

Welcome...

...to the second edition of Trinity's ESOL Skills for Life Newsletter.

In this edition, we will introduce you to the Skills for Life team at Trinity and share feedback from the first year of this new suite of examinations. We also look at changes which will be introduced for the coming year, based on our experiences during year one.

Skills for Life – One year on!

From Clinton Rae, Director of Language Examinations, Trinity College London

I would like to take this opportunity to address all our partner centres throughout the UK at the end of what has been a very challenging year for Trinity.

As you will know, we introduced our ESOL Skills for Life exams on 1st September 2004, following a long process of accreditation with QCA. We were confident that they would be popular exams, as they combined Trinity's student-centred and communicative approach to language assessment with the particularly relevant content of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum.

When we launched, we expected to examine perhaps several thousand candidates over the year, with around half taking an all-modes qualification. In fact, we actually carried out many times more assessments than anticipated in the first year to end of August 2005. We are naturally delighted with this though it did put our systems severely to the test!

We managed to handle a very busy peak examining season, thanks to an incredible performance from our Head Office team and some very good-natured flexibility from our examiners and with the cooperation of our centres.

I am very aware that some of you had to wait far too long for results and certificates from the summer season and for this I can only apologise and assure you that we are taking steps to ensure that we will improve for the future. We have learned many lessons from this first year, not least from the useful and, at times, critical feedback from our centres.

We are very grateful to everyone who has contacted us. This feedback has been invaluable in helping us review and revise our procedures for the rest of 2005 and 2006. Some of these points are outlined in this newsletter. Thank you for your continued support of Trinity exams and I look forward to working with you over the coming year.



Clinton Rae, Director of Language Examinations

Meet the team

To keep you all up to date with the Trinity team, here are the people you are most likely to deal with, and what they do:

Sheila Needham is Chief Examiner for Skills for Life as well as for our international ESOL panel. Sheila is responsible for recruiting and training our examiner panel, designing and writing our exam syllabus, and for ensuring the academic quality of our examinations.

Cathy Taylor is our Academic Manager, looking after the academic team in the office and supporting the Chief Examiner in maintaining our academic standards and procedures.

Kate Biggins is the Skills for Life Manager on the academic team with particular responsibility for commissioning and marking our written papers each month. Kate is your first point of contact for appeals and academic queries.

Gill Byrne is our Examinations Manager with overall responsibility for the operations team and of all Skills for Life examinations.

Karl Wood is the Speaking & Listening Coordinator, who arranges the examiner visits to our centres for the oral exams in the south of Britain. **Carolyn Scott** is the Speaking & Listening Coordinator who will cover what we loosely term the north of Britain. Contact Karl or Carolyn for any issues relating to your Speaking and Listening sessions.

Emily Tumeth is our coordinator for the Reading & Writing exams – it is her task to get the right number of papers of the right level to the right centres at the right time. Emily will also be able to help you with queries about Trinity Online.

Janet Golding is the main point of contact for academic and general support – she spends much of her time travelling up and down the country visiting centres to offer advice and support on the exams themselves.

Brian Cooper is our Marketing Manager and is also very busy supporting our centres with academic and general enquiries.

2005 – 2006: some changes

We hope you will appreciate our responses to your comments and see improvements where they are required. Following the difficult first year we have all just experienced, we are going to introduce some changes for the new academic year. These changes are reflected in the new version of the Centre Handbook which is being sent with this newsletter to the administrative contact at each centre.

Please continue to send us your feedback via email and the centre evaluation questionnaires.

1. Exam dates: Reading & Writing

Many centres were pleased that they could hold written exams any month of the year, and found the fixed date and start time very convenient. Some centres found it impossible to manage with just one date and time, which is why we introduced an extra evening session during December, March and June (15 sessions in all for the year).

However, the evening session also had a fixed start time and a few centres simply could not accommodate all their students on the two fixed start times. Therefore we have decided that for the academic year 2005 – 2006 we will introduce staggered start times for the extra sessions in December, March and June. The monthly 10.00 start on Wednesdays will continue as normal.

Dates for the coming year are:

October	Wednesday 19 th	10.00
November	Wednesday 16 th	10.00
December	Staggered starts: 13 th *	
	Wednesday 14 th	10.00
January 06	Wednesday 18 th	10.00
February	Wednesday 22 nd	10.00
March	Staggered starts: 21 st *	
	Wednesday 22 nd	10.00
April	Wednesday 12 th	10.00
May	Wednesday 17 th	10.00
June	Staggered starts: 27 th *	
	Wednesday 28 th	10.00
July	Wednesday 19 th	10.00
August	Wednesday 23 rd	10.00
September	Wednesday 20 th	10.00

* The staggered start papers will be as follows:

Tuesday	Entry 1	12.00
	Entry 2	13.15
	Entry 3	15.15
	Level 1	18.00
Wednesday	Level 2	18.00

* Download details of the staggered start times from:
<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/organiser/Skills4life/examdates05.htm>

The start times above are given on the understanding that candidates will do the Reading paper first and then the Writing paper. If a candidate is only doing the Writing paper at a particular level, they must start at the same time as those doing both papers at that level but must not be allowed to communicate with the other candidates if breaks coincide. See the revised Centre Handbook for full details.

