

GCSE Examiners' Report

English Language
GCSE
Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
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Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Component 1	6
Component 2	12
Component 3	20
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	26

Executive Summary

Component 1

In Section A, candidates engaged well with the chosen extract. In Section B, all four titles were responded to.

- For Q01, candidates should give concise bullet points with one clear idea per point, and avoid overcomplicating answers or using inaccurate wording that changes the meaning of their answer.
- When analysing characters, candidates should support impressions with evidence from the passage and avoid unsupported inferences.
- For the question on drama and tension, successful responses tracked the sequence of events, selected relevant evidence, and explained how it created specific effects.
- Successful narrative writing stayed focused on the given title or prompt, fully developed the central plot, and did not drift into unrelated events.

Component 2

In Section A, candidates understood the content of the 19th century and the 21st century texts. Examiners reported that candidates seemed to enjoy both writing tasks and answers were mostly sustained for both Q21 and Q22.

- Candidates should read both the question and the correct text carefully. Many lost marks by using information from the wrong article or missing simple details. Check which text is being referenced before answering.
- For analysis and evaluation questions, candidates should track through the text methodically and select evidence from across the entire text rather than focusing on only a few paragraphs.
- Candidates should avoid lists of quotations or isolated words. Textual details should be linked to clear comments.
- In writing, candidates should use an appropriate tone and structure, include specific examples to support points, manage time carefully, and check spelling, punctuation, and grammar, as technical accuracy can affect marks.

Component 3

The majority of centres accurately assessed their candidates' Spoken Language NEA.

- Candidates should select a topic that genuinely interests them so that they can develop their own ideas rather than relying on AI-generated content. Candidates should practise thoroughly so they can engage the audience confidently using effective speaking techniques.
- The question and feedback section is an essential part of the assessment. Candidates should be ready to give detailed, thoughtful and spontaneous responses that show genuine understanding of the topic, rather than rehearsed or scripted answers.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2026

COMPONENT 1

Overview of the Component

This component tests candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding across 5 assessment objectives (AOs)

- AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.
- AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.
- AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences and organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.
- AO6 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Section A

The short story for this year's paper involved an attack on a tourist by a crocodile but it was handled without gratuitous violence or graphic detail. Most candidates reacted well to the story, and the narrative was straightforward to follow. Candidates at all levels of ability seemed to be engaged by the story and very few did not grasp what was happening.

Section B

Section B offered the candidates the usual choice of four titles which were intended to give everyone an opportunity to write imaginatively or from personal experience. All of the titles attracted significant numbers of candidates, although there were some issues with 'prepared' responses which did not fit the chosen title. Candidates perform best when they write naturally in their own voice and going into an examination with a prepared story should be discouraged.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.01** The opening question followed the established pattern of asking for straightforward information from a short section of text. The question required five discrete pieces of information about the crocodile farm and most candidates have now grasped that a simple list of bullet points does the job perfectly.

The first point in the text was the fact that the crocodile farm was spacious. It was well laid out and visitors could move about easily from one enclosure to another (there were two marks to be had here for those who separated the two points in the sentence). The farm had crocodiles of various sizes and ages. There were other animals such as wallabies and kangaroos. Some said that the farm had a range or variety of animals which was the same point but made a different way. The star attraction of the farm was Old Harry who, it was claimed, was the largest crocodile in captivity.

Some candidates were careless in their responses or presentation. For example, it was not true that old Harry claimed to be the largest crocodile in captivity. A talking crocodile would have been quite an attraction. Most dealt with this question clearly and efficiently but those who complicated things reduced their chances of getting 5 marks. A significant number of candidates lost marks because of clumsy expression. The key is simple clarity.

- Q.02** This question asked for initial impressions of Bill Jameson but it was only worth five marks and a decent range of impressions with supporting evidence from the text was all that was required. The best answers showed clear understanding but a surprising number of candidates struggled to get the measure of the character.

It is almost always sensible to approach the text methodically and this was no exception. At first Bill seemed the quiet type, a man of few words saying little on the car journey north. Some argued that he could be shy and that was fair as an initial impression. However, when they arrived at the crocodile farm, he revealed that he had some odd beliefs. He believed that you had to see a crocodile at close range to be a real Australian. Some argued that he was patriotic, a proud Australian, although those who suggested he was religious were less convincing. He had a sense of humour, or at least he thought he had, but his joke about hundreds of potential handbags was in poor taste. He was boring as he was good at destroying interest in a subject and he was easily pleased as he was excited by the cheap souvenirs on sale. When Bill bought the passport holder for Laura, some saw this as kind or generous (or at least well-intentioned) but his taste was 'appropriately low' and he was not sensitive to her reluctance to accept the gift.

Bill repeated his crass description of the crocodiles as 'walking handbags' which most saw as another attempt to be funny but which merely revealed his clumsy sense of humour.

In general, Bill was presented as boring and insensitive and it was not difficult to argue that case. The less successful answers made unconvincing inferences and often made too much of Bill's joke about the 'walking handbags', condemning him as a cruel monster and really missing the point.

- Q.03** This was a two-part question focusing on Laura's thoughts and feelings and the way the writer showed those thoughts and feelings. The most successful responses approached the text methodically and handled the 'what' and the 'how' simultaneously. Positioning was also important and more successful answers had a lot of sentences beginning with 'She thinks' or 'She feels'. Less successful responses tended to produce a character study with limited focus on the question. Too many candidates seemed to be struggling with how to approach this type of question.

At first Laura seemed interested in what the farm had to offer and she was described as being 'fascinated' by the 'sheer immensity' of Old Harry. She showed her fascination by staring at the crocodile for a few minutes. She felt impressed, nodding her head in agreement when Bill said, 'Now **that** is a crocodile' in a voice full of awe. She agreed reluctantly as she was fascinated and impressed 'in spite of herself'.

When the passport holder fell into the crocodile enclosure, she felt amused and probably pleased. However, she checked herself, thinking it would be rude to show her true feelings at the loss of the gift, and she pretended that 'something terrible' had happened. She smiled and claimed that she had really appreciated the gift but she clearly felt secretly pleased that it was lost forever. She thought that she had got rid of an unwanted souvenir while not offending Bill. Some candidates suggested, quite rightly, that she felt that the passport holder was no great loss and she could live with it.

