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# GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(8700)

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## Specification

For teaching from September 2015 onwards  
For exams in May/June 2017 onwards

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Version 1.2 27 September 2014



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## Are you using the latest version of these specifications?

- You will always find the most up-to-date version of this specification on our website at [aqa.org.uk/8700](https://www.aqa.org.uk/8700)
- We will write to you if there are significant changes to this specification.

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Why choose AQA for GCSE English Language

### A specification designed for you and your students

Our assessments have been designed to inspire and motivate students, providing appropriate stretch and challenge whilst ensuring, as far as possible, that the assessment and texts are accessible to the full range of students.

The specification will enable students of all abilities to develop the skills they need to read, understand and analyse a wide range of different texts covering the 19th, 20th and 21st century time periods as well as to write clearly, coherently and accurately using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures.

### Dynamic and engaging content

The specification offers the attraction of two equally-balanced papers, relating reading sources to the topic and theme of writing tasks. The reading sources act as stimulus for writing tasks, providing students with a clear route through each paper.

Each paper has a distinct identity to better support high quality provision and engaging teaching and learning. Paper 1, *Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing*, looks at how writers use narrative and descriptive techniques to engage the interest of readers. Paper 2, *Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives*, looks at how different writers present a similar topic over time.

Our approach to spoken language (previously speaking and listening) will emphasise the importance of the wider benefits that speaking and listening skills have for students. The endorsed unit will draw on good practice to suggest how engaging formative tasks can lead to a single summative assessment.

### Skills-based approach

The specification offers a skills-based approach to the study of English Language in an untiered context. Questions are designed to take students on an assessment journey through lower tariff tasks to more extended responses.

### Teach Language and Literature together

The specification is fully co-teachable with GCSE English Literature. Students who choose to study both will benefit from the transferable skills developed across the two subjects.

### We're behind you every step of the way

After careful consultation with practising teachers, subject associations and employers, we have designed the specification to meet the needs of students and teachers, providing high quality assessment and good provision for English. It offers excellent preparation for AS and A-level English, as well as equipping students with essential life-skills and the best progression route to future employment.

With AQA you can rest assured that your students will receive the grade that fairly represents their attainment and reflects the skills that they have demonstrated.

You can find out about all our English qualifications at [aqa.org.uk/english](https://www.aqa.org.uk/english).

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## 1.2 Support and resources to help you teach

We know that support and resources are vital for your teaching and that you have limited time to find or develop good quality materials. So we've worked with experienced teachers to provide you with a range of resources that will help you confidently plan, teach and prepare for exams.

### Teaching resources

We have too many English Language resources to list here so visit [aqa.org.uk/8700](https://www.aqa.org.uk/8700) to see them all. They include:

- English Language reading support booklet. This will include a wide range of texts from the 19th, 20th and 21st century and some suggested teaching activities to support you in preparing students for the reading sections of both papers
- a KS3 resource about 19th century texts helping you to develop progression through KS3 into KS4
- a digital anthology which will include resources to support the teaching of English Language and English Literature
- provision of resources to teach speaking and listening skills, in recognition of the wider benefits that these skills have for your students
- marked and annotated student responses to the questions on our specimen papers with senior examiner commentaries
- Subject Advocates who will support you in the transition to the new specification and facilitate local and regional network and update meetings
- student textbooks and digital resources that have been checked and endorsed by AQA
- training courses to help you deliver AQA GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature qualifications
- subject expertise courses for all teachers; from newly-qualified teachers who are just getting started to experienced teachers looking for fresh inspiration.

### Preparing for exams

Visit [aqa.org.uk/8700](https://www.aqa.org.uk/8700) for everything you need to prepare for our exams, including:

- past papers, mark schemes and examiners' reports
- specimen papers and mark schemes for new courses
- Exampro: a searchable bank of past AQA exam questions
- exemplar student answers with examiner commentaries.

### Analyse your students' results with Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA)

Find out which questions were the most challenging, how the results compare to previous years and where your students need to improve. ERA, our free online results analysis tool, will help you see where to focus your teaching. Register at [aqa.org.uk/era](https://www.aqa.org.uk/era)

For information about results, including maintaining standards over time, grade boundaries and our post-results services, visit [aqa.org.uk/results](https://www.aqa.org.uk/results)

## Keep your skills up to date with professional development

Wherever you are in your career, there's always something new to learn. As well as subject-specific training, we offer a range of courses to help boost your skills:

- improve your teaching skills in areas including differentiation, teaching literacy and meeting Ofsted requirements
- help you prepare for a new role with our leadership and management courses.

