

Consultation on the Conduct, Marking and Grading of Spoken Language Skills in GCSE English Language



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The scope of this consultation

From September 2015, students in England will start studying for new GCSE English language qualifications, graded 9 to 1. We have already announced that the outcomes of the assessment of students' speaking skills will not contribute to the 9 to 1 grade for the subject. This grade will be based on students' performance in their written exams only. Students' performance in their spoken language assessment will instead be reported in a separate grade. We are now seeking views on how the spoken language assessment should be conducted, marked and graded.

How to respond to this consultation

If you are interested in GCSE English language we hope you will respond to this consultation.

The closing date for responses is 26th September 2014.

Please respond to this consultation in one of three ways:

- Complete the online response at: <http://surveys.ofqual.gov.uk/s3/spoken-language-skills-in-gcse-english-language>
- Email your response to consultations@ofqual.gov.uk – please include 'GCSE English Spoken Language Consultation' in the subject line of the email and make clear who you are and in what capacity you are responding.
- Post your response to: GCSE English Spoken Language Consultation, Ofqual, Spring Place, Coventry Business Park, Herald Avenue, Coventry, CV5 6UB.

Evaluating the responses

To evaluate responses properly, we need to know who is responding to the consultation, and in what capacity. We will therefore only consider your response if you complete the information page (see page 14).

Any personal data (such as your name, address and any other identifying information) will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and our standard terms and conditions.

We will publish the evaluation of responses. Please note that we may publish all or part of your response unless you tell us (in your answer to the confidentiality question) that you want us to treat your response as confidential. If you tell us you wish your response to be treated as confidential, we will not include your details in any published list of respondents, although we may quote from your response anonymously.

1. Background

- 1.1 Following our detailed investigations into GCSE English and English language qualifications awarded in 2012,¹ we decided, following consultation, that the speaking and listening components of these qualifications in the future should be reported separately to the grade for the written exams. This change is taking effect for the current qualifications awarded from this summer (2014).
- 1.2 Students who are awarded English or English language GCSE qualifications during 2014/16 will have their performance in the speaking and listening assessment reported using a grade from 5 to 1, with 5 being the highest grade and 1 the lowest. The grade will appear on students' certificates alongside grades A* to G. A similar approach was used between 1988 and 1993, when oral communication was a separately reported feature of GCSE English. However, at that time a student had to achieve at least a pass grade to be awarded the qualification. Speaking and listening is not being used as a 'hurdle' for the current qualification.
- 1.3 We will not repeat here the reasons for our decision that the outcomes of the speaking and listening assessment in the current qualification should be reported separately or the options on which we consulted. This information can be found in our April 2013 consultation, on our website.²
- 1.4 We have decided, again following consultation, that the outcomes of spoken language assessment that will be a feature of the *new* English language GCSE will also be reported separately. Again, the background to this decision can be found on our website.³

¹ www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-11-02-gcse-english-final-report-and-appendices.pdf

² <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/speaking-and-listening>

³ www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-06-11-gcse-reform-consultation-june-2013.pdf

2. Subject requirements for new GCSE English language

2.1 The content on which all new GCSE English language qualifications, to be taught from September 2015, must be based has been published by the Department for Education.⁴

2.2 The content includes expectations that students will be able to:

- present information and ideas: selecting and organising information and ideas effectively and persuasively for prepared spoken presentations; planning effectively for different purposes and audiences; making presentations and speeches;
- respond to spoken language: listening to and responding appropriately to any questions and feedback;
- use spoken standard English: expressing ideas using standard English whenever and wherever appropriate.

2.3 This content document also includes the assessment objectives for the subject. The assessment objectives describe the principal abilities candidates taking GCSE English language should be expected to demonstrate.

2.4 The assessment objectives require exam boards to provide opportunities for students to be rewarded for demonstrating the following:

- AO7 – presentation skills in a formal setting;
- AO8 – listening and responding appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations;
- AO9 – using spoken standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.

2.5 Spoken English language skills are therefore an important aspect of the qualification and must be assessed. These skills are most effectively assessed through direct observation.

