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Monitors' Report/ Principal Monitor Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCSE English Language (1EN0)

Paper E Spoken Language Endorsement

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Summer 2017

Publications Code 1EN0_E_1706_ER

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The Spoken Language endorsement for GCSE 9 - 1 English Language

Introduction

It is clear that the challenges and opportunities of the new spoken language endorsement have been embraced with professionalism and commitment by the vast majority of centres who were monitored this series. Assessment standards were applied with rigour and accuracy in most cases. Many unfamiliar factors are involved in the process of providing samples for monitors but guidance to centres is clearly set out on pages 9 to 13 of the English Language specification. The application of assessment criteria is perhaps a little more familiar but it is inevitable that some centres may lack confidence in how to employ the criteria. Some guidance will be provided in this report.

The recording of student presentations

We recognise that the endorsement places considerable demands on the technical resources and expertise of centres, as well as on the time needed to record student presentations. It is to be hoped that centres will be able to meet these demands more comfortably as the component moves into its second and future years.

The guidance provided in the specification was followed in the majority of cases but a number of issues were reported by monitors, including:

- Sound quality. Although it was usually possible to hear a candidate clearly on the submitted USB drive or DVD, it was sometimes difficult to hear the questions posed to the candidate. In a small minority of instances the opposite was the case. On a number of occasions, background noise intruded in a major way. Centres often have to deal with difficult circumstances but candidates can be disadvantaged when recordings are made during break time, for example, or when maintenance work is under way in the vicinity.
- Positioning of candidate and audience. It is perfectly acceptable to film the candidate face on to the camera or slightly in profile so that the candidate can face both camera and audience. There is no need to film the audience but their questions must be heard. There were some instances of audiences being positioned behind the candidate and then addressing questions to the back of his/her head which must be disconcerting and might well prevent the candidate from meeting the needs of, or engaging, the audience.
- Centres sometimes ignored the importance of lighting and, on a few occasions, monitors found it difficult to see some candidates or read their expression.
- Candidate identification. Most centres went to considerable lengths to identify candidates: some sending photographs of candidates or providing clear labelling on screen. Few candidates wore name labels, as required, but most clearly gave their names and candidate numbers at the start of the recording.

- Overall quality. It is important that centres check in advance the quality of materials submitted. It was sometimes impossible to open some files sent and substitute copies had to be requested. Clear guidance is given in the specification and centres are asked to check all recordings before they are sent to monitors.

Administration

Guidance for administration is provided in the specification. It was required that recordings, accompanied by the Head of Centre Declaration sheet, be sent to monitors to arrive on or before May 15th. Most centres did so but a small minority of centres had to be reminded well after this deadline had passed. There is no requirement that centres include Candidate Assessment Sheets but many did and monitors found these extremely helpful.

Assessment Standards

It is essential that all teachers in centres are familiar with the standardisation DVD provided jointly by the examination boards. The recordings of sample candidate performances, together with the commentaries explaining grades awarded, set the benchmark for all awarding of grades. It is also expected that centres carry out some internal standardisation to guarantee consistency.

The following observations, provided by monitors, are intended to help centres apply standards accurately and consistently.

- Choice of topic. It is highly recommended that this should be a collaborative decision involving both teacher and candidate, with the candidate having some element of choice. Some topics chosen for discussion made it more difficult (though not impossible) for candidates to achieve the higher grades. Recounting holiday experiences or the virtues of famous footballers or family members are not, in themselves, topics without challenge or sophistication, but they make it that much more of an uphill task to meet the national standards for merit and distinction grades. Potentially able candidates were let down by choosing subjects which offered little challenge. The most successful tackled subjects which involved a degree of controversy. Good examples included 'The Scourge of People Trafficking', 'What is "post-truth"?', 'How to encourage children to read'. Some centres required all candidates to speak on the same subject: 'Work Experience', 'The Experience of Exams' or a set text. This often prevented candidates from showing enthusiasm and ownership and frequently encouraged presentations which were merely descriptive. Some candidates were asked to give talks on poems or texts they had studied but this often inhibited candidates.

- Use of notes or scripts. It is appreciated that candidates are often nervous and even the most able can be helped by using prompt notes. However, reading from a prepared script severely disadvantages a candidate. Of all the examples of unhelpful practices reported by monitors, this was the cause of greatest concern. A candidate who has his/her eyes firmly fixed on a sheet of paper or a tablet or a PowerPoint presentation, reading it verbatim, cannot be said to meet the needs of, let alone 'engage', an audience. Nor, in such circumstances, can a candidate 'achieve the purpose of his or her presentation', which surely must include interesting the audience or at least getting them to listen. Eye contact and other paralinguistic features must surely form part of the interaction.
- Listening and responding to questions. Candidates who are not asked questions and therefore cannot respond to them must be recorded as N (Not classified). In a significant number of cases, candidates who delivered a perfectly good presentation which fulfilled all but this criteria, should have been awarded N. To quote the specification guidance: **'In order to achieve a particular grade, a student must meet all of the criteria for that grade.'** The questions asked, either by the teacher or by other members of an audience, should serve to help the candidate. Some centres had clearly spent some time preparing students to ask relevant and purposeful questions: others had not. Challenging yet supportive open-ended questions, which allow candidates to develop and expand their arguments, can help candidates achieve higher grades. Even a moribund presentation can be rescued by questions. There is an art to asking such questions and coaching students in that art is not only helpful to candidates but audience members too, as an intellectual tool. A few centres had arranged for students to ask scripted questions, to which candidates read scripted replies. This practice cannot be of much educational value and would not help candidates to be awarded more than a pass, if that.
- Use of visual aids. The use of PowerPoint and video can be effective in buttressing presentations. However there is skill involved in using such supporting material, and they can give candidates too much to do in operating them. PowerPoint is perhaps best used sparingly to focus the audience on a particular stage in the development of an argument, rather than to provide a text to be read from and it can be counterproductive to use videos to fill up time, or because they are perceived to be entertaining, rather than support an argument.
- Length of presentation. The maximum length of a presentation, with questions, should be ten minutes. Very brief presentations of a minute or so do not allow candidates to demonstrate that they have structured and organised their presentations.

- The use of groups. Individual candidates must be given the opportunity to provide an extended individual presentation and it is unlikely that a group discussion will offer that opportunity. However, there were some examples of very formal debate speeches where candidates performed successfully, provided they were asked questions and responded appropriately. Some pair work where the candidate was interviewed formally proved to be successful also; please see the example of candidate A5 (Josh) on the standardisation video. Very few candidates performed drama presentations that did not match the assessment criteria.

Grades awarded to candidates

- The pass grade is well within the grasp of all candidates who use spoken standard English, who don't read from scripts and who respond to questions. The more help they get in choosing their topic, preparing their presentation and interacting with their audience, the more likely it is that they can access the merit grade.
- The merit grade requires candidates to present challenging ideas and material, rather than the straightforwardly narrative or descriptive. Successful candidates were those who had done some research on their topic, structured their presentation, thought about the vocabulary they would use and demonstrated some engagement with their material and their audience.
- There were some superb candidate performances this series, with some students going far beyond the criteria for the distinction award. On the other hand, topics which limited performance, the reading of scripts or the lack of questioning prevented some candidates being awarded this grade.

Summary

Successful centres were those that had carefully followed the guidance in the specification and had made themselves familiar with the standardisation video provided by the examination boards. It appears that many candidates are enthused by the opportunities provided by the endorsement and responded well to the commitment of their teachers.