**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

English Language B   **ENGB4**

(Specification 2705)

Unit 4: Investigating Language

Report on the Examination

General

Just over 900 students were entered for ENGB4 in the January 2012 series. As always, the advice and information given in the body of this report is intended to help schools and colleges feel confident to teach and assess further series of this unit. Further individual advice on coursework tasks and requirements can be gained from coursework advisers and the teacher standardising material which is available on e-AQA.

For schools and colleges or teachers new to Language B it would be worth reading the previous reports for this unit. In particular the January 2011 report outlines the key characteristics of the most and least successful language investigations and media texts in terms of approaches and outcome, and this would make a sensible starting point for any school/college or teacher in the early stages of experience with this unit

Language Investigation

As stated in many previous reports, this element of the coursework folder allows students to independently pursue interesting questions about language in use, and once again moderators were impressed by the variety of topics and approaches undertaken by students this series.

Central to the spirit of this unit is the idea that while students should be working on topic areas which are seen to afford interesting questions about language in use, the role of the supervising teacher(s) is to guide the student in terms of the time and word constraints as well as in matters of ethics and ethical approaches to investigating language. Schools and colleges are advised to consult their coursework advisers if they are unsure about any topic – however, this is not a mandatory requirement; schools and colleges do not have to send their advisor a list of language investigation questions to be checked and agreed. Schools and colleges who have had feedback about the word length of their students' submissions or about approaches to either element of the ENGB4 folder are reminded of the importance of adhering to the guidelines in the specification for future submissions.

Introduction

Moderators felt that there was a continued trend to maintain the quality and focus of students' introductions. In a small number of schools and colleges there was evidence of some narrowing of the range of topics, but moderators did remark that there were still many schools/colleges which worked hard to encourage their students to pursue areas of personal language interest. In line with previous series, it was clear that the most successful starting point for an investigation was a strong personal engagement with the topic area.

Popular topic areas this series included:

- language acquisition, especially literacy based work – often using the student's own writing from primary school
- political speeches
- language and gender, often comparing male and female use
- reality TV
- advertising
- media texts, especially comparisons between newspapers and magazines.

Some of the more interesting topic areas included:

- language change: one example used letters sent to a family during the 2nd World War
- language and technology: live sports blogs were very successful, as were the examples of the language of on-line gaming
- literary texts, often focusing on a popular genre of writing, eg fantasy fiction
- existing language theories as the starting point of the investigation: a fascinating example tested existing technology based theories against the use of a Blackberry phone for 24 hours; another used theories around identity and play to look at social networking in teenagers.

Methodologies

Moderators remarked that the majority of schools and colleges are now very confident with this aspect of the investigation. Most students set themselves sensible and appropriate methods of data collection, often balancing quantitative and qualitative approaches. This series, there was less evidence of students using this section to explain the 'physical elements' of data collection, which was a very pleasing development.

Moderators also remarked that they saw questionnaires used both as a method for data collection and a way of gaining more detail about the contextual factors surrounding the data. As highlighted above, students who chose to 'test' or 'repeat' an existing language theory, eg men and women's ability to describe colour, often produced very focused and successful investigations. For further advice on selecting an appropriate methodology to set up a language investigation, please refer to the texts listed in the Teacher Resource Bank www.aqa.org.uk or contact your coursework adviser.

Analysis

Previous reports have highlighted the fact that this section of the investigation should be used to demonstrate the analysis of the data using appropriate linguistic concepts, and to offer consideration of concepts and issues relating to language and analysis of contextual issues. In the most successful investigations this was demonstrated by the use of clear, salient subheadings relating to the topic and data. Moderators remarked that where schools and colleges encouraged their students to use carefully shaped subheadings, the success of the investigations was significantly better than where students did not. These subheadings should be linked to the aims/focus of the investigation rather than simply a list of routine language methods.

Schools and colleges are reminded that there is no need to cover all the language methods listed in the specification in one language investigation. Moderators also commented that occasionally there was a whole school/college approach to the analysis section, where every student used the same four or five methods to analyse their data. This approach should be avoided as it does not suggest an enquiry-based approach to teaching and learning – an approach which is essential for success in the unit.

