AQA

ELC
STEP UP TO ENGLISH

5970/U Step Up to English NEA umbrella
Report on the Examination

5970/U
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ELC Step Up to English

After two years of TAGs, the return to the 'normal' Step Up to English moderation process saw both returning and new centres entering in both the Winter and Summer 2022 Series. The specification continues to attract a growing demographic of students from a wide-range of abilities and centres. This year saw a similar entry at Silver and Gold Step, with many centres entering students across both steps. Students were clearly engaged with and motivated by the extensive range of topics that their teachers had selected. Although there was evidence of all topics being submitted, the new topics, Style and Crime, did appear to be very popular and the responses to both were generally well crafted and interesting. There were examples of exemplary, holistic teaching practices being utilised by centres to enthuse their students and encourage the transference of literacy skills.

It was clear that many students were using the stepped approach (Silver to Gold) and that a number of centres were using Step Up to English as a springboard to build skills in English. In addition, exam technique was clearly embedded as students' confidence and understanding of the Assessment Objectives and how to tackle question stems was generally very good and focused. The Lead Moderator envisages that this will enable Gold students to progress to either GCSE English Language or for others, to Functional Skills Levels 1 or 2.

Administration

Overall, the administration of the specification was satisfactory. Centres who had used the 'Submission Checklist', that their named adviser and / or moderator had emailed to them, were much more successful in this area. However, administration wasn't as efficient as it has been in past moderation series.

Looking forwards to Winter and Summer 2023, centres should note that the key administration areas for improvement are:

- complete and enclose the Centre Declaration Sheet using the specification code 5970/U
- check addition is correct before entering marks onto e-submissions
- ensure the front covers of the Non-Exam Assessments (NEAs) are fully completed
- fully complete and Attach JCQ Forms where Access Arrangements have been used
- apply to AQA for exceptional JCQ arrangements prior to embarking on the Specification. Please note this includes a Reader for the Reading task and / or a Scribe for the Writing task.

Centres are reminded that administration errors can slow the moderation process down and in more serious cases can be detrimental to the final outcome of their students' submissions. However, centres will continue to be supported by: their named adviser, who will email a 'Welcome Pack' to the centre in September; by the AQA Customer Service team; by their current moderator who will provide constructive feedback and their future moderator who will provide a Submission Checklist prior to their Submissions in 2023. The Lead Moderator is confident that this will support centres to improve their Administration.

Component 1 (5972/1 and 5973/1)

The moderation team overwhelmingly reported that students had very successfully tackled the transactional Component 1 texts. The Spoken Language tasks, in many instances, were being used effectively by centres as Speaking Frames to help explore the topic and scaffold the Reading and subsequent Writing tasks.

The most popular topic choices were: Hobbies, Music and Style. However, centres had clearly chosen topics carefully to match students' interests and many centres entered a wide spectrum of topics.

In most instances, centres had fully understood and met the specification requirements of Component 1. However, there were instances of centres only completing one Component 1 NEA. Centres are reminded that, it is a requirement of the specification that two topics are entered. The Lead Moderator would like to acknowledge that, where errors had occurred, centres worked professionally and swiftly to try to rectify the issue.

Spoken Language

All students had clearly valued the Spoken Language tasks. Where centres had embedded the tasks in 'real world' activities, the students' engagement was apparent   There were many examples of outstanding practice, including meticulous comments and in many cases the inclusion of an annotated Level of Response grid.

However, there were also some instances where centres had misunderstood the requirements of the teacher's comment. In order to support those centre, in future series, the Lead Moderator would suggest that centres should ensure that:

- comments contains sufficient context
- the mark is justified by referencing all strands of the assessment criteria
- key examples of what the student contributed are included
- the Level of Response grid (in the Mark Scheme) is used to help accurately pinpoint the mark to award

In addition, Feedback reports and Centres engagement with TOLs should help to ensure that the expectation of the Spoken Language comments are fully met in future series.

Reading

Generally, teachers had applied the mark scheme to the Reading tasks with precision. Where centres had annotated with reference to the marking criteria, it was much easier for moderators to understand why the centre had made those decisions and to confirm them. However, it remains important, when marking, to use the mark schemes to ensure that responses are answering the question posed and the objective being assessed.

For 5972/1, the Lead Moderator would like to advise centres:
- for Reading 2, question 4, a mark can be awarded where the tick is supported by one or more reasons. In terms of the reasons, marks can be only be awarded where they are embedded in the text and demonstrate some personal opinion.

For 5973/1, the Lead Moderator would like to advise centres:

- for Reading 2, question 3 answers must relate to organisational techniques to meet the AO2 criteria "Begin to show awareness of structure".

Writing

In the transactional Writing tasks, students often demonstrated the ability to write very convincing pieces. It was noted, that students who had utilised the planning section, were often able to structure their writing piece more effectively. Centres who had adopted marginal or summative annotation, alongside the Writing Level of Response grids, tended to award marks more precisely.