However, her mood changed when Bill suggested retrieving the passport holder, which had a cost an eye-watering twenty dollars. At first she 'shrugged', suggesting that she felt it was no big deal and that he, like her, should just accept the loss. When she realised that Bill was serious about retrieving the passport holder, she felt angry and concerned. She 'snapped' at him and told him not to be 'so stupid'. She was clearly alarmed as she twice tried to restrain him physically by grabbing his shirt. When Bill brushed her off and asked her to watch the crocodile, Laura rolled her eyes, suggesting that she thought he was an incorrigible fool.

Successful answers combined a clear overview of Laura's thoughts and feelings with attention to detail. Less successful answers showed limited understanding or an inability to get beyond character study or impressions of Laura.

- Q.04** The way a writer creates tension and drama involves language and structure, but it also relies heavily on content, on 'what happens'. This was clearly true here. There were some significant language choices but the structure was chronological, which is so familiar as a narrative technique it is barely noticeable. However, it was possible to make something of the way the writer built the tension. Those who tracked the text closely and focused on the sequence of events generally did well. However, a string of quotations, no matter how well chosen, was not enough without some analysis and comment. This does not require a display of jargon or assertions about the mystical power of the short sentence but some sensible commentary is essential.

The start of this section was tense and dramatic as Bill was actually in the crocodile pen and close to retrieving the passport holder. Old Harry seemed to be asleep but some candidates noticed the use of the adverb 'gingerly' to describe Bill's movements. The adverb revealed that he was aware of potential danger and Laura also experienced an 'anxious moment' as she thought she saw an eyelid flicker. Some candidates, quite rightly, noticed the deliberate use of uncertainty by the author to create tension. Nevertheless, Bill did get the passport and he waved it in triumph, perhaps tempting fate. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly, the muddy water 'erupted in a great heave'. Some candidates got the sense of power in the language

as well as the shock of a second crocodile - much more active and threatening than Old Harry - appearing out of nowhere. The triumphant Bill had his moment of hubris as he found himself to be 'prey' for the second crocodile. The situation was suddenly life-threatening and its seriousness was emphasised as all Laura could see was teeth as the crocodile's jaws opened menacingly. Bill reacted with 'disbelief' and Laura's shock and horror at what was unfolding before her were conveyed when she attempted to scream but no sound came out. The stark description of the event was effective as the jaws opened and closed and Bill disappeared in a 'turbulence' of foam and bubbles. The tragedy was over in seconds and the surface of the water settled 'quickly' as if nothing had happened. Some candidates were so taken aback at this turn of events that for a moment they did not quite grasp exactly what had happened. At first Laura was too shocked to move and, when the man in the uniform asked her what was happening, she could not speak. Then she pointed at the water and screamed. The unnamed man 'swore loudly'.

Most candidates understood that the sequence of events was tense and dramatic as comedy exploded into tragedy with shocking speed. Some candidates also saw the effective and at times powerful use of language.

- Q.05** The final question in this section is intended to test critical evaluation and it requires the candidates to put together a coherent argument based on the text as a whole. Coverage and coherence are the key skills. This particular question encouraged the candidates to look at the initial presentation of the character of Bill and the reactions of the other characters to what happened to him as well as giving a personal response. There was plenty for them to address but the more successful responses were well-structured and had some shape and focus. The less successful answers did not establish a line of argument and often were too quick to 'fully agree' or 'fully disagree' when the characters in this story were subtle and provoked complicated reactions.

The quotation in the question suggested that Bill was not a very likeable character and there was plenty of evidence to support that view in the beginning of the story. Bill was presented as dull and boring with poor taste in humour and souvenirs. He tried to be generous and attentive in his way but Laura found it increasingly difficult to be polite and most readers struggled to feel much sympathy for him. When he went into the crocodile enclosure, there was some uncertainty about his motive in attempting to retrieve a fairly worthless souvenir. Most saw him as merely foolhardy and perhaps trying but failing to impress Laura.

However, as one candidate argued, Bill was not a serial killer. He was an idiot and perhaps annoying but he hardly deserved to be eaten by a crocodile. Laura was genuinely shocked by what happened to Bill and she could not move or speak. Eventually she screamed and when she was given some tea her hands were shaking so much she spilled it. However, her reaction was more shocked than grief-stricken and she seemed anxious to establish that she was blameless. She muttered 'I told him not to go' to make it clear that what happened to Bill was not her fault. The man in uniform swore loudly, suggesting he was more concerned about the implications of this incident for the crocodile farm than he was for Bill.

The woman wearing the small crocodile badge said that what had happened was 'terrible' and she asked rather hesitantly if the victim was Laura's husband. When Laura replied that he was 'just a friend', the woman was relieved as if that somehow made the situation better. The man's expression also 'lightened' when he learned that Laura was not a grieving widow. The man expressed regret that Bill was 'taken' by the creature but he was also anxious to establish that there was nothing he could

have done and that he believed that some 'joker' would inevitably take a chance on climbing into the enclosure. When the woman pointed out that Laura was 'upset', he did apologise but he was clearly more concerned about convincing the police that there was nothing wrong with safety precautions at the crocodile farm than he was about Bill. He was particularly anxious to point out that Bill was responsible for his own decision and that there was nothing wrong with the fences. The man and the woman, the representatives of the farm, did express regret for what had happened but neither seemed overwhelmed by grief.

The focus returned to Laura who seemed to be feeling 'calmer' already. As the shock wore off, she told herself it was 'terrible' and 'overwhelming' but 'not her fault'. She told herself that she had tried to stop him and that there was nothing she could have done. She seemed rather too concerned about justifying herself and coping with feelings of guilt about her earlier thoughts regarding Bill.

The more successful candidates experienced a range of feelings about Bill's demise. Unlike the other characters in the story, they did not feel guilt or a sense of responsibility. Most agreed that Bill was not particularly likeable. He was boring and tasteless but that did not prevent feelings of shock and sympathy. The most convincing responses took the position that Bill may have had his faults, including a fatal stupidity, but his death was still shocking.

Section B

The four options offer opportunities to write imaginatively or from personal experience. The suggested length of answers is 450-600 words and keeping reasonably close to the suggested length should ensure that the narratives have some substance but also a tight structure.

