



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Review of standards in GCSE English

2002–5

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Contents

Section 1: General introduction.....	4
Section 2: Examination demand in GCSE English.....	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Key issues identified in previous review of standards in GCSE English.....	5
2.3 Materials available	6
2.4 Assessment objectives.....	6
2.5 Syllabus content.....	9
2.6 Schemes	9
2.7 Options.....	18
2.8 Tiering	19
2.9 Question papers.....	19
2.10 Coursework.....	20
2.11 Summary.....	27
Section 3: Standards of performance	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 GCSE grade A performance description	29
3.3 Performance at the GCSE grade A boundary	30
3.4 GCSE grade C performance description.....	30
3.5 Performance at GCSE grade C boundary.....	31
3.6 Comparison across tiers	31
3.7 GCSE grade F performance description	31
3.8 Performance at GCSE grade F	32
3.9 Standards of performance over time.....	32
3.10 Summary.....	33
Appendix A: Details of GCSE English syllabuses reviewed.....	34
Appendix B: Details of GCSE English scripts reviewed	35
Appendix C: List of reviewers	36

Section 1: General introduction

QCA conducted an enquiry into standards over time in GCSE English in 2003. The results were published in a report, which is available on the QCA website www.qca.org.uk/6909.html. The key issues identified by the enquiry were considered as part of the work on this review.

Between them, the GCSE English syllabuses included in this review attracted about 90 per cent of the 710,000 candidates who took GCSE English in 2005.

The following awarding bodies offered syllabuses in the subject: the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA); the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); Edexcel; Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

Section 2: Examination demand in GCSE English

2.1 Introduction

The most significant changes for GCSE English between 2002 and 2005 were:

- the revision of GCSE English syllabuses for first examination in 2004 in line with the revised national subject criteria for GCSE English
- the introduction by OCR of a modular scheme of assessment
- the banning of annotation on pre-release material and anthologies
- the introduction by 2005 of a common weighting and structure to mark schemes for the assessment of candidates' spelling, punctuation and range of sentence structures
- changes to the way questions were phrased, with fewer generic questions
- a reduction in overall examining time by two awarding bodies.

GCSE English syllabuses in 2002 and 2005 conformed to the 1995 and 2002 criteria, respectively.

2.2 Key issues identified in previous review of standards in GCSE English

The 1999–2002 standards review of GCSE English identified the following issues:

- adherence to the national curriculum requirements and the Northern Ireland regulations maintained a broadly similar scheme of assessment and level of demand across the awarding bodies. However, where there was an imbalance in the weighting given to different elements in the syllabus, this lowered the demand marginally
- reviewers came to conclusions similar to those of the previous review (1995–1998) about the relatively lower demand of the CCEA syllabus, though the requirement for a comparative task brought the syllabus more closely in line with other awarding bodies in 1999 and 2002 than in 1998

- reviewers judged, as in the previous review (1995–1998), that the coverage of writing in the WJEC syllabus could be unbalanced, with a relatively heavy weighting on narrative and imaginative writing.

2.3 Materials available

Reviewers considered the syllabus documents, examiners' reports and question papers with associated mark schemes from each of the awarding bodies in 2002 and 2005. Details of the syllabuses included in the review are given in Appendix A.

2.4 Assessment objectives

There were changes to the assessment objectives in the syllabuses for English between 2002 and 2005, in line with changes to the revised national criteria for GCSE English, but it was judged that these changes did not constitute a change in demand. Rather, there was some reordering and rationalisation between the two sets of syllabuses. CCEA, for example, brought its assessment objectives in line with those of other awarding bodies. Reviewers judged that there were differences between the awarding bodies in the extent to which the schemes of assessment then drew on the full range of the assessment objectives. Edexcel, for example, drew too heavily on one aspect of the assessment objective for reading (AO2i) and too little on others.

Between 2002 and 2005 there were changes to the national criteria, which resulted in changes to syllabuses with regard to the assessment objective for speaking and listening. Although the number of assessment objective strands for speaking and listening reduced from four to three, the reviewers judged that there was some increase in demand, particularly in the assessment of candidates' ability to 'sustain' their talk, to use standard English 'appropriately', and 'to adopt roles and communicate with audiences using a range of techniques.'

