



**National Qualifications 2012  
Internal Assessment Report  
English and Communication**

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

# National Courses

Titles/levels of National Courses verified:

English — Standard Grade Talking

## General comments

In all centres visited by Verifiers in 2011–12, there was clear and accurate understanding of the national standards.

## Course Arrangements, Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Previous reports have highlighted the need for course design, in the individual centre, to reflect the relative importance of Talk. The Course Arrangements make clear that this should be a priority, and that Talk should not be regarded as having any less importance than Reading and Writing.

In the centres visited in 2011–12, it was encouraging to note that departments' organisation of Standard Grade Talking remains wholly appropriate and relevant and that Talking and Listening are not being treated in isolation but as central to classwork.

## Evidence Requirements

Apart from the recording of grades over the duration of the two years of the Course, there has never been a requirement for formal gathering of evidence of performance in Standard Grade Talking.

Verifiers will expect to see evidence that assessed performances in Group Discussion and Individual Talk — at intervals throughout the Standard Grade Course — have taken place.

In the centres visited, these requirements were clearly understood.

## Administration of assessments

The Grade Related Criteria (GRC) for Talking were written more than twenty-five years ago, and have not been altered since their introduction.

The application of the GRC is a well-established and well-understood part of the work of every English Department.

Departments visited this year were confident and accurate in their application of the GRC.

## **Areas of good practice**

The following features occurred in centres in which Standard Grade Talking impressed the Verifiers:

- ◆ Use of an integrated model, in which opportunities for discussion and reporting back are found in Course components from Close Reading to the study of Literature
- ◆ Most units of work involve Listening and Talking
- ◆ There are regular opportunities for Talking and Listening
- ◆ The final assessments for Group Discussion and Individual Talk reflect progression over the two years of the Course

## **Specific areas for improvement**

Areas of good practice, referred to above, imply the sort of features that departments should adopt.

In addition, the point is made annually that Talk cannot proceed in a way that meets the requirements of verification if there are no procedures for internal verification.

# National Qualifications (NQ) Units

Titles/levels of NQ Units verified:

F796 10 Language Study Intermediate 1

F796 11 Language Study Intermediate 2

F796 12 Language Study Higher

## General comments

All centres called for central verification were asked to submit a sample of the work of Unit 1: Language Study.

In the majority of centres, assessments were concordant with national standards.

There were some instances of leniency in the marking of Writing, and some loose application of the Marking Guidelines for Close Reading. Verifiers found few instances of overly severe marking.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The Verifier checking the sample has to decide whether the marking of the scripts is sufficiently accurate to be judged 'Accepted'. In all cases, the Verifier's approach to the task is sympathetic to the centre sampled. Unless there is clear evidence that the marking is not in line with national standards, the Verifier will confirm the centre's judgements. This means that most borderline cases pass, with advice given where necessary.

Centres are adjudged 'Not Accepted' for one or more of the following reasons:

- ◆ Inaccurate marking of Close Reading or Writing
- ◆ Use of out-of-date instruments of assessment, deleted from the NAB — see below
- ◆ Use of invalid instruments of assessment (including all commercially produced papers and SQA past papers) — see below
- ◆ Submission of only one of the two Learning Outcomes for Language Study

A Not Accepted verdict is checked by the Principal Verifier before the sample is sent back to the presenting centre for action. Until the matter is resolved satisfactorily, *all* SQA assessments for the centre are put on Hold.

## Evidence Requirements

With the exception of the small number of centres that are discrepant in one or more of the respects listed above, there is widespread understanding of the Evidence Requirements for this Unit.

## **Administration of assessments**

It is clear, annually, that the most successful centres are those which deal with the administration of the Unit assessments in a systematic way. Procedures typical of such centres are shown below (under Specific areas for improvement).

## **Areas of good practice**

### **Close Reading**

Thorough preparation of candidates was evident in a number of centres. Familiarity with how to go about tackling specific types of questions is crucial to success in the Close Reading Learning Outcome. It follows that training in the answering (particularly) of word-choice questions, sentence-structure questions, analysis questions should be a central part of teaching and learning in these Courses.

### **Writing**

Verifiers commented on the variety of tasks, topics and purposes offered for Writing, and the range of responses to them. Some new 'standards' appear to have become popular in Discursive Writing, and it was particularly pleasing to see the maturity with which candidates responded to current issues, such as 'gay' marriage and independence for Scotland.

It was also a pleasure to read some reports. Many centres evidently steer clear of this option; they should not. Some very well-researched and well-prepared reports were sampled at verification, with candidates demonstrating strong awareness of the structuring and presentation of the report.

In the centres in which candidates had performed well, Verifiers commented on the thoroughness of the preparation in the classroom. Tags, checklists, well-focused comments and constructive redrafting all contributed to the impression of good teaching and learning. In one case, a detailed and very supportive log, charting progress through the stages of the writing process, had made a significant difference to the final drafts.

## **Specific areas for improvement**

### **Close Reading**

Candidates should be prepared for the demands of different types of questions. Teaching should focus on what is expected of candidates in, particularly, questions on word choice, imagery and structure.

Marking of Close Reading should follow the Marking Guidelines. Overly generous interpretation of marking instructions does not, in the end, do the candidate any favours.

Valid, eligible instruments of assessment for Close Reading are only those materials currently held on the National Assessment Bank. The NAB is regularly checked and updated, and colleagues must use the centre's secure-site access to check that the instrument of assessment intended for use is current. Withdrawals from the NAB (usually because the security of an item has been

compromised) are announced on the English home-pages, and at development and Understanding Standards sessions.

Some submissions this year included the following Close Reading passages, *all* of which have been withdrawn from the NAB:

*The Simpsons* (Intermediate 2)  
*The Circus Comes to Town* (Higher)  
*Tragic Beauty* (Higher)

(Since *Tragic Beauty* was withdrawn in the session just completed, its inclusion for central verification did not affect the outcome. *The Simpsons* and *The Circus Comes to Town* were withdrawn over a year ago.)

Instruments of assessment held on the National Assessment Bank are available only for formal presentation for Unit assessment, and must not be used for any other purpose.

Improper uses of instruments of assessment include the following:

- ◆ Use as practice papers in preparation for a Unit assessment
- ◆ Use by tutors or others not teaching in the presenting centre
- ◆ Storing in a way that is likely to compromise the security of the item
- ◆ Allowing items out of the presenting centre (for example, sending papers home)

The use of instruments of assessment from the NAB is permitted for presentation for the Close Reading component of SQA Communication Courses: Higher papers for Communication 4 (Higher); Intermediate 2 papers for Communication 3 (Int 2).

### **Writing**

Candidates should be encouraged to explore their own interests and strengths in Writing. This has obvious implications for the coverage required in the Writing Learning Outcome. Whole-class assignments, while they may make life easier, are unlikely to lead to each candidate fulfilling his or her potential.

Verifiers commented positively on the following features of successful centres:

- ◆ Use of assessment tags, checklists and pro-forma profiles
- ◆ Cross-marking
- ◆ Well-focused comments, referring to the assessment criteria
- ◆ A wide range of tasks, topics and purposes
- ◆ Clear identification of next steps

Where appropriate, sources should be clearly acknowledged.