

Reforming GCSEs in Modern foreign and Ancient languages

1. Your details

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Would you like us to treat your response as confidential? If you answer Yes we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.

No

Are the views expressed on this consultation an official response from the organisation you represent or your personal view?

Official response from an organisation/group (complete the type of responding organisation)

Please choose from the below, are you a...

Please state capacity:

If you selected 'official response from an organisation or group', please respond accordingly, Type of responding organisation

Other representative group or interest group

School or college type

Other type of school or college

Type of representative group or interest group:

Subject association or learned society

Please describe the nature of your group

Nation

England

Please state which country

How did you find out about this consultation?

Via internet search

How did you find this consultation?

May we contact you for more information?

Yes

We want to write clearly, directly and put the reader first. Overall, do you think we have got this right in this document?

Do you have any comments or suggestions about the style of writing?

2. Consultation questions

1. Reading skills should be assessed using exams set and marked by the exam boards. To what extent do you agree or disagree this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

Within a national examination system, it makes sense for reading to be assessed via an exam. The setting of valid, reliable reading assessments is a skilled job best undertaken by an independent awarding body for a consistent and standardised approach.

Some ALL members expressed concerns about TL testing within an examination framework that claims to offer discrete skills testing. Others believe that TL testing can, under the right conditions, provide a valid means of assessment. However, there is unanimity amongst members that students should be absolutely clear what they are been asked to do in all parts of the examination, and that question types should be skilfully chosen and formulated, so that the tests are a valid mechanism for assessing students' understanding and/or use of language, and so that students are never likely to be penalised for misunderstanding an examination rubric.

2. Writing skills should be assessed using exams set and marked by the exam boards. To what extent do you agree or disagree this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

All views expressed to the Association for Language Learning support the removal of Controlled Assessments for writing. Controlled Assessment, as it has been implemented within the current GCSE framework, has reduced valuable teaching time. An examination should offer the fairest means of assessing students' written production, and is coherent with a focus on grammar, independent and creative language use. As such, it offers the most coherence in terms of joining up the new curriculum at KS3, KS4 and productive skills at KS5.

3. Listening skills should be assessed using exams set and marked by the exam boards. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

The rationale here is the same as that given in the case of reading (Q1). As with reading, and given the DfE position on target language (TL) questioning, we would strongly urge that all due consideration is given to achieving maximum question validity, ensuring that: (i) students understand the questions set (ii) there is clarity and transparency about which single skill is being tested at any one time

In the case of listening, our members request that listening material is provided as video, rather than disembodied audio. This is something that association members have discussed on many occasions. Publishers at KS2-5 have included much more video material in their courses in recent years. Given the visual nature of talk interaction generally, and the dominance of visual culture online, it seems incongruous to retain voice-only listening assessment at GCSE. This is entirely compatible with the aim of achieving a challenging, rigorous GCSE, and may assist awarding bodies in the sourcing of more high quality, authentic listening material.

4. Speaking skills should be assessed by non-exam assessments, using tasks set and marked by the exam board. To what extent do you agree or disagree this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

There is widespread acceptance that the teacher should conduct speaking assessments at GCSE. On the issue of whether the awarding body should mark the assessments, ALL members expressed a variety of views. Overall there is more support for the view that marking by the awarding body ensures fairer outcomes for students for three reasons: Firstly, there would be less pressure on teachers to 'second guess' the exam board marking and under-estimate their students' performance to avoid their centre's work being marked down; Secondly, it would avoid the situation where awarding bodies need to adjust the grade boundaries in one section of the exam to achieve the desired overall outcomes year or year. In short, there is ironically a great chance of achieving something closer to criteria-driven assessment if the exam board marks all exam components; Thirdly, with performance-related pay linked to exam results, there is the need for exam results to be much more stable and less prone to individual component fluctuations than currently. One key disadvantage of divorcing teachers from the marking process is the risk of de-professionalising them. A key strength of the current system has been the need for teachers to understand the assessment process much more intimately. A further disadvantage highlighted is a concern about the quality of assessment of the speaking, if left to the awarding bodies. Many ALL members have been examiners and are aware of the tightly-constrained time frames in which training of markers, moderation and assessment are carried out. ALL urges awarding bodies to ensure that there is a rigorous process of training in place, adequate time allowed for assessment, and crucially for moderation processes, and for the development of clear, transparent mark schemes for assessing speaking, which are clear to students, teachers and examiners alike. (For further detail, see answer to Q5 below).