You can attend a course at venues around the country, in your school or online – whatever suits your needs and availability. Find out more at [coursesandevents.aqa.org.uk](https://coursesandevents.aqa.org.uk)

### Get help and support

Visit our website for information, guidance, support and resources at [aqa.org.uk/8700](https://aqa.org.uk/8700)

You can talk directly to the English Language subject team

E: [english-gcse@aqa.org.uk](mailto:english-gcse@aqa.org.uk)

T: 0161 953 7504

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# 2 Specification at a glance

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## Subject content

- 1 [Explorations in creative reading and writing](#) (page 13)
- 2 [Writers' viewpoints and perspectives](#) (page 13)
- 3 [Non-exam assessment](#) (page 14)

For the award of the GCSE in English Language students must offer all three assessments.

## Assessments

All texts in the examination will be unseen.

Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing	+	Paper 2: Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives	+	Non-examination Assessment: Spoken Language
<p><b>What's assessed</b></p> <p><b>Section A: Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>one literature fiction text</li> </ul> <p><b>Section B: Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>descriptive or narrative writing</li> </ul>	<p><b>What's assessed</b></p> <p><b>Section A: Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>one non-fiction text and one literary non-fiction text</li> </ul> <p><b>Section B: Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>writing to present a viewpoint</li> </ul>	<p><b>What's assessed</b></p> <p>(AO7–AO9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presenting</li> <li>responding to questions and feedback</li> <li>use of Standard English</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Assessed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes</li> <li>80 marks</li> <li>50% of GCSE</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>written exam: 1 hour 45 minutes</li> <li>80 marks</li> <li>50% of GCSE</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teacher set throughout course</li> <li>marked by teacher</li> <li>separate endorsement (0% weighting of GCSE)</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Questions</b></p> <p><b>Reading (40 marks) (25%)</b> – one single text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 short form question (1 x 4 marks)</li> <li>2 longer form questions (2 x 8 marks)</li> <li>1 extended question (1 x 20 marks)</li> </ul> <p><b>Writing (40 marks) (25%)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 extended writing question (24 marks for content, 16 marks for technical accuracy)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Questions</b></p> <p><b>Reading (40 marks) (25%)</b> – two linked texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 short form question (1 x 4 marks)</li> <li>2 longer form questions (1 x 8, 1 x 12 marks)</li> <li>1 extended question (1 x 16 marks)</li> </ul> <p><b>Writing (40 marks) (25%)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 extended writing question (24 marks for content, 16 marks for technical accuracy)</li> </ul>			



# 3 Subject content

Students will draw upon a range of texts as reading stimulus and engage with creative as well as real and relevant contexts. Students will have opportunities to develop higher-order reading and critical thinking skills that encourage genuine enquiry into different topics and themes.

This specification will ensure that students can read fluently and write effectively. Students will be able to demonstrate a confident control of Standard English and write grammatically correct sentences, deploying figurative language and analysing texts.

For GCSE English Language students should:

- read fluently, and with good understanding, a wide range of texts from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, including literature and literary non-fiction as well as other writing such as reviews and journalism
- read and evaluate texts critically and make comparisons between texts
- summarise and synthesise information or ideas from texts
- use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write effectively and coherently using Standard English appropriately
- use grammar correctly and punctuate and spell accurately
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary, alongside a knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology, and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language
- listen to and understand spoken language and use spoken Standard English effectively.

GCSE English Language is designed on the basis that students should read and be assessed on high-quality, challenging texts from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Each text studied must represent a substantial piece of writing, making significant demands on students in terms of content, structure and the quality of language. The texts, across a range of genres and types, should support students in developing their own writing by providing effective models. The texts must include literature and extended literary non-fiction, and other writing such as essays, reviews and journalism (both printed and online). Texts that are essentially transient, such as instant news feeds, must not be included. The number and types of texts, and their length, are not prescribed.

## 3.1 Scope of study

This GCSE specification in English Language will require students to study the following content:

### 3.1.1 Critical reading and comprehension

- *critical reading and comprehension*: identifying and interpreting themes, ideas and information in a range of literature and other high-quality writing; reading in different ways for different purposes, and comparing and evaluating the usefulness, relevance and presentation of content for these purposes; drawing inferences and justifying these with evidence; supporting a point of view by referring to evidence within the text; identifying bias and misuse of evidence, including distinguishing between statements that are supported by evidence and those that are not; reflecting critically and evaluatively on text, using the context of the text and drawing on knowledge and skills gained from wider reading; recognising the possibility of different responses to a text
- *summary and synthesis*: identifying the main theme or themes; summarising ideas and information from a single text; synthesising from more than one text

- *evaluation of a writer's choice of vocabulary, form, grammatical and structural features*: explaining and illustrating how vocabulary and grammar contribute to effectiveness and impact, using linguistic and literary terminology accurately to do so and paying attention to detail; analysing and evaluating how form and structure contribute to the effectiveness and impact of a text
- *comparing texts*: comparing two or more texts critically with respect to the above.

