

TEACHER BRIEFINGS

Briefing 3 / April 2018

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THE NEW A LEVEL

Background

In 2017-18 major changes were made to external examination structures for languages.

This paper describes the changes and some of their implications, identifies key messages to share with colleagues and parents and suggests actions for individual teachers and departments.

Key messages

The new examination specifications have major implications not only for students, for language teachers and for departments, but also for those involved in planning timetables and schedules for mock examinations. Many parents will be confused by the changes and may welcome an overview.

... feedback on progress, skills and achievement should be focused more on language progress.

For the time being there are few resources available from the accrediting boards; it will be challenging for departments to create mock examination papers confidently.

It is recommended (as in OfSTED and ASCL advice to headteachers) that schools do not ask teachers for predicted grades in a context where nobody has yet taken the examination, but that feedback on progress, skills and achievement should be focused more on language progress.

Changes at A Level include:

- Linear examination at end of 2 years. AS Level still exists, but as a standalone examination and doesn't count towards final A Level grades
- Revised content - where students have to demonstrate understanding and knowledge of the A Level topics within the context of at least one target language country (for Edexcel worth 20% and assessed in written and speaking papers, for AQA it is assessed throughout)

- The speaking exam is much changed, with an independent research project at the core of the examination
- The Independent Research Project (IRP) must be rooted in the target language culture
- The writing exam is also much changed, with students having to write two target language essays, one on a book and one on a second book or a film
- The listening, reading and writing exam is now 70% of overall grade for Edexcel; for AQA the scheme of assessment is as follows – speaking 30%, writing 20% and listening, reading, writing is 50%
- Summary skills are an important new skill on both the reading and the listening sections of the exam.

References

ASCL: http://www.ascl.org.uk/filemanager/root/site_assets/news/a_level_reform_guidance_document.pdf

OfSTED: <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2017/03/02/inspection-and-the-use-of-grade-predictions/>

OFQUAL issued this statement in February 2018: <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/01/19/gcse-and-a-level-awarding-in-2018/>

Points for reflection/action

Key issues: You may wish to clarify with colleagues, especially those in senior leadership teams with curriculum and pastoral overview, the key issues raised above.

Issues for speaking: You may wish to discuss with colleagues how the following issues impact on your work and requirements for support (they will be different between schools). Which points should your department take forward with senior leaders etc.?

- How can teachers best support candidates with their IRP research whilst respecting rules and regulations?
- How can schools conduct a mock speaking exam whilst respecting these rules and regulations?
- The role of assistants (private tutors) in the preparation process – what are the rules governing their work with candidates?
- What feedback if any can be given following the mock speaking exam?
- For the role play card, how can you encourage candidates to include more cultural content and background information?
- Might it be necessary to have an invigilator in the exam room for safeguarding reasons?
- How might a teacher-examiner best prepare to ask appropriate questions of candidates, given that the candidate is the expert in their IRP and the teacher may know very little about it?

Practical issues around exams: you may wish to discuss these matters within your school. Do these suggestions from other schools apply to your context?

- Students must have individual access to the audio for the listening examination. How best can this be achieved?
- Does your school require students to sit a Year 12 mock exam, in addition to the Year 13 mock exam and how might this be structured, particularly with reference to the speaking exam? Should it be structured as the AS Level examination is structured, or could this potentially confuse students?



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Suggestions for effective practice in developing independent learners

The new requirements place value on factual knowledge and understanding of the target language countries. Students will need to keep up to date with current affairs as they relate to the target language countries. There is an expectation that students will do a considerable amount of independent research into a topic of their choice. They also need to keep track of the sources they use for their research.

- What strategies could you/your department propose to help students to acquire the appropriate knowledge and keep this up to date with events and current affairs?
- How will you access appropriate resources for the new A Level courses? There are many resources available to purchase but some are extremely expensive.
- How can you stimulate students to do extra reading and learning for the main topics in order to discuss them fully in the speaking exam? What websites or other links could you provide for students?
- How can you best support students to prepare for the IRP – what research skills can you teach them that will encourage independent study and research?
- How can you assess students research skills in Year 12? What task(s) might you set to support them with this?

Supporting progression

How would you characterize and describe the experience of language learning in KS5 to illustrate progression to pupils in Year 11 and their parents, governors etc.?

Motivation

Spring is the time for language debates organised by the cultural institutes, for students in their sixth form years; students report that participating boosts their confidence in speaking and contributes to their exam preparation.