



ALL Briefing No. 29

Date : 10 March 2021

Theme: GCSE MFL Subject Content Consultations March 2021

Background: In November 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the appointment of an independent panel of experts to review the subject content for GCSEs in modern foreign languages (MFL), in French, German and Spanish. Their aim was to recommend changes to ensure the content continues to be rigorous as well as supporting high-quality teaching. Consultation on their proposals has been delayed by the pandemic until now.

Key messages : There are **two consultations** live until 19 May 2021: DfE is consulting on the proposals for content; OFQUAL is consulting on ensuing arrangements for the examinations themselves. Both relate to first teaching of a new GCSE from Sept. 2023 and first exams in 2025 – in England. There are no changes to GCSE content for exams in 2022. Both consultations are detailed; this Briefing extracts some key points only.

References:

DfE consultation document: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/ebacc-and-arts-and-humanities-team/gcse-mfl-subject-content-review/>

DfE consultation online: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/ebacc-and-arts-and-humanities-team/gcse-mfl-subject-content-review/consultation/intro/>

OFQUAL consultation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/revised-gcse-qualifications-in-modern-foreign-languages/revised-gcse-qualifications-in-modern-foreign-languages>

Related article in Languages Today January 2021

Extracts from the DfE document (numbers refer to that document; our bold text):

...

7. GCSE specifications in MFL should enable students to:

- a. Learn, and be able to recall readily and use, the range of vocabulary required for the level at which they are studying.
- b. Learn and be able to use the grammar specified to understand and produce meaning accurately, in oral and written modalities, and to speak with increasing fluency.
- c. Know and be able to apply the principles by which spelling represents sounds in standard or widely used forms of the language, and use clear and comprehensible pronunciation when speaking the language.

...

9. GCSE specifications in MFL must require students to:

- a. understand written texts in the language. Texts will comprise defined vocabulary and grammar for each tier and will be of limited complexity at foundation tier.
- b. understand spoken extracts comprising the defined vocabulary and grammar for each tier which are delivered at a pace which is no faster than a moderate pace, where each word is clearly discernible, and which do not contain extraneous distractions or interruptions; undertake dictation exercises from short spoken extracts, with credit for accurate spelling.
- c. write text in the language in a lexically and grammatically accurate way, based on simple and familiar stimuli.
- d. translate in writing vocabulary items and short sentences or texts, from the language to English and vice versa using a range of the vocabulary and grammar specified for each tier. In this context translation means an appropriate and sufficient rendering of the meaning of the original English.
- e. read aloud, using clear and comprehensible pronunciation, short sentences from the written form of the language and demonstrate understanding of them (for example by answering questions); undertake role play simulating a context such as a social conversation where instructions are unambiguous and there are no unexpected questions; answer questions about a visual stimulus such as a photograph. For these activities students will have time for preparation (without access to reference materials), and vocabulary and grammar expected will be from the defined content for each tier.

...

11. Where questions are designed to test comprehension of written and spoken texts in the assessed language, these comprehension questions will be in English. Other types of question will be in English or the assessed language as appropriate to the task. Rubrics will be in English.

12. Themes and topics: Because vocabulary specified in this content is informed by the frequency of occurrence in the language it will be well suited to communication about a wide range of common themes and topics, and for different purposes

Vocabulary

13. Students will be expected to know 1200 lexical items for foundation tier, and a further 500 lexical items for higher tier. Because no vocabulary is specified for KS2 or KS3, the vocabulary list proposed for GCSE must be comprehensive and should make no specific assumptions about vocabulary previously taught.

There will be an explicit and representative balance of different parts of speech such as nouns (concrete and abstract), pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions.

...

15. At least 90% of words selected must be from the 2,000 most frequent words occurring in the most widely used standard forms of the language.

...

17. Cognate words should be included and counted in the defined vocabulary list in a way which reflects their frequency of occurrence in the assessed language

18. The vast majority of lexical items listed as vocabulary will be single word vocabulary items (with their grammatical gender where appropriate), with exceptions ...

19. At higher tier students are expected to read texts that may include a small number of words outside the vocabulary list defined by the awarding organisation.

English meanings of such words must be supplied adjacent to the text for reference.

20. Words will be listed in the basic form commonly found in dictionaries. Where different parts of speech are derived from a single root, each part of speech will be listed separately.

21. The grammar requirements are set out in two tiers: foundation and higher ... in the annexes to the document.

24. The requirements for knowledge about sound-symbol correspondences (SSCs) are the same for both foundation and higher tiers, as laid out in the annexes to this document.

(They include detailed notes on NOUN PHRASES VERB PHRASES
ADJECTIVAL PHRASES ADVERBIAL PHRASES PREPOSITIONS
HIGH FREQUENCY PATTERNS OF DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGY
and Sound-Symbol Correspondences.

Extracts from the OFQUAL document (numbers refer to that document):

... The revised subject content places a different emphasis on how the 4 skills should be taught, and therefore the assessment arrangements should reflect this approach. The revised content seeks to encourage more linkages between skills, for example ... to read aloud short sentences and demonstrate understanding ...

We are, therefore, proposing a changed structure for the assessment objectives, to cater for the more mixed skill assessments.

Proposed assessment objectives for GCSE MFL qualifications in French, German and Spanish

AO1	Understand and respond to spoken language in speaking and in writing	35%
AO2	Understand and respond to written language in speaking and in writing	45%
AO3	Demonstrate knowledge and accurate application of the grammar and vocabulary prescribed in the specification	20%

This proposed structure and weighting of assessment objectives would, we believe, support the aims of the subject content ...

... tiered assessments should be used in the revised GCSE MFL qualifications in French, German and Spanish.

Further, we are proposing that students, as now, should be entered for all assessments at the same tier...

The assessment approach of the current GCSE MFL qualifications includes 25% NEA, in order to assess students' spoken responses and interactions. The assessment is undertaken by teachers (or the exam board where visiting examiners is offered). Each student's performance is recorded and sent to the exam board for marking.

We propose that teachers should administer the assessment of the new spoken language content and skills using exam board set tasks and that the exam boards should mark the assessments.

... we believe that the NEA weighting should be retained at 25%.

Points for reflection / action:

ALL members will wish to explore the details of the full proposals with colleagues; ALL is considering hosting a webinar to inform members, allow sharing of ideas and encourage individual as well as collective response to the consultation.

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

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