

***Preparing for the new  
GCSE English  
specifications***

***How Let's Think in English  
can help***

## *Summary*

All GCSE specifications are to be made more demanding to improve education in England, improve our international competitiveness and raise our position in international comparisons such as PISA.

The new GCSE English Language and English Literature (and Maths) specifications will be taught from September 2015 and examined from June 2017.

*For historical reasons, the total increase in demand will be greater in GCSE English than in other subjects. Teaching methods will therefore need to change if grades are to be maintained.*

## *GCSE changes already implemented*

- Modular examinations ended in 2013
- Ofqual with power to direct Examining Boards to change grade boundaries
- Grade from only first sitting of GCSE to count towards schools' results (to deter early and multiple entries)
- In GCSE English, Speaking and Listening not to count towards final grade from June 2014
- Grade therefore to be based on 60 per cent examination answers (instead of 40% as at present)
- The combined effect of these changes is likely to lead to lower GCSE English grade rates from 2014.

## ***GCSE English 'overgraded'***

Ofqual considers that GCSE English has historically been more generously graded than other subjects through a combination of three factors:

- greater use of modular specifications than other subjects
- coursework and controlled conditions assessments
- inclusion of Speaking & Listening with insufficient checks on validity of assessments.

With the discontinuation of two of these, national grade rates are likely to be lower in 2014 and subsequently than in previous years, despite Ofqual's commitment to 'comparable outcomes' to allow for the separation of Speaking & Listening.

## *The new specifications*

The new specifications in all subjects are to be:

- comparable in demand to other high-achieving jurisdictions
- more demanding especially at grade C
- less predictable in content and with less scaffolding
- externally assessed only so no controlled conditions assessments
- examined at the end of the course only

## *Timescale*

New English Language, English Literature and Mathematics specifications to be taught from September 2015 (other subjects from 2016)

June 2014 - Awarding Bodies publish draft specifications in these three subjects for consultation

September 2014 – Ofqual approves new specifications

Schools have a year to prepare for teaching the new specifications

## ***Schools to be judged on GCSE results only***

**From 2015, schools will no longer be required to report end-of-KS3 assessments to DfE, so there will be no centrally held data between Y6 and Y11; Ofsted inspections based on whatever pupil tracking data schools choose to keep**

**In 2017, GCSE grades change to numerical - 9 highest, 1 lowest, then U (ungraded)**

**From 2016, 11 – 16 education assessed only on GCSE results by two measures:**

- **point score totals of students' GCSE score in 8 subjects – Eng Lang (double weighted if taken with Eng Lit and vice versa), Maths (double weighted), 3 other E Bacc subjects and 3 best others from permitted list (Attainment 8)**
- **value-added from KS2 scores (Progress 8)**
- **Schools' Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores to be published year by year on their websites and in league tables**

## *Additional note on Progress 8*

*Reforming assessment and accountability for primary schools* (DfE, 27 March 2014) states that:

- from 2016, Y6 pupils will continue to sit externally set and marked tests in Reading, SPAG and Maths
- their results will be presented as a scaled score where 100 is the expected standard for the end of KS2
- they will continue to be teacher assessed in Reading, Writing, Maths and Science
- BUT only the tests will count for school performance measures , so Progress 8 will be based on KS2 test scores only.



## ***Key features of GCSE English***

- English Language and English Literature (no English).
- Literature not compulsory **BUT Eng Lang is double weighted in Attainment 8 if Eng Lit taken at the same time and vice versa.** Provided Eng Lit is included in the 8 subjects, the student's higher score of Eng Lang or Eng Lit is counted.
- So English = 30% of each student's' (and school's) attainment score if both Eng Lang and Eng Lit are taken [Maths = 20%, other subjects 10% each]
- End-of-course examinations only, taken in June. November resits for English Language only [*but this may change to allow English Literature also*].
- Assessed by untiered, external exam only.
- IGCSE to be brought into line with GCSE for centres in England.