Assessment Objective	% Weighting	2002	2005
AO1	20	(i) communicate clearly and imaginatively, structuring and sustaining	(i) communicate clearly and imaginatively, structuring and sustaining

Speaking and Listening		<p>their talk and adapting it to different situations;</p> <p>(ii) use standard English;</p> <p>(iii) listen to and understand varied speech;</p> <p>(iv) participate in discussion, judging the nature and purposes of contributions and the roles of participants.</p>	<p>their talk and adapting it to different situations, using standard English appropriately;</p> <p>(ii) participate in discussion by both speaking and listening, judging the nature and purposes of contributions and the roles of participants;</p> <p>(iii) adopt roles and communicate with audiences using a range of techniques.</p>
AO2 Reading	40	<p>(i) read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to texts and developing and sustaining interpretations of them;</p> <p>(ii) distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented;</p> <p>(iii) follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies;</p> <p>(iv) select material appropriate to their purpose, collate material</p>	<p>(i) read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to texts and developing and sustaining interpretations of them;</p> <p>(ii) distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented;</p> <p>(iii) follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies;</p> <p>(iv) select material appropriate to their purpose, collate material</p>

		<p>from different sources, and make cross references;</p> <p>(v) understand and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects, and comment on ways language varies and changes.</p>	<p>from different sources, and make cross references;</p> <p>(v) understand and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects, and comment on ways language varies and changes.</p>
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AO3	40	<p>(i) communicate clearly, adapting their writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences;</p> <p>(ii) use and adapt forms and genres for specific purposes and effects;</p> <p>(iii) organise ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts;</p> <p>(iv) use accurate spelling and punctuation, and present work neatly and clearly;</p> <p>(v) use the grammatical structures of standard English and a wide vocabulary to express meanings with clarity and precision.</p>	<p>(i) communicate clearly and imaginatively, using and adapting forms for different readers and purposes;</p> <p>(ii) organise ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts using a variety of linguistic and structural features;</p> <p>(iii) use a range of sentence structures effectively with accurate spelling and punctuation.</p>
Writing			

2.5 Syllabus content

Syllabus content in GCSE English tends to be specified in less detail than in some other subjects and based closely on the GCSE English subject criteria, which in turn reflect the national curriculum programmes of study for key stage 4. The subject criteria governing the 2002 and 2005 syllabuses prescribed reading topic areas and the range of writing to be assessed, which was specified as four writing triplets. Between 2002 and 2005 the subject criteria were revised. The requirements for the assessment of writing remained essentially the same, while there was a slight reduction in the reading requirements, as candidates in England were required to study work from the English literary heritage by one major author with a well-established critical reputation rather than works from one pre-1900 and one post-1900 author. This meant that awarding bodies no longer linked pre- and post-1900 texts in a single task, as some did in 2002. This produced more valid, but slightly less demanding assessment. The revised criteria also laid down requirements specific to candidates in Northern Ireland and Wales, who were not required to study a Shakespeare play but were allowed to substitute it with a substantial piece of literature from their own tradition. Reviewers judged that these changes led to more effective schemes of assessment and did not constitute a change in demand.

There were some reductions in the content of syllabuses between 2002 and 2005. AQA reduced the number of reading topic areas assessed from six to five and OCR eliminated some duplication in the assessment of Writing. It was judged that these changes arose from rationalisation and a move to create clearer and more effective schemes of assessment, and did not constitute a change in demand. They also had the effect of bringing demand across the awarding bodies more closely into line.

The national criteria made the requirements for speaking and listening tasks more precise between 2002 and 2005. The reviewers judged that, in following the national criteria, awarding bodies increased demand a little by requiring a focus on ‘extended individual contributions, group discussion and interaction, and drama-focused activities’, mostly as a result of the drama-focused activities.

2.6 Schemes

The schemes of assessment are shown below.