5. What considerations need to be taken into account to make sure students' speaking skills are assessed in a way that is:

	consideration
a) valid	Validity refers to the extent to which a test measures what it sets out to measure. Comments referring to the concerns about TL testing (above) are relevant in this regard. Equally, ALL points out that speaking assessments, particularly those that will assess the new criteria which stress unplanned, spontaneous production, are not single skill assessments. They are in their essence a test of both listening and speaking. To acknowledge this, one of two actions is required: firstly, the claim to discrete skill assessment could be removed for the speaking exam. There are examples of speaking assessment markscheme (iGCSE - www.cie.org.uk/images/128380-2015-syllabus.pdf) in which listening and speaking are explicitly recognised, something which results in a much clearer understanding of what represents good performance in spoken interaction, which is, by definition, a mixed-skills event. Alternatively, the speaking assessment criteria would have to start from the premise that the ability to understand a question is not part of measuring speaking ability and therefore ensure that the criteria do not penalise for any aspects of spoken performance that rely on listening skills. This seems rather difficult to imagine in an assessment that deliberately sets out to test unplanned speaking.
b) reliable, and	Reliability in languages assessment concerns two specific aspects of reliability. Firstly, in relation to the setting of questions in all four skills papers, there is the need to ensure that the assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. This is important, both over time, when different papers that purport to test the same level and extent of language understanding / use are compared over several years, and also within one individual paper, when different question types are chosen to test the same knowledge at different levels. Secondly, and just as importantly, inter-rater reliability is required (particularly when assessing written and spoken performance) to ensure that the application of a mark scheme to a student's performance produces the same outcome, regardless of the assessor / marker. To help to ensure that this happens, where there are key terms, such as 'fluency', 'spontaneity', 'complex lexical items' 'takes initiative' 'elaborate responses' etc., these should all be exemplified, so that there is no guesswork about the sorts of performance they describe.
c) fair?	The principle of fairness relates to the need to ensure that all candidates take the assessment under the same conditions and have equality of experience. To ensure that this is the case, there is a need to: (i) ensure that grade boundaries reflect the new spontaneity paradigm, recognising that previous incarnations of speaking assessments (however well-intentioned) have resulted in marathon feats of memorisation in a great many centres (ii) eliminate teacher / student choice beforehand and any other opportunities to pre-prepare or over prepare (iii) provide clear tasks with transparent markschemes, which are applied consistently year on year. (iv) ensure that the themes and topics that students talk about in the assessments are relevant, interesting and up-beat, able to engage all learners, irrespective of gender, ability or interests. (v) ensure inter-rater reliability at exam board level when marking performances

6. How might any aspects of the proposed assessment requirements impact on:

	aspects
a) the costs, and	As far as the cost of the exams themselves are concerned, the consensus is that costs did not go down when teachers assumed responsibility for marking the speaking component, so that there is no cause for them to go up, when the responsibility for marking the speaking component returns to the awarding bodies. In schools, however, the conditions requiring higher levels of control / supervision / invigilation and a recording of all tasks increase staffing costs, i.e. the cost of cover when teachers need to administer tests.
b) likely take-up of new modern foreign language GCSEs?	1 In speaking, it is crucial that those involved in designing the assessment, and more crucially, in the criteria for assessment, understand the difference in performance that is implicated in truly 'unplanned' language production. It is not possible to retain the notions of fluency and accuracy, and just add spontaneity to them, without the explicit acknowledgement that increased spontaneity incurs a re-negotiation of expected levels of fluency and accuracy. Not to do this from the outset (and not to make it explicit for teachers) will lead to the outcry that the impossible is being asked. Two possible consequences in the short time would be that: (i) teachers believe that the new exam is only accessible to higher ability learners and 'market' the course according in their schools, resulting in a lower, skewed KS4 uptake (ii) teachers attempt to spot any and all ways to enable their students to achieve.g. by working out how students can learn / memorise all that they might need (which would return us to the pre CA GCSE where teachers complained that candidates had to memorise numerous questions from all topics). 2 In writing, we believe that students will benefit from the increased teaching time freed up by the removal of CAs and that they will respond positively to producing shorter pieces of writing independently under exam conditions. The inclusion of prose translation may also appeal to boys, whose writing is often penalised when they are disinclined to develop or elaborate. 3 Cost – if languages examinations are more costly than other GCSEs, there is a danger that this may be a disincentive for school leaders when it comes to encouraging uptake. 4 Grading – if grading issues are resolved for the new incarnation of the GCSE in languages, such that there is no difference between the subjects on offer, there is no reason to believe that the new assessment requirements would not see an increase in take-up at GCSE.

