

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP on MODERN LANGUAGES



Chair: Nia Griffith MP (Lab); Co-Chair: Baroness Coussins (CB).

27 April 2020

Response to Ofqual's Consultation¹ on exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020 from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages (APPG MFL).

Background

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages (APPG MFL) was established in January 2008. It is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers with a common interest in language policy and issues. Full details: <http://bit.ly/APPGMFLhome>

Approximately 30,000 students take a qualification in their 'community' language every year². This situation has highlighted that this cohort may be systematically disadvantaged in gaining these qualifications.

The value of 'community' language examinations (also known as 'less taught languages') is recognised as strategically important to the country in terms of economic growth and exports; security, defence and international relations; social mobility and educational achievement of EAL pupils.³

The APPG MFL wishes to emphasise the potential for a lack of fairness and equality which could result in students of 'community languages' missing out on receiving a qualification unless the following issues are addressed.

1. Calculated grades

1.1 Community language examination centres

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020>

² Alantara Communications (2019): <http://www.alcantaracomms.com/gcse-languages-entries-2019/>

³ See: *National Recovery Programme for Languages*, APPG MFL (2019); *Languages for the Future*, British Council (2017); *Exporting is Good for Britain but Knowledge Gaps and Language Skills hold back Exporters*, British Chambers of Commerce (2013); Minutes from APPG MFL meeting on 28 January 2015 http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/appgmfl_15.01.28_strategiclans_mlnotesfinal.pdf; Commons debate 24 March 2015 'Lesser-taught languages' <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150324/debtext/150324-0004.htm>; *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*, House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence (2014).

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The APPG MFL understands that established community language examination centres are able to provide teacher assessments/predicted grades on the same basis as mainstream schools.

However, such centres are reporting poor communication about this: mainstream schools were informed of the new arrangements first, and supplementary school-based examination centres were not informed until some time after mainstream schools (NRCSE, 21 April 2020).

The APPG MFL seeks confirmation that all examination centres have been contacted to confirm that they can provide teacher assessments on the same basis as mainstream schools.

1.2 Community language schools which are not examination centres

The majority of students taking an examination in a 'community' language are learning in a supplementary school which is not an examination centre and not learning their 'community'/heritage language in a mainstream school i.e. their mainstream school cannot provide a predicted grade but their supplementary school can.

The Turkish Cultural and Education Consortium is working with mainstream schools towards a model whereby mainstream schools are satisfied that a student's level in Turkish reaches a certain grade, through submission of evidence, in order that the mainstream school can submit a predicted grade in this subject for the student (NRCSE 21 April 2020).

The APPG MFL would like to see this model encouraged. It requires mainstream schools and supplementary schools to work together.

- **The APPG MFL calls on the DfE to recommend to mainstream schools that they should work with their students' supplementary school(s) if possible to ascertain a predicted grade.**
- **The APPG MFL calls on Ofqual to provide guidance on any potential issues such as rank ordering in such arrangements.**

2. Refunds and re-registering for examinations in the Autumn

2.1 Refunds

Most of the cohort are external candidates and have paid fees to take the examination this Summer. These fees are often high, and higher than the fee charged by the examination boards⁴. There is concern among supplementary

⁴ Exam fees for 'community' language GCSEs are typically around £60; some schools absorb this fee for internal candidates, some schools charge it. However, schools routinely charge external candidates £110 - £200 for one of their pupils to take this GCSE (and charge an admin fee on top of that to any external candidates); the highest fee recorded by the NRCSE is £495 (NRCSE, 21 April 2020).

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schools that not all candidates will receive a full refund, reporting that some candidates have received them and others not.

The APPG MFL calls on Ofqual and DfE to make it a requirement for all examination centres (mainstream schools and colleges and private centres) to give a full refund to their external candidates automatically (i.e. not require them to apply for a refund), and offer them the opportunity to take the examination in the Autumn.