Schemes of assessment 2002–2005

2002					
Component Title	Option	Weighting %	Time Allowance	Type of assessment	
AQA	Paper 1	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 2	Foundation			
	Paper 1	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 2	Higher			
	Coursework		40		Coursework
CCEA	Paper 1	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination

2005				
Component Title	Option	Weighting %	Time Allowance	Type of assessment
Paper 1	Foundation	30	1hr 45mins	Written Examination
			1hr 30mins	
Paper 2	Higher	30	1hr 45mins	Written Examination
			1hr 30mins	
Coursework		40		Coursework
Paper 1	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination

	Paper 2	Foundation					Paper 2	Foundation			
	Paper 1	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 1	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 2	Higher					Paper 2	Higher			
	Coursework		40		Coursework		Coursework		40		Coursework
Edexcel	Paper 1A	Coursework (Speaking & Listening)	20		Coursework		Paper 1A	Coursework (Speaking & Listening)	20		Coursework
	Paper 1B	Coursework (Reading & Writing)	20	4 units	Coursework		Paper 1B	Coursework (Reading & Writing)	20	3 units	Coursework
	Paper 2F	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 2	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 3F	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 3	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination

	Paper 4H	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 4	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 5H	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 5	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination

Schemes of assessment 2002–2005

2002						2005				
	Component Title	Option	Weighting %	Time Allowance	Type of assessment	Component Title	Option	Weighting %	Time Allowance	Type of assessment
OCR	Paper 1	Foundation	30	2 hrs + 10 mins reading time	Written Examination	Unit 1	Foundation	30	1hr 45mins	Written Examination
					Higher					
	Paper 2	Foundation	30	2 hrs + 10 mins reading time	Written Examination	Unit 2	Foundation	30	1hr 45mins	Written Examination
					Higher					
Paper 3	Higher	30	2 hrs + 10 mins reading time	Written Examination	Unit 3	Foundation	(20)	1hr 45mins	Written Examination (Alternative to Unit 4)	
				Higher						
Paper 4	Higher	30	2 hrs + 10 mins reading time	Written Examination	Unit 4	Coursework (Alternative to Unit 3)	(20)		Coursework	

	Coursework: Reading & Writing	Coursework	20		Coursework		Unit 5	Coursework	20		Coursework Speaking & Listening
	Coursework: Speaking & Listening	Coursework	20		Coursework						
WJEC	Paper 1	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 1	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 1	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 1	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 2	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 2	Foundation	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Paper 2	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination		Paper 2	Higher	30	2 hrs	Written Examination
	Coursework: Reading & Writing	Coursework	20		Coursework		Coursework: Reading & Writing	Coursework	20		Coursework

	Coursework:	Coursework	20		Coursework		Coursework:	Coursework	20		Coursework
	Speaking & Listening						Speaking & Listening				

Reviewers judged that the 2005 schemes were closer to each other in their range and degree of demand than the 2002 schemes had been. Because individual syllabuses had different structures in terms of where specific writing triplets and reading topic areas were assessed, there remained some quite significant variations in the weightings given to particular topics. Inevitably, a topic assessed in the written examination carried greater weighting than one assessed as coursework. For example, all awarding bodies assessed Shakespeare through the coursework component, with a weighting of 5 per cent per task, compared to 7.5 per cent or 10 per cent for reading tasks in the written examination. This was raised in the previous review and remains a concern.

The reviewers judged that the use in examinations of pre-released reading material, whether in anthologies or in pre-release booklets, and the predictability of many writing and reading tasks set in examinations had created an imbalance between foreseeable and unforeseeable demand. This had been the case in 2002, but was more noticeable in 2005. Reviewers judged that in some cases this left insufficient unforeseeable challenges, and that this was of particular concern given that GCSE English is a core subject and an often essential gateway to progression in education/training or entry to a career path.

Overall, the reviewers judged that the Edexcel scheme of assessment was less demanding than those of the other awarding bodies because of the predictable nature of the non-fiction assessment tasks and its overemphasis on AO2i of the Reading assessment objective, 'read with insight and engagement...'. Furthermore, for Edexcel, the only unseen material for reading tasks that candidates encountered were the media texts, as the non-fiction texts were included in the anthology. For the other awarding bodies candidates had to deal with unfamiliar non-fiction texts, as well as media material.

There was some variation across awarding bodies and between 2002 and 2005 in terms of where the writing triplets were assessed in the scheme of assessment. This meant that the weighting attached to the four triplets varied from 5 per cent to 15 per cent. For example, CCEA assessed *analyse, review, comment* in coursework in 2002 and in the written examination in 2005, thus increasing the weighting for this triplet from 5 per cent to 15 per cent. Overall, Writing requiring candidates to *analyse, review or comment* tended to attract less weighting than the other triplets.

Between 2002 and 2005 AQA and OCR reduced their overall examining time, while the other awarding bodies did not change in this respect. AQA reduced examining time by 45 minutes overall at both tiers. This change was linked to a reduction in content prompted by changes to the

reading requirements in the revised GCSE English subject criteria as detailed in Section 2.5. Candidates in 2005 had to answer one poetry question, instead of two in 2002. Reviewers judged that the AQA scheme had become less demanding in 2005.

OCR removed the reading time of 10 minutes allowed in 2002 and further reduced the examining time on each paper by 15 minutes. Reviewers judged that the tasks were comparable in 2002 and 2005 and that the OCR examination had therefore become more demanding in 2005, as candidates were under increased time pressure.

There was one particular innovation since 2002. OCR introduced a modular scheme of assessment. This allowed candidates to take units several times with the best mark counting. In addition, candidates could take the same unit in the same series both as coursework and as a written examination. Reviewers judged that this marked a reduction in demand, making the scheme easier than the other awarding bodies in this respect. They considered that this more than offset the increase in demand caused by the reduced examining time.

In terms of Speaking and Listening, reviewers found no change in demand other than those reported in Sections 2.4 and 2.5.

2.7 Options

There were few optional routes in most schemes of assessment in GCSE English in either year. The 2005 OCR syllabus was an exception in that it afforded centres and candidates alternative routes within its structure. Candidates could take both the coursework and the examination options and use the better mark to count towards their overall GCSE grade. As stated above, the reviewers judged that constituted a reduction in demand.

Candidates had some degree of choice when determining the texts to be studied, especially for coursework: an open choice of Shakespeare text was the norm, for example. Some of the awarding bodies offer a choice of writing tasks on examination papers. OCR was the exception in this respect, offering only one task addressing one aspect of the writing triplet being assessed. Reviewers considered that this made the task more difficult than when a choice was offered.

Reviewers judged that the 2005 OCR examination was the most demanding in terms of content, examination time and lack of choice on examination papers. However, this was offset to a certain extent by the modular scheme of assessment, which reviewers judged to be less demanding than those of the other awarding bodies. Overall, reviewers found it hard to decide where the balance lay.

2.8 Tiering

There were no general changes to the tiering arrangements in most syllabuses. The new modular OCR syllabus, however, allowed entry for different units to be on different tiers, so that the final grade for a candidate could arise from results on a combination of the two tiers. The reviewers did not think that this in itself constituted a change in demand: it offered centres and candidates the opportunity to change and perhaps vary their tier of entry over the period in which the units were taken.

There was a significant amount of textual material and content in written papers that was common to both tiers. Questions, too, were often similar, with the only difference being additional prompts at foundation tier. Questions assessing Writing often relied on differentiation by outcome. Reviewers considered that there was generally a lack of effective differentiation between tiers across all awarding bodies. In particular, reviewers considered that the Edexcel and CCEA syllabuses provided insufficient challenge to candidates at the top end of higher tier. OCR, by contrast, was if anything a little too demanding for these candidates. Reviewers also judged CCEA to be unchallenging for lower-attaining candidates, while Edexcel was judged to be somewhat too challenging for these candidates.

2.9 Question papers

Awarding bodies made several changes to question papers over the period. As a result of a decision by the regulators, annotation was no longer allowed on the anthology or pre-release material brought into the examination, increasing the demand (although examiners' reports have indicated that the 'regurgitation' of annotation has often depressed candidates' performance and that weaker candidates tend to be disadvantaged by having access to such material).