### 3.1.2 Writing

- *producing clear and coherent text*: writing effectively for different purposes and audiences: to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue; selecting vocabulary, grammar, form, and structural and organisational features judiciously to reflect audience, purpose and context; using language imaginatively and creatively; using information provided by others to write in different forms; maintaining a consistent point of view; maintaining coherence and consistency across a text
- *writing for impact*: selecting, organising and emphasising facts, ideas and key points; citing evidence and quotation effectively and pertinently to support views; creating emotional impact; using language creatively, imaginatively and persuasively, including rhetorical devices (such as rhetorical questions, antithesis, parenthesis).

### 3.1.3 Spoken language

- *presenting information and ideas*: selecting and organising information and ideas effectively and persuasively for prepared spoken presentations; planning effectively for different purposes and audiences; making presentations and speeches
- *responding to spoken language*: listening to and responding appropriately to any questions and feedback
- *spoken Standard English*: expressing ideas using Standard English whenever and wherever appropriate.

# 4 Scheme of assessment

Find past papers and mark schemes, and specimen papers for new courses, on our website at [aqa.org.uk/pastpapers](http://aqa.org.uk/pastpapers)

This specification is designed to be taken over two years with all assessments taken at the end of the course.

GCSE exams and certification for this specification are available for the first time in May/June 2017 and then every May/June and November for the life of the specification.

This is a linear qualification. In order to achieve the award, students must complete all exams in November or May/June in a single year. All assessments must be taken in the same series. November entries will only be available to students who were at least 16 on the previous 31 August. See Resits and shelf life in the General administration section for November entry restrictions.

In designing and setting the assessments for this specification we have ensured that taken together, these assessments include questions or tasks which will allow students to:

- provide extended responses
- demonstrate their ability to draw together different areas of knowledge, skills and/or understanding from across a full course of study for this qualification.

The final reading question on each paper – Question 4 on Paper 1 and Question 4 on Paper 2 allows students to fulfill this requirement.

All materials are available in English only.

## 4.1 Aims and learning outcomes

Courses based on this specification should encourage students to:

read fluently and write effectively. They should be able to demonstrate a confident control of Standard English and they should be able to write grammatically correct sentences, deploy figurative language and analyse texts.

Courses based on this specification should enable students to:

- read a wide range of texts, fluently and with good understanding
- read critically, and use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write effectively and coherently using Standard English appropriately
- use grammar correctly, punctuate and spell accurately
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary, alongside a knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology, and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language.

In addition, they must enable students to:

- listen to and understand spoken language, and use spoken Standard English effectively.

The Spoken Language endorsement will be reported on as part of the qualification, but it will not form part of the final mark and grade.

## 4.2 Explorations in creative reading and writing

The aim of this paper is to engage students in a creative text and inspire them to write creatively themselves by:

- in section A, reading a literature fiction text in order to consider how established writers use narrative and descriptive techniques to capture the interest of readers
- in section B, writing their own creative text, inspired by the topic that they have responded to in section A to demonstrate their narrative and descriptive skills in response to a written prompt, scenario or visual image.

The paper will assess in this sequence, AO1, AO2 and AO4 for reading, and AO5 and AO6 for writing. Section A will be allocated 40 marks, and Section B will be allocated 40 marks to give an equal weighting to the reading and writing tasks.

### Content

The source for the reading questions will be a literature fiction text. It will be drawn from either the 20th or 21st century. Its genre will be prose fiction. It will include extracts from novels and short stories and focus on openings, endings, narrative perspectives and points of view, narrative or descriptive passages, character, atmospheric descriptions and other appropriate narrative and descriptive approaches.

As a stimulus for students' own writing, there will be a choice of scenario, written prompt or visual image that is related to the topic of the reading text in section A. The scenario sets out a context for writing with a designated audience, purpose and form that will differ to those specified on Paper 2.