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-english-language-and-gcse-english-literature-new-content

3. The conduct of the spoken language assessment

- 3.1 For current GCSE English and English language qualifications, students undertake a speaking and listening assessment. Teachers assess their own students' performance in the assessment. Exam board representatives visit a small sample of schools each year to observe the conduct of some assessments and to moderate teacher assessments. If they find a teacher is marking too harshly or too leniently, the exam board requires the teacher to adjust his or her approach appropriately. The exam board will assume that the marking observed was typical of all marking undertaken by the teacher. If adjustment is needed, this is applied to all marking of the assessments the teacher has undertaken, typically using a regression approach.
- 3.2 Therefore, students whose performance was not observed by the exam board moderator may nevertheless have their marks reduced or increased. If there is no tangible evidence of students' performance, it is difficult for schools to challenge an exam board's review of its teachers' marking and the impact on the grades awarded. Similarly, it is more difficult for individual students to seek a review of a teacher's assessment.
- 3.3 To address these shortcomings, we propose that students' performance in their assessments should be digitally recorded. The recordings would then be available for use by exam board moderators and for students who wish to question their teacher's assessment. We recognise that recording the assessments would not provide assurance that all assessments were conducted fairly. For example, some students could have multiple attempts at, and be coached through, an assessment. Others might be given 'one chance only' and be unsupported. Nevertheless, we believe that recording will introduce new safeguards that are currently lacking.
- 3.4 We have considered whether such recordings should be audio only or audio and visual. We believe an audiovisual recording would provide more useful evidence of a student's performance. Students might, for example, use visual materials during their presentations. If such use was not captured, the recording might inaccurately represent a student's performance.
- 3.5 Schools currently make an audio recording of GCSE modern foreign language speaking assessments. The number of students taking modern foreign languages is, of course, lower than that for GCSE English language. Before we decide whether the assessments should be recorded and, if so, in what form, we wish to understand more about the costs, benefits and manageability of a requirement that all spoken language assessments should be recorded. We will base our understanding on the expectation that each student's assessment –

both their presentation and their response to questions and feedback – will last about ten minutes. We will also take into account the reduced need for exam board visits to schools to moderate teacher assessments if all assessments are recorded.

3.6 We are seeking feedback on:

- whether the benefits for marking, moderation and review of the assessments being recorded would outweigh the costs;
- which of audio or audiovisual recordings would be more useful and more manageable; and
- any positive or negative impact either form of recording might have on students, teachers, schools, colleges and exam boards.

4. Reporting the outcomes of the spoken language assessment

- 4.1 In our *GCSE Reform* consultation of June 2013,⁵ we explained our concerns about the difficulty of establishing a national standard for teacher-administered and teacher-marked spoken English language assessments, particularly when schools are under great pressure to secure good outcomes for the qualification. We have decided that the impact of any inherent weaknesses in the spoken English language assessment should be contained through the separate reporting of the outcomes.
- 4.2 In June 2013, we consulted on how the outcomes of new GCSEs should be reported and on our proposal that a graded approach, described numerically, should be used. We subsequently decided that GCSEs should be graded using a 9 to 1 grade range. We did not at that time consult specifically on how the outcomes of the spoken language aspect of new GCSE English language should be reported. We are addressing this now.

The number of grades for reporting the outcomes of the spoken English language assessment

- 4.3 We must decide how many grades should be used to differentiate students' performance in the spoken language assessment.
- 4.4 One option would be simply to differentiate between students who demonstrate an acceptable standard in spoken language assessment and those who do not – a pass/fail approach. This is an approach we consider appropriate for the outcome of A level students' practical science skills assessments.
- 4.5 However, we believe such an approach would be inappropriate for the skills to be assessed in the spoken language assessment. For some skills, a judgement can be made as to whether or not a skill has been demonstrated. In a practical science experiment, for example, a measurement is either both accurately made and recorded, or it is not. In contrast, presentation skills will be shown to a particular degree. Some students will demonstrate very high skills levels. Others will have less well developed skills but will nevertheless perform above a minimum acceptable standard. A pass/fail approach would not reflect the range of skill levels students demonstrate and might not motivate students to develop their skills, especially as most English speakers might be expected to achieve the minimum standard.