The extent of the poetry included in pre-release material to be studied and changes in the nature of questions on these texts, where poetry was tested in the written examination, also raised demand somewhat. Questions became more specific, requiring candidates to comment on one

named poem and one other poem of their choice. These factors will all have somewhat increased demand.

There were also differences in the time allowed to answer question papers across the awarding bodies in 2005. Reviewers judged OCR to be demanding in this respect, as candidates had to do similar tasks in less time than candidates from other awarding bodies. CCEA, however, was judged to be undemanding compared to the other awarding bodies, as candidates had to complete fewer tasks in two hours.

The reviewers judged that questions on pre-release material and some of the Writing questions were becoming predictable or formulaic to the extent that centres and candidates could foresee too many of the likely questions. This issue has already been explored in Section 2.6. To some extent this process is cumulative, of course, as particular patterns of questioning are repeated over time. The reviewers concluded that the predictability of Edexcel question papers made them less demanding than those of other awarding bodies in 2005, although AQA and WJEC question papers were also thought to contain predictable elements. CCEA papers were judged to contain an overemphasis on narrative texts and descriptive writing.

2.10 Coursework

The table shows the coursework requirements for each awarding body in 2002 and 2005.

Coursework requirements for each awarding body in 2002 and 2005

2002					
20% Weighting		Collectively weighted at 20%			
AQA	Speaking & Listening (AO1)	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)
	Tasks to cover:	Shakespeare play	Work by pre-1900 author and Work by post-1900 author	<i>analyse</i> <i>review</i> <i>comment</i> using Media contexts	<i>explore</i> <i>imagine</i> <i>entertain</i> using context of Original Writing
	explain describe <i>narrate</i> explore analyse <i>imagine</i> <i>discuss</i> <i>argue</i> <i>persuade</i>				
CCEA	Talking & Listening (AO1)	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)

2005					
20% Weighting		Collectively weighted at 20%			
	Speaking & Listening (AO1)	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)
	Tasks to cover:	<u>In England:</u> Shakespeare play and Work from the English literary heritage	Candidates from Wales and Northern Ireland had options including authors from their respective literary heritages	<i>analyse</i> <i>review</i> <i>comment</i> using Media contexts	<i>explore</i> <i>imagine</i> <i>entertain</i> using context of Original Writing
	explain describe <i>narrate</i> explore analyse <i>imagine</i> <i>discuss</i> <i>argue</i> <i>persuade</i>				
	Talking & Listening (AO1)	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)

	<p>Tasks to cover:</p> <p>explain describe</p> <p><i>narrate</i></p> <p>explore analyse</p> <p><i>imagine</i></p> <p><i>discuss</i></p> <p><i>argue</i></p> <p><i>persuade</i></p>	<p>Shakespeare play</p> <p>and</p> <p>Poems by post-1900 Asian or American authors</p>	<p>Poem by pre-1900 author</p> <p>and</p> <p>Poems by post-1900 Asian or American authors</p>	<p><i>analyse</i></p> <p><i>review</i></p> <p><i>comment</i></p>	<p><i>explore</i></p> <p><i>imagine</i></p> <p><i>entertain</i></p>
Edexcel	<p>Speaking & Listening (AO1)</p> <p>Tasks to cover:</p> <p>explain describe</p>	<p>Reading (AO2)</p> <p>Shakespeare play</p> <p>and</p> <p>Work by pre-</p>	<p>Reading (AO2)</p> <p>Texts from other cultures and traditions</p>	<p>Writing (AO3)</p> <p><i>Analyse</i></p> <p><i>review</i></p> <p><i>comment</i></p>	<p>Writing (AO3)</p> <p><i>explore</i></p> <p><i>imagine</i></p> <p><i>entertain</i></p>

	<p>Tasks to cover:</p> <p>explain describe</p> <p><i>narrate</i></p> <p>explore analyse</p> <p><i>imagine</i></p> <p><i>discuss</i></p> <p><i>argue</i></p> <p><i>persuade</i></p>	<p>Shakespeare play</p> <p>or</p> <p>Play by another pre-1914 dramatist</p>	<p>Poetry from other cultures and traditions</p>	<p><i>argue</i></p> <p><i>persuade</i></p> <p><i>advise</i></p>	<p><i>explore</i></p> <p><i>imagine</i></p> <p><i>entertain</i></p>
	<p>Speaking & Listening (AO1)</p> <p>Tasks to cover:</p> <p>explain describe</p>	<p>Reading (AO2)</p> <p>Shakespeare play</p>	<p>Reading (AO2)</p> <p>Texts from other cultures and traditions</p>	<p><i>argue</i></p> <p><i>persuade</i></p> <p><i>advise</i></p> <p>dropped from coursework and now assessed by written paper</p>	<p>Writing (AO3)</p> <p>Task</p> <p><i>explore</i></p> <p><i>imagine</i></p>

	<i>narrate</i>	1914 author			
	explore analyse				
	<i>imagine</i>				
	<i>discuss</i>				
	<i>argue</i>				
	<i>persuade</i>				

<i>narrate</i>				<i>entertain</i>
explore analyse				
<i>imagine</i>				
<i>discuss</i>				
<i>argue</i>				
<i>persuade</i>				

Coursework requirements for each awarding body in 2002 and 2005

2002					
20% Weighting		Collectively weighted at 20%			
OCR	Speaking & Listening (AO1)	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)
	Tasks to cover:	Shakespeare play	Work by post-1900 author	<i>Inform, explain, describe</i>	<i>analyse</i>
	explain describe	and	and		<i>review</i>
	<i>narrate</i>	Work by pre-1900 author	Work from the English literary heritage	<i>explore</i>	<i>comment</i>
	explore analyse			<i>imagine</i>	
	<i>imagine</i>			<i>entertain</i>	
	<i>discuss</i>				
	<i>argue</i>				
	<i>persuade</i>				
WJEC	Speaking &	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)

2005				
20% Weighting		Collectively weighted at 20%		
Speaking & Listening (AO1)	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	argue	Writing (AO3)
	Shakespeare play	Poetry by a major writer pre- or post-1914	persuade	
	explain describe		advise	
	<i>narrate</i>		dropped from coursework and now assessed by written paper	<i>explore</i>
	explore analyse			<i>imagine</i>
	<i>imagine</i>			<i>entertain</i>
	<i>discuss</i>			
	<i>argue</i>			
	<i>persuade</i>			
Speaking &	Reading (AO2)	Reading (AO2)	Writing (AO3)	Writing (AO3)

Listening (AO1)					
Tasks to cover:	Shakespeare play	Texts from other cultures and traditions	<i>argue</i>	<i>explore</i>	
explain describe	and		<i>persuade</i>	<i>imagine</i>	
<i>narrate</i>	Work by pre-1914 author		<i>instruct</i>	<i>entertain</i>	
explore analyse			<i>analyse</i>	<i>Inform</i>	
<i>imagine</i>			<i>review</i>	<i>explain, describe</i>	
<i>discuss</i>			<i>comment</i>		*also assessed via written papers
<i>argue</i>					
<i>persuade</i>					

Listening (AO1)					
Tasks to cover:	Shakespeare play	Poetry from other cultures and traditions	<i>argue</i>	<i>explore</i>	
explain describe	(in Wales candidates have the opportunity to study a text by a Welsh writer of Welsh relevance or set in Wales)		<i>persuade</i>	<i>imagine</i>	
<i>narrate</i>			<i>advise*</i>	<i>entertain*</i>	
explore analyse			<i>analyse</i>	<i>Inform, explain, describe*</i>	
<i>imagine</i>			<i>review</i>		
<i>discuss</i>			<i>comment*</i>		*also assessed via written papers
<i>argue</i>					
<i>persuade</i>					

As already noted in Section 2.5, the range of contexts in which Speaking and Listening had to be assessed had slightly increased, with a commensurate increase in demand. In addition, the procedures for the standardisation and moderation of Speaking and Listening assessment varied a little between 2002 and 2005, but not in such a way as to constitute any change in demand.