- a) This was a popular choice of title and it encouraged the candidates to write about their achievements and successes. Predictably, a lot of races were run, and often won, but musical performances and acts of generosity or self-sacrifice were also common.
- b) This title offered an opportunity to write from personal experience, but it was also possible to write imaginatively. The problem for most candidates was the concept of a deal and too many found it almost impossible to make their writing convincingly relevant. Too often candidates confused a deal with a promise and the writing was awkward in structure.
- c) This option gave the candidates a starting point and it was either a first-person or third-person narrative. The dog was very quickly abandoned in some responses, and some could not resist the very unwise temptation to wander off into a forest. Better responses were clearly structured and showed attention to detail.
- (d) This was also a popular option as the opportunity to write about mobile phones proved irresistible to many candidates. Not all of the narratives were entirely successful in structure, and this type of question does require some thought and planning. However, there were some amusing and lively responses to this title.

Characteristics of Successful Responses

- Successful responses to reading questions show understanding of how to 'line up' the answer. This ensures that the response actually answers the question.
- Successful responses to reading questions do not rely on quotation only. Some analysis or commentary is essential.
- Successful writing has shape and direction and does not usually rely just on action.
- Successful writing uses commas sparingly and has the full stops in the right place.

Areas for Improvement

- In question 01, use a list of bullet points but aim for simple clarity in content and expression.
- In question 05, make sure that the argument is clear and avoids muddle and contradiction.
- Answers which have relevance and insight are valued more than those which are lengthy but unfocused. A methodical, step-by-step approach almost always works best.
- Candidates should plan and structure their story carefully and include clear development and detail, and ensure the narrative builds logically, especially when working towards a given ending.

GCSE ENGLISH | LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2026

Component 2

Overview of the Component

This component tests candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding across 6 assessment objectives (AOs)

- AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.
- AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.
- AO3 Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.
- AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences and organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.
- AO6 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Section A

The two reading texts for this examination were accounts of people who had successfully rowed across the Atlantic Ocean. One was a newspaper report from 1896 of the first successful voyage, completed in 55 days by George Harbo and Frank Samuelsen. The other text was an article about the attempt in 2010, by a team of four rowers led by Leven Brown. This voyage was completed in 43 days, beating the record set by Harbo and Samuelsen that had stood for 114 years.

The six questions followed a familiar pattern, covering all four reading assessment objectives and almost all candidates were able to respond to the events in the two accounts. Successful candidates used the texts well to support their responses, showing good understanding of the two voyages and responded at length and in detail to the more demanding questions. Less successful candidates often showed understanding of the texts but their responses were frequently quite brief and lacked the range of detail necessary for a convincing response. In some cases, time-management issues meant candidates struggled to complete the final reading question.

Section B

In the first of the two writing tasks, candidates were asked to write a letter of application to the manager of their local community centre, in response to an advertisement offering an opportunity for students to work with children aged 6-12 during the centre's summer holiday programme. The advertisement indicated activities for the children could include creative and performing arts, sports and gaming, and invited candidates to suggest why they would

be the right person for the job, along with the sorts of activities they could offer. The second writing task was to write what they would say in a talk to their class, with the title: 'Living without a smartphone – can it be done?'

The first task gave candidates opportunities to write a formal letter to persuade the manager of the community centre that they would be the right candidate for the job, perhaps by including relevant information about their personal qualities, along with relevant skills and experience with younger children. The second task invited candidates to write what they would say about a topic they were certain to have strong views about. It was possible to offer a balanced view about the use of smartphones, or to offer a strongly positive or negative view of them, perhaps along with the speaker's personal experience, and other relevant information to an audience of their peers. As usual, there was an expected length of 300-400 words for each task.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Question 1.1

This first question focused on the 2010 newspaper article, 'Rowers break 114-year-old north Atlantic crossing record', with three one-mark questions that asked candidates to select specific details from across the text. These were the familiar 'search and find' questions, but candidates needed to read the complete article. The first part of the question focused on the very first paragraph of the article and asked candidates to give the name of the skipper of the rowing boat, Artemis Investments. Almost all candidates were correctly able to name Leven Brown as the skipper, although examiners occasionally came across responses that named all four of the crew, or curiously, named another member of the crew in error. More surprisingly still, there were a few responses that went to the wrong text entirely and named George Harbo as the skipper. This should serve as a reminder that checking the correct text (and the text from the 21st century is always the focus of this and the second question), reading the question carefully and checking the answer is important even in what are straightforward questions. The information required for the second part of the question: how many calories did the men eat each day, appeared in the third paragraph, and again most candidates correctly identified 'up to 7,000 calories' as the correct answer. For the final part of this question, candidates had to read to the end of the article, as the answer appeared in the final paragraph. They were asked how many people greeted the rowers when they arrived in the Scilly Isles, at the completion of their voyage, and almost all candidates correctly noted that two thousand people were there to see them. Where candidates failed to gain reward it was most frequently a case of not reading the question carefully enough, rather than being unable to locate the appropriate part of the article. This opening question should have given candidates a clear sense of the details of the voyage and prepared them for tackling the next question.

Question 1.2

The second question asked candidates to consider how the writer of the newspaper article, Michael Howie, tried to show that rowing across the Atlantic was a very challenging experience for the rowing team led by Leven Brown. The article included information about the four men and the construction of their boat, along with some details about their rowing schedule and so on but Howie focused mainly on the challenges they faced during the voyage.

As with all ‘craft of the writer’ questions, those candidates who worked methodically through the whole text were usually the most successful, selecting and commenting on those details about the voyage that showed the challenges it posed. Most of the eight paragraphs included relevant information that candidates could explore and comment on and the best responses used the whole text, selecting and commenting on appropriate details. Weaker responses sometimes often lacked a methodical approach and ‘stabbed’ at a few textual details with limited explanation, and frequently failed to cover more than a few paragraphs of the article. Sometimes, these responses were reduced to a series of quotations, often with little explanation or context; in some cases, the quotations were merely fragments from the text and lacked clarity.

