



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English/English Language

Specification 4700/4705

ENG02: Speaking and Listening

Report on the Examination

2012 Examination – June series

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GCSE English/English Language

Principal Moderator's Report Unit 2 (ENG02)

Summer 2012 saw the first very large entry for Unit 2 Speaking and Listening, using new criteria and without the fixed points of grade equivalence. Talking to teachers at meetings and on visits they largely appear happy with application of the criteria in their own centre but, in the competitive world of league tables, want to be assured that parity is being maintained across all schools.

AQA and its team of advisers and moderators have worked very hard this year to ensure that there is indeed parity across schools when it comes to awarding students their marks in this unit. Speaking and Listening is, by definition, hard to capture beyond the moment of its delivery, but it is worth 20% of a very important GCSE and so must be monitored rigorously.

This monitoring has taken a number of forms. The first batches of schools have been visited by advisers, with visits now extending into late Spring and Summer to increase the number of schools that can be seen. Advisers have been told that, while continuing to offer general advice and support, they must also check carefully that schools are awarding marks accurately based on the standards shown by the DVDs. This means that not only must joint marking on the day be (a) accurate against the published criteria and (b) conducted within a discussion informed specifically by knowledge of the DVDs, but it must also (c) reflect the marks being given by the teachers in the centre's classrooms. In other words if schools are awarding bands 4/5 in their classes, but cannot show bands 4/5 performances to the visiting adviser, then this becomes a serious cause for concern.

In the light of concerns raised by visiting advisers, AQA has undertaken its most extensive programme of moderation visits ever. These visits do not necessarily lead to adjusting marks, but they can do.

Perhaps of most significance to schools in the desire for parity is AQA's commitment to using statistical evidence to identify possible leniency/harshness. AQA English staff, the AQA's research team and the Principal Moderator have worked hard to produce a model of data analysis which will identify schools awarding marks outside the 'norms' of performance across other schools and across other units. This is a sophisticated tool, which does not in itself lead to adjustments in marks. What it does do, though, is identify schools who will be on a priority list to receive visits from senior advisers in Autumn.

Fairness and parity are, of course, best delivered by schools all applying the same standards by reference to published criteria and by exemplification through DVDs. The report will now consider some aspects of this application.

Applying the standard: Criteria

Teachers and advisers have found it useful that each of the five mark bands has a 'headline' label – so for example band 5 is labelled 'sophisticated and impressive'. This helps to highlight the sort of work, and the sort of content, that is required at this level; the topic under discussion needs to have sufficient depth and scope to enable students to work at a 'sophisticated' level.

Once the band of performance has been identified, the specific mark then needs to be given, based again upon careful application of the criteria across all three columns, whatever the nature of the task. (Some teachers have erroneously assumed that each column in the criteria can only be used for each type of activity ie Creating and Sustaining Roles applies only to Role Playing. This is **not** the case).

The need to refine the mark in the band by careful application of the criteria means that a system of record keeping which merely highlights the band descriptors cannot be allowed. Three performances in band 3, for example, could give a student any mark between 21 and 27, which mere highlighting will not justify.

Applying the standard: DVDs

The criteria published in the specification provide a paper based form of assessment. This is obviously useful, but to be implemented carefully it needs to be supplemented by filmed material of actual performances. AQA has a huge commitment to exemplifying standards in as many ways as possible, which is why it has so far produced two DVDs based on filming in Essex, and is now committed to at least two more DVDs as a result of filming in Rochdale.

These DVDs perform a vital function in achieving parity of marking across schools, but also within centre too. Visiting advisers have been told to check with schools that they are using DVDs to standardise across teachers and teaching groups. Where schools seem unaware of the DVD, and so unable to compare a performance on the day with a similar performance on DVD, then this has to be reported as a potential problem.

An increasing number of schools are also filming their own students as part of their standardising. With cheap and easily usable cameras now readily available, this makes good sense, providing the standards shown are identical with those shown by AQA.

Choosing Tasks

Unit 2, Speaking and Listening, offers English teachers more opportunities than any other part of the GCSE to tailor tasks to their own students and contexts. This freedom brings with it, though, the responsibility to ensure that tasks offer students appropriate challenges so that they can achieve their best. Advisers have tended to find that where tasks are not working well, it tends to be at either end of the ability spectrum. So, apparently able students are not given tasks which allow them to handle sophisticated ideas and language, while sometimes quite limited students are expected to discuss often inaccessible material – often of a literary nature.

Two examples highlight this. In several schools able students have been asked to deliver rants (a very popular genre at the moment) on deliberately ‘trivial’ topics. Not surprisingly their language choices have often lacked sophistication. In several schools limited students have been put into groups and told to discuss poems, sometimes even unseen. Again there is sadly an inevitability about the outcome.