There were some changes to the requirements of coursework between 2002 and 2005. Perhaps the dropping of the requirement to cover two literary texts on one unit was the most significant change. Generally, the changes served to bring the demands of the awarding bodies more closely into line with one another. However, the reviewers did express concern that a minimalist approach on the part of a centre or an individual teacher could result in a reduced level of demand.

2.11 Summary

The reviewers judged that most of the changes made to syllabuses and schemes of assessment between 2002 and 2005 had served to make them clearer and more effective and had reduced variations between awarding bodies without changing demand overall. The length of syllabus documents had grown significantly, and by 2005 several contained repetitive material and explanation that could be reduced by careful editing.

The introduction of a modular scheme by OCR had brought a radically different approach to assessment and grading, which the reviewers judged had made it easier for candidates to achieve particular marks and grades. The demand set by OCR's question papers, on the other hand, was judged to be the highest among the awarding bodies.

The reviewers judged that the use of pre-release or anthology material in assessment was leading to a more predictable pattern of questioning, although they concluded that the removal of annotation on such texts was beneficial in ensuring that candidates did not simply reprocess such notes. In the assessment of writing, the questions asked also seemed too predictable, and the triplet for *analyse, review, comment* was given less weighting than the other triplets.

Edexcel and CCEA were judged to be less demanding than other awarding bodies, principally on the grounds of predictability in the case of Edexcel and an overemphasis on narrative and descriptive writing by CCEA.

Section 3: Standards of performance

3.1 Introduction

Reviewers considered candidates' work from all of the awarding bodies in 2002 and 2005. Details of the materials used are provided in Appendix B. Reviewers did not consider candidate work in the Speaking and Listening component as evidence for this component is ephemeral and there is no requirement to record it.

Reviewers were asked to identify key features of candidate performance in 2005, based on the work seen at each of the key grades. Performance descriptions for each grade boundary were drawn up, based on the performance descriptions developed in the 2002 review.

3.2 GCSE grade A performance description

Reading

Candidates understood whole texts and could interpret and explain them. They could select appropriate and relevant material for a variety of purposes. They showed perception, understood implicit meanings and sustained their interpretations of texts coherently. They could appreciate writers' purposes and show how facts and opinions might be used to support particular purposes.

They showed perceptive engagement with a range of texts and could sustain their responses with appropriate supporting material and by developing a line of thought and argument. They could identify and evaluate a range of linguistic and presentational features. They could make apt contrasts and comparisons between texts.

Writing

Candidates showed adaptability of style according to audience and purpose. They wrote clearly and fluently, using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary to engage the interest of their readers. They showed purposeful control of organisation of whole texts. They wrote concisely where necessary and developed ideas methodically and coherently, with sound use of paragraphing to enhance meaning.

They used sentence structures confidently. Generally, they showed some evidence of stylistic adventurousness and good technical accuracy at this boundary.

3.3 Performance at the GCSE grade A boundary

Standards of performance at this grade boundary were broadly comparable across the awarding bodies.

3.4 GCSE grade C performance description

Reading

Candidates had a firm grasp of the main ideas and themes of texts and could select and elaborate upon material or draw together points from different texts, mostly chronologically or sequentially. They could re-tell narratives in detail and showed some focus in other tasks. When asked, they showed an understanding of the differences between facts and opinions and showed some understanding of writers' purposes and viewpoints.

They could respond to or empathise with characters in literary texts. They could follow a line of argument. They could make inferences. They could offer personal responses and some textual illustration. They showed awareness of a range of linguistic and presentational devices and made some straightforward comments about them.

Writing

Candidates adapted the form of their writing to suit their purposes with some appropriate variation of style and register. They showed a generally secure awareness of audience. They communicated ideas in a straightforward and sometimes imaginative way. They organised information or ideas methodically, though often with thoroughness rather than selection. They showed generally appropriate use of paragraphing and vocabulary in most of their writing.

They wrote with some control, using a range of sentence structures and with mostly accurate expression. They understood spelling conventions and were able to apply them with some

consistency. They could use a range of punctuation accurately, and sentences were generally demarcated correctly.

