

Pearson response to the Ofqual Consultation
 Conduct, Marking and Grading of Spoken Language in
 GCSE English
 September 2014

Organisation details

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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

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

We agree that the benefits for marking, moderation and review of the spoken language assessments being recorded would outweigh the costs.

As an exam board, it would be beneficial to have access to recordings of the Spoken Language assessments. We agree with the points raised in 3.2 of the consultation document and feel that having access to recordings of centres' work would address the issues which could arise if a teacher or student wishes to challenge an exam board's review of its teachers' marking.

Having access to recordings of all candidates' work would have great value in representing a permanent record of the assessment. Exam boards would be able to use this record to moderate and review the marks of a greater number of centres and students. This would significantly improve the security of the assessment and confidence in it.

Although the purchase of suitable audio-visual recording equipment may be an additional cost for some schools, we have already seen that a number of schools have started recording their Speaking and Listening assessments to show the visiting moderator and to ensure they have these assessments for their own records and standardisation purposes.

As an exam board, Pearson would try and mitigate the expense for centres as much as possible by advising on low cost cameras and recording equipment which could also include the use of a smartphone or tablet technology providing this gives quality outputs.

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

- audio only
- audio and visual?

Please give reasons for your answer

We believe that the use of audio and visual recording would be the most reliable way of ensuring that individual students are recorded and assessed. It will ensure that teachers can keep an accurate record of each student and the moderator can easily see that they are reviewing the marks of individual students.

We agree with the points made in 3.4 of the consultation. As the assessment asks students to present on a topic to an audience, they could use visual materials during their presentations and these would not be captured if the recording was audio only.

We also think that non-verbal communication is an important part of Spoken Language assessment and audio-visual recording would allow teachers and moderators to see any non-verbal communication devices the speaker may be using to engage their audience.

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.

The positive impacts on both teachers and students would be that the recording of the assessment underlines the importance of the Spoken Language element of the course and also allows for the use of IT to be embedded into the teaching and learning processes for English. By requiring teachers to make an official record of the assessment, this allows them to ensure that they are allocated curriculum time for this vital aspect of GCSE English Language.

Students are also likely to put more emphasis and importance onto the Spoken Language element of the course and are therefore likely to spend more time preparing and rehearsing their task if it is recorded.

As an exam board, we would argue that the positives are that having access to recordings of the assessments allows moderators to have access to a larger number of centres' work. The current model of visiting moderation means that moderators do not visit every centre every year. The proposal to record the spoken language assessments allows them to moderate all centres on a yearly basis.

The negative impacts for some students may be that the enhanced pressure of being recorded could cause them to underperform in the assessment. Many students are good speakers but are not confident in talking to an audience for up to 10 minutes and being recorded for this length of time may be daunting. However, this could be mitigated by teachers in that students may present to smaller audiences or a select group of their peers to alleviate these concerns.

Another possible negative impact for both centres and exam boards would be the storage and delivery of the audio/visual files. Large centres with 250+ students would need to ensure that their internal systems can store these files. They also need to be able to transfer the files from their internal systems to a USB device (or other such portable digital storage) which can then be opened and played on a computer which is not attached to the school network. Centres would also need to be aware that the quality of filming and sound capture needs to be of a high enough quality to enable the moderator to see and hear both the speaker and to hear the questions that the speaker may be asked from the audience. These negative impacts can be resolved by clear guidance from the exam board. As first teaching is not until September 2015 and the first moderation is 2017, we believe this gives exam boards ample time to address this possible negative impacts.

As an exam board, we would need to be able to access all the differing file formats and moderators would need to ensure that they have the relevant IT equipment. However, these negative impacts listed can be lessened by adapting current

practises for the submission and moderation of electronic files. As an exam board, we would be able to issue guidance to centres around these issues.

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

We agree with the point made in section 4.8 of the consultation. We agree that pass/fail as used in science practicals would not be sufficient for GCSE English. We believe that three positive grades and a separate outcome would allow teachers enough range to identify the differences in student performances accurately as well as providing employers with a clear indication of the level of Spoken Language the student has attained.

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

We prefer to use the descriptors Pass, Merit, Distinction and unsatisfactory as we feel that these would resonate more with employers and with students. We feel that 'Fail' in the first suggestion is overly negative and would discourage some students from attempting the course. Whilst we take on board the assertion raised in 4.12 around possible confusion around the word 'pass' in the descriptors, we don't feel that centres or students will find this confusing given that the GCSE English qualifications will have a number as the overall grade and the Spoken Language will be reported as a separate endorsement which is not part of the overall grade of the GCSE.

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

We would disagree with this proposal. We believe, as is currently the case, that students who attempt an assessment and do not pass should have a different outcome recorded to those who do not attempt an assessment.

We would agree with the point raised in 4.17 of the consultation that students who have taken the assessment should not receive an outcome on their certificate which '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.

Therefore, we would propose that students who attempt the assessment and who do not meet the required standard should be reported as 'unsatisfactory' and students who do not attempt the assessment should be reported as 'not attempted'.

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

We agree with the proposed criteria. We would like to see some acknowledgment of non-verbal communication as this is an important skill when engaging an audience.

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

As an exam board, Pearson would disagree with teachers using only descriptors rather than marks for the reasons outlined in 4.28 of the consultation. We agree that this approach would make the regression process time consuming and a huge administrative burden on centres especially if they have a large cohort of students. Whilst we do agree with the point made in 4.27 that it is straightforward to use and explain, we would be concerned that it could cause inaccuracies with marking especially around the pass/unsatisfactory (fail) borderline.

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

Pearson would agree that teachers should mark the Spoken Language assessment using both bands and marks. We would argue that teachers are very used to marking both the current S&L assessments and the controlled assessment tasks with bands and marks which allows them to 'rank' the students and conduct thorough and structured internal standardisation. Whilst we recognise that teachers may prefer the simplicity of assigning a band and not a mark, we also believe that teachers would adapt more readily to the new requirements and a three band system if they can use marks to help with the rank order. It will also ensure that centres are able to deal more accurately with unbalanced responses

We also believe that bands and marks would ensure that moderators can see how the centre has differentiated between the levels within their marking.

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?

There are no decisions which could have a negative impact on persons who share protected characteristics.

We would agree with the proposal in 5.6 of the consultation in which students should have the choice as to whether or not their exemption is explicitly recorded on their certificate or whether the fact that the exemption is evidenced by a 'blank'.