The headline labels for each of the five mark bands are again useful here – for example band 5 is labelled ‘sophisticated and impressive’. This helps to highlight the sort of work, and the sort of content, that is required at this level. Band 5 tasks need to encourage substance and complexity.

Teachers might like to refer to an article by the Principal Moderator in the Spring edition of the AQA English magazine 2012. In that article it is again stressed – ‘again’ because this has been

a constant thread for many years now- that there are essentially three ways in which spoken language works: there needs to be *content and ideas, a repertoire of language and appropriate interactivity*.

Record Keeping

When teachers submit marks for this unit no other paperwork is required and nothing should be sent to a moderator for other units. Teachers do though need to keep ongoing records for Speaking and Listening. All records for all students must be available for monitoring by a visiting adviser. These should be retained until each such visit has taken place – so for example it could be that 3 years' worth of records are retained.

There is no requirement to use the AQA provided record form, but many schools do use it to good effect. The best summative comments are those which reflect the criteria but which also comment on specific aspects of the student's performance. Increasingly schools store forms electronically, which also makes good sense. Also schools are storing unit 2 records alongside other units, so that they can see a direct correlation across all aspects of the course.

Visiting advisers will expect to learn about the centre's methods of internal standardisation. Ideally these will combine a number of methods: watching AQA DVDs; collaborating in class rooms; special help for NQTs; checking centre marks against other components etc. All of this takes time of course, but this unit carries a significant weighting and so needs the care and attention to detail that is given to other controlled assessment.

Presenting

Presenting tasks have often been the most successful of the three strands. The flexibility showed in the DVDs, with interviews as a popular vehicle for extended personal talk, seems to have been welcomed.

Formal presentations are of course possible, and indeed many excellent ones have been seen, but they can have some problems. The main one is over-reliance on pre-written material; this is especially the case with powerpoint presentations. Many teachers reading this report will no doubt be familiar with the limitations of the read powerpoint, so we have a duty to ensure that this method of presentation serves the human voice, rather than dominating it.

As ever, it is the mix of suitable topic and suitable approach to the topic which works best. One adviser reports a joint presentation which, although introduced as being 'about football' in fact turned out to be an intelligent debate about the advantages and disadvantages of goal-line technology. This was a good example of how to extract complex material from an apparently unpromising subject.

Discussing and Listening

Group tasks are notoriously hard to 'show' : we know that from our experience in filming for DVDs. But this area is seen by advisers as the most problematic. Group sizes are often too big. It seems that frequently within any group of four, at least one participant is left out in the cold. Tasks can be too open ended, especially when they have a literary starting point, so that students have no real sense of where they are going, or for what purpose.

The best discussions require students to have a sense of purpose, an engagement with the material of the talk, and accessible but challenging roles. One of the best group discussions seen involved three quite able students 'buying-in' art work for a gallery and choosing one (

from 5) as the centre-piece of their display. Note here that some of the best group work needs an element of role-play to establish the context, even if the students are not especially in role when they discuss and listen.

It sometimes seems that this strand is expected to just happen, and that topic and task don't really matter. If anything this strand requires the most forethought if assessable work is to take place. Some advisers noted that discussions seemed to be over-planned, with almost choreographed turns and responses: 'That's a good point Mike but don't you think....' 'I see what you mean Mary but ...' etc. Good discussion is informed, interactive and at least in part spontaneous.

Role Playing

Role-plays in English are not the same as exercises in Drama. In English it is the language itself, as much as the physical expression of that language, which is of importance. This strand of Unit 2 is not about 'acting' (which of course is why working from scripts is not allowed). Many schools have picked up on the monologue idea highlighted in recent DVDs, although the source for these has been almost exclusively literary. The 'inner voice' of a public figure in the news, for example, would make a welcome alternative.

Where very able students are carrying out role play tasks, teachers should be aware of the need for their students to meet the 'complex character' and 'complex ideas, issues and relationships' criteria within Band 5.

Several advisers have commented on the fact that role-playing can be a great source of fun, even for supposedly grumpy teens. Students of both sexes and all abilities can enjoy a break from the stressful routines of functionality and express themselves playfully.

Indeed a sense of play, of creativity with language, is a distinguishing mark of good Speaking and Listening across all activities and is not the exclusive property of the most able only.

Conclusion

AQA and its advisory team are working very hard to maintain the integrity of Speaking and Listening within GCSE English/Language. This report has therefore focused on what is required for this unit to serve all schools, and their students, fairly. But within the daily round of advisory visits there is always interest and fun to be had. So the last word goes to an adviser who says:

For all the occasional gripes, the experience is positive. Visiting schools and seeing enthusiastic and committed teachers and students is invariably enjoyable and worthwhile. Rather than resenting the intrusion, schools seemed to welcome the attention and the opportunity to discuss what they were, as a rule, confident in doing.
