



ALL Briefing No. 26 *revised*

Date: January 2021

Theme: GCSE Languages 2021

This Briefing has now been overtaken by decisions made in January 2021 to cancel summer examinations. Briefing 27 outlines a consultation around proposals for the awarding of grades. A new Briefing will outline outcomes of that consultation in due time.

Background: OFQUAL was tasked by the Secretary of State with mitigating the impact of the pandemic on schooling in the academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21.

For Languages the major recommendation was to make the spoken language assessment an endorsement (rather than a formal test) assessed by teachers during the course of study.

Ofqual is removing the requirement for assessments to use words outside vocabulary lists, and will “permit glossing where necessary whilst maintaining level of knowledge and accuracy needed for the highest grades.” There are other changes to specifications e.g. around optional questions.

This Briefing was updated following the publication of outcomes of the OFQUAL consultation on Speaking:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gcse-mfl-spoken-language-assessment-criteria-and-approach>

Key messages: The changes to Speaking are for 2021 only.

Ofqual’s decisions only affect GCSE. Any changes to iGCSE are the responsibility of the examination boards.

Speaking:

Background:

... the changes ... are intended to have the following impact ... in 2021:

- to remove the assessment of spoken language from the calculation of the overall qualification result (the 9-1 grade)
- to put in place flexible requirements for the assessment of spoken language by teachers
- to put in place common criteria for the assessment of spoken language by teachers

Extracts from the final OFQUAL Requirements document

... exam boards will not be required to review evidence of student performance as this would undermine the intended flexibility of the approach, and would be burdensome for centres.

Spoken language assessments should, but do not have to, take place during normal teaching and learning rather than during a one-off performance. The criteria set out below are not intended to be used in a formal examination context and there is no requirement to set up Centre-devised speaking tests to arrive at an outcome unless this is a necessary arrangement for specific Learners, e.g. for private candidates.

Teachers may base their judgements on the accumulation of evidence of a Learner's language performance through everyday classroom activities over time. This means Teachers have scope for various opportunities for Learners to demonstrate competence against the criteria set out below. Teachers may share the criteria with their Learners as well as their 'working at' level ...

Themes are those broad themes which will be taught in order to cover the requirements for Listening, Reading and Writing as outlined in the ... specification.

Speaking activities can be integrated into the teaching and learning of these skills in order to develop the skill of speaking in its own right as well as supporting the development of the other skills.

Different purposes may cover for example, conversations, presentations, transactions, formal and informal settings, descriptions and narrations. These suggestions are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Learners can demonstrate their speaking skills ... in a whole class context, working in pairs and groups or in a one-to-one interaction with the Teacher.

To be awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction a Learner must –

(a) take part in different tasks that are varied across different themes,

(b) use language for different purposes, and

(c) meet all of the criteria at the level for the Communication and interaction aspect and all of the criteria at the same level for at least two of the three other aspects of assessment with one aspect permissible at the level below. This includes awarding a pass to Learners who fail to meet the criteria for one of Range of language, Accuracy or Pronunciation and intonation.

The key focus is on competence in Communication and interaction which is mandatory at the level to be awarded.

The criteria are not intended to be a mark scheme...

Table 1: The criteria for Pass, Merit and Distinction

Grade	Communication and interaction	Range of language	Accuracy	Pronunciation and intonation
Pass	To be awarded a pass, the Learner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gives some relevant information in generally short responses. • conveys simple opinions. • asks some straightforward questions. • may not always understand questions asked, but responses to those which are understood are comprehensible. • demonstrates a basic level of interaction. 	To be awarded a pass, the Learner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses mostly simple grammatical structures. • uses a limited range of familiar vocabulary and expressions. • makes reference to present and past and/or future events with occasional success. 	To be awarded a pass, the Learner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is mainly correct when using familiar vocabulary and simple grammatical structures. • is likely to make errors, which sometimes impede communication. 	To be awarded a pass, the Learner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses pronunciation that is mostly understandable. • makes errors that sometimes impede communication. • there may be frequent native language interference.