## ***Position of English Literature***

- **The decision to double-weight English Language if English Literature is taken at the same time has secured the position of Eng Lit as some schools have been considering discontinuing Eng Lit to concentrate on Eng Lang.**
- **The decision that schools will be able to double-weight the student's higher point score of Eng Lang and Eng Lit means that schools will seek the highest possible grade in both, not just enter students for Eng Lit as a default position to secure double weighting in Eng Lang. Publication of average point scores for each subject on schools' websites year by year will also raise questions if Eng Lit scores are much lower than Eng Lang.**
- **The fact that English will count for 30 per cent of students' point scores gives English Departments a strong case for arguing for maximum teaching time in Key Stage 4.**

## ***GCSE English Language***

- **No set texts - students expected to read ‘a wide range of texts’ – 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century**
- **Reading (50%): critical reading and comprehension; summary and synthesis; evaluation of a writer’s choice of vocabulary, form and structural features.**
- **Reading assessment based on unseen texts from all three centuries – fiction & non-fiction including literary non-fiction**
- **Writing (50%): producing clear and coherent text; writing for impact.**
- **20% of Writing marks for range of vocabulary and sentence structures, spelling and punctuation.**
- **Spoken language : presenting information and ideas; responding to spoken language; spoken standard English.**
- **Speaking assessment reported separately.**

## ***GCSE English Literature***

- **Emphasis on ‘classic literature’ and ‘substantial whole texts in detail’. Shakespeare; 19<sup>th</sup> century novel; selection of poetry since 1789, including Romantic poetry; fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards.**
- **Exam must include unseen texts including texts for comparison. Comparison questions = 20 – 25% of marks**
- **Reading : literal and inferential comprehension; critical reading; evaluation of the writer’s choice of vocabulary, grammatical and structural features; comparing texts.**
- **Writing about literature : ‘writing effectively about literature for a range of purposes’.**
- **Students to ‘maintain a critical style’ so creative responses not possible.**
- **5% of marks for vocabulary, sentence structures, spelling and punctuation.**

## ***Increased demand of new specifications***

The new specifications will be more demanding in four ways:

- content – texts from 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (Eng Lang); Romantic poetry, 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, substantial whole texts - no short stories (Eng Lit)
- examination – end of course only; no controlled conditions assessments
- assessment – less scaffolding; comparison of unseen passages
- grading – mid grade of new 9 to 1 scale (grade 5) to be a half to two-thirds of a grade higher than that required for a current grade C [*Ofqual proposal under consultation*]

## ***Increased demand in Reading, not Writing***

The first three of these increased demands all relate to Reading response, not to Writing.

In Eng Lang, there will continue to be alternative Writing tasks, related to the Reading passages , worth 50 per cent and marked similarly to now, as also in Eng Lit.

The Reading tasks will be significantly more demanding in the ways outlined. Writing will be affected only insofar as students will be responding to more difficult content and questions.

*The rest of this presentation therefore focusses on response to Reading.*

## *Structure of new GCSE English papers*

- Two papers each for Eng Lang and Eng Lit
- Papers no longer than 2 hours each – possibly 1 hour 30 minutes plus 15 minutes reading time
- Eng Lang – 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century passages each year
  - fiction, literary non-fiction and other non-fiction
  - some short comprehension questions ; most marks on summary, evaluation and comparison questions
- Eng Lit – Shakespeare, 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, poetry including Romantics, British fiction /drama since 1914
  - critical analysis and evaluation including comparison of two ‘unseen’ passages from studied texts

## *Consequences for teaching and learning*

The new specifications will require students to respond confidently to unknown 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century texts (Eng Lang) and passages from full-length works (Eng Lit) – deducing and inferring meaning quickly and explaining their ideas accurately in writing in timed conditions.

They will therefore need practice in developing the skills of inference and deduction, reflected in higher level thinking and fluent explanatory writing.

This is more successfully achieved by a regular programme of lessons which develop the necessary skills beginning in Key Stage 3.



