



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

**Research summary – A study of stakeholders' views on
English courses for 16 year olds
(English teachers and employers)**

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Contents

- 1 Summary..... 3
- 2 Findings from the English teachers' questionnaire 4
 - 2.1 Skills needed for progression to further study..... 4
 - 2.2 English syllabus structure..... 4
 - 2.3 Internal and external assessment issues 4
 - 2.4 Tiering models 4
 - 2.5 Types of support..... 4
 - 2.6 Statement of achievement content..... 5
 - 2.7 Set texts..... 5
 - 2.8 General comments section..... 5
- 3 Findings from the employers' questionnaire 6
 - 3.1 Grade needed for sufficient knowledge and skills in each subject..... 6
 - 3.2 Useful English skills..... 6
 - 3.3 English skills that new employees lack 6
 - 3.4 English training 6

1 Summary

Two questionnaires were developed to survey English teachers' and employers' views on English courses for 16 year olds. Teachers and employers were invited to participate by email.

2 Findings from the English teachers' questionnaire

93 teachers responded to the questionnaire. The largest group were from comprehensive schools (40%), with 27% from independent schools. Most teachers (93%) taught multiple courses, often spanning both Levels 2 and 3, and Literature and Language.

2.1 Skills needed for progression to further study

Four skills were considered to be most important for progression to further study: critical reading (89% of respondents); extended writing (76%); self-directed study (59%); and independent research (50%).

2.2 English syllabus structure

Most teachers (80%) felt that English should be taught and assessed as separate 'Language' and 'Literature' syllabuses.

2.3 Internal and external assessment issues

Most teachers felt that a mix of internal and external assessment arrangements should be used to assess reading skills (57% Literature / 55% Language) and writing skills (51% Literature / 57% Language). Most teachers also felt that only internal assessment should be used to assess speaking and listening skills (54% Literature / 70% Language). 55% of teachers expressed concerns about suggestions that English might only be assessed externally. They were concerned about a potential narrowing of assessed skills, with this possibly harming students' later progression into work or study. There were also concerns that students at the extreme ends of the ability range might not perform well when assessed solely through external examination.

2.4 Tiering models

More than half of the teachers felt that a common writing paper would be suitable for all students in English Literature (55%) or English Language (62%). Less than half of the teachers felt that a common reading paper would be suitable for all students in English Literature (42%) or English Language (26%).

2.5 Types of support

Over 80% of teachers felt that a variety of types of support would be useful. These included: exam papers; examiner reports; model answers; pupil responses with commentaries; exemplar tasks; regional face-to-face training; interpretation of assessment objectives; digital resources (eg teaching materials); and schemes of work. Less than two thirds of the teachers felt that text books, online training and social network / internet forums would be useful types of support.

General teacher comments suggested that support materials should be explained more clearly and renewed less often. There were also suggestions that opportunities for shared interactions between teachers and shared interactions between teachers and examiners would be very helpful.

2.6 Statement of achievement content

A majority of the teachers responded that all of the content suggested for inclusion in a statement of achievement for weaker students' subsequent teachers / employers would be useful. A 'report on the strengths of the student's performance' and a 'list of specific skills covered together with a measure of achievement for each skill' were the most popular responses.

2.7 Set texts

66% of the teachers reported that the current GCSE set texts were interesting, with 60% reporting that they were challenging. 64% of the teachers reported that the set texts were over-used, with 67% reporting that there was insufficient choice / range of texts (67%). Most of the teachers indicated that they would value thematic exam tasks being set which would allow them to choose their own texts for English Literature (80%) and English Language (75%).

2.8 General comments section

29 teachers submitted general comments which expressed some concerns about the perceived validity of skills covered or recognised in current GCSE English assessments. There were also some suggestions that less complex assessment arrangements appeared to be more rigorous, with some citing the IGCSE as an example of a 'clear' assessment model.

3 Findings from the employers' questionnaire

35 employers from a wide range of sectors submitted responses to the questionnaire. Over half came from businesses with more than 250 employees (54%).

3.1 Grade needed for sufficient knowledge and skills in each subject

The most favoured response to the question about which exam grade employers felt provided good evidence that new employees had sufficient levels of English to work confidently, effectively and independently was grade B (34%), followed by grade C (26%).

3.2 Useful English skills

All respondents reported that all of the speaking and listening skills suggested in the questionnaire were useful for their new employees. Similarly all respondents also reported that reading and understanding texts and writing clearly and succinctly were useful for their new employees.

3.3 English skills that new employees lack

15 employers submitted responses about which English skills their new employees lacked. These responses suggested that writing skills (including spelling, grammar, punctuation and text structuring), verbal skills / vocabulary and deficits relating to an overarching concept of 'precision' were lacking in new employees.

3.4 English training

23% of employers suggested that they provided remedial teaching to remove gaps in employees' essential English language knowledge or skills, with a further 20% indicating that this was necessary for a minority of employees. When asked about whether there were other specific types of training that they provided for new employees, responses fell into three areas of writing: report writing; technical writing; and minute taking.