## 4.3 Writers' viewpoints and perspectives

The aim of this paper is to develop students' insights into how writers have particular viewpoints and perspectives on issues or themes that are important to the way we think and live our lives. It will encourage students to demonstrate their skills by:

- in section A, reading two linked sources from different time periods and genres in order to consider how each presents a perspective or viewpoint to influence the reader
- in section B, producing a written text to a specified audience, purpose and form in which they give their own perspective on the theme that has been introduced to them in section A.

The paper will assess in this sequence, AO1, AO2 and AO3 for reading, and AO5 and AO6 for writing. Section A will be allocated 40 marks, and section B will be allocated 40 marks to give an equal weighting to the reading and writing tasks.

### Content

The sources for the reading questions will be non-fiction and literary non-fiction texts. They will be drawn from the 19th century, and **either** the 20th or 21st century depending on the time period assessed in Paper 1 in each particular series. The combination selected will always provide students with an opportunity to consider viewpoints and perspectives over time. Choice of genre will include high quality journalism, articles, reports, essays, travel writing, accounts, sketches, letters, diaries, autobiography and biographical passages or other appropriate non-fiction and literary non-fiction forms.

In section B, there will be a single writing task related to the theme of section A. It will specify audience, purpose and form, and will use a range of opinions, statements and writing scenarios to provoke a response.

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## 4.4 Non-exam assessment

The aim of the assessment is to allow students to demonstrate their speaking and listening skills by:

- giving a presentation in a formal context
- responding appropriately to questions and to feedback, asking questions themselves to elicit clarification
- using spoken Standard English.

The assessment will be separately endorsed and will cover AO7, AO8 and AO9 for spoken language.

### Content

Students will base their presentations on a theme or topic chosen by their teacher with guidance from AQA. Tasks and standards will be exemplified by AQA. Presentations will be on a formal basis and students will need to respond to questions and feedback from the audience. In the assessed piece, students will be required to use spoken Standard English as appropriate.

## 4.5 Assessment objectives

Assessment objectives (AOs) are set by Ofqual and are the same across all GCSE English Language specifications and all exam boards.

The exams and Spoken Language endorsement will measure how students have achieved the following assessment objectives.

- AO1:
  - identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas
  - select and synthesise evidence from different texts
- AO2: Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views
- AO3: Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts
- AO4: Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references
- AO5: Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts
- AO6: Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. (This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)
- AO7: Demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting
- AO8: Listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback on presentations
- AO9: Use spoken Standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.

## Weighting of assessment objectives for GCSE English Language

Assessment objectives (AOs)	Component weightings (approx %)			Overall weighting (approx %)
	Paper 1	Paper 2	Spoken Language NEA	
AO1	2.5	7.5	N/A	10
AO2	10	7.5	N/A	17.5
AO3	N/A	10	N/A	10
AO4	12.5	N/A	N/A	12.5
AO5	15	15	N/A	30
AO6	10	10	N/A	20
AO7	N/A	N/A	endorsement	0
AO8	N/A	N/A	endorsement	0
AO9	N/A	N/A	endorsement	0
Overall weighting of components	50	50	0	100

### 4.6 Assessment weightings

The marks awarded on the papers will be scaled to meet the weighting of the components. Students' final marks will be calculated by adding together the scaled marks for each component. Grade boundaries will be set using this total scaled mark. The scaling and total scaled marks are shown in the table below.

Component	Maximum raw mark	Scaling factor	Maximum scaled mark
Paper 1: Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing	80	x1	80
Paper 2: Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives	80	x1	80
Total scaled mark:			160

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# 5 Non-exam assessment administration

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This specification will be updated once decisions on speaking and listening have been taken. Ofqual have provided this statement:

The preparation and assessment of Spoken Language is a compulsory requirement of the course of study. It will appear on all students' certificates as a separately reported grade, alongside the overall grade issued. Ofqual will be consulting shortly on the marking and grading arrangements. Performance will be assessed against common assessment criteria issued by all exam boards.

The criteria will address the following assessment objectives:

- AO7 – Demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting
- AO8 – Listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations
- AO9 – Use spoken Standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.

The assessment criteria and arrangements for assessment of spoken language will be consistent across all exam boards. These criteria and arrangements will be piloted in the autumn 2014 and the specification will be updated in spring 2015 to include this information.

# 6 General administration

You can find information about all aspects of administration, as well as all the forms you need, at [aqa.org.uk/examsadmin](http://aqa.org.uk/examsadmin)

## 6.1 Entries and codes

You only need to make one entry for each qualification – this will cover all the question papers, coursework and certification.

Every specification is given a national discount (classification) code by the Department for Education (DfE), which indicates its subject area.