2. Tightening of enrolment procedures

As this was the first year of operation of these exams for us all, we have also given centres as much latitude as possible in the enrolment of candidates. However, this caused considerable problems for our operational team and has exacerbated the delays in processing some results.

We will therefore be tightening up our enrolment procedures slightly for the coming year.

Our operational team require only **one point of contact** for candidate enrolment. This will normally be the Exams Office (or a tutor expressly in charge of all aspects of enrolment for their centre) – and should not be any tutors who want to amend enrolments already made on their behalf or add late entries without informing their Exams Office. It is also essential that you update Trinity Online if personnel at your institution change. Examination materials, certificates and updates – even examiners – may be sent to incorrect addressees if details are not amended. (This also applies to centre and venue addresses.)

We will no longer be able to accept **late entries** in the last two weeks before an examination session. Our closing dates will remain four weeks before the exam, and any late entries after the closing date will be on a request basis only. If possible, we will fulfil these requests but only up to two weeks before the exam. This does not affect block bookings for Speaking & Listening, as long as the original booking has been made prior to the closing date. With block booking, centres can continue to make changes to candidates or levels right up to the time they lock the batch and print their examination materials.

Under no circumstances will we examine candidates who have not been enrolled on Trinity Online before the start of an examination session. **Retrospective enrolments** have been our single biggest problem this year, and because we did not have candidate names before the exams took place we have found it near impossible to match up exam results with the right candidates.

All our examiners have been instructed not to examine any candidates without the correct individual Speaking & Listening marksheets. Similarly, we will not be able to mark any written papers where the exam paper has been photocopied by the centre.

Substitutions can only be carried out in accordance with our published procedures – please make sure that your centre is aware of these procedures which are laid out in the Centre Handbook in section 3.2.

3. Clarifying the role of the facilitator

Many centres told us that their facilitators weren't sure enough of their exact role, so we have expanded the Appendix on this in the Centre Handbook. Please make sure that all your facilitators have seen these guidelines.

4. Changes to Trinity Online

Trinity Online is a very powerful database, which administers all of Trinity's exams throughout the world. As such, it may not always behave in as intuitive a manner as we would like. We will be introducing some changes to Trinity Online over the next few months which will make it easier to work with and hopefully harder to make mistakes with!

If you or your staff would like more training on Trinity Online, you can request a visit from a member of our team or please attend one of our centre support events around the country.

5. Seating plans for Reading & Writing Sessions

Trinity appreciates that some of our centres use large halls to house all of their candidates. Therefore, alternative seating plans to the one set out in Appendix F of the Centre Handbook can be sent with completed examination scripts, attendance lists and summary of papers used. These seating plans must still include the layout of the desks, candidate numbers and candidate names.

6. Changes to the content of the exams

Here we are very limited, because the format of the exams have been confirmed, accredited and (to an extent) dictated by QCA.

We are unable to change exam timings and word lengths, task types or the number of tasks and assessment procedures.

We have amended some of the rubrics for the written papers and the introductions for the oral exams. We are sure your candidates will find these changes helpful.

Some matters we have addressed

A new Vetting committee has been formed with people with experience of the QCA requirements and the sector to vet all examination items (including all written material tasks).

New role-play and group discussion tasks are to be produced for use in the December session. New maps will feature symbols and words. The task is exactly the same as that described in the Core Curriculum (page 45) and therefore candidates should have been practising it as part of their normal classroom activities. Sample maps very similar to the ones used by examiners will be posted on the website.

The group discussion tasks will be set out differently with more bullet points and with shorter rubrics. There will be the opportunity for the facilitator to introduce further points for discussion if the conversation flags.

Some teachers are unsure how to conduct the discussion groups. We will put more detail into the Conducting the Group Discussion notes which can be found in the Centre Handbook.

We will circulate more copies of this to the academic team.

The front of the examination papers now has information about the use of dictionaries, writing in pen not ink etc.

Planning and drafting requirements are now clearly stated on papers and in FAQs to be circulated. Word length includes all work which is assessed; therefore it includes plan and draft.