2.2 Re-registering for examinations (Autumn 2020).

There is a lack of clarity among students and supplementary schools about the availability of examinations in the Autumn term (NRCSE, 21 April 2020). Example reports from supplementary schools include:

- Ofqual guidance appears to be that pupils in Year 10 or below (for GCSE) or Year 12 or below (for A Level) should sit the examinations in Summer 2021. This may not be appropriate for this cohort and may constitute an unfair disadvantage. Most students are taking the examination in addition to a full set of GCSEs/A Levels in their mainstream school, which is why they take this examination earlier and have typically been preparing for taking the examination early for several years. In addition, exam boards have accepted entries from Years 8, 9 and 10 for many years (NRCSE 24 April). Taking the examination at the same time as the other examinations places undue pressure, creates timetabling issues, and may impact on performance, or result in students dropping out of the 'community' language examination altogether.
- Mainstream schools advising students not to take the 'community' language GCSE exam and go straight on to taking an A Level instead in a later year.
- Examinations being refunded with no offer of re-registration in the Autumn, without which parents will not know that re-registration is an option, and schools are concerned that these candidates may not be permitted to register for Autumn examinations in these cases (NRCSE 23 April 2020).

The APPG MFL calls for clarity and consistency on the availability of examinations:

- **Ensuring that Autumn examinations in 'community languages' are available in all examination centres which offered them in the Summer.**
- **Ensuring all candidates in 'community languages' are permitted to register for Autumn examinations.**
- **Allowing younger cohorts to take the examination in Autumn as they planned to do in the Summer.**
- **These guidelines to be communicated effectively to all examination centres and all supplementary schools, and candidates.**

3. Appealing the results

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As a disproportionate number of students taking 'community languages' examinations enter individually, they should have the option to appeal on that basis i.e. not have to rely on doing so via an examination centre.

4. General comments: equality impact

It is vital to counter the myth that 'community' language students are advantaged and that therefore these qualifications matter less in any way.

- Students typically study their 'community' language in their own time (often Saturdays).
- Even if they have some degree of oral fluency they are unlikely to have to have the grammar, vocabulary and literacy required to take an academic examination in the subject.
- The standard form of the language in the examination is often different to the dialect they may be familiar with at home.
- Many students study their 'community language' as part of their heritage but have been born and/or been growing up in the UK, or indeed be several generations removed from native speakers in their family history, and therefore do not necessarily speak the language regularly.

Take-up of examinations in 'less taught languages' should be encouraged, valued, and facilitated.

There are well over 1 million 'bilingual' students in our schools (NALDIC 2013) which indicates that this issue is relevant to many more students than the 30,000 currently taking the examinations; and that there is low take-up of the examinations among this group, which should be addressed.

The government has shown willingness to intervene before in recognising the strategic importance of these languages (for example in securing the future of the examinations in 2015) and should not hesitate to do so again.

The APPG MFL recommends a review be undertaken to reduce systemic issues and to recognise the value of these examinations. Including:

- **Ensuring that Ofqual's External Advisory Group on Exam Grading includes an expert representative with in-depth knowledge of the supplementary school sector.**
- **Ensuring community language examination centres are treated on the same basis as mainstream schools (including relevant communications being sent to them no later than to mainstream schools).**
- **Addressing the increasing difficulty of finding affordable and available examination centres to take an exam in 'community' languages. (Reduction in the number of mainstream schools allowing external candidates; reduction in the number of FE Colleges with an MFL department; high price of private centres' fees). (See, for example, testimonial from After 18 Resource Centre, Leicester, via NRCSE 20 April 2020).**

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- **An investigation into the high fees sometimes being charged to external candidates for taking an examination and whether this needs to be regulated.**
- **Consider measures to ensure all students have access to these examinations.**
- **Consideration whether leaving the availability of these exams entirely to market forces is always appropriate. If the strategic, economic and social value of these qualifications is recognised, the government should be prepared to act to ensure their availability to candidates is guaranteed, and their up-take encouraged.**

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