



Internal Assessment Report: English

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in National Qualifications in this subject.

Standard Grade

Titles/levels of Standard Grade qualifications verified

Standard Grade English: Talking and Listening

General comments

Verifiers visited a number of centres. Staff and candidates involved, in all centres visited, found the procedure positive and helpful.

As they tend to, 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. All centres visited were assessing in line with national standards.

In all centres visited, strong awareness of the conditions and arrangements for Talking at Standard Grade English was evident.

There was a good balance of Individual Talk and Discussion, and assessment opportunities had been provided at regular intervals during the two-year course. This ensured, or at least allowed for the possibility of, progression and development in talking and listening skills.

Talk was often most successful when integrated with other components of the course, for example group discussion on aspects of a novel studied, followed by presentation or report back to the class. This is not to question the usefulness of one-off activities, but such an approach may be helpful in providing neat opportunities for the assessment of different types of Talk.

Areas of good practice

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 departments
- ◆ A variety of 'talk situations' offered, encouraging each candidate to fulfil their potential

Areas for improvement

Centres should consider the adoption of all the measures highlighted above. A thorough and systematic approach to Talking and Listening is necessary to raise Talk to its proper status within the Standard Grade English Course. One-third of the final course assessment suggests that Talk should occupy a rather more central role than one or two talks on hobbies or memorable moments at an aunt's wedding.

The Verification of Standard Grade Talking is a requirement of the system of assessment. If a centre is unable to provide candidates for Verification, then that requirement cannot be met. In such a case, the centre would need to consider an alternative to Standard Grade English.

The national standard is exemplified on the various training tapes. Standardisation within centres is the responsibility of the individual English department. Familiarisation with the various training tapes, dated as some of them are, should be a central part of standardisation procedures within every department. The most recent tape has been transferred on to DVD, and all centres will have received a copy of the DVD and the gradings and commentary. The video clips and commentaries can also be downloaded from SQA's secure site.

National Qualifications (NQ) Units

Titles/levels of NQ Units verified

D8VH: Language Study

D8VJ: Literary Study

D8VK: Personal Study (limited sample)

General comments

D8VH Language Study

In previous years, the main focus of Central Verification of this Unit has been Higher English. This year, the focus was, predominantly, Intermediate 2. Verifiers found a high degree of consistency with national standards, both in the application of the marking guidelines for Close Reading, and the Performance Criteria for Writing.

D8VJ Literary Study

This year, Verification sampled scripts mainly at Higher and Advanced Higher. A variety of NABs was used for Textual Analysis at Higher. Candidates' scripts showed strong understanding of the requirements of Textual Analysis; in many cases, there was a sophisticated appreciation of the specific techniques of the given genre. In Advanced Higher, essays for the Literary Study Unit were often original, perceptive and stylish. In most scripts sampled, marking was in line with national standards.

D8VK Personal Study

There was a limited sampling of Personal Study (written response), since this Unit will be discontinued as a component of the National Courses in English. The Unit will continue to be available as a free-standing Unit; some thoughts on that are given below. Marking of the samples verified was entirely consistent with national standards.

In all cases, centres sampled showed clear understanding of the Unit Specifications, and of the application of the Performance Criteria to candidate scripts.

All Instruments of Assessment in use were valid. Centres had, in every case, selected appropriate materials from the National Assessment Bank. In most cases, the marking guidelines had been applied accurately.

Where Instruments of Assessment had been designed by the centre, careful thought appeared to have been given to ensuring that the Performance Criteria were met, and that resulting judgements were likely to be secure.

Scripts sampled indicated that candidates and teachers were thoroughly familiar with the relevant exemplification materials.

Areas of good practice

D8VH Language Study

(main focus: Intermediate 2)

In **LO1 Close Reading**, Verifiers commented on the following:

Most marking sampled was in line with national standards.

Answers which were structured in response to the question (for example by using bullet-point layout) helped candidates to focus effectively.

Verifiers commented on the following good practice in **LO2 Writing**:

- ◆ Use of models for writing that links this part of the course to Textual Analysis
- ◆ Candidates writing 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

Many candidates had tackled the Writing pieces with commitment and a clear sense of involvement. There was much evidence of neat and considered work.

