

Developing new GCSE, A level and AS qualifications for first teaching in 2016

Response from the Association for Language Learning, September 2014

A level and AS qualifications in modern foreign languages

45. To what extent do you agree or disagree that for AS qualifications in modern foreign languages 70 per cent of the available marks should be allocated to exams and 30 per cent to non-exam assessment?

46. To what extent do you agree or disagree that for A Levels in modern foreign languages 70 per cent of the available marks should be allocated to exams and 30 per cent to non-exam assessment?

ALL members in consultation responses tended to agree with this balance, understanding that the 30% includes the oral element.

Quotation: *"We would hope that the oral exam remains and that the speaking element is a major part of the course".*

Any suggestion of coursework would largely not be approved.

Quotation: *"The administration side of the exams deserves proper attention".*

There was a specific interesting question about future-proofing of the oral part of the exam.

Quotation: *"I am old enough to remember the revolution that magnetic tape reels and then cassettes brought about, with a subsequent improvement in resources, teaching and attainment in oral proficiency, which led to a rebalancing between written papers and the oral element. What is on the horizon in 2014?"*

47. To what extent do you agree or disagree that all A Level and AS qualifications in modern foreign languages should have the same requirements for non-exam assessment and that no exceptions should be made for specific languages?

ALL members agree that all languages are of equal value and should be comparable in the way they are assessed.

Quotation: *"We agree that all 4 skills should be tested, and indeed that listening and speaking are the most important skills of any language learning. We appreciate the difficulty and financial cost of organising oral examinations in less widely taught languages".*

Some members worry that there could be an unintended consequence for some World Languages, which should be resisted.

Quotation: *"Is there a risk that the Boards will say 'It is impossible to find enough examiners for X language' so we will stop offering that accreditation?"*

Quotation: *"Comparability across languages is necessary, but the content examples given seem to lean towards European languages".*

48. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for A Level and AS qualifications in modern foreign languages?

Although several of the Assessment Objectives were clearly accepted without comment, ALL members responding were categorical in their views on AO4, which indicate that, at least, the weighting for this AO should be considerably reduced.

The question of the essay in English received equally negative reactions in the DfE consultation on content; ALL suggests that this issue be reconsidered.

Quotation: *"I think that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate but that it is not a good idea for 50% of AO4 to be assessed through the candidate's response in English. This will result in less time attributed to the development of students' productive skills in the foreign language which would be a negative development".*

Quotation: *"Awarding 20% of the marks for cultural knowledge is not a test of language".*

Quotation: *"We currently approach topics from a sociology viewpoint; we would appreciate a greater insistence on a comparison between the Target Language country and the UK. Furthermore, the study of a TL film or a TL poet would be a wonderful opportunity for us to build on the work we currently do at GCSE with film".*

Quotation: *"We are concerned that 20% of the marks are to be given to A04 and would hope that this would **not mean a return to learning facts about the country rather than concentrating on language.** We are very much opposed to the fact that half of the marks for A04 are to be in English, and are convinced that a return to literature essays written in English would not be a good move. **In the past, this inevitably meant that students read the book in translation and that all of the discussion work was done in English.**"*

49. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for AS qualifications in modern foreign languages?

Members responding felt that students in the AS year are building on GCSE skills - especially their confidence in communication, fluency and manipulating grammar, and that the weightings should better reflect this.

Quotation: *“Strongly disagree. 25% for grammar and syntax is very high and may even be higher than communication marks. A transfer of meaning task rather than an actual translation would be a more valuable skill. 10% of marks being given to assessment of AO4 in English is very poor”.*

50. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for A Levels in modern foreign languages?

ALL members are concerned that in some mixed skills tests students may be doubly penalized, in that, if they do not fully understand the Target Language rubric, they are unlikely to complete the task efficiently. Members propose that guidance for accrediting bodies should require very precise definitions of what is to be tested.

Quotation: *“We do not feel that students should be penalised for grammatical errors in listening tasks, where the purpose of the assessment should be communication, although we agree that grammar should continue to be assessed elsewhere”.*

51. Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

Quotation: *“I am concerned that once again, languages are being made even harder. They are already considered a difficult subject and while I make no complaint about that, it is hard to see 'easier' subjects celebrating their high results when even academic pupils can struggle to gain the highest grades in languages. This is putting pupils off studying languages... and... is not good for the country's future where languages are still important! ...We need language achievements to be recognised at all levels”.*

Quotation: *“The idea that at A level HALF of the marks available for AO4 must be through responses written in English is a massive step backwards. We currently teach the text *Un Sac de Billes* in French, *Cuba* in Spanish and *Die Welle* in German and our students are able at the end of Y13 to discuss these topics, both in speaking and writing in the Target Language, in great depth. If we have to teach these topics, or any topics in English, students would not have the opportunity to develop their fluency to the extent to which they do currently and we would be sending them off, after 2 years of study in a language, with less language”.*

Quotation: *“We would hope that the awarding authorities would have some autonomy in choosing themes and works, as the suggestions given are far too advanced and complicated for A Level study. Indeed, the majority of language teachers will not themselves have studied many of the topics listed, and the work required to prepare to teach these would be immense. Whilst we welcome a refreshing of the topics, the changing of the focus from knowledge of the language to knowledge of the country and culture seems a retrograde step and will make unreasonable demands on language teachers, who are not necessarily historians, mathematicians, etc. We also feel that the leap from GCSE to A Level would be too much for all but the most able to overcome, and that many would be put off studying A Level languages. This is even more the case with AS being separately assessed.”*