



National Qualifications 2007

Senior Verifier Report

Subject: English

Assessment Panel: English and Communication

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on moderation which has taken place within National Qualifications in this subject.

STANDARD GRADE

ELEMENT / COURSEWORK VERIFIED

STANDARD GRADE ENGLISH – TALKING

FEEDBACK TO CENTRES

General comments:

Verification is the means by which SQA seeks to confirm, and ensure consistency with, national standards, and is a key part of the SQA's quality assurance. Agreement established, the crucial next step is the move towards consistency within the individual department, or among assessors in the same centre. Colleagues will be more familiar with the term 'Moderation' for this process; the change to 'Verification' reflects an important principle of the exercise – that the aim is confirmation of the given department's assessments. It is felt that the change to 'Verification' better reflects this principle.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

Centres are advised that all future Verification visits for Standard Grade English – Talking will be run according to the new arrangements piloted in 2005 and introduced in 2006. Verification will focus on the assessment of live candidate performance. In this respect, the Verification of Standard Grade English – Talking will be brought into line with all other verification of performance carried out by SQA. Exemplification of standards will be demonstrated, as before, on the available training tapes.

Notice of the change has previously been given in the Senior Moderator's reports for 2005 and 2006.

The following extract from the new arrangements for the Verification of Standard Grade English – Talking summarises new practice. More detailed information about procedures will be issued to centres selected for Verification.

“Verifiers appointed by the SQA will carry out the Verification of centres' internal assessments of Standard Grade English - Talking. Presenting centres must have in place procedures for the internal verification of standards. Each department should also have an Internal Verifier (who need not be the Head of Department). During the Verification visit, the SQA Verifier will work with the centre's Internal Verifier. Following the visit, the Internal Verifier will use the results of the Verification to inform the work of the department, aiming to achieve consistency with the national standards exemplified in the SQA's training tapes.”

Centres should stress to candidates that grades awarded in the Standard Grade course prior to a Verification visit are provisional. All assessments should be reviewed following the Verification visit, taking account of the result.”

Summary of changes

- SQA Verification will be carried out by a Verifier appointed by the SQA

- Each English Department should have an Internal Verifier (not necessarily the Head of Department)
- The Internal Verifier is responsible for standardisation of assessment within the department
- Only the selected candidates and the centre's Internal Verifier will be involved in the SQA Verification. No other staff should attend.
- The SQA's training tapes will continue as the exemplification of national standards

All centres visited in 2006-2007 had assessments verified using the new arrangements. SQA Verifiers reported general satisfaction, among those visited, with the new procedures. All felt that it was a more positive exercise than moderation of the department using the training tape, largely because it related more to departmental practice and involved 'real' candidates. Encouragingly, far from finding the exercise daunting (a concern raised by some centres about to be visited), candidates involved rose to the occasion.

Other positive features mentioned by centres visited:

- new procedures encouraged more productive discussion, possibly because there was some room for manoeuvre in the final allocation of grades
- cover was required for only one member of department
- the exercise was felt to be much more helpful in ensuring accuracy in the awarding of grades
- candidates were involved
- centres had freedom to select candidates

In addition, some colleagues referred to items on the most recent training videotape which were clearly out of date.

In most cases, the judgments of the Internal Verifier coincided with those of the SQA Verifier. This was hardly surprising, given that the final assessment of each candidate followed useful discussion. While the final say must go to the SQA Verifier, it is unlikely that there will be much disagreement over the awarding of grades on a scale with which the profession is so thoroughly familiar.

Since 1988, six videotapes have been issued for distribution to centres.

- the videotape "Young People Talking" with the supporting documentation (issued to all centres in 1988)

and

- the videotape and further documentation "Moderation of Assessment of Talking 1989" (issued for distribution to centres in December 1989)
- the videotapes and further documentation "Moderation of Assessment of Talking 1990 and 1991" (issued for distribution to centres on 28 February 1992)
- the videotape and further documentation "Moderation of Assessment of Talking 1992 and 1993" (issued for distribution to centres on 27 May 1994)

- the videotape and further documentation "Moderation of Assessment of Talking 1994 and 1995" (issued for distribution to centres on 12 April 1996)
- the videotape and further documentation "Moderation of Assessment of Talking 1996 to 1998" (issued for distribution to centres on 15 December 1998).