## *A different way of teaching*

The greater difficulty and sheer range of texts in the new specifications mean that close-focus sentence-level teaching will be insufficient. Students will need to be able to:

- infer or deduce reasonable meanings when faced with unfamiliar words
- recognise the layered effects of figurative language
- perceive tonal effects like irony, exaggeration, innuendo, humour
- in the light of these, speculate persuasively about the writer's intentions
- write confidently using evidence from the texts

## *For example...*

When teaching two poems by the same poet, one can introduce the poet, give some biographical background and work through the poems with the students, identifying meaning and similarities or differences between the poems.

Or one can give students the two poems saying nothing about their authorship; ask each half of the class to work out what is happening to explain to the other half; then ask the class to work out whether the two poems are written by the same poet, with evidence.

## *Or...*

Teaching a short story one can work through the story, drawing out meaning paragraph by paragraph and then considering how storyline, setting and characterisation work to make the story successful.

Or one can read the story without the first two paragraphs; ask the students to speculate on the significance of one or two selected incidents in the story; then reveal the missing paragraphs and ask the students to decide whether they should come at the beginning or end of the story – which would be better and how would each position affect our understanding of the story?

## ***Not one or other, but both***

Students will need both kinds of teaching if they are to succeed with the new GCSE specifications - detailed study of texts for English Literature *and* a carefully structured approach to *building their awareness of the principles of literary understanding* of unknown texts for English Language and 'unseen' passages for English Literature.

This approach should be embedded in KS3 schemes of work for maximum effect. Let's Think in English (LTE) provides such an approach.

**[The examples on the previous two slides are LTE lessons – *Decisions* and *When the Wasps Drowned* in the current AQA GCSE anthology. These are available on our website – [www.letsthinkinenglish.org](http://www.letsthinkinenglish.org) ]**

## *How Let's Think in English can help*

Let's Think in English (LTE) consists of 30+ fully trialled lessons which:

- are designed to be used fortnightly
- use fiction, poetry, non-fiction, drama and film
- stimulate students' reasoning powers, including inference and deduction, in a systematic way
- build awareness of the underlying principles of literary understanding
- have very high interest for students
- are discussion-based, leading to written work when the teacher wishes
- are designed for regular use in KS3 and KS4

## ***Let's Think in English and less able students***

**Let's Think in English lessons work particularly well with less able and EAL students. This is partly because there is almost no writing which is often a cause of anxiety and frustration. When less able and EAL students realise it's the development of their ideas rather than their writing skills that is important, they begin to gain confidence and flourish.**

**Teachers in our pilot schools repeatedly tell us how less able and EAL students make significant progress. And when we teach demonstration lessons in schools, the class's teacher is often amazed at the quality of answers and comments by students with learning difficulties.**

**It is also becoming clear that writing improves as students gain confidence in discussion, showing significant gains in range of language and grammatical structure as students' oral ability develops.**

## ***More about Let's Think in English***

- Let's Think in English lessons have been initially designed to be used in KS3. *More GCSE-related lessons will; become available when the new specifications are published.*
- Ofsted has repeatedly judged LTE lessons outstanding or good with outstanding features.
- LTE has the same basis as Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education (CASE) which has been repeatedly proven to raise attainment by between one and two GCSE grades.
- Training is necessary and a full training and support programme is available.

## *The London trial*

Let's Think in English is now being used by 120+ schools across England. These include 21 London schools which are formally trialling the programme – we have received £130k from the London Schools Excellence Fund for this.

Evidence is growing that LTE improves students' written work as well as their cognitive skills and reading. We want to prove this.

We will need another 20 London schools for Year 2 of the trial from September 2014 and welcome expressions of interest.



## *The next steps*

For further information, please go to

[www.letsthinkinenglish.org](http://www.letsthinkinenglish.org)

Any queries to Laurie Smith at [laurie.smith@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:laurie.smith@kcl.ac.uk)

Our next introductory training days are **Tuesday 17 June**, repeated on **Thursday 3 July**, 9.30 – 3.30, at King's College London. Training and support elsewhere is available by arrangement.

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