The approach to context (AO3) has gradually improved over pervious series, and moderators remarked that there was more evidence of an integrated approach to the analysis of context this series. It is essential that analysis sections are a balance of the language features in use and context, allowing students to access the higher bands of the Assessment Criteria. Schools and colleges are reminded that tables containing numbers of syllables, lexis and lengths of sentences are unlikely to be illuminating on their own. Moderators felt that some students were distracted by this type of 'counting' approach and consequently failed to make any 'evaluative' comment, keeping the quality of their analysis in the bottom half of the AO1 Assessment Criteria.

Conclusion

This section of the investigation remains problematic in some submissions. Successful approaches focused on and evaluated the key findings of the analysis section, drawing perceptive and tentative conclusions. Less successful approaches tended to simply repeat comments from the analysis section and consider speculatively what might have been, given more time and/or words.

Bibliography

This remains a mandatory element of a language investigation. However, despite consistent and clear advice through the teacher standardising materials and previous reports some investigations did not contain this section.

Appendices

Many moderators remarked that they were impressed by the organisation of this section of the investigation folder. Data was usually offered in a format which was easy to access and read, which was very helpful. Schools and colleges are reminded that it is not necessary to include tapes, CDs or DVDs in the data section. All spoken data should be transcribed and included as a paper copy.

Unfortunately there were a number of submissions this series which did not contain data or contained incomplete data sets. This is highly problematic as the moderator is unable to assess the validity of the language investigation. If data has been lost or misplaced, the school/college must discuss this with AQA before an investigation is submitted to the moderator.

Assessment

This series clearly demonstrated that the vast majority of schools and colleges are fully conversant with the new assessment criteria and were able to use the teacher standardising materials to benchmark students' work. As stated in previous reports, moderators welcomed the referencing of teacher standardising materials in the teacher comments. Moderators also found the use of individual centre assessment sheets to be particularly helpful during the moderation process.

Schools and colleges are reminded that annotation and teacher comments should be addressed to moderators and colleagues rather than students, in order to be an effective element of the moderation process. Unfortunately, in a very small number of cases, assessment was driven by a focus on the minor technical aspects of the students' writing, rather than led by the assessment objectives in the assessment criteria. In these cases it was very hard for the moderator to understand how the marks had been awarded for the language investigation.

Media Text

Once again this element of the ENGB4 folder was handled in very different ways by schools and colleges. Schools/colleges where the media was an effective and valuable complement to the language investigation often allowed students to move on from the investigation and consider a new aspect of the broad topic area. In addition, it is pleasing to note that schools and college encouraged students to have a precise audience and genre in mind for their media text.

For example, a media text such as:

> *How to manipulate your boss!*
> Genre: Cosmopolitan
> Audience: young women

is often likely to be more effective than:

> *How to manipulate your boss!*
> Genre: magazine article
> Audience: adults

This small difference in terms of audience and genre usually allowed students to have a more precise control over their language choices and therefore achieve at a higher level in terms of all three strands of the AO4 assessment criteria.

In many schools and colleges the genres attempted for this task were increasingly ambitious this series. Website articles were a particularly popular and successful genre. Radio scripts were more successful than in previous series, and use of interesting publications such as *Psychologies* and the *TES* allowed for some lively and engaging pieces of writing.

Unfortunately some schools and colleges failed to meet the requirements of this task in terms of using the broad subject focus of their language investigation to highlight the language ideas and issues surrounding their chosen topic.

Assessment

This section is assessed in three different ways, as highlighted in the assessment criteria bands:

- audience, purpose and genre
- register
- transformation of ideas and concepts from language study (original materials).

Moderators remarked that when schools and college referred to these three strands in their comments the assessment of the text was likely to be very accurate. Problems occurred when schools and colleges failed to consider one or more of these elements, or when there was no indication of the intended audience or genre of the text, making the assessment of the first bullet very difficult.

Administration Issues

In a small number of schools and colleges, moderators noticed some administration issues which were very frustrating and often delayed the moderation process.

Schools and colleges are reminded that:
- all folders requested in the sample should arrive promptly and should match the request from the moderator
- students' marks need to be carefully checked as they are transferred from centre comment sheets to the Candidate Record Form
- Students' details should be complete on the Candidate Record Form
- data for the language investigation should be in paper format and securely attached
- all folders should contain teacher comments which indicate how the marks were awarded to that folder – comments simply transferred from the assessment criteria or highlighted in a photocopy of the assessment criteria are not as helpful as individual comments.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades
Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.