The article began by telling readers that the rowing team had successfully completed their voyage across the Atlantic in 43 days, breaking the record that had stood for 114 years. In this opening paragraph, successful candidates could see that Michael Howie, in calling the voyage an ‘epic’ journey, recognised the level of challenge involved by saying that it “would have tested the toughest of seamen.” This was further put into context by explaining that the previous record time for the crossing, had “withstood more than 60 attempts to beat it.” Howie went on to give details of the “punishing schedule of rowing” that the men had to follow, “two hours on, two hours off, round the clock, every single day.” Even this did not guarantee progress, as “strong winds and currents” sometimes forced the boat backwards on occasions. Many candidates noted that because of the “energy-sapping daily routine” they adopted, and despite eating up to 7,000 calories a day, all the men “lost several stones in weight.” Through the article, Howie used Leven Brown’s reflections and comments, and these too captured the very challenging nature of the voyage. Readers were told the rowers encountered “force 10 winds and terrifying 40ft waves” with Brown commenting, “We’re all really exhausted and it’s been tough on the body.” He went on to explain how the seas swamped the boat “at least a dozen times” and gave details of one of the two capsize events they had, with one of the rowers being ‘catapulted’ overboard, and dependent on the safety harness that attached him to the boat. Lots of candidates were able to comment on these events, with some probing and commenting on language and how Howie used Brown’s comments to give emphasis to the challenges faced. Others recognised the challenges the rowers faced when there was a near-collision with a fishing boat in the heavy seas, or were able to comment on the difficulties of living in a “tiny, cramped cabin for weeks.” Food poisoning and an emergency operation with “just a Swiss army knife and a pair of pliers” were also challenges the men had to face whilst in the vastness of the ocean, and towards the end of the article, many candidates picked up Brown’s comment about the rowers being “in constant pain.” Some candidates wanted to give all and every detail of the pain suffered, often with a long quotation from the penultimate paragraph, while more perceptive candidates simply went on to explain that Brown had been moved to conclude that there was never any respite from the pain, saying that it “keeps building until it hits a peak just before you finish.”

Candidates who used the whole text, selecting these sorts of details gained high marks, particularly where these were linked to perceptive and insightful comments. Less successful candidates tended to range less widely, some covering only a few paragraphs of the article. On this question (and in 1.4) some candidates struggled to select and use quotations effectively, with fragments of text that lacked explanation or context; where clarity was an issue, there was limited reward. Other candidates tried to use ellipsis, but it was too frequently unsuccessful, resulting in ‘part-quotations’ that lacked sufficient clarity to gain reward. However, there were many candidates who gained good marks through their careful, methodical approach, effective selection of textual detail and sensible comments that showed the question had been kept firmly at the heart of the response.

Question 1.3

This question asked candidates to read and respond to the second text, the report of the first successful attempt to row across the Atlantic, by Harbo and Samuelsen in 1896.

Like question 1.1, the question was in three parts and ensured that candidates read the whole text to gain the three marks available. This process should also have prepared them for the more demanding question that followed. The first part of the question asked how long each of the men spent rowing each day. The answer - 18 hours - was in the second paragraph and most candidates had no difficulty locating the correct detail. However, there were some candidates who had struggled to identify the correct text and their answers referred to the rowing schedule adopted by Leven Brown's team. For some, the problem continued into the second part of the question, 'How long did a shark swim alongside the boat?' Whilst the answer - two days - should have been a simple matter of location from the fourth paragraph, some bemused candidates suggested that there was no mention of a shark at all. Finally, candidates were asked what distance the journey covered. Almost all correctly noted it was 3,250 miles, apart from those doggedly continuing on the wrong text. The issue of sorting out the appropriate text to answer the question is thankfully a rare occurrence but is another reminder that care in reading the instructions as well as the questions is as important as reading the two texts with care.

Question 1.4

This question asked candidates to consider the 19th century text in greater detail. They were given a statement: 'The writer of the newspaper report is full of admiration for what Harbo and Samuelsen achieved' and asked to what extent they agreed with it. As with question 1.2, the most effective way of tackling this question was to work methodically through the text, selecting and commenting on the writer's report and his comments on the voyage. Almost all candidates agreed that the writer admired the men and their achievements, although there were a few who were determined to suggest the opposite; their progress on this question was inevitably very limited. From the very beginning of the report, many candidates could see the writer was very impressed by what had been achieved, indeed the headline showed the voyage could be considered as "The Most Remarkable Marine Exploit on Record." The first paragraph described it as "the most daring of sea adventures", a voyage that was "viewed as impossible and leading to certain death." Candidates using and exploring these details made a good start to their response, recognising and commenting on the way the writer recognised the extreme dangers the men had faced. The writer admired the way "Harbo skilfully constructed his boat" and gave details of the lengths he went to ensure the safety of the rowers. He also wrote about the effective routines and organisation adopted that helped to make the voyage a success. Successful candidates made use of these details to show how the writer was impressed by Harbo's foresight and planning. The report of the capsizing that occurred also showed how thought put into the construction of the boat prevented a more serious outcome. It was in the final two paragraphs where good candidates were particularly able to focus on the writer's admiration of the rowers' achievement. He called it an "astounding voyage" that would "excite wonder and comment all over the world", and taking on the tone of a eulogy, described their success as "an athletic accomplishment" that would "go down in history as unequalled and unparalleled." In exploring these details, this paragraph gave candidates lots of opportunities to consider the writer's admiration for the two men, as he used hyperbole to describe the voyage as "a battle royal" of man against nature and the "triumph" of the two rowers. The paragraph concluded with a sentence that captured the different dangers that faced the men during the journey. In the final paragraph the writer focused on the physical hardships the men faced, and his admiration for the men was clear when he wrote the hardships "are scarcely to be comprehended", then giving details of some of them. The report concluded with the writer

describing the rowers as “brave mariners”, their feat as “miraculous” and being “one of the most dangerous and improbable in the world’s history.”

In responding to a question that focused on evaluation, less successful responses too frequently failed to make use of the whole text, sometimes limiting their exploration of the text to just one or two paragraphs. Others made ineffective use of the textual details, often by quoting fragments of text that lacked supportive explanation or context. In some cases, less successful candidates resorted to offering little more than a list of quotations, merely tacking on vague comments such as “this shows his admiration” with little or no critical exploration. However, there were many candidates who gained good marks. They did so by tracking the report methodically, linking textual details and/or quotations with sensible, clear explanation and comment that supported the statement convincingly.

