



The Association for Language Learning's response to the Ofqual consultation on assessment arrangements for languages with smaller cohorts at A and AS Level

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that AS qualifications in modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) should be assessed entirely by exam?

The Association for Language Learning (ALL) believes that the time available for the teaching and learning of languages in schools is already highly pressurised and that any requirement for external examination activity to be effected by teachers is likely to eat into this time; members therefore agree that a terminal examination (or a suite of examinations to cover the AOs) is appropriate for languages in general in relation to Reading, Listening and Writing.

Speaking is currently a 'non-exam' but this skill is omitted in the DfE proposed content for this group of languages, which we regret.

The comments below in Q2 relate to some extent to this Question also:

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that A Levels in modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) should be assessed entirely by exam?

AS for AS level in Question 1.

In addition members feel that OFQUAL may have concerns about maintaining equal standards between subjects in the content of these examinations: the status of the A-level examination requires that examination across the curriculum subjects share parity of esteem, as well as of content and of level of difficulty.

The Consultation document (3.8) speaks of '*comparability of requirements across all of the different languages that will be assessed using the same assessment objectives*' but ALL believes as a principle that this comparability should reach across all languages and not just this subset.

The proposal by DfE to omit Speaking from the examinations in Languages for smaller cohorts compromises this balance as it is difficult to equate with transparency the

challenges of a Speaking examination (as required in the MFL specification) with the 'alternative content' they propose for Languages with smaller cohorts (*a new emphasis on the culture and society of the country or countries where the language is spoken, and a requirement for critical analysis and evaluation*).

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for AS and A Levels in modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts)?

The Consultation document (3.8) speaks of '*comparability of requirements across all of the different languages that will be assessed using the same assessment objectives*' but ALL believes as a principle that this comparability should reach across all languages and not just this subset.

Members feel that OFQUAL may need to address concerns about equal status and standards between subjects in the content of these examinations. The status of the AS / A-level examinations require that examination across the curriculum subjects share parity of esteem, as well as of content and of level of difficulty, and the fact that the proposed AOs for MFL will be different from the AOs for these languages is clearly a matter of concern.

Question 4: 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 (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts)?

Given the points above about equality of esteem between AOs in the MFL specification as compared with the AOs for languages with smaller cohorts the balance between these AOs seems to be reasonable.

Question 5: 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 (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts)?

Given the points above about equality of esteem between AOs in the MFL specification as compared with the AOs for languages with smaller cohorts the balance between these AOs seems to be reasonable.

Question 6: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

ALL members are concerned about the speaking element of the proposed examinations being dropped, especially in view in the disparity between languages this will create; we have expressed these views in the DfE consultation which runs in parallel to the OFQUAL one.

No further comments at this time.

Question 7: We have identified a number of ways the proposed requirements for reformed GCSEs, AS and A Level in modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) may impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any other potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they?

The omission of a speaking element might have a negative impact on the overall performance of students who have motor difficulties or cognitive difficulties with their writing skills and who count on their speaking to balance out inaccuracies these may cause in e.g. their spelling, character-forming or other written accuracy.

Question 8: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

The Association recommends that OFQUAL (and DfE) explores the possibility and feasibility of a speaking assessment further. The Institute of Linguists would be an extremely beneficial partner/stakeholder in this.

In addition, the Association recommends OFQUAL (and DfE) take every measure to assert the value the UK places on the diversity of languages taught, learnt and used in our country (viz answer to Q9).

Question 9: Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

The possibility of a perceived disparity of status between languages in this group and the MFL covered in other specifications raises the threat of some 'racial groups' feeling their language is being devalued.

The Association recommends OFQUAL (and DfE) take every measure to assert the value the UK places on the diversity of languages taught, learnt and used in our country (in addition to clarifying with school leaders that all these languages count towards EBacc and other measures.