⁵ <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/gcse-reform-june-2013>

- 4.6 We have considered whether spoken language in the new qualification should be reported using five grades, as this is the approach being used for speaking and listening assessments taken in 2014/16.
- 4.7 It will be a while before we have useful evidence about the way the approach being used for 2014/16 is working. However, we do recognise that such a differentiated approach, which requires teachers to make fine judgements about a student's performance, suggests a degree of precision that might not be realised. The approach also adds to the pressures placed on teachers delivering a high stakes qualification.
- 4.8 Our proposal is that students' performance should be reported using one of three 'pass' grades and that there should also be an outcome to indicate performance below the minimum standard. We believe this would provide sufficient differentiation between students to motivate them to develop their spoken language skills and enable employers and others who might have a particular interest in these skills to identify students with the skill level appropriate for particular roles. We also believe that with appropriate guidance for teachers, and moderation arrangements enhanced by recordings, students' performance could be sufficiently accurately and consistently reported using three grades.
- 4.9 We are seeking views on the number of grades that should be used to differentiate between students' performance.

How the grades should be described

- 4.10 When we confirmed in November 2013 that the spoken language assessment would be reported separately to the outcomes of the written exams, we also confirmed that new GCSEs will be graded 9 to 1.
- 4.11 It would be confusing if a separate numerical grade was also used for the spoken language assessment, as students would have two numerical grades for a single qualification. Similarly, the use of alphabetical grades for spoken language could cause confusion with current GCSE grades (A* to G).
- 4.12 As we are proposing the use of three pass grades and a fail grade, we have considered how these grades should be described. One option is to call them 'pass', 'merit', 'distinction' and 'fail'. This terminology is often used to describe assessment outcomes and requires little explanation. There is, however, a risk that as *all* GCSE grades are pass grades, describing one grade explicitly as a 'pass' might be confusing.
- 4.13 Alternatively, the three pass grades could be described as 'satisfactory', 'good' and 'excellent' and the fail outcome as 'unsatisfactory'. Again, such terminology

is familiar and self-explanatory. It avoids the potential confusion that might arise if the term 'pass' is used.

- 4.14 Of course the terms suggested above could be combined in different ways.
- 4.15 We welcome views on these options and invite alternative suggestions.
- 4.16 Students will not have to pass the spoken English language assessment in order to be awarded a grade for their performance in their written exams. The spoken English language assessment will not be a 'hurdle'. Schools and colleges will, however, be required to offer the assessment, as spoken language is an essential feature of the overall qualification. A school or college that decides not to teach the skills or to enter students for the assessment will be failing to deliver the qualification (and the national curriculum requirements, where applicable). The exam boards are likely to investigate if there was evidence that a school or college was not giving students the opportunity to complete their GCSE English language qualification in full.
- 4.17 Students who do not take the assessment will not have demonstrated they meet the required spoken English language standard. We must avoid this being indicated on their qualification certificate in a way that is, or is perceived to be, more favourable than the outcome recorded for a student who attempts the assessment but who does not demonstrate the required standard. This would be unfair and might deter entry of weaker students, and efforts to improve their skills.
- 4.18 We therefore propose that students who do not attempt the spoken English language assessment should have this fact indicated on their certificate. Our preference is that this is indicated using the same term as that used for a student who attempts the assessment but does not meet the required standard. However, a different term could be used.
- 4.19 We are seeking views on the options.
- 4.20 Some disabled students will not be able to enter for the assessment at all, because of the nature of their disability. These students will be able to apply for an exemption from the assessment. They will therefore have a different outcome reported on their certificates. One option is the certificate is left blank where the outcome would otherwise have been reported.

The assessment model

- 4.21 If, as proposed, three grades are used to indicate a level of performance that meets or exceeds the required standard, we propose that teachers should assess students against published criteria, common to all exam boards.

