

STANDARD GRADE

ELEMENT / COURSEWORK VERIFIED

Insert details:

ENGLISH STANDARD GRADE TALKING

FEEDBACK TO CENTRES

Insert details relating to specific guidance which should be offered to centres based on the verification of centres.

Include:

- *General comments*
- *Areas of good practice*
- *Areas for further development*

General comments:

Verifiers visited a number of centres. Experience of the past two years had suggested a strongly favourable reaction to the new Arrangements for Standard Grade Talk; this year was no exception. Staff and candidates involved, in all centres visited, found the procedure positive and helpful.

In many cases, candidates responded enthusiastically to the Verification, often improving on the provisional grading awarded prior to the Verifier's visit.

Internal Verifiers were all found to be consistent with national standards.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

One or two minor problems had arisen as a result of ignorance of the detail of SQA Arrangements documents. Centres are reminded that the original *Standard Grade Revised Arrangements in English (in and after 1989)* continue to apply. Detailed guidance on the organisation and assessment of Talk can be found therein.

Arrangements for Verification of Standard Grade Talking are issued to centres selected for Verification.

The national standard is exemplified on the various training tapes. Standardisation within centres is the responsibility of the individual English Department. Verifiers were impressed by centres which explored Talk in a thorough and systematic way, and by those with well planned procedures for internal verification of standards. These centres had in common one or more of the following features:

- Paired assessing
- Visits by the Internal Verifier to classrooms
- Partnering of inexperienced teachers with more experienced colleagues, with particular support for probationers
- Internal Verifier 'sampling' of classes in the department

- Periodic review of SQA training tapes
- Discussions within department
- A variety of 'talk situations' offered, encouraging each candidate to fulfil potential

NATIONAL UNITS

TITLES/LEVELS OF NATIONAL UNITS VERIFIED

Insert detail:

D8VH LANGUAGE STUDY (ACCESS 3 TO ADVANCED HIGHER)

D8VJ LITERARY STUDY (ACCESS 3 TO ADVANCED HIGHER)

D8VK PERSONAL STUDY (ACCESS 3 TO HIGHER)

D9GV TEXTUAL ANALYSIS (ADVANCED HIGHER)

FEEDBACK TO CENTRES

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General comments:

Centres selected for Verification appeared to be clear about the requirements of the exercise, with most sending, for Central Verification, correctly prepared packages of materials. Centres should note that submissions sent in late will be verified in the same way as those submitted on time. Since it is unlikely that late submissions for Central Verification will be verified before early May, centres (particularly schools) judged “Not accepted” are likely to have problems re-assessing candidates at such a time in the calendar.

Substitutions for candidates withdrawn from the examination (or for persistent absentees) are perfectly in order. Information sent out with the Verification Sample offers guidance on acceptable numbers of substitutes. Centres are welcome to contact the Senior Verifier to discuss difficulties.

As in previous years, there was evidence, in 2008, of candidates presented at inappropriate levels. If this mis-match is clear in the Units, it is likely to be more harshly exposed in the external examination.

Verifiers will look for, and comment on, evidence of cross-marking, departmental discussion of standards and referral of scripts to the head of department or internal verifier. It is clear, annually, that departments in which such good practice is the norm are more likely to achieve consistency with national standards.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

Language Study

Close Reading

There is now a good range of Close Reading papers in the National Assessment Bank. Several of those for Higher are double-passage format, making their dual use for Unit Assessment and Prelim an obvious economy for English departments. Departments should feel comfortable that the double-passage papers are accurate predictors of performance in Close Reading: all have been prepared by the Principal Assessor for Higher (responsible for standards and consistency in External Assessment), and vetted by a team including the Senior Verifier for NQ courses in English (responsible for standards and consistency in Internal Assessment). Since secure-site NABs are the only instruments of assessment valid for the completion of Close Reading, the use of the double-passage papers is recommended.

Timing of Close Reading assessments is crucial. Candidates will gain only limited benefit from repeated practice of papers, if they lack the skills required. Centres in which the Unit Assessment for Close Reading came later in the course (after January) were often more successful than those assessing in the Christmas term. Earlier successes are often bare passes, suggesting that the skills and techniques required to deal confidently with the Close Reading paper take time to develop.

Overly generous marking of the Close Reading Outcome will give candidates a misleading impression of standards for Close Reading in the external examination.