3.5 Performance at GCSE grade C boundary

Standards of performance at higher tier were broadly comparable across the awarding bodies, although OCR candidates tended to demonstrate slightly weaker performance than others. Reviewers commented that OCR candidates' writing was less accurate and that they were less able to develop and sustain their ideas.

At foundation tier, standards of performance were broadly comparable across the awarding bodies, with the exception of AQA, whose candidates tended to show slightly weaker performance. Reviewers noted that AQA candidates showed less detailed engagement with reading texts, with less effective use of textual references in their comments. Reviewers also found that AQA candidates' written expression was less varied and accurate than candidates from other awarding bodies.

3.6 Comparison across tiers

Performance at grade C across foundation and higher tiers was found to be broadly comparable.

3.7 GCSE grade F performance description

Reading

Candidates understood some ideas and grasped the main themes within texts. They could restate the surface content. They could re-tell narratives in broad terms. When asked, they showed some awareness of the difference between fact and opinion and could identify some similarities and differences between the texts they read. They identified some relevant points and features when asked to comment on particular aspects of texts. They could recognise characters' primary motivation and could sometimes pinpoint the main purpose and viewpoint of a text.

They showed some personal engagement with the texts read. They responded simply to the ways in which writers had presented their material. They could make relevant if unsupported assertions about texts. They could recognise examples of the use of language for deliberate effect.

Writing

Candidates showed basic awareness of the need to vary form and structure for different purposes. They sometimes attempted to shape their writing for an intended audience. Their writing usually communicated central ideas with some clarity and relevance. They demonstrated some control of sequencing in the organisation of narrative and non-narrative writing.

They used a limited range of sentence structures. They showed variable control of spelling using generally simple vocabulary. They employed some conventions of punctuation but without consistency or accuracy.

3.8 Performance at GCSE grade F

Standards of performance across Edexcel, OCR and WJEC were broadly comparable. AQA candidates tended to show slightly weaker performance than candidates from other awarding bodies, while CCEA candidates tended to demonstrate slightly stronger performance.

Reviewers noted that AQA candidates' responses were less sustained and focused, with more inaccuracies. They commented that CCEA candidates produced more controlled, focused and detailed responses in coursework and in the examinations.

3.9 Standards of performance over time

At all three grade boundaries, including foundation and higher tiers at grade C, standards of performance had been maintained between 2002 and 2005.

3.10 Summary

Reviewers found that standards of performance over time had been maintained at all grade boundaries.

However, there were some variations in standards of performance in 2005. Standards were comparable across all awarding bodies in 2005 at grade A. AQA candidates were judged to be weaker than those from other awarding bodies at grade C foundation tier and grade F. OCR candidates were judged to be weaker at grade C higher tier, while CCEA candidates were found to be stronger than those from other awarding bodies at grade F. Performance within awarding bodies across tiers at grade C was judged to be comparable.

Appendix A: Details of GCSE English syllabuses reviewed

Year	Awarding body and syllabus				
	AQA	CCEA	Edexcel	OCR	WJEC
2002	1111	G29	1202	1500	150
2005	3702	5030	1203	1900	

Appendix B: Details of GCSE English scripts reviewed

Grade	AQA		CCEA		Edexcel		OCR		WJEC	
	2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005
A	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	10	10
C(H)*	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	10	10
C(F)*	15	10	10	10	10	10	10	5	10	10
F	10	10	5	5	5	10	10	5	10	10

* H = higher tier; F = foundation tier

Appendix C: List of reviewers

Review team	
Coordinator	John Johnson
Syllabus reviewers	Rosemary Adams Russell Carey Mick Connell
Script reviewers	Roger Addison (Edexcel) John Andrews (CCEA) Don Astley (WJEC) Kate Barley Peter Buckroyd (AQA) Paul Clayton (NATE) Alan Coleby (OCR) Joanna Haffenden Jackie Moore John Reynolds (OCR) Ted Snell (WJEC) Dave Stone (AQA) Pam Taylor (Edexcel) Pauline Wylie (CCEA)

Note: where a participant was nominated by a particular organisation, the nominating body is shown in parentheses after their name.