

From Language Alliance

Dear Secretary of State,

Further to my correspondence of Spring 2012 and the reply from your Department I write now in the light of the recent announcement from OCR of the proposal to 'redevelop' the Asset Languages qualification at the cost of a large number of World Languages studied in the UK which will in consequence no longer have any comparable accreditation.

Members of the Language Alliance are concerned about the long-term impact of this decision on the reputation of the UK and on our capacity to build up skills in certain key international languages, with consequent deleterious effect on our international trading and standing.

We are keen to be supportive in any way which reduces these threats and in advising relevant agencies on a positive way forward.

The report concerned states:

*'Asset Languages being re-developed for September 2013  
Wednesday 4 July 2012*

*We'd like to keep you up to date with our plans for Asset Languages.*

*The range of current qualifications is accredited until December 2013 and plans are already underway to redevelop successor Asset qualifications in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Mandarin.*

....

*At the present time we're not planning on redeveloping any other qualifications in Asset Languages other than those mentioned above.*

....

*If you need to speak with us, you can call our dedicated helpdesk at 01223 553998 or alternatively you can email us at [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk).*

Members of the Language Alliance recognise that this decision by OCR is very likely to be based on commercial decisions over which national policy has no influence, but at the same time we feel that the Government (which commissioned the original framework on which Asset Languages is based) does have a significant role in supporting the retention of accreditation for certain languages which will otherwise disappear, and in recognising formally the contribution of specific language communities who would be disenfranchised by this eventuality.

Since the announcement there has been considerable reaction in the online fora, including via the ALL World Languages forum, the Language Alliance, linguasnet-forum and the Arabic Network, some of which I summarise for you here. Many of

the views expressed are significant to the economic and social well-being of the UK as well as to the communities of language-speakers/ learners most immediately affected, and they are based on research as well as in personal, professional and emotional response:

*'Based in university, I have worked on outreach projects such as*

*1 e-mentoring using undergraduates to mentor on-line school students of languages, including MFLs and Arabic, Dutch, Japanese, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese and Russian, (see <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/crosscall>)*

*2 an introduction to a range of languages [www.ucl.ac.uk/atlas](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/atlas) in order to encourage their take up at university*

*3 collaboration between Russian teachers in 3 sectors (university, state schools and complementary schools). (The Onstream project see <http://www.linksintolanguages.ac.uk/resources/2589>)*

*I also conducted a piece of research for the ESRC on the factors affecting the recruitment of students to courses at university in the less widely taught languages*

*In all the projects and research it is obvious that a key factor in encouraging school students (mainstream and complementary) to continue study is the availability of a qualification.*

***If the proposal is to save money then nationally it is a false economy. We all know that British business is crying out for linguists and that one "asset" that Britain has, is the potential for training linguists, native speakers and beginners or heritage learners for this purpose.***

*The small savings that might accrue are nothing compared to the damage the cut will have on teaching and learning languages in this country and negate all the good work that has been done so far. If the problem is low take-up, then an effort should be made to publicise the existing Asset languages and to develop the range further..'*

There is an issue about perceived parity between languages and cultures:  
*'I am sure every language is valuable, and it is not ethical to think one language is more important and superior to another and deserves special treatment however good the argument of the economics may be... the 20 languages dropped from the Asset Languages in favour of the selective 5 can not be either ethical or economical in the long run. The Community Languages have progressed this far after a long period of struggle and hard work done by so many caring people who gave hours of their time free for the teaching of their*

*language on weekends in the community schools to serve their community and preserve their language and culture. In the school like mine we are fortunate to have the provision of several community languages being taught, though they have not achieved the same status as the so called MFL because the teaching of these languages still takes place after school and is not on school timetable. But it shows progress though as the need and demand for learning of these languages is being acknowledged by our fair minded head. By the way, we use the Curriculum Guides for the teaching of community languages in our school. The Units of teaching in the Levels of these guides are related to the Asset Languages Levels.'*

There are suggestions for potential solutions:

*' If their imperative is solely commercial could OCR be encouraged to think of reducing cost by providing assessment online? or considering whether consulates / embassies might to some degree 'sponsor' the qualification in their languages? or simply raising the candidate fee rather than closing down the route entirely?'*

*It seems unjust that learners cannot gain recognition for their competence.'* and the Languages Community would certainly be willing to work together with relevant agencies to seek a workable solution.

There are politically sensitive questions being asked - about the message being given about the value of some languages over other (with the potential accusation of racism entailed, as well as about other Government policy: *'Another matter which raises concern is that the Specialist Language Colleges have started to turn into academies specialising in music, arts or something else. Then first thing they do, is to drop any community languages being taught there, so these languages will suffer further decline.'*

*'It seems likely that the proposed narrowing of Asset qualifications is related to schools switching to GCSEs which (unlike Asset) are accepted for the EBacc.'*

There is a general feeling of wasted effort and funding in response to short-term, or to political, imperatives:

*'.. waste of all the research and work that's gone into developing a structure of exams which may not be perfect but has given hope and confidence to a lot of students who do not have the time or ability to study as far as GCSE but nevertheless deserve recognition for their effort and enthusiasm in studying less mainstream languages.'*

The strengths of the Asset provision are noted:

*1) Flexibility*

*By assessing skills separately it was possible through Asset to develop/assess a jagged profile for the learner of the kind that many employers say they want (e.g. CBI report). The plan was to develop some more "vocational" Assets which would have gone a long way towards the kind of requirements we are hearing from our employers' groups.*

*It would also be possible to include an asset qualification in a broader set of competences (Diploma type)*

*2) Validity*

*Asset was developed along side the Common European Framework of Reference and the Asset descriptors were used in the revised National Curriculum levels. There is therefore equivalence with GCSE at Level 1 and level 2. That is why a full set of Asset qualifications at Intermediate (7-9) achieved GCSE equivalence. In a sense the new GCSE levels were developed through Asset.*

The Language Alliance works with other associations and bodies in a spirit of cooperation and has a wide range of expertise which its members are willing to share.

Steven Fawkes for the Language Alliance

## The Language Alliance

.. seeks to bring together interested individuals and groups in education, citizenship, disability, social inclusion, local democracy, international development or world peace who share a common interest in supporting language learning (whether this be foreign languages, world languages, sign language, English, etc.)

The Alliance acts as a broad-based independent Forum, predominantly within England, to:

- share information, views, concerns and ideas, and offer mutual support in times of change
- monitor change alongside the achievements and development of national strategy and policy for languages
- propose action relevant to the aims of the Alliance's constituent groups
- identify and advise policy makers, at all levels, of relevant research and of practical means by which they can strengthen and widen ongoing strategies
- work to bring to the attention of a wider public the importance of language to the development of community understanding and empowerment on a local, national or international level.

Members of the Alliance attend meetings as individuals, but since its inception, the Alliance includes members and visitors from the following organizations, among others:

ALA , ALL

BAAL, Black Country Pathfinder, British Academy , BBC Worldwide, British Council, British Deaf Association.

CILT, CLIE, CUDAH

Department for Education

Friends of Classics

GDST

Institute of Linguists, ISMLA

Japan Foundation

Links into Languages/ Routes into Languages, LSC

Maison du Quebec, MGLT

NALA, NALDIC, NATECLA, Network for Languages, NIACE, Nuffield Foundation

OFSTED

SALT

TUC

UCML

Several Universities

Several Embassies

Several Cultural Agencies