Borderline cases should be examined carefully. The practice of referral of borderline scripts to the Head of Department or to an internal verifier was commended by Verifiers.

Internal verification and cross-marking will improve accuracy.

Generosity in the marking of Close Reading was particularly evident in Analysis and Evaluation questions.

Writing

Writing, too, will benefit from a substantial block of teaching and learning. Many samples of Writing seen at Central Verification are barely competent and uninspired, suggesting that the practice of aiming candidates for the first draft of the first piece that will meet the criteria to pass is fairly widespread. Verifiers' reports will always encourage centres to explore the Writing Outcome fully. In the best practice seen during development visits to centres, Verifiers have been impressed by strategies that relate Writing to other parts of the syllabus (or the wider curriculum):

- using models for writing that link this part of the course to Textual Analysis;
- allowing candidates to write in different genres and forms;
- taking contexts for writing from other subjects;
- non-fictional writing demonstrating that the skills of Close Reading have been successfully absorbed.

Well-focused redrafting is a key part of development in Writing.

The controlled conditions applying to Writing do not require the piece to be written in the teacher's presence. Drafts completed out of class, or out of school, are perfectly acceptable provided that the teacher is certain of their authorship. Drafts containing teachers' comments are acceptable samples for Verification.

Writing pieces covered a good range of genres. In the main, assessments were in line with national standards, although more helpful feedback to candidates could have been given by, for example, specific reference to Performance Criteria.

A number of pieces lacked the development required in an essay produced over a period of time, particularly some of the Higher submissions. Centres are reminded that there are minimum word limits specified for each level; if that basic criterion is not met, the piece must fail. Specific word limits can be found in the Unit Specifications.

The suggested duration of the Language Unit is 40 hours. In an important respect, English differs from most other subjects: the neatness of completing one unit in a single block of forty hours is not an effective approach to the teaching of English. Forty hours spread over a course that develops, refines, demonstrates and matures the required skills is likely better to prepare the candidate for the Unit Assessment.

Literary Study

Many of the centres sampled showed signs of students working with determination and commitment to produce detailed and appropriate answers. In the centres Verifiers found most impressive, there was clear evidence of positive teacher support, indicating how best to improve.

Most of the marking sampled was reliable, although one or two centres which had over-rewarded candidates for thin or under-developed answers demonstrated clearly the benefits of cross-marking or referral to an internal verifier for standardisation. It was encouraging, in this respect, to see departments themselves correcting some rather lenient marking, and bringing markers into line with the key principles and standards of the marking guidelines for this Unit.

The National Assessment Bank materials for the Literary Study Unit are hierarchical (as they are for Close Reading). A pass at a higher level implies one at a lower. Candidates dropping to a lower level need not, therefore, resit the NAB if they have already passed at a higher level.

At Advanced Higher, centres are reminded of the differences between the Unit Assessment and the external examination:

- For the Unit Assessment, candidates must have access to texts
- Where two texts are specified in the Arrangements, the question set for the Unit Assessment may require that the candidate answer only on one
- Assuming that the conditions set for the Prelim mirror those of the external exam, work produced in the context of a preliminary examination will not meet the evidence requirements of the Literary Study Unit Assessment
- Questions set for the Unit Assessment may be more focused and specific than those likely to appear in the external paper
- The Unit Assessment should be marked as Pass or Fail

Personal Study

On the whole, submissions for Personal Study demonstrated good awareness of the evidence requirements of the Unit, with many candidates managing to write at length in the time allowed.

Strong essays were not over-reliant on the pursuit of too narrow an aspect of the text, but had a balanced and well-developed line of thought.

Weaker essays demonstrated one or more of the following features:

- Over-reliance on narrative
- Excessive exploration of analysis at the expense of the central concerns of the text
- A disjointed approach, dealing with discrete techniques but with no developed line of thought
- Undue leniency in the marking of technical accuracy

Textual Analysis (Advanced Higher)

A small number of centres was sampled for the Textual Analysis Unit at Advanced Higher. In most cases, assessment was rigorous and revealed a firm grasp of national standards. Verifiers commended those centres in which detailed feedback to candidates was provided to assist understanding of assessment decisions.

Questions for assessment of the Textual Analysis Unit should not be taken from past papers, since these are in the public domain.