Centre support update from Janet and Brian

1. Please watch out for dates and an invitation to join one of our centre support events around the country. The sessions will include support for using Trinity Online and academic matters. You will be invited to send the appropriate people from your college to take advantage of these events.
2. Join the KEEP ME INFORMED email list to receive regular updates and website links. The latest message was about Reading & Writing dates for 2005/06, a handy auto-timetabler for your Speaking and Listening sessions, fees for 2006, a time and fees calculator for your various levels and group interview sessions – all designed to save you time and make your involvement with Trinity exam sessions simpler.
<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/organiser/skillsforlifemenu.htm>
3. Your centre may be inspected at any time during a reading and writing session. Comments from our inspectors include the following advice for your session to run smoothly: make sure you have a correct candidate listing for all students, know who is sitting papers and at what level, pin the relevant candidate/level details on each exam room door, give invigilators accurate lists, indicate by stickers or names on desk who is to sit where, post the 'Notice to candidates' on each exam room door. Ensure the papers begin and end at the appointed times. You MUST do the papers at the allotted times. Make sure you are aware of the Tuesday staggered start times (December 2005, March, June, December 2006) and stick to them! You MUST comply with these regulations if you are to continue offering the reading and writing exams.
4. Every speaking and listening session must have a timetable and every examiner must receive a copy of this timetable plus the necessary mark sheets and report forms you compile from Trinity Online. Remember, if a candidate's name does not appear on the list, s/he will not be examined.
5. Let us know how the session was for you by completing the online evaluation questionnaire at:
<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/organiser/Administration/evaluationq%27aire.htm>
6. Make use of the support we offer: join the KEEP ME INFORMED list, email sflsupport@trinitycollege.co.uk, phone us and visit the website frequently for updates. The current website is being updated and improved over the next couple of months. We will send you links to the Skills for Life pages so that you don't miss out on important information. The new website will make information more accessible and will carry an extended teacher support section.
7. Tell us if you want a visit from one of us to help you with specific points relating to Online or any academic issues. Many points can be discussed over the phone or by email but in some cases a visit from us may just help you to sort out your particular concerns.
8. A new video is in production so that you can remind yourself the standards the examiner is looking for.
9. Every year Skills for Life examiners come together for a weekend for a standardisation session. Examiners are reminded of the procedures for conducting the examinations by viewing video samples and doing exercises with the criteria and mark scheme by which candidate performance is assessed. Examiners who do not attend such standardisation sessions are not allowed to examine until they have completed this review. You can be confident that your students will be assessed consistently, fairly and in accordance with the criteria and procedures set down by Trinity. You can see how the assessment process is conducted and how criteria are applied by referring to the relevant sections of the Introduction Booklet and the individual syllabus booklets.

Similar standardisation procedures are in place for markers of the reading and writing papers.

Results: 2005 - 2006

In our first newsletter, we reported on all examination results up until February 2005 – but obviously the largest sessions were in the spring and so these latest results (which include examinations taken since September 2004) are based on a far larger sample of candidates.

Here are our pass rates (based on candidates who sat the exam, ie not including absent candidates) for all levels and modes to date:

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Writing</u>	<u>Speaking & Listening</u>
<u>Entry 1</u>	69.11%	66.29%	81.66%
<u>Entry 2</u>	73.92%	60.66%	83.70%

<u>Entry 3</u>	87.96%	65.10%	88.29%
<u>Level 1</u>	73.19%	64.83%	86.39%
<u>Level 2</u>	72.94%	59.07%	86.24%

From these figures it is clear that candidates are doing best at Entry 3, which is obviously a key achievement point for these learners. Overall, writing is proving more challenging than either Reading or Speaking & Listening, which reflects both concerns expressed by tutors about the difficulty level of the papers and the desire on the part of QCA to improve standards across the board.

One statistic which many centres have been interested in is the absence rate; here are our absence rates per level and mode so far:

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Writing</u>	<u>Speaking & Listening</u>
<u>Entry 1</u>	10.33%	10.51%	12.26%
<u>Entry 2</u>	8.67%	9.98%	9.56%
<u>Entry 3</u>	10.40%	11.15%	10.78%
<u>Level 1</u>	3.60%	11.14%	8.41%
<u>Level 2</u>	10.68 %	14.69%	14.23%

There are likely to be many reasons for this level of absences, though it is considerably lower than during the first 6 months of the examinations. From discussions with centres, it has become apparent that some absences are completely unavoidable – due for example to changing family circumstances or last-minute sickness. There is also the influence of the four-week period between the closing date for entries and the exam date; some candidates obviously drop out during this period and are therefore marked as absent on the day though the college may have known about this for three weeks. Absences of this sort can be minimised with Speaking & Listening by making use of Trinity's Block Booking facility, which allows centres to delete and/or replace candidates up until the last minute. There are also some absences recorded where centres have mistakenly entered the same candidates twice for an exam, or occasionally for different levels of the same mode of exam. From all of this, we would suggest that the actual "absent on the day" level is considerably lower than these figures would at first indicate.

And finally...

A new academic year is upon us again and you may have already planned when you would like to have your Trinity examinations.

In order to maintain our service levels, we would be grateful if you could indicate to us when you would like your Speaking and Listening sessions to take place, particularly if you are planning to hold sessions in December 2005.

(Please note that this notification does not replace you using Trinity Online to submit your candidate entries.)

Please email gill.byrne@trinitycollege.co.uk with the subject title: SPEAKING AND LISTENING SESSIONS outlining prospective dates and numbers of examiners required.