The most effective Reflective Writing paid close attention to the necessity for more than token reflection. In such essays, the reflection pervaded the whole essay; in the weakest, the reflection was tacked on at the end.

Feedback to candidates on Writing was often helpful.

D8VJ Literary Study

(Higher)

In many of the centres sampled, Verifiers found evidence 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.

In the Unit Assessment, many candidates demonstrated good critical awareness of technique, and a sound grasp of the techniques relevant to the respective genres.

Different questions in the Textual Analysis place different demands on the candidate. Awareness of the most effective structuring of answers aided many candidates: a bullet-point layout, for example, was often very effective.

Verifiers found evidence, in this Unit and in Close Reading, of the teaching of effective reading strategies. Many candidates moved beyond simple quotation or paraphrase, making detailed reference to the text and going on to make suitable comment.

Sound preparation was also indicated by the fullness of the answers given. Many candidates clearly understood the importance of matching the answer to the number of marks available.

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.

D8VJ Literary Study (Advanced Higher)

Questions on texts studied were well designed. Often, Verifiers found that more focused and straightforward questions elicited sharper and stronger essays from candidates.

In questions on Poetry, better candidates provided sophisticated comparison between or among texts discussed, avoiding the 'guided tour' of each poem.

Many candidates demonstrated secure knowledge of central concerns and significant detail, indicating thorough preparation by teaching staff in the centres sampled.

Teacher comments provided in the body of the text were often useful in pinning down the general comments at the end.

D8VK Personal Study

There was a limited sample of Personal Study (written response). Personal Study will continue to be available as a free-standing Unit, possibly as useful preparation for Advanced Higher Dissertation, but will be discontinued as a component Unit of the National Courses in English.

In the Personal Studies sampled, candidates often wrote with sensitivity and sophistication, and there was strong evidence of independent thought.

Areas for improvement

D8VH – Language Study (main focus: Intermediate 2)

In Close Reading, candidates should be trained in the most effective structuring of their answers, and reminded that there is no necessity to answer in sentences.

Candidates will save necessary time in Close Reading by avoiding answering in sentences when the answer could be more effectively structured as bullet points. Repetition of the wording of the question is not expected.

Verifiers found evidence, in a number of samples, of:

- ◆ Overly generous marking of the Close Reading Learning Outcome. This will give candidates a misleading impression of standards for Close Reading in the external examination. Marking should follow the guidelines strictly, and not too liberally.
- ◆ Lack of proper scrutiny of borderline cases. 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.

- ◆ Lack of evidence of Internal Verification and cross-marking. Inevitably, these practices will improve accuracy and consistency.

Writing pieces sampled 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. 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 Specification.

D8VJ Literary Study (Higher)

A systematic approach to internal verification is strongly recommended. At the very least, departments should find opportunities to share and discuss assessments and standards and aim for consistency of approach to assessment. Referral of scripts for a second opinion will help to compensate for marking which is unduly lenient, overly severe, or inconsistent.

Marking which is unduly severe may be a fault, though in some ways it's a laudable one. In fairness, however, candidates should be given full credit for good answers.

Candidates should be made aware that there is no need to answer questions in the Textual Analysis Unit Assessment in sentences. Clearly focused answers, using bullet points when appropriate, will allow the marker to be more certain as to where credit is due.

In longer answers, it was not always clear which parts of the response were gaining credit. Ticks and marginal comments will be helpful in this regard.

A relatively large number of fails and borderline scripts may suggest a need for a review of presentation policy.

The National Assessment Banks 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.

D8VJ Literary Study (Advanced Higher)

Where two texts by one author are specified, the Unit Specification allows the use of one text only for the Unit assessment. Since the Unit assessment will reflect the centre's teaching, it will tend to have a sharper focus than the external assessment, often making the use of one text desirable.

In the design of questions for Unit assessment, it is helpful to bear in mind the stage reached in the Course. While questions should be appropriate for students at Advanced Higher level, they need not be overly demanding.

Although the Unit is assessed as pass or fail, the use of the 30-point external assessment scale is recommended, providing the candidate with a finer indication of how to move beyond the bare pass. Clear advice on 'next steps' is recommended.

A systematic approach to cross-marking will help to address any inconsistencies in the application of the Unit Criteria within each centre.