Question 1.5

As usual, this four-mark question asked candidates to select relevant material from across the two texts. On this occasion the question simply asked what food and drink was taken on the two voyages. Dealing with each text separately was the obvious and sensible approach and those who looked at the ‘Harbo and Samuelsen’ report usually had no trouble in noting that the men had canned food and for drink they had coffee and water. In the 2010 newspaper article, the rowers had high-calorie freeze-dried meals like chilli con carne, but also had flapjacks and as a treat when they reached the half-way point, Mars bars. Readers were told the men drank “lots of tea.” Most candidates were at least able to select a detail from each of the texts and many gained full marks. In some cases, candidates lost marks by only writing about the food eaten but as in previous examinations, candidates were able to gain full marks with just a sentence or two on each text that gave the precise details.

Question 1.6

The final reading question asked candidates to compare the way the boats were built and equipped to be as safe as possible, and then to consider how the writers showed the importance of each boat’s safety features. The 2010 article informed readers that the rower’s boat had a specially constructed lightweight hull, strengthened by the use of Kevlar, fibreglass and a special resin that gave it “exceptional strength.” It was built with a low centre of gravity so that it would self-right in the event of a capsize. It was also equipped with “state-of-the-art GPS computers” that worked even when the boat capsized. Another safety feature was the harnesses that each men wore that tied them to the boat. The boat, Fox, built more than a hundred years earlier had more primitive safety features but which nevertheless, proved their worth during the voyage. The boat itself was described as being “skilfully constructed” so that it would cope with being “tossed or tumbled.” It was equipped with extra pairs of oars and was fitted with watertight compartments to aid flotation. In case of capsize, handles were fitted to the underside of the boat which, when the capsize actually happened, allowed the two rowers to turn the boat back upright. The second part of the question was the opportunity to discuss the methods each writer employed in their reports to show the importance of each boat’s safety equipment. Howie, in the 2010 article, went into very specific detail when he described the boat’s construction and used the example of how Livar Nysted was saved by his harness when he was catapulted into the ocean when the boat capsized. In the case of the Fox voyage, in emphasising the importance of having extra oars, the writer explains they were “tightly secured” by “stout lashings.” The report gives a clear, detailed description of the way the two men were able to use the underside handles, and to right the boat, following the capsize. In some cases, candidates explored the writer’s choice of language, while others considered how the writers focused on explanation, examples and descriptions.

In responding to the question, a significant number focused solely on the first bullet point, but accumulating detail from both texts still allowed candidates to gain a mark in Band 3. However, it was those candidates who were also prepared to respond to the second bullet point and could explain 'how', who were able to push into the higher bands. For candidates who read the questions and the two texts carefully, examiners saw many good responses but there were also some brief, weaker responses, possibly the result of time-management issues that meant some had too little time to tackle the question in sufficient detail.

Section B

Question 2.1

The first of the two writing tasks for candidates was to write a letter to the manager of the local community centre, in response to an advertisement inviting applications for a summer job, working with 6-12 year olds as part of a holiday programme. The advertisement suggested that activities in the programme might include creative and performing arts, sports and gaming. It was a task in which almost all candidates understood the need to 'sell themselves' as the right candidate, and it was how they went about doing this, along with what they were able to offer that marked out the successful responses.

Almost all candidates recognised the need for a more formal tone to the letter and many established this by correctly setting out the addresses for a formal letter. Others showed some awareness of the need for addresses in such a letter but there was some variation, even confusion, about how this should be done. Some candidates indicated where the home and recipient's address might go, but in spelling 'address' or 'recipient' incorrectly, probably did not get them off to the strongest start. Most candidates then sensibly wrote an introductory paragraph, giving a few details about themselves and their interest in the holiday work. This was often accompanied by the suggestion that they would be an ideal candidate for the role, with a little detail about why this was the case. In the following or subsequent paragraphs, good candidates explained in more detail why they might be offered the job, often explaining how they frequently looked after younger siblings or had built up experience of dealing with younger children because of babysitting for friends and neighbours; sometimes, these details came with brief but often convincing anecdotes of how they had dealt with particular situations, adding to the persuasive nature of the application. Other candidates drew on their school work experience placements in primary schools to show they were familiar with the needs of younger children, while others wrote of voluntary work or their involvement in organisations such as scouts, guides or cadets, the best responses giving details of specific projects with younger children or other initiatives they had been involved in. Lots of candidates were anxious to write of the personal qualities that made them strong candidates, with virtually all professing to be calm, kindly, reliable and willing to help in any circumstance. When candidates moved on to explain what they were able to offer in the holiday programme, most responded to the details in the advertisement and gave detail of their involvement in the arts, sports or gaming. Many suggested they could offer help or expert tuition in all sports as well as all art forms, but the most convincing responses were those that gave some specific details: their involvement in a tennis club or a football team, a musical they had performed in, tuition they had given in a particular art form and so on. Often, the concluding paragraphs of letters stated again why they should be considered as the perfect candidate, giving a clear shape and structure to the letter. Examiners saw many very good responses that balanced relevant and persuasive detail about personal qualities, skills and experience with an appropriately formal tone. Less successful responses were frequently too brief, giving little opportunity to expand upon the information offered, struggled to establish or maintain a formal tone or were unconvincing in their attempts to persuade.

Question 2.2

In the second writing task candidates were asked to write what they would say in a talk to their class, with the title: 'Living without a smartphone – can it be done?' It was a topic that proved to engage almost all candidates, and examiners saw a wide range of approaches, some wanting to offer a balanced view that recognised the advantages and the dangers of smartphones. Others were much more certain that it would be impossible to live modern life without such a device, while an equal number were clear that life would be much better without them. As this was a talk given to their peers, a more informal approach was appropriate, with candidates often asking questions of their audience or inviting their agreement with a particular point of view. There were good responses regardless of the approach or viewpoint but frequently the best responses were seen where candidates structured their talk with an introductory paragraph that set out their positive or negative view of smartphones, followed by subsequent paragraphs that each dealt with a specific aspect that added to the strength of their argument. Those who felt that life was so much better without a smartphone often gave a historical perspective, where life had endured perfectly well without them and children could enjoy 'playing out' with real friends, rather than living their life 'doomscrolling' endlessly and wasting huge chunks of their life addicted to a screen. These responses often focused on the dangers of smartphones, particularly to the young, with chilling tales of cyberbullying and scams. Candidates giving these talks frequently offered advice about how to reduce or limit their smartphone use, and explained how life would be improved as a result. There were also many who were convinced that it would be impossible to live life as we know it without their phones. They spoke of the ease of communicating with family and friends through programs such as Facetime, the ready availability of social media sites for news, community and subject interests, the opportunities for shopping, booking tickets and banking and the sheer improvements in technology that were now available for all. One candidate, for example, told his audience about the 'dark days of the past', and asked his audience to imagine, if they possibly could, what life must have been like when there was just one phone available in a house.

