

Glenys Stacey
Chief Regulator
Ofqual
Spring Place
Herald Avenue
Coventry
CV5 6UB

30th August 2013

Open letter from The Communication Trust and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in response to the decision by Ofqual to press ahead with its plans to stop speaking and listening assessments from counting towards final grades in GCSE English and GCSE English Language

Dear Ms Stacey,

We are writing to register the profound disappointment of the speech, language and communication sector at your decision to go ahead with plans to stop speaking and listening assessments from counting towards final grades in GCSE English and GCSE English language.

The Communication Trust represents 47 organisations leading in the field of support for children's speech, language and communication. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK and has more than 16,000 members.

Your analysis of responses to your consultation shows that an overwhelming 92% of respondents disagreed with the removal of the requirement for speaking and listening marks to contribute to the overall GCSE English/English language grade. Your press release yesterday acknowledges the "vital importance" of speaking and listening skills and the concerns that "these skills will not be taught if they don't count towards grades and accountability measures". The Communication Trust highlighted the problem as follows.

"Removing the speaking and listening element of the English/English language assessment is likely to reduce its importance and lower its status among teaching professionals, who will inevitably focus on those aspects of the assessment that they are held accountable for. Our strong fear is that if speaking and listening does not contribute to the school accountability measure, then there will be no incentive for it to be taught in schools."

Your analysis of responses shows that 225 respondents echoed this concern.

Another major concern for us is the impact of this decision on students with special educational needs (SEN) and, in particular, students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Some of these students will perform better on reading and writing than on speaking and listening. Others, however, may perform better on speaking and listening – perhaps because of the support they have received in school. It would seem unfair for the hard-won spoken language skills of students in the second group not to be reflected in their grades.

A key point in all of this, which was raised by 329 respondents, is that speaking and listening is a vital and important skill. The Communication Trust put the point as follows.

“Oral communication is the foundation of written language; without strong spoken language, children will struggle to read and write well, accurately and with meaning. It is the vehicle by which teachers teach, fundamental to professional engagement and provides the gateway to children’s learning. It is the basis of social interaction, necessary for wider development as well as learning. There is growing evidence that a focus on spoken language can impact positively on educational outcomes.”

The removal of speaking and listening from grading will reduce the focus on, and quality of, the teaching and learning of speaking and listening in schools and will have a negative impact on pupils.

We believe this decision is the wrong one and that insufficient attention has been paid to developing an alternative workable solution. We are again offering our assistance, and that of our sector, in helping to shape a solution.

The Communication Trust had a positive meeting with an Ofqual official at which it offered to support the development of alternative solutions. We remain willing to help to find a solution and would ask that the decision be rescinded until all available options have been explored.

To this end we are offering to host a meeting of stakeholders from our sector, professional bodies involved in supporting children’s communication and education and Ofqual. We hope you will accept this offer.

Yours faithfully,

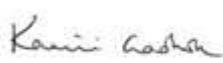
Anne Fox



Director

The Communication Trust

Kamini Gadhok MBE



Chief Executive Officer

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists