![AQA - Questions matter]

GCSE English Language

POST-16 RESULTS SNAPSHOT

Spring 2026

November 2025 exams

aqa.org.uk

Welcome

This report provides a targeted snapshot of GCSE English Language November 2025 results, focusing on post-16 learners. It contains information on grade boundaries and performance for each question on the papers for all candidates. We've added guidance and feedback from the Exam report, as well as some tips and links to our training and resources.

For more information on the November 2025 results, you can:

- access our free Data Insights tool. Find out more here: AQA | Contact us | Secure services | Data Insights
- sign in to Centre Services to download the full Report on the exam for a detailed breakdown
- join us for our targeted training, GCSE English Language: Stretching 3 - 4 find out more about specific GCSE English Language training by using our course finderAQA | Professional Development
- watch the English Language Inside Assessment presentation video, which focuses on the benefits of having a single assessment objective per question and how those assessment objectives work.

Visit the GCSE English Language page here

In summer 2026, we'll be introducing small but meaningful changes to our GCSE English Language exam papers and mark schemes. Use this dedicated web page to explore some updated resources now, with more coming soon. GCSE English Language

Contents

November 2025 summary

November 2025 attracted a larger cohort than in previous series – more in line with the size of cohort that we saw before the pandemic. The cohort continues to be mainly students who wish to obtain a Grade 4 having failed to do so in the summer series, though there are some students who want to try and improve the grade they got previously. The data indicates that students' performance is similar to previous November cohorts.

The overall mean mark for this series was 34.61, which is very close to the mean mark in November 2024 of 33.03. This suggests that, despite a rise in the number of students sitting the exam this November (an increase from 46,835 processed entries in November 2024 to 55,832 processed entries in November 2025), the level of performance has been maintained and very slightly improved. Thus, performance last November has shown that the level of students' skills as exemplified in the exam is consistent and stable.

The overall mean mark on Paper 1 is slightly higher than the overall mean mark for Paper 2. Before getting into the detail, it's worth noting that students' mean marks were higher across the Writing questions than the Reading questions on both papers.

We have provided guidance on how post-16 learners have performed in the November 2025 GCSE English Language exams. Though the grade boundaries shown below must be the same, as the students all sit the same papers, we have tried to show how just this cohort of students have performed across the papers. This means that you can compare the data to your own students.

For both papers, we have provided mean marks for each question. Comparing this with the mean marks of all learners, not just post-16 ones, shows that there is understandably a weaker performance across the whole paper. However, for this series, the difference was more evident on Paper 1 Question 4 and Paper 2 Questions 3 and 4. On these questions, the post-16 learners seemed to struggle more than with the other questions.

Although all efforts are made to read student responses, examiners reported that there appeared to be a significant increase in responses that were very challenging to read. Centres are reminded that the use of word processing can be arranged through the appropriate channels if this is the student's normal method of working. See page 58 of the Access arrangements JCQ document.

GCSE English Language grade boundaries

Grade boundaries are set using a combination of statistics and expert judgement. Our research team uses a range of statistics to make predictions that suggest the most appropriate grade boundaries. The statistical evidence considers the prior attainment of the given cohort as well as the distribution of marks. Senior examiners then review a script sample to confirm the statistically recommended marks are sensible for the grade. Boundary setting is overseen by Ofqual. To find more grade boundaries and learn how they are set, visit our grade boundaries page. GCSE Exam results statistics for November 2025 can be found on the AQA website. View the document here.

Subject	Max mark	Grade boundaries November 2025								
		9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
English Language 8700	160	120	110	101	91	82	73	54	35	16

Component grade boundaries

8700	Max mark	Grade boundaries November 2025								
		9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Paper 1	80	60	55	50	45	41	37	27	17	8
Paper 2	80	60	55	51	46	41	36	26	17	8

Cumulative grade statistics can be found on the AQA website. Visit **AQA | Exams admin | Results days | Results statistics** for more information. GCSE exam results statistics for June 2025 can also be found on the AQA website.
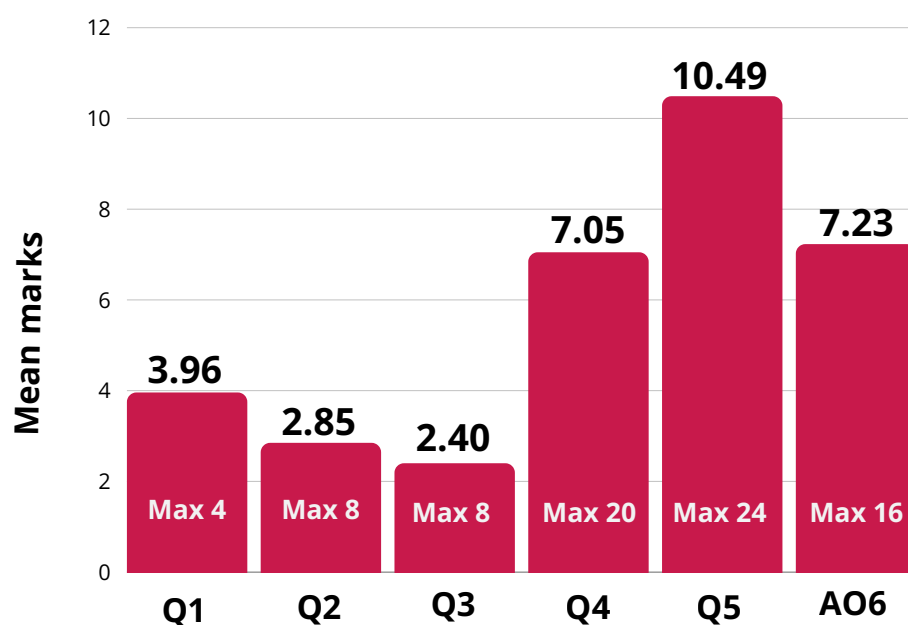
> **Boundary setting is overseen by Ofqual. To find more grade boundaries and learn how they are set, visit AQA | Exams admin | Results day | Grade boundaries**

Paper 1 insights

Learn more about the November 2025 series in our Reports on the exam. Visit aqa.org.uk/log-in and follow: Secure key materials > GCSE > English > English Language (new specification) > Reports on the exam. Additionally, you can visit Centre Services at https://onlineservices.aqa.org.uk/resources/assessment-and-training/subject/English

Average performance by question/mean marks: Paper 1

Question	Mean marks	Max
Q1	3.96	Max 4
Q2	2.85	Max 8
Q3	2.40	Max 8
Q4	7.05	Max 20
Q5	10.49	Max 24
AO6	7.23	Max 16

Highlights from Paper 1

The overall picture of performance on Paper 1 is very stable when compared to previous November series. Students performed well on the Writing question this series, and this is shown by the mean mark being in the middle of Level 2 of the mark scheme, whereas across the Reading questions, the mean mark is either at the top of Level 1 or the bottom of Level 2.

Areas where students did well

Question 1:

Read again the first part of the source from lines 1 to 6.
List four things about the classroom from this part of the source. [4 marks]

- This is often done well by students and many obtained 3 or 4 marks. Over 99% of students gained full marks for this question.
- The context is that this is a simple retrieval question. Students can simply write one word on each answer line if they choose and do not have to write in full sentences.
- A few students used the introductory information, in the box above the extract, as a source of information; however, there were far fewer statements taken from outside of the given lines and fewer instances of unnecessary inferences clouding the answers. Popular answers were the condition of the floor and walls, as well as the coats and snow puddles and heavy benches.

For ideas about teaching structure, log in to Centre Services and see our on-demand training materials, **GCSE English Language: Teaching strategies to support the 2026 changes for P1, Q3 Structure.**

Stretching from Grade 3 to 4 is just one of the live online (and free) courses we run throughout the year to help teachers and students achieve their best results. Go to our website and click on the Professional Development tab to search for what you need.

Areas where students did less well

Question 3:

… How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? You could write about:
- **what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning of the source**
- **how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops**
- **any other structural features that interest you. [8 marks]**

- Overall**,** students continue to show wider identification and use of structural features, and there was an increase in the mean mark to 2.40 from 2.35 in November 2024. However, this question had the highest number of non-attempted answers.
- Some students just recounted what happened at the beginning, middle and end, which limited many. There needs to be some comment on why the writer uses these features in a specific part of the text.
- More successful responses were able to link features across the text, e.g., the contrast between the newcomer and the rest of the class. Many students identified clues throughout the text that built up his identity toward the end of the extract. They linked the shabby classroom in the first paragraph to the teacher in the second making the newcomer seem even more out of place. Other successful answers considered the teacher's changing behaviour across the text.
- Some weaker responses did not see the flashback and had little understanding of the effects of the features – such as zooming in or a 'shift'. There were also students who wanted to see a cyclical structure or an anti-climax where there was none.

Areas where students did well

Question 5:

Your school newspaper is running a creative writing competition. The best entries will be published.
Either: Write a description of a classroom, as suggested by this picture.
[Image removed due to copyright] **or**
Write a story called 'The Newcomer'. [40 marks]

- Here, many wrote their own version of a new student in school – some were love stories; many related the situation to a hobby, e.g. being the new team player and cementing their place by scoring the winning goal. Others introduced the idea of team rivalry. Creative ideas also included newcomers as babies, being the new drummer in a band, taking an initiation ceremony, having to pass a test to be part of a magic kingdom. Students who scored highly were able to explore details on a theme.
- For the descriptive option, many students related their own classroom experiences to the image, and these were often engaging and appropriately humorous. More successful answers often built up the atmosphere rather than simply stating what, or who, was in the classroom.
- Some weaker responses read as a list of details of the image. Using features of the image but adding further detail from the imagination can be more successful. For the narrative option, the structure and events of some weaker responses were identical to the extract. Changing the colours of the walls or characters' gender or names are superficial aspects and are likely to attain in Level 1.

Areas where students did less well

Question 4:

... A student said, "The new boy is clearly very different from the rest of the students and the writer suggests that everything about him is better than everybody else." To what extent do you agree?
In your response you could:
- **Consider your impressions of the new boy**
- **Evaluate how the writer presents the new boy as better than everybody else**
- **Support your response with references to the text. [20 marks]**
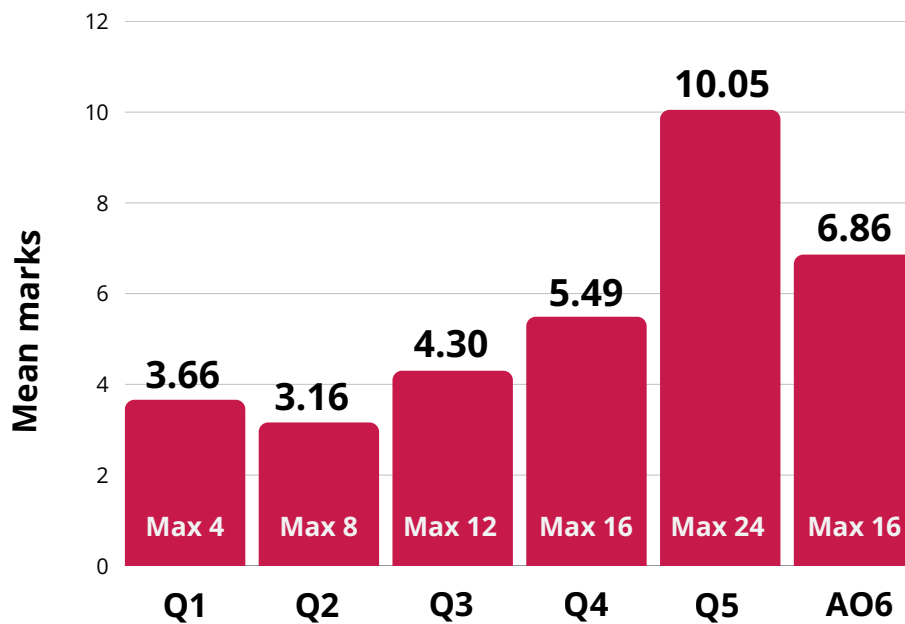
- An increase in the mean mark to 7.07 from 6.23 in November 2024 showed more confidence in responses, but the mean mark is still near the bottom of Level 2.
- Some weaker responses wanted to argue that he was not different, just dressed in expensive clothes – but arguing to disagree when there is little supporting evidence can be a hindrance.
- More careful unpicking – by focusing on phrases or words – tends to be successful. E.g. it's the reaction of the boys (amazement) in the simile 'we stared at him like we had seen a ghost' which is important here, not the idea of the supernatural – a common mistake.
- Stronger answers selected evidence and built an argument on it, e.g. the newcomer's look and demeanour (elegance, confidence, pride). Others explored how the boy's clothes (a sign of status, not just wealth) matched his actions when he 'announces' his name and place of birth (indicating pride and self-importance). There were some good explorations of the teacher's actions, e.g. how he 'stepped down from his desk', lowering himself, literally and metaphorically, to serve the new boy.

Paper 2 insights

**Learn more about the November 2025 series in our Reports on the exam. Visit
aqa.org.uk/log-in and follow: Secure key materials > GCSE > English > English Language (new
specification) > Reports on the exam. Additionally, you can visit Centre Services at
https://onlineservices.aqa.org.uk/resources/assessment-and-training/subject/English**

Average performance by question/mean marks: Paper 2

3.66 (Max 4)	3.16 (Max 8)	4.30 (Max 12)	5.49 (Max 16)	10.05 (Max 24)	6.86 (Max 16)
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	AO6

Highlights from Paper 2

Performance for November 2025 has continued to show a strengthening of students' skills. The overall performance of students saw increases across the Reading and Writing questions showing a consistent and stable standard of achievement. Although the mean mark across the Writing questions was slightly higher, there were improvements in some Reading questions and a weaker performance in others. Students performed well on Questions 1 and 2 with the Reading but struggled with Questions 3 and 4. Performance on Question 1 was at the higher end of the range of achievement with a mean mark of 3.66.

The source texts used in this series are based on houses and renovations. Students engaged enthusiastically with the concept of home improvements and responded to the various motivations and perspectives expressed by the two writers about their experiences. You'll find a useful commentary and some tips below.

**This is only a snapshot. Log on to aqa.org.uk/myaqa and visit
Centre Services to get the full Report on the exam.**

Areas where students did well

Question 2:

… The house in Source A and the houses in Source B are worked on in different ways.

Use details from both sources to write a summary of what you understand about the differences between the ways in which the houses were worked on.
[8 marks]

- Question 2 saw some of the best, most comprehensive answers to the three longer reading questions in Section A.
- Level 3 responses gave clear explanations about the work, e.g., the catalogue of failed, amateur attempts to repair the house in Source A where the basics of home improvement were carried out with limited success; in Source B, the planning and execution of a list of works which suggested a strategic overview and determined focus on achieving the overall aim. Finding a common factor between the two texts – such as how far the works were completed – is a key to a Level 3 synthesis of ideas. E.g., the degree to which the home improvement tasks were completed or not, and the professionalism of one schedule of works compared to the other's amateur efforts.
- There were weaker responses where students struggled to do more than select quotations and paraphrase or repeat details about the works. These were typically awarded marks in Level 1. Where students offered some understanding without full explanation, such as comments on the work being lazy or unfinished in Source A and quick to get started or strict in Source B, these responses were awarded at Level 2 ('some difference').

Areas where students did less well

Question 3:

…How does the writer use language to describe the houses and their surroundings?
[12 marks]

- Many students showed that they were able to select language features appropriately and identify them using the right subject terms but were unable to comment clearly on their effects. It is always and only the quality of the comment on effect which attracts marks. This is the key skill and determines the level. Naming language features and selecting details are supporting skills and can't determine the student's level.
- At Level 1, students tended to select examples of language and identify techniques with more or less accuracy, but offered a generalised comment, such as '…which shows us how bad the houses were.' Students often selected words such as 'dilapidated' which they could only offer a generalised comment on, such as to say how disgusting it was.
- The majority of students were rewarded with marks in Level 2: they were able to make some attempt to comment on effect, but did not fully explain how or why the writer had chosen that particular word, phrase or image.
- Level 3 responses offered clear explanations of effects, e.g., of how the writer used a simile to describe the damp creeping up the walls as if it were an intruder, silently infiltrating the houses without being noticed. Similarly, they explained how the tide simile reflects the unstoppable progress of the damp.

Find our Further insights guide to teaching synthesis here.

Areas where students did well

Question 5:

"Happiness and success in life are the result of our own determination and hard work. Where we come from is far less important and luck has nothing to do with it.'

Write a speech for a meeting of young people in which you argue your point of view on this statement. [40 marks]

- It was noticeable that many students were able to structure arguments well; sequencing ideas; incorporating introductions and conclusions; offering a range of appropriate rhetorical devices and adapting tone and style to suit audience and purpose – all strengths.
- At Level 3, ideas within paragraphs were developed and explained what lessons were learnt, how we benefited from them and how we should appreciate their sacrifice.
- Level 4 responses offered an original perspective, such as that of the student hoping to be an actor and finding that the progeny of celebrities are above her on the staircase to fame, criticising the instant notoriety of the Kardashians, for example. The tone and style of Level 4 responses were characterised by confidence, conviction and consistency.
- At Level 2, students typically offered generalised responses. Some tried to explain how determination and hard work are linked to happiness and success without much sense of what they understood by those terms. At the lower end of Level 2, responses typically offered repeated exhortations that the audience should work harder and be more determined because they could achieve anything. Without examples and ideas to support these assertions, Upper Level 2 or Level 3 couldn't be attained.

Get a teaching pack on P2 Q4 here and one for P2 Q5 here or view our resources with the QR code.

Areas where students did less well

Question 4:

**... Compare how the writers convey their different feelings and perspectives about their experiences of the houses they write about.
In your answer, you could:**
- **compare the writers' different feelings and perspectives about their experiences of the houses they write about**
- **compare the methods they use to convey their feelings and perspectives**
- **support your response with references to both texts. [16 marks]**

- The best responses were where students viewed the two extracts as a whole. E.g., comparing the levels of responsibility felt by Evaristo (Source A) as a powerless child living in her rundown house as opposed to Hill's (Source B) professional and moral responsibility to renovate and repair the houses for the sake of her many tenants.
- Many students identified and compared the writers' feelings as being 'proud' or 'grateful' in Source A or feeling a sense of 'joy' and 'power' in Source B, but they reused the words used by the writers to describe their feelings and therefore could be judged only as having simple understanding in Level 1. Students needed to qualify their understanding by using synonyms or explaining what they understood about her gratitude in Source A, for example, or her joy in Source B.
- There were still responses to Question 4 which failed to comment on methods at all and so limited themselves to the bottom half of the level. Central to this task is the expectation that students select quotations that are rich with opportunities to comment on how the writers' feelings are conveyed, as well as showing their understanding. It is a key skill for Q4.

Next steps

Take a look at what else we can offer

my training

GCSE English Language Post-16 Preparing for 2026

my profile

Find Reports on the exam and much more on our secure site, Centre Services, via myAQA.

my resources

Watch our Inside Assessment videos to learn more about how 8700 is assessed.

my support

Get your free resources, including a Post-16 scheme of work and exam timings at-a-glance blueprint, from our Get resit ready webpage.

my data

Visit Exampro for past papers, related mark schemes and examiner comments.

Use Data Insights to dig deeper into your exam results.

my network

Free at 4: GCSE English resit support

Book a free 20-minute 1:1 with our friendly English Subject Support team. We're here to help with questions on GCSE English Language resits.

Available Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 4pm to 5pm.

Contact us today

T: 0161 953 7504
E: english-gcse@aqa.org.uk
aqa.org.uk/english

Considering switching to AQA? Find out how at aqa.org.uk/switch-to-aqa-today