4.22 Draft criteria are set out below.

Description of performance indicated by the lowest grade	Description of performance indicated by the middle grade	Description of performance indicated by the highest grade
<p>The candidate:</p> <p>Is audible and intelligible</p> <p>Expresses straightforward ideas/information/feelings, using a basic range of vocabulary</p> <p>Makes an attempt to organise and structure their talk</p> <p>Makes an attempt to meet the needs of the audience</p> <p>Provides an appropriate response in a straightforward manner to questions and feedback</p> <p>Generally uses appropriate spoken standard English</p>	<p>The candidate:</p> <p>Is audible and intelligible and adapts their style and tone for the context</p> <p>Expresses challenging ideas/information/feelings, using a broad range of vocabulary</p> <p>Organises and structures their talk clearly and appropriately to meet the needs of the audience</p> <p>Achieves the purpose of the presentation</p> <p>Responds formally and in some detail to questions and feedback</p> <p>Confidently uses spoken standard English</p>	<p>The candidate:</p> <p>Is audible and intelligible and selects a suitable style and tone for the context</p> <p>Expresses sophisticated ideas/information/feelings, using a sophisticated range of vocabulary</p> <p>Organises and structures their talk using an effective range of strategies to engage the audience</p> <p>Achieves the purpose of the presentation</p> <p>Responds perceptively to questions and feedback and elaborates with further ideas and information where appropriate</p> <p>Demonstrates assured and flexible use of spoken standard English</p>

4.23 We are seeking feedback on whether such criteria appropriately describe the level of performance students might demonstrate and whether they could be fairly and consistently applied (with guidance) by teachers marking assessments.

4.24 We propose that teachers should identify the level that best describes each student's performance. The teacher's assessment would determine the grade

the student should be awarded – subject to subsequent moderation (using digital recording) by the exam board.

4.25 Teachers could be required simply to identify in which band the student's performance falls (the non-mark approach) or also to judge, using a mark scheme, the student's performance *within* the band, for example 5 to 10 marks for performance at the lowest level, 11 to 15 the middle level and 16 to 20 for the top level (the mark-approach).

4.26 There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these approaches.

4.27 Advantages of the non-mark approach:

- It would be straightforward to use and explain.
- There would be no need for teachers to decide where within the band a student's performance falls, making their judgement more straightforward.
- Moderators would only have to consider whether a sampled student's performance was in line with the description, but not where within the range of performances covered by the band the student's performance should be placed. Moderators' views on the accuracy of teacher marking could therefore be less finely judged and adjustments less frequently needed.

4.28 Disadvantages of the non-mark approach:

- If a problem was found when a sample of a teacher's marking was moderated, all of the recordings of the students marked by the teacher would have to be re-marked by the exam board as regression could not be used. If teachers' marking was regularly found to be incorrect, this would increase the time needed for, and the costs of, moderation.

4.29 Advantages of the marks approach:

- Use of marks would allow adjustments to be made, where necessary, following moderation using a regression model. This would be in line with current practice when marks are adjusted following moderation of a sample of student work.
- Teachers are familiar with mark-based schemes.

4.30 Disadvantages of the marks approach:

- It may be difficult, as now, to standardise marking across teachers to give the level of precision needed.

- There could be disagreements between moderators and teachers about the exact mark a performance deserves, increasing the number of requests for reviews and appeals.
- The use of regression following moderation could have an unfair impact on candidates whose performance was not included in the sample of recordings moderated.

4.31 We favour the non-marks approach but we would welcome your views on the two options.

4.32 We propose that exam boards should trial both approaches with a number of schools and teachers during autumn 2014 and that our decision on the best approach should be informed by the outcome of the trial and by responses to this consultation.