The videotapes illustrate a range of talk activity and performance as set out in the GRC. Centres should acquaint themselves with the exemplification on the tapes, and use them as the basis for training in the application of national standards. Regular review of standards and consistency within the department is recommended. This will be the responsibility of the Internal Verifier and the Head of Department.

Training tapes were issued to local authorities, and it is their responsibility to ensure distribution to centres within the authority. SQA does not have a supply of past tapes.

NATIONAL UNITS

TITLES/LEVELS OF NATIONAL UNITS VERIFIED

National Units Verified (complete evidence)

D8VH	Language Study (Access 3 to Higher)
D8VJ	Literary Study (Access 3 to Advanced Higher)
D8VK	Personal Study (Access 3 to Higher)

National Units Verified (incomplete evidence)

D8VJ	Literary Study (Advanced Higher)
D9GT	Specialist Study (Advanced Higher)
D9GV	Textual Analysis (Advanced Higher)
D9GW	Creative Writing (Advanced Higher)

FEEDBACK TO CENTRES

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Verification is the means by which SQA seeks to confirm, and ensure consistency with, national standards, and is a key part of the SQA's quality assurance. Agreement established, the crucial next step is the move towards consistency within the individual department, or among assessors in the same centre. Colleagues will be more familiar with the term 'Moderation' for this process; the change to 'Verification' reflects an important principle of the exercise – that the aim is confirmation of the given department's assessments. It is felt that the change to 'Verification' better reflects this principle.

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 2007, 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

Centres are reminded that NABs should be selected from those listed on the secure website. Past papers, commercially produced materials and support materials are not acceptable for Verification.

Minor alterations to marking guidelines are permitted, and should be clearly indicated on the guidelines submitted with the moderation sample. Alterations apart, Verifiers will expect that the marking guidelines have been tightly applied.

Verifiers commented on the following good practice:

- In Close Reading, focused use of ticks to indicate exactly which parts had achieved the mark
- In Close Reading, attempts to use technical terms in responding (impressive in some cases)
- Good range of subject matter in Writing (particularly Expressive Writing)

Some problems were encountered:

- Use of half-marks in Intermediate Close Reading
- Marks awarded for thin, under-developed or unfocused answers
- Squeezing marks out of thin Close Reading scripts to pass borderline fails
- Inaccurate or loose application of marking guidelines
- Candidates entered at inappropriate levels

Centres are reminded of advice offered in previous reports on the marking of analysis questions. To gain the marks, candidates must show an understanding of connotation; mere quotation and denotative responses should receive little reward.

Half-marks should be awarded sparingly, for an under-developed answer rather than a brave effort, and should not be used at Intermediate 1 and 2.

Writing tasks should be provided for the Verification. Scripts should show why a pass has been awarded, although comment is more necessary in the event of a fail - particularly for the candidate's guidance in redrafting.

Centres are referred to the Unit Specification (support notes) for the Writing Outcome, and reminded that the Reflective Essay at Higher (and at Intermediate 2) is not simply an account of personal experience.

Literary Study

Centres are reminded that NABs should be selected from those listed on the secure website. Past papers, commercially produced materials and support materials are not acceptable for Verification.

Candidates, on the whole, performed better in more recent NABs. Centres are reminded that the earlier NABs (in which candidates had to pass in each of *Understanding, Analysis, Evaluation*) must be marked according to the original guidelines.

Marking of Textual Analysis was often generous, rewarding thin, under-developed answers. As with Close Reading, comment that fails to show understanding of connotation is given little credit in Verification. Centres should take this into account in their marking. It is clear enough in the marking guidelines that candidates have to work to earn the marks. As a rough guide, two lines of fairly thin comment will not tend to be worth 4 marks at Higher. Annually, over-marked submissions for Literary Study are returned to centres for Assessment Review.