Grade Merit	Communication and interaction	Range of language	Accuracy	Pronunciation and intonation
	<p>To be awarded a merit, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conveys mainly relevant information with occasional longer responses. • expresses opinions with some simple justification. • asks some varied questions to obtain information. • responds to questions and develops some answers. • demonstrates a good level of interaction. 	<p>To be awarded a merit, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manipulates straightforward grammatical structures with some variation and occasional complex structures. • uses relevant and some varied vocabulary and expressions. • is generally successful in making reference to present, past and future events. 	<p>To be awarded a merit, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a generally good level of accuracy when using straightforward vocabulary and grammatical structures. • is likely to make errors, particularly when more complex language is attempted. Such errors sometimes hinder clarity of communication. 	<p>To be awarded a merit, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses generally good pronunciation and intonation but with some inconsistency. • makes some errors that occasionally impede communication. • there may be some native language interference.

Grade Distinction	Communication and interaction	Range of language	Accuracy	Pronunciation and intonation
	<p>To be awarded a distinction, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicates detailed and relevant information, including extended responses. • expresses a variety of opinions with justification. • asks a variety of questions using a range of question forms. • responds to a variety of questions, often developing their answers. • demonstrates a very good level of interaction. 	<p>To be awarded a distinction, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manipulates a variety of grammatical structures including some complex structures. • uses a range of relevant vocabulary and a variety of expressions. • is mostly successful in making references to present, past and future events. 	<p>To be awarded a distinction, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses predominantly accurate language using a range of relevant vocabulary and some complex grammatical structures. • is likely to make errors that are usually minor or occur when complex structures and/or less familiar vocabulary are attempted. Such errors rarely hinder clarity of communication. 	<p>To be awarded a distinction, the Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses pronunciation and intonation that are overall accurate and intelligible. • makes errors which rarely impede communication. • there may be only isolated native language interference.

Points for reflection / action:

You may wish to read discussions between colleagues at the ALL Zoom meeting preceding the OFQUAL Consultation. Here: <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/secondary/speaking-endorsement/>

This Speaking Endorsement page is in development; please contribute.

Specific references from Awarding Bodies issued before the Consultation documents above.

AQA**Speaking**

To reduce pressures on teaching time, the Ofqual consultation outcome confirmed that the spoken language assessment in summer 2021 will be an endorsement reported on a 3-point scale. Students' speaking skills will be assessed by teachers during the course of study

Writing

There will be more optionality in the writing components, so the 2021 Writing papers will include an additional optional question for the overlap question at both tiers (Question 4/Question 1) and for Higher tier Question 2. This is so students can answer on their preferred theme. For each optional question, the theme will be given in the introduction to the question in the question paper.

Foundation tier

There will be an additional option for Question 4. Students will need to answer one question from a choice of three.

Higher tier

- There will be an additional option for Question 1. Students will need to answer one question from a choice of three.
- There will be an additional option for Question 2. Students will need to answer one question from a choice of three.

To give students time to read all of the optional questions carefully before making a choice, we'll be adding an extra five minutes to the scheduled exam time at both tiers for the Writing paper in 2021.

This means that:

- the Foundation tier Writing exam will last for one hour and five minutes
- the Higher tier Writing exam will last for one hour and 20 minutes.

Vocabulary

Following the removal of the regulatory requirement for assessments to use words outside of vocabulary lists and the regulatory permission to gloss where necessary, we've reviewed all of our draft Listening and Reading papers for the 2021 exams. We will be making some changes at both tiers to reflect this.

We may still include, in Listening and Reading papers, a small number of basic vocabulary items (eg primary colours, cognates/near cognates) not listed in the specification which will not be glossed and which students may need to understand in order to answer the questions. This is because excluding such items from the assessments is likely to increase the demand of the tasks.

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/news/changes-to-2021-exams-for-gcse-languages>

Edexcel

The document on the link below lists a number of changes to the format of the tests at GCSE level, based on feedback, and with exemplification. These include:

Listening:

- extracts are shorter; the focus is on understanding not memory
- fewer non-vocabulary list words
- shorter sentences at Foundation; reduction and spreading out of complex structures at Higher
- fewer and less demanding inference questions, particularly at Foundation tier.

Reading:

- all texts are shorter
- fewer non-vocabulary list words
- Literary texts are more carefully adapted to make them more accessible
- fewer and less demanding inference questions

Writing:

- contexts have been shortened and questions relate more closely to learners' experience
- bullets are shorter, simpler, and always clarify the required time frame
- translations at both tiers will only include one past tense and will only elicit words on the vocabulary list

https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Modern-Languages/MFL_GCSE_Assessment_Amendments_Guide.pdf

This Briefing has been prepared and updated by volunteers from the ALL Council and is for the benefit of ALL members.

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Association for Language Learning, 1A Duffield Road
Little Eaton, Derby DE21 5DR

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