitigate that Adverse Effect.

Specified levels of attainment in spoken language assessments

In relation to each spoken language assessment, an awarding organisation must ensure that -

- (a) the specified levels of attainment are Pass, Merit and Distinction,
- (b) the criteria used by Assessors to determine whether each Learner will be awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction are those set out below, and
- (c) a Learner who does not meet the criteria to be awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction, or who has not been exempted on grounds of disability from the assessment but who does not take it, is issued a result of 'not classified'.

Under Condition H1.1, an awarding organisation must have in place arrangements to ensure that, as far as possible, the criteria set out for Pass, Merit and Distinction are -

- (a) understood by Assessors and accurately applied, and
- (b) applied consistently by Assessors, regardless of the identity of the Assessor, Learner or Centre.

The criteria for Pass, Merit and Distinction

General criteria

To be awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction a Learner must -

- be audible, and
- use Spoken Standard English which, for the purposes of the spoken language assessment, means that a Learner must -
 - be intelligible, and
 - generally use language appropriate to the formal setting of the presentation.

Pass criteria

In addition to the general criteria, to be awarded a Pass a Learner's performance in his or her spoken language assessment must meet all of the following criteria –

- expresses straightforward ideas, information and/or feelings
- makes an attempt to organise and structure his or her presentation
- makes an attempt to meet the needs of the audience
- listens to questions and/or feedback and provides an appropriate response in a straightforward manner

Merit criteria

In addition to the general criteria, to be awarded a Merit a Learner's performance in his or her spoken language assessment must meet all of the following criteria –

- expresses challenging ideas, information and/or feelings using a range of vocabulary
- organises and structures his or her presentation clearly and appropriately to meet the needs of the audience
- achieves the purpose of his or her presentation
- listens to questions and/or feedback responding formally and in some detail

Distinction criteria

In addition to the general criteria, to be awarded a Distinction a Learner's performance in his or her spoken language assessment must meet all of the following criteria –

- expresses sophisticated ideas, information and/or feelings using a sophisticated repertoire of vocabulary
- organises and structures his or her presentation using an effective range of strategies to engage the audience
- achieves the purpose of his or her presentation
- listens to questions and/or feedback, responds perceptively and if appropriate elaborates with further ideas and information

Certificate Requirements

Condition GCSE(English Language)4.3 allows us to specify Certificate Requirements in relation to the way in which a Learner's attainment in a spoken language assessment is reflected on that Learner's certificate for the qualification.

In addition, under Condition I3.1, an awarding organisation is required to ensure that the design of each certificate in relation to a qualification which it makes available complies with the Certificate Requirements which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

We set out our Certificate Requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(English Language)4.3 and Condition I3.1 below.

These requirements must be followed in addition to the [Additional Certificate Requirements](#) which apply to all qualifications.

Certificate requirements for spoken language assessments

A certificate will only be issued for a GCSE English Language qualification where a Learner has been awarded a grade 9-1 in respect of the level of attainment he or she has demonstrated in the Assessments by Examination to be taken for that qualification.

Where a Learner has not been awarded a grade 9-1 in respect of those Assessments by Examination, an awarding organisation must ensure that no certificate is issued in respect of that Learner's spoken language assessment, regardless of the result of that assessment.

For clarity, the result for that Learner's spoken language assessment must still be issued, together with the Learner's result in respect of the Assessments by Examination, under Condition H6.1.

Where a certificate will be issued to a Learner in respect of the Assessments by Examination, an awarding organisation must ensure that it meets the following requirements in recording the outcome of the spoken language assessment on that certificate -

(a) Where the Learner has been awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction, that outcome must be recorded on the certificate.

(b) Where the Learner -

(i) has taken the spoken language assessment but has not been awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction, or

(ii) has not been granted an exemption on grounds of disability from taking the spoken language assessment, but has not taken that assessment,

the outcome reported on the certificate must be 'not classified'.

(c) Where the Learner has been granted an exemption from taking the spoken language assessment under Condition G6, the outcome reported on the certificate must be in line with any requirements which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

(d) In all cases an awarding organisation must ensure that it is clear that the above outcomes are in relation to the spoken language assessment.

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