7. The outcome of the speaking component should contribute to a student's overall grade. To what extent do you agree or disagree this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

The ability to speak the foreign language is a key element of the GCSE qualification. Additional point: ALL members would like to see the CEFR used in all languages assessment frameworks, including the new GCSE. All other European countries use the CEFR in their foreign language teaching, learning and assessment. It has proved useful in the past to bench-mark, reference and incorporate descriptive language from the CEFR in other English assessment frameworks for modern languages, including the Languages Ladder in the UK.

8. All assessments (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in new modern foreign language GCSEs should be tiered. To what extent do you agree or disagree this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

ALL members' view align themselves with two different positions as regards tiering: Model 1 All students complete a short foundation tier in each skill. Completion of a further higher tier paper in any or all of the skills is optional. Advantages (i) There is no risk for students (or teachers) in selecting the best tier. (ii) There is flexibility built-in and the opportunity for learners to make progress at different rates, including rapid improvement in the last stages of the course (iii) Students are not demotivated when taking the tests (we have found that students completing the higher tier reading and listening papers can be demoralised by a tricky question encountered early in the paper, with knock-on detrimental effects on their completion of the remainder of the paper). When middle ability students take the higher paper, they are already secure in the knowledge that they have completed the foundation tier confidently. Conversely, able students are not put-off by being required to complete a short set of questions that is too easy for them. (iv) There is no requirement on the exam board to produce such precision-balanced, comparable papers with an overlap. Disadvantages (i) an overall increase in assessment time (but many GCSE subjects already have far longer examination time than languages) (ii) an increase in marking (it would be possible to devise a system, whereby the marking of the higher tier was dependent on achievement in the foundation tier, or that the achievement of a certain level in the higher tier removed the need to mark the foundation tier paper. Equally, electronic marking might also provide gains in terms of time. Model 2 Tiering is built into all four skills, with an overlap for foundation and higher level. There are members who hold one of these two views, but no views expressed that are not covered in one of these two models.

9. All available new modern foreign language GCSEs should be tiered. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

ALL strongly supports the view that schools should be encouraging students to study a range of languages at GCSE level, and that achievement at both foundation and higher level in the full range of languages must be allowed for.

10. Students should be required to enter for either higher- or foundation-tier assessments but not a combination of the two. To what extent do you agree or disagree this statement?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

Students have different profiles to those described in paragraphs 3.35 – 3.38. The completion of two short courses at different levels in one language is not a solution that accounts for the different learning and achievement profiles presented to teachers in our membership in the classroom. On this basis, we argue strongly for the retention of mixed tier entering (notwithstanding our suggestion about tiering in Q8 response). In addition, we propose that all awarding bodies adopt the approach of the exam board that allows flexibility in terms of tier entry to the day of the exam itself.

11. For the listening, reading and writing assessments 20 per cent of marks, and for speaking 50 per cent of marks, should be allocated to questions or tasks that are common in any series to both the foundation and higher tier assessments. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

The proposal seems to be that the overlap would be 'grades' 4 and 5 on the 1-9 point scale. Currently the overlap (G – C / E – A*) allows for the equivalent of 3 of the available 8 grades, which seems to be adequate. There might therefore be the need to allow for the awarding at higher tier to allow for achievement at the current E-grade equivalent, to ensure that there is no sudden drop off to 0 after 4. 50% seems on the face of it to be a very large degree of overlap, but presumably this anticipates a general conversation section, which will be differentiated by outcome.

12. Do you have any further comments on the tiering of modern foreign language GCSEs?

13. New GCSEs in ancient languages should be assessed wholly by examination. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

14. New ancient language GCSEs should not be tiered. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Don't know/no opinion

Please give reasons for your answer

The non-tiering of ancient languages GCSEs may seem logical and to reflect the current cohort of students that enter these exams. As long as (as suggested in 5.4) the assessments can be so designed that students across the ability range can demonstrate their abilities, we agree that these exams could be untiered.

15. Modern foreign language GCSEs in a wide range of languages should be available in the future. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

ALL members are united in their view that GCSEs should be available in a wide range of languages. Not only do they believe that the current range of languages should be maintained, they argue strongly that additional languages should now be offered, to fill the gap that has arisen following the withdrawal of Asset Languages qualifications.

The association believes strongly that the diversity of languages learnt and spoken in England is an asset that should be promoted and recognised in the national examination system. We do not wish to see some languages and cultures prioritised over others, rather we want to encourage the learning of all languages within the immediate community, the wider context of the UK and Europe as a whole, as well as those languages of particular interest and importance at a global level, economically, politically and socially.