The most successful responses were sustained, engaging and often thought-provoking. These responses also had good shape and structure so that a specific area of focus within the topic was developed well in a paragraph that often contained a mixture of information, personal experience and factual details. With an assured summative sentence, such paragraphs were persuasive and convincing. Less successful responses were usually more brief and although they too were often assertive, they lacked the range, detail and development seen in more successful talks. Overall, the task provided much for examiners to enjoy, with a wide range of opinion and argument and a clear sense that this was a topic close to the hearts of all candidates. As in previous series, it was disappointing that some candidates struggled with time-management and could only provide brief or incomplete responses, with some failing to tackle the task at all.

Although the report on writing has dealt with the content of the responses, eight of the 20 marks available for each task were available for vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling and this remained an issue for many. Many candidates gained marks in a higher band for communication and organisation than for VSSPS, particularly with simple spelling and punctuation errors again costing candidates valuable marks.

Characteristics of Successful Responses

- Successful responses in reading tracked the texts methodically, from the beginning to the end of each text. This allowed candidates to select a good range of detail from across the whole text to explain and comment on. The steady accumulation of relevant detail which was linked to perceptive explanation and comment resulted in responses gaining marks in the higher bands.

- Where quotations were selected, they were clear and contained all relevant information needed to precisely illustrate, explain or support a comment. This sometimes meant longer or whole sentence quotations were necessary, but where used effectively, they significantly improved the quality of the response.
- In writing, successful responses to the letter writing task were sustained and had range and development. They quickly established an appropriately formal tone, and the introductory paragraph explained clearly their interest in the holiday job and why they would be a good appointment. Subsequent paragraphs almost always included convincing supportive and persuasive detail and then concluded with a brief, and often polite, summative paragraph. These responses rarely muddled when to use 'sincerely' or 'faithfully'.
- In the 'Smartphone' talk, successful responses were also well-sustained. The introductions quickly established the speaker-audience relationship, gave an overview of the focus of the talk and offered a clear personal view. Subsequent paragraphs began with topic sentences that were then developed, using a mixture of information, personal experience and comment. Sometimes, direct address and questions to the audience added to the realism of the talk.

Areas for improvement

- Less successful reading responses often lacked a methodical approach in tackling the text; as a result, important details were often missed, and it was difficult to accumulate the range of points necessary for a good mark.
- In reading responses, quotations that are just 'fragments' of a longer sentence rarely give complete detail, and unless they are explained or contextualised, they gain little reward. For example, in response to 1.2, candidates who used the fragment "two hours on, two hours off" with limited explanation or context, gained little reward. Similarly, where ellipsis is used, it must have clarity and make complete sense.
- In the letter writing task, responses that were brief were rarely sufficiently convincing or persuasive. Many of these responses were well below the 300-400 words indicated in the exam paper. Some lacked the formality required, and although even weaker responses were earnest in asserting their suitability for the role, they lacked the detail or range of information that would have supported their application. Similarly, in the 'Smartphone' talk, brevity often limited the impact of the talk, and in these responses there was rarely the development of points seen in more assured pieces.
- Basic spelling and punctuation remains an issue for many candidates, with avoidable errors in frequently used words: were/where, your/you're, its/it's and so on.

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2026

Component 3

Overview of the Component

Moderators saw many examples of excellent practice in centres where Spoken Language was given appropriate status alongside Reading and Writing allowing candidates to meet the higher grade criteria in full. Moderators reported being genuinely uplifted and impressed by presentations in which candidates had expressed their views with real interest, even passion at times, communicating clearly and winning the attention and interest of their listeners. Watching young people having the confidence to stand in front of an audience to present and defend their ideas with conviction makes the moderator's role very rewarding.

Most centres clearly responded to Eduqas guidance and feedback, aiming to give their candidates every chance to succeed. It was especially encouraging to note how many centres contacted in the past regarding inaccurate grading had worked hard to develop their Spoken Language preparation and make their assessment more secure. In the majority of centres, the teachers are to be commended for their hard work and conscientious, accurate assessment, while their students should also be congratulated on their achievements, whichever grade they were awarded.

Comments on the Spoken Language Presentations

Based on feedback from moderators, it was clear the most successful presentations shared similar characteristics suggesting that candidates had been helped and encouraged by their teachers to:

- choose a suitably challenging topic with a clear purpose to achieve
- understand the assessment criteria and how they would be applied using the competency model
- recognise the dangers of relying too heavily on downloaded or AI generated material
- watch and discuss examples of successful presentations to identify key features they could adopt
- use presentational skills to express their ideas in ways which would engage their audience
- practise their presentation to build confidence in their spoken delivery
- recognise the importance of the question-and-answer section and how to prepare for it.

Unfortunately, not all candidates had benefited from such careful preparation for the Component 3 assignment or such accurate assessment of their work. In some centres the candidates appeared to lack experience in presenting their ideas and were not fully sure how to succeed. Rather than promoting confidence, the Spoken Language assignment seemed quite dispiriting and likely to confirm candidates' reticence about speaking publicly.