If a student takes two specifications with the same discount code, Further and Higher Education providers are likely to take the view that they have only achieved one of the two qualifications. Please check this before your students start their course. Where two specifications have the same discount code, only one of them will be counted for the purpose of the School and College Performance tables – the DfE's rules on 'early entry' will determine which one.

Qualification title	AQA entry code	DfE discount code
AQA GCSE in English Language	8700	FK2B

This specification complies with Ofqual's:

- *General Conditions of Recognition* that apply to all regulated qualifications
- GCSE qualification conditions that apply to all GCSEs
- GCSE English Language conditions that apply to all GCSEs in this subject.

The Ofqual qualification accreditation number (QAN) is 601/4292/3.

## 6.2 Overlaps with other qualifications

This specification overlaps with the AQA Level 1/Level 2 Certificate in English Language.

## 6.3 Awarding grades and reporting results

The qualification will be graded on a nine-point scale: 1 to 9 – where 9 is the best grade.

Students who fail to reach the minimum standard for grade 1 will be recorded as U (unclassified) and will not receive a qualification certificate.

## 6.4 Re-sits and shelf life

Students can re-sit the qualification as many times as they wish, within the shelf life of the qualification. November entries will only be available to students who were at least 16 on the previous 31 August, as set out in Ofqual's *GCSE subject level conditions and requirements for English Language*, and we will make reasonable checks to ensure schools and colleges comply with this requirement.



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## 6.5 Previous learning and prerequisites

There are no previous learning requirements. Candidates are not required to have taken any particular qualifications before taking this course. Any requirements for entry to a course based on this specification are at the discretion of schools and colleges.

However, as English Language is taught in progressively greater depth over the course of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, GCSE outcomes may reflect or build upon subject content that is typically taught at Key Stage 3. There is no expectation that teaching of such content should be repeated during the GCSE course where it has already been taught effectively at an earlier stage.

## 6.6 Access to assessment: diversity and inclusion

General qualifications are designed to prepare students for a wide range of occupations and further study. Therefore our qualifications must assess a wide range of competences.

The subject criteria have been assessed to see if any of the skills or knowledge required present any possible difficulty to any students, whatever their ethnic background, religion, sex, age, disability or sexuality. If any difficulties were encountered, the criteria were reviewed again to make sure that tests of specific competences were only included if they were important to the subject.

As members of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) we participate in the production of the JCQ document *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments: General and Vocational qualifications*. We follow these guidelines when assessing the needs of individual students who may require an access arrangement or reasonable adjustment. This document is published on the JCQ website at [jcq.org.uk](http://jcq.org.uk)

### Students with special needs

We can make arrangements for students with special needs to help them access the assessments, as long as the competences being tested are not changed. These arrangements must be made **before** the exam. For example, we can agree to a reader for an individual student with learning difficulties. This would be classed as an access arrangement.

### Students with disabilities

We can make reasonable adjustments for disabled students. For example, a Braille paper would be a reasonable adjustment for a Braille reader but not for a student who does not read Braille. We are required by the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to remove or lessen any disadvantage that affects a disabled student.

If you have students who need access arrangements or reasonable adjustments, you can apply using the Access arrangements online service at [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](http://aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

### Special consideration

We can give special consideration to students who have been disadvantaged at the time of the exam through no fault of their own – for example a temporary illness, injury or serious problem such as the death of a relative. We can only do this **after** the exam.

Your exams officer should apply online for special consideration at [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](http://aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

For more information and advice about access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration please see [aqa.org.uk/access](http://aqa.org.uk/access) or email [accessarrangementsqueries@aqa.org.uk](mailto:accessarrangementsqueries@aqa.org.uk)

## 6.7 Working with AQA for the first time

If your school or college has not previously offered any AQA specification, you need to register as an AQA centre to offer our exams to your students. Find out how at [aqa.org.uk/becomeacentre](https://www.aqa.org.uk/becomeacentre)

If your school or college is new to this specification, please let us know by completing an Intention to enter form. The easiest way to do this is via e-AQA at [aqa.org.uk/eaqa](https://www.aqa.org.uk/eaqa)

## 6.8 Private candidates

This specification is not available to private candidates.

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## Get help and support

Visit our website for information, guidance, support and resources at [aqa.org.uk/8700](http://aqa.org.uk/8700)

You can talk directly to the GCSE English subject team

E: [english-gcse@aqa.org.uk](mailto:english-gcse@aqa.org.uk)

T: 0161 953 7504