5. Equality impact

- 5.1 We have previously considered the potential impact, positive and negative, of our decision that students' performance in their speaking assessment should be reported separately to their performance in their written exams, on students who share particular protected characteristics.⁶
- 5.2 As we have considered the approach to the conduct, marking and grading of spoken language skills, we have taken this analysis into account.
- 5.3 Concerns have been raised with us that our decision that the outcome of the spoken language assessment should be reported separately will reduce the attention given by schools and teachers to developing spoken language skills. This could have a negative impact on students whose spoken language development is affected by their disability.
- 5.4 Our proposals that all assessment must be recorded and that there should be a grading system that differentiates students' performance beyond a pass/fail approach should signal to schools and teachers that students' spoken language skills are to be developed and the assessment is to be taken seriously.
- 5.5 Our proposal that students who do not take the assessment, other than as a consequence of their being exempt because of their disability, should have the same outcome recorded as students who attempt the assessment but do not demonstrate the required standard should similarly signal to schools, teachers and students that the assessment is not an 'optional extra'.
- 5.6 A number of equality groups have argued that students who are exempt from the assessment because of their disability should not have the fact of that exemption reported on their certificate. We believe that where students are exempt from a separately reported aspect of a qualification, they should have the choice as to whether or not their exemption is explicitly recorded on their certificate or whether the fact of the exemption is evidenced by a 'blank'.
- 5.7 We have not identified anything about the proposed arrangements that would have an adverse impact on students because of their racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sexual orientation or as a result of gender reassignment.
- 5.8 We are seeking views on any potential impacts and on evidence that we should consider as part of this consultation.

⁶ www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-04-25-equality-analysis-changes-to-gcse-english.pdf

Responding to the consultation

About you

Name:	
Position:	
Name of organisation or group (if applicable):	
Address:	
Email:	
Telephone number:	

Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?* If you answer yes, we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.

Yes No

Are the views you express on this consultation an official response from the organisation you represent or your personal views?*

Personal views

Official response from an organisation/group (please complete the type of responding organisation tick list)

If you ticked "Personal views", which of the following are you?

Student

Parent/carer

Teacher (but not responding on behalf of a school or college)

Other (including general public) (please state capacity) _____

If you ticked “Official response from an organisation/group”, please respond accordingly:

Type of responding organisation*

- Awarding organisation
- Local authority
- School/college (please complete the next question)
- Academy chain
- Private training provider
- University or other higher education institution
- Employer
- Other representative group/interest group (please skip to type of representative group/interest group)

School/college type

- Comprehensive/non-selective academy
- State selective/selective academy
- Independent
- Special school
- Further education college
- Sixth form college
- None of the above (please state what) _____

Type of representative group/interest group

- Group of awarding organisations
- Union
- Employer/business representative group
- Subject association/learned society
- Equality organisation/group

School/college or teacher representative group

None of the above (please specify) _____

Nation*

England

Wales

Scotland

Northern Ireland

Other EU country (please state which) _____

Non-EU country (please state which) _____

How did you find out about this consultation?

Our newsletter or another of our communications

Via internet search

From our website

From another organisation (please state below)

Other (please state) _____

May we contact you for more information?

Yes

No

* Denotes mandatory fields

6. Consultation questions

Question 1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the benefits for marking, moderation and review of the spoken language assessments being recorded would outweigh the costs?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 2. If assessments are recorded should the recording be:

- audio only
- audio and visual?

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 3. What would be the impact, positive and negative, on students, schools/colleges, teachers and exam boards if all spoken language assessments were recorded? Please quantify your answer where possible.

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Question 4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that students' performance in the speaking assessment should be differentiated using three positive grades and a separate outcome showing that the required level has not been demonstrated?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 5. If three positive grades and an outcome showing the required level has not been demonstrated are used, should these grades be described as:

- pass, merit, distinction and fail?
- satisfactory, good, excellent and unsatisfactory?
- an alternative? Please indicate what this should be

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Question 6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that students who do not take the spoken language assessment, other than because they were given an exemption because of their disability, should have the same outcome on their certificate as a student who attempted the assessment but did not demonstrate the minimum required level of performance?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the draft assessment criteria appropriately describe the different levels of performance that students might demonstrate?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should grade students using the descriptions only, without also using marks?

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should, in addition to identifying the description that best matches a student performance, also differentiate performance within that description band by allocating marks?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 10. Are there any ways by which decisions on the conduct, marking and grading of the assessment may have a positive or negative impact on persons who share protected characteristics?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what are they and what steps could be taken to mitigate any negative impacts?

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