Assessment Issues

- **Pass grade** is clearly intended to be as inclusive as possible and the vast majority of candidates awarded Pass had been correctly assessed. However, there were examples where the candidate's contribution was so brief and/or un-operative that the basic requirement to *attempt* to meet audience needs, present straightforward information and respond to feedback appropriately had not been met. The presentations given by HOLLY and MOFAIZA in the original standardising materials, along with the accompanying commentaries, remain a very helpful guide to the minimum standards for Pass grade.
- Unfortunately, there were again this year too many examples of overly lenient marking in awarding the higher grades, especially **Distinctions**, as candidates had not met **all** the criteria.
- Some teachers had applied the assessment criteria too generously without adhering to the established standards. Others may have been unfamiliar with the competency model which requires all the criteria for any grade must be met. It did indeed seem that many teachers were still using a best-fit approach, awarding higher grades if candidates had met *some*, but not *all*, of the criteria. It is important to ensure those assessing work are confident in using the competency model. There is clear guidance available on the Eduqas Portal.
- The generous assessment highlighted by moderators might also be caused by centres moving away from the standards exemplified in the original Inter board examples. Eduqas guidance has consistently reminded centres that all teachers involved in assessment must watch and discuss a range of these Inter board examples each series. This is vital to ensure they are confident of the agreed standards and to avoid individual teachers or centres developing their own standards.
- It is worthwhile looking closely at the **criteria for Distinction grade**, which are intended to be demanding and limited to those candidates whose presentations are truly distinctive. It might well be the case in some cohorts that only a few candidates in a centre produce work of this high standard and meet all the criteria, whose content and repertoire of vocabulary are *sophisticated*, their ideas *effectively organised* and delivered using a *range of strategies to engage* with responses to feedback demonstrating *perceptive elaboration*. The presentations given by LAURA, CHARLOTTE and JIBREEL are still very useful benchmarks for the high standard required for Distinction grade.
- Some centres automatically awarding the 'top' third of their candidates the highest grade of Distinction, even when they were giving their presentations early in Year 10 or even in Year 9. We would hesitate to award top grades in Reading and Writing to such young and inexperienced candidates, recognising that they need more practice and maturity to reach their full potential.
- Whatever the age of the candidate, in schools or FE colleges, all of the criteria must be met in the presentation formally assessed.

Problematic choices

Inaccurate assessment was once again compounded by less-than-ideal approaches which made it more difficult, if not impossible, for candidates to meet all the criteria. The same issues related to task setting, presentation skills, use of visual aids, make up of audience and timing have all been fully covered in previous reports, including last year's. For that reason, they can be briefly outlined here as all PM's Reports are available to consult for more detailed guidance.

- Candidates often spoke on topics that were not sufficiently challenging or sophisticated in content, range of vocabulary or organisation.
- Many candidates adopted a descriptive, straightforward approach to delivering facts without a clear purpose to achieve, limiting them to Pass grade.

- Candidates often seemed very unused to speaking in front of an audience and did not seem to have practised their presentations or prepared adequately.
- Candidates were often not helped to present effectively by less than conducive environments, such as sitting at a cramped desk in a classroom or so near to the teacher assessing them.
- Increasingly candidates spoke to an 'audience' of a single teacher. This is permitted but it can pose problems in demonstrating a *range of effective strategies to engage*.
- Timing was an issue. Many presentations were simply too brief, often under three minutes, to allow candidates to meet the criteria, particularly those for Distinction grade. Others, however, were too long and had not been *clearly organised to meet audience needs*, still less to *engage*. Talks over ten or even twenty minutes would have benefited from editing but were often awarded high grades based apparently on length rather than the assessment criteria. Once again, the standardising exemplars are helpful guides, all lasting between five and seven minutes in total.
- Candidates who simply read aloud with heads lowered, especially from their phone screens, were unlikely to meet the Merit criterion to *meet the needs of the audience*, let alone engage their interest for Distinction.
- Others who tried to memorise their entire speeches encountered problems and would have benefited from prompt cards and strategies to help when they lost their place.
- PowerPoint slides were more often a distraction or hindrance than an asset, especially when candidates focused on preparing them rather than practising what they were actually going to say. Turning to read text from the slides was not evidence of an effective strategy to engage.
- Including audio or video clips simply wasted time when the candidate was not demonstrating Spoken Language skills.

All of the above resulted in less successful presentations which often led to overly generous and inaccurate assessment. However, the two factors causing greatest concern this year were the use of AI generated speeches and unproductive approaches to the feedback section.

Over reliance on AI generated material

Last year's PM's report mentioned the potential impact AI might have on Spoken Language, but it was still rather alarming to see how quickly its effects had taken hold. There are obvious benefits for candidates in making carefully considered use of AI when preparing their talks, but unfortunately the drawbacks were often much more evident. Many had simply relied on speeches generated by AI which had a negative effect on their performance.

- In many instances the material had simply been downloaded without much, if any, personal input from the candidate, and they just read their 'speech' aloud, usually without having practised sufficiently. This meant they read in a monotone, without strategies to engage, and often stumbled over unfamiliar words affecting clarity and success in meeting audience needs. As they were not fully engaged in the material they were reading, it was obviously harder to engage their listeners.
- The material provided by AI often began with a lively opening which promised well, but the speeches as a whole tended to be fact-laden with far too many statistics and percentages which candidates had not edited or reshaped to make them more engaging. These talks often became descriptive and straightforward, especially when the focus was on a famous figure from history or celebrity when a chronological, narrative approach was often adopted.
- In line with AI's generic style, the content was often quite bland and neutral, without a clear purpose to achieve beyond conveying superficial information. The speeches tended to lack the detail or development of key points needed to make a convincing

case. In covering both sides of any 'argument', the content descended at times into vacuous self-help or motivational speeches characterised by lots of emotive language without much substance.

- A lot of candidates chose to speak on unusually abstract topics such as: 'failure'; 'nature versus nurture'; 'self-image', etc. Such wide-ranging topics are not recommended in general because they tend to lack a clear purpose and pose problems for candidates trying to shape their material effectively to engage. The problem was compounded when candidates had relied on AI and it wasn't uncommon to hear very similar speeches from candidates in different centres, possibly hundreds of miles apart but united by over-reliance on the same AI source. For instance, those who spoke on 'failure' referenced the same anecdotes about Thomas Edison, JK Rowling and Vincent Van Gogh, while the speeches on nature versus nurture all seemed to develop into descriptive biographical accounts of American serial killers such as Jeffrey Dahmer or Ted Bundy. In many of these speeches there was often very little sense of the candidate's own ideas or feelings which also affected their performance in the Q and A section. When one candidate was asked to develop a point she had outlined about Van Gogh's 'failure', for instance, she had to admit that she wasn't fully sure who he was.
- It was also noticeable that most facts related to the US rather than more local and relevant examples, with candidates often reading out statistics on gun crime or teenage mental health from Utah or Connecticut, some of which they struggled to pronounce. AI generated speeches also seem to make frequent use of feedback from unattributed surveys, so the candidates found themselves quoting comments such as. '*Olive, 39, from Tallahassee in Florida said...*'
- This American bias also affected the language used by the candidates at times, and it was very common to hear phrases such as, '*But here's the thing...*' or '*Here's the kicker...*', '*Now let's flip the coin...*' or '*Here's where this stuff gets really interesting...*'. Some candidates read out subheadings showing limited sense of the difference between a carefully organised presentation and research downloaded from the computer.
- A lot of candidates were, perhaps understandably, very tempted by the ease of instructing AI to write their speeches but it was not as helpful as they might have hoped. The content was often quite challenging with lots of technical terms with facts and figures couched in some impressive-sounding vocabulary which did lend a veneer of sophistication. This meant the 'talk' might have met *some* higher grade criteria but created obstacles in meeting *all* the rest. Candidates' lack of familiarity with the material often meant an unvaried or halting delivery affecting audience engagement. In addition, many were sadly unable to give more than brief and straightforward responses to questions about what they had read aloud in their talks.
- Candidates could have used the AI material as a useful starting point or valuable research tool, developing key points and editing or reshaping the material effectively to make the speech their own. They could have practised their delivery, becoming more confident of the content and thinking about strategies to interest and persuade their audience. Injecting more of their own views and gaining more knowledge of the topic might have helped them give really thoughtful, elaborative responses to feedback. AI is clearly a double-edged sword and candidates need guidance on how to use a tool which promises so much but has limitations when the criteria only assess Spoken Language skills. This problem was compounded when the teacher assessed their work too generously, awarding Merit or even Distinction when all the criteria had not been met.

Under-valuing the Question-and-Answer section

Every PM's report since the introduction of this specification has emphasised that this vital part of the presentation, judged by a separate criterion in each grade, *must* be given proper status rather than being tagged on as an unimportant afterthought. To secure any grade, candidates must, as part of their presentation, *listen to and respond appropriately to questions or feedback*. Eduqas advice has consistently recommended that candidates be made aware of the significance of this element; even sophisticated and engaging talks cannot be awarded the highest grade unless there is evidence of the speaker's responding to questions/feedback with '*perception*' and '*elaboration*' where necessary. If answers to questions are only brief and/or straightforward, the candidate cannot be awarded a grade higher than Pass.

Unfortunately, however, in more than half the centres where grades were too generously awarded, the relatively weak performance of the candidate in the Q and A was the reason. The same problems which caused underachievement have been covered in more detail in previous reports, so they can be briefly outlined here.

- candidates did not seem prepared to answer questions and needed practice, as in improving any other skill.
- Too little time was left for the Q and A after the candidate's talk, sometimes less than twenty seconds.
- This made it very difficult to meet the requirement for detailed, formal responses for Merit or perceptive elaboration for Distinction.
- Questions were often not sufficiently challenging or probing to elicit more than brief, straightforward responses, especially when feedback was left solely to classmates lacking expertise.
- The teacher's involvement in questioning was crucial in drawing out candidates, encouraging and prompting them to develop their points in a thoughtful, detailed way. When teachers did not participate in the feedback section this tended to limit the candidate's opportunities to elaborate effectively.
- All of these factors affected the quality of the Q and A but even more worrying was the large increase in centres where candidates had clearly been advised to write their own questions and give them to classmates or even the teacher to read aloud.
- They had prepared rehearsed answers and most did not respond to any genuine or spontaneous feedback on their ideas.
- The almost mechanical nature of this approach was compounded when some candidates did not even wait for the questioner to finish reading the question before answering.
- This was even more unsatisfactory when the candidate had scripted responses to the pre-planned questions and simply read the responses. This reductive approach was strongly warned against in last year's report when a relatively small number of centres had opted for it, but it was extremely disappointing to see that so many more had adopted it this year as a suitable way to prepare candidates for this part of the presentation.
- In some cases, the situation was rescued by a spontaneous and probing question from the teacher which prompted a developed and thoughtful response demonstrating the candidate's real engagement and knowledge. This was sadly quite rare though.
- It is understandable that candidates can be very nervous and that prompting members of the audience to ask for elaboration on certain key points, rather than scripted questions, might be a helpful way to start the Q and A section. Those candidates aiming beyond Pass grade, however, must show that they can respond in some detail to more spontaneous, genuine feedback.

- When candidates had relied increasingly on AI material, often simply reading downloaded material, the role of the Q and A became more important in giving them the chance to demonstrate their engagement and preparation. In quite a lot of centres, however, the candidates read AI generated material for their talks and relied on the same resource when reading their responses to the questions they had provided in advance.
- At its worst, this was little more than an exercise in reading aloud and it was hard to see how this was at all in the spirit of the specification or useful preparation for later life. In situations when candidates might need to present ideas or information in the future, they are unlikely to be able to count on responding to follow-up questions which they have prepared themselves and simply reading answers scripted in advance.
- Rather than enhancing and promoting their confidence in using Spoken Language, this approach to the Q and A must surely have confirmed candidates' anxiety about expressing their own ideas or answering any questions without the help of machines.
- It can be difficult to adapt and keep up to date with technological developments, but AI is clearly here to stay. Moderators understand the difficulties this may cause teachers delivering Component 3, but it has to be made clear that relying solely on reading scripted answers to pre-planned questions does not meet the requirement for candidates to *listen and respond* to genuine feedback on the ideas they have expressed.

Key points for centres

- Candidates greatly benefit from guidance on topic choice and how to organise their material to achieve a clearly defined purpose.
- Candidates should have opportunities to see and discuss examples of successful and less effective presentations by using the standardising exemplars as a classroom resource.
- Candidates should be advised not to rely solely on reading from written scripts or slides but should be encouraged to practise their presentations with audience engagement in mind.
- Candidates should make careful and limit use of PowerPoint, focusing their efforts on preparing what they will say rather than complex animation effects.
- It is not recommended candidates rely entirely on pre-planned questions in the feedback section.
- Candidates should not read scripted responses to questions.
- All teachers involved in assessment must be fully confident of the assessment process and criteria as well as the agreed standards as exemplified in the standardising examples.

At times, it was difficult to moderate how accurately the candidates had been assessed when they were filmed from the side or below rather than facing the camera, in the dark or with so much ambient noise that it was impossible to hear clearly what they were saying or the questions they were answering. If they were making use of PowerPoint slides or a whiteboard, it was obviously important the screen was also clearly visible.

We would like to thank those centres where the sample had been carefully and correctly compiled and teachers had ensured all candidates could be seen and heard clearly throughout.

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