16. Modern foreign language GCSEs for which there is low demand should be available in the future. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

The UK needs a diverse range of language skills for the future. The British Councils' 2014 Languages for the Future report identified Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin Chinese, German, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Turkish and Japanese as the languages most vital to the UK over the next 20 years. This list includes many languages not usually regarded as "high demand" for GCSEs, even though they have been forecast as being key to the UK's future from the view of the needs of UK businesses, the UK's overseas trade targets, diplomatic and security priorities, and prevalence on the internet. As our global community is constantly and rapidly changing, it is therefore crucial that we keep a diverse range of languages available at GCSE, as no doubt other languages will become identified as significant to the UK according to the economic, social, political and cultural environment of the time. In addition to these globally-significant languages, there are several key community languages that should continue to be accredited in England at GCSE level. These languages are economically and socially highly significant for the UK. Many home speakers of the languages are encouraged to retain and develop their interest in their home language because there is recognised accreditation for its study. In this way, language speakers that might not otherwise have acquired higher levels of literacy in their home language are encouraged to do so. The positive benefits on our society of learners that are literate, whether in English, a modern foreign European language, or additionally a heritage language, (or all three) are clearly demonstrable.

17. Modern foreign language GCSEs should be available for students who are existing users of the language. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly agree

Please give reasons for your answer

Existing users of a language should also be able to get accreditation for the language, whatever it may be, and for the reasons outlined above. However, ALL would welcome an attempt to exempt literate native speakers from the norm referencing so that only learners competing on a level playing field are part of the % allowed at every grade. This would not be completely straightforward and would rely on teacher professionalism and 'fair play', but we do believe that teachers, in cases where a student was clearly going to achieve A* in every component as a result of a long period of residence in the country or a bi-lingual upbringing resulting in native speaker levels of competence, would be willing to indicate this as point of entry. This identified cohort would achieve A* as before, but the higher % of A* grades overall would be justified and national figures could report them separately as two figures, if necessary (A* and A* - BL). To ensure that all languages are available, each exam board should have to provide an equal number of 'lower-demand' GCSE languages, worked out in terms of numbers of entries. Each exam should also be accessible to non-native speakers of those languages.

18. In your opinion would schools and colleges be willing to pay a higher fee to enter students for modern foreign language GCSEs for which there is a lower demand?

19. What, if any, steps do you think Ofqual should take to secure the availability of GCSEs in a range of modern foreign languages?

It seems reasonable to come to an arrangement with the awarding bodies such that they 'share out' the provision for less widely taught languages. Ofqual would need to insist on an identified list of languages that GCSEs would be provided in, as commercial interests alone will be insufficient.

20. A range of Ancient language GCSEs should be available in the future. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Agree

Please give reasons for your answer

ALL believes that the current range of ancient language GCSEs is appropriate and should be maintained.

21. What, if any, steps should Ofqual take to secure the availability of GCSEs in a range of ancient languages?

Ofqual should continue to encourage awarding bodies to maintain their current provision.

22. A disabled student should obtain an exemption for no more than 40 per cent of the available marks for a modern foreign language GCSE. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Strongly disagree

Please give reasons for your answer

It is not entirely clear why 40% has been selected, but it means that a student would be disadvantaged were s/he not in a position to complete 3 of 4 components. We have experience in members' schools where students have not been able to complete two of the four exam components. For example, a blind student who could only complete the listening and speaking components in Mandarin Chinese as the reading paper could not be brailled and neither was it possible to complete the written component. We believe strongly that in these cases, it should be possible for awarding bodies to aggregate to full GCSE award.

23. We have identified a number of ways the proposed requirements for new GCSEs in modern foreign languages may impact (positively and negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any other potential impacts we have not identified?

Yes

If yes, what are they?

ALL members believe that the removal of mixed tiering will have a negative impact on a range of learners with 'non average' profiles (as detailed above), and that mixed tiering should therefore be retained.

24. We have not identified any ways by which the proposed requirements for new GCSEs in ancient languages may impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic over and above those impacts that apply to the changes to GCSEs generally. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified?

No

If yes, what are they?

25. Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

Yes

If yes, what are they?

We suggest re-thinking the proposal of a maximum 40% exemption and the removal of mixed tiering.

26. Do any of the proposals or options being considered have financial or wider resource consequences, positive or negative, for:

	Yes	No
Schools	X	
Exam boards	X	
Others		

Please explain your response

Schools – the changes to the speaking assessments proposed here will require higher levels of invigilation and teacher examiner time. Exam boards – the requirement on them to maintain and extend the current range of languages provision at GCSE. This should be incentivised at government level.

3. Accessibility of our Consultations

Do you have any special requirements to enable you to read our consultations? (For example screen reader, large text, and so on)

No

Which of the following do you currently use to access our consultation documents? (Select all that apply)

Which of the following document formats would meet your needs for accessing our consultations? (Select all that apply)

How many of our consultations have you read in the last 12 months?