Where centres were less accurate in their marking, there appeared to be a misunderstanding in the expectation at Silver Step, particularly for AO6, bullet point 1 (Spelling). Some students were under-awarded despite evidence of accurate High Frequency and CVCC/ CCVC/ CVVC spelling. In those instances, the centre are directed to the High Frequency Word list located in the Teach section of the AQA Step Up to English webpage. In the Gold Step, there were some instances of over-awarding both at AO5 and AO6.

In order to support centres, in improving the marking of the Writing task, the Lead Moderator would like to advise centres that:

- they should use the Writing key in the mark scheme. By working from the bottom of the band upwards marking each statement D (Demonstrated), W (Working Towards) and N (No evidence) to find the appropriate best fit band
- for AO5 the handwriting bullet is worth a maximum of one mark. The second bullet (structure and audience) is worth a maximum of 2 marks and the third bullet (construction of ideas and phrases / sentences) is also worth a maximum of 2 marks
- for AO6, each bullet is worth a maximum of 1 mark
- they may find it helpful to mark and standardise their students' Writing tasks in rank order.
- they should use TOLS to help them establish the standard.

Component 2 (5972/2 and 5973/2)

The quality of the Component 2 responses were excellent. The vast majority of students had clearly been fully prepared and had subsequently engaged enthusiastically with a wide range of different topics. The most popular topics, across Silver and Gold step were: Crime, Gothic Horror and Myths and Legends. However, as with Component 1, the whole range of topics were in evidence.

Reading

Generally, centres applied the Reading criteria in a fair and flexible manner. Annotation that explained the reasoning behind the marks awarded made it much easier for the moderator to understand the centre's judgements.

Where there were discrepancies between the moderator's and centre's standard, it usually involved the application of the mark scheme for AO2 and AO3. In order to support centres in future series, the Lead Moderator would like to suggest:

For 5972/1 that:
- for question 3, the explanations are embedded in the text. Generic explanations of the words should limit the mark awarded.
- for question 8, the word from the example is clearly identified.
- responses for question 12 are comparisons and must be validated by the source.

For 5973/2 that:
- for question 3, a mark is only awarded where both the word or phrase and the explanation are valid.
- for question 5, students' responses must make reference to the language and correctly explain why words have been chosen within the context. The examples should not be simple paraphrases and must be correctly embedded within the context of the phrase.
- for question 6, the expectation is that the students' responses should be direct quotations taken from the text that answer the question posed. Summaries or paraphrasing should not be awarded. .
- for question 7, the marks are awarded on a qualitative not quantitative basis. Centres may find it helpful to revisit the AO3 Level Descriptors for GCSE Ready, Entry Level 3 and Entry Level 2 in the Specification p29-32. There are some useful examples of what constitutes each strand, which may help centres when awarding AO3 marks in future submissions.

Writing

The creative writing responses were generally outstanding and a pleasure for the moderation team to read. Students were clearly very well prepared and understood and could apply the different genre conventions. The Gothic Horror and Crime responses, in particular, were imaginative with gripping plots at both Silver and Gold step.

In terms of the Writing standard, similar trends of under-awarding at Silver Step and over-awarding at Gold Step were seen in Component 2. Similarly, centres with the most precise marking were using the Level of response grids alongside marginal or summative annotation.

In order to support centres to improve the accuracy of the Writing task, in future series, the Lead moderator would like to suggest:
- centres use the Writing grid and working from band 1 upwards, mark it either: D (Demonstrated), W (Working Towards) or N (No evidence). By doing this they will be able to see the Best Fit Band and more accurately pinpoint the mark to award within it.
- For Component 2, AO5, each bullet point is worth a maximum of 2 marks. If a skill has been fully demonstrated, full marks should be awarded.
- For Component 2, AO6, each bullet point is worth 1 mark and should be awarded where a skill has been demonstrated. However, for AO6 Component 2, an additional mark is available and should be awarded where the skill has exceeded the criteria, but not to the extent that it has moved into the higher band.

Conclusion

In both the Winter and Summer series, the students who entered have overwhelmingly demonstrated their motivation and enthusiasm to engage with the range of activities, tasks and texts across Component 1 and 2. The vast majority of students have been clearly stretched and challenged and so it is always a pleasure to acknowledge that their hard work has resulted in a nationally recognised certified award.

It is anticipated that the supportive feedback provided, combined with training, exemplar material and TOLs will enable centres to rectify issues where these have occurred and lead to even greater success for future cohorts.

Centres are reminded that the new NEAs are now available to download from the SKM area of Centre Services. In addition, centres are reminded that the Detectives NEAs for Component 1 and the Sports NEAs for Component 2 have now expired. For 2022-23, NEA topics The Next Step and Exploring have now been identified for removal.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.