Personal Study

The Unit Specifications require that the Personal Study be produced unassisted and under supervision. Since it will *normally* be unlikely that this regulation could be satisfactorily met by a teacher supervising a large group of candidates working on computers, it is expected that most submissions will be hand-written (except by those with learning difficulties). However, it is possible that the supervising teacher is able to guarantee that the requirements have been met, and that spell-checks, syntax checks, earlier drafts, files, websites and the other many aids accessible on computer have not been used in the word-processing of the study. Despite that, it is possible that Verification staff will contact centres submitting word-processed Personal Studies. This should not be taken as suspicion of anything improper – rather as confirmation that the centre is aware of the regulations. For candidates entitled to use a word-processor, it would be helpful if a brief covering letter from the responsible teacher were to be included with the submission.

Verifiers were impressed by centres in which candidates writing on fiction had been encouraged to consider good quality literary fiction other than the ‘usual suspects’. In one centre, candidates had selected from recent Booker nominees; in others, there was a good balance of recent literary fiction and the ‘classics’. Such practices are to be commended. English teachers are keen readers, and are encouraged to share their own interests in the teaching of Personal Study.

Personal Studies on memoirs of childhood abuse (many to choose from, and many chosen) tend to fare badly. Studies of genre fiction can work well, but the texts need to be approached with care. Both types of study are often tackled by weaker candidates and will, generally, be narrative-led.

Teachers (of Higher particularly) are advised to steer candidates away from the compartmentalised approach to the Personal Study (‘I will look at character, setting and symbolism’). In itself, this will not, of course, lead to a fail in the Personal Study, but it is a formulaic approach to essay writing which will not do well in the Higher external examination. Teaching Personal Study as a skill separate from the Critical Essay is an opportunity for integration missed; candidates writing the Personal Study should have in mind the requirements of the Critical Essay.

Centres are reminded, once again, that all four Performance Criteria must be met in the Personal Study which passes. Verifiers found widespread evidence of candidates awarded a pass for demonstrating good understanding of a given text, but with little attention to analysis. In many cases, too, technical inaccuracy had been over-looked.

Teachers are reminded of the Unit Specification for Personal Study, in particular the range of genres permissible. Some particularly good studies of Poetry and Drama have been submitted for Verification. A further point made in this report last year is worth repeating: the study is not restricted to the study of a chosen *text*. The outcome states:

Write critically about chosen text(s) or topic(s).

Later in the Unit Specification, the section on *Suggested areas for study* offers further guidance. The choice of a topic as the area for study would probably remove the possibility of a back-up text for the external examination (exercised, anyway, by few candidates), but may be of interest to teachers looking for options for candidates with little interest in the personal study of literature. Note that the Performance Criteria are

the same: the topic study would need, for example, to include detailed analysis and evaluation of sources used.

Candidates pursuing a comparison of two or more texts should ensure that the comparative analysis is detailed. The time constraints on the writing of the study appear to encourage analysis spread too thinly over the texts chosen for comparison.

Comparison of texts from different genres (eg a novel and a film) is not, generally, a good idea, since the key points of analysis are likely to differ.

Once again, few centres opted for the spoken version of Personal Study. This was reflected in the small number of centres verified.

Advanced Higher – complete evidence

Literary Study

In Literary Study, assessments of scripts submitted for Verification suggested general conformity with national standards, and use of appropriate and well-designed instruments of assessment.

Once again, centres are reminded that candidates need only answer on *one* major text (play or novel) for the Unit assessment. It should be stressed that this will *not*, in every case, provide adequate coverage for the external examination, for which all texts specified for each author must be prepared.

Advanced Higher – incomplete evidence

Specialist Study

Verification of incomplete evidence revealed strong awareness of the requirements of the Specialist Study. Centres are reminded that candidates are best served by a process which involves negotiation of appropriate choices, independent study, compliance with deadlines, and ongoing monitoring of progress.

Literary Study

Centres are reminded of the benefits of the study of a broad range of texts. In Unit assessments, consideration should be given to a more focused question than past papers provide.

Textual Analysis

Centres are reminded of advice given in this report in previous years.

Creative Writing

In Creative Writing, there was, once again, clear evidence of systematic and thorough teaching, at its best when candidates were encouraged to explore a variety of genres.