

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP on MODERN LANGUAGES

Chair: Nia Griffith MP (Lab); Co-Chair: Baroness Coussins (CB);
Vice Chairs: Tonia Antoniazzi MP (Lab); Lord Dykes (CB); Baroness Garden of Frognal (LD);
Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Con).



PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00H01 ON THURSDAY 13 MAY 2021

MPs and Peers in urgent call for government to delay controversial changes to Modern Languages GCSE

The Department for Education (DfE) review of the Modern Languages (MFL) GCSE is risky, untested and should be delayed to give more time for consensus across the sector, a group of MPs and Peers warns today.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages issued a statement today calling on the DfE to address concerns raised by stakeholders in relation to the reforms.

The statement is launched with the backing of sixteen organisations representing teachers, school leaders, linguists and education experts, including ASCL, the British Academy, the Chartered Institute of Linguists, NAHT, NEU and HMC.

Particularly controversial is the proposal to base the GCSE solely on the 2000 most frequent words, an approach contested by experts in language acquisition, whilst leaving out thematic content, communication skills, and culture.

The DfE is currently carrying out a consultation on the review, but the APPG found that the consultation does not adequately cover many of the most concerning issues.

The APPG highlights:

- The contested evidence base for the reforms, noting that the impact evaluation of the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) programme on which the reforms are based has not been published.
- A risk to standards and take-up, as the reforms appear to reduce the subject content, make it more difficult for exam boards to devise fair examinations, and risk widening the existing gap between GCSE and A level.
- Concerns that stripping out communicative skills and culture is counterproductive when these are the skills the country needs in real world settings such as trade, exports, international relations, diplomacy, security, and international development.
- The risk of implementing untested reforms in a year when MFL is already under pressure from Covid-19 lockdowns preventing students from engaging with lessons, and post-Brexit arrangements affecting exchanges and the recruitment of language assistants and teachers.

Baroness Coussins, Co-Chair of the APPG on Modern Languages, said:

“The DfE has been supportive of languages in the curriculum in recent years but these reforms risk undoing all of that progress.

Everybody agrees that elements of the current GCSE could be improved but is this the way to go about it? The evidence base is contested and the implications of getting this wrong very serious indeed, not least for standards and take-up.

The APPG has been inundated with messages of concern from across the sector.

We hope and expect that by pausing the process and building more consensus, the DfE will reach a set of proposals everybody can get behind.”

The APPG MFL's statement on the MFL GCSE review is available for anyone to download from 13 May 2021 on the following link: <https://APPGMFL-GCSE2021.weebly.com>

ENDS.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact APPGMFL@gmail.com / 07834174733

Hashtag: #LanguagePolicyUK

Twitter: [@APPGMFL](https://twitter.com/APPGMFL)

The APPG on Modern Languages statement on the MFL GCSE Subject Content review and consultation can be downloaded at the following link – it is embargoed until 00h01 on Thursday 13 May 2021: <https://APPGMFL-GCSE2021.weebly.com>

The full list of organisations supporting the statement at launch:

- **ALL** (Association for Language Learning)
- **AMLUK** (Alliance of Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics Subject Associations UK)
- **ASCL** (Association of School and College Leaders)
- **The Association for German Studies**
- **The British Academy**
- **The Chartered Institute of Linguists**
- **CLIE** (Committee for Linguistics in Education)
- **HMC** (Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference)
- **ISMLA** (Independent Schools' Modern Languages Association)
- **Linguistics in MFL**
- **NAHT** (National Association of Head Teachers)
- **NALA** (National Association of Language Advisers)
- **Network for Languages North East**
- **NEU** (National Education Union)
- **North West German Network**
- **UCML** (University Council of Modern Languages)

The DfE's MFL GCSE content review runs until 19 May 2021 and is available at:

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

About the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages:

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers. It meets six times a year to discuss a wide range of issues relating to languages and their place in the policy discussions of the day. The APPG also acts to gather evidence and write to Ministers and other key figures when the need arises, to draw attention to key issues.

The Chair of the APPG is Nia Griffith MP (Labour); its Co-Chair is Baroness Coussins (Crossbench); its Vice-Chairs are Tonia Antoniazzi MP (Labour), Lord Dykes (Crossbench), Baroness Garden of Frognal (Liberal Democrat), and Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Conservative). The Secretariat is provided by the British Council.

The APPG's stated purpose is:

- to explore the educational, skills-related, employment, competitive and cultural benefits of learning and using modern languages throughout the UK;
- to provide a parliamentary forum for information exchange, discussion and consultation;
- and to encourage and support policies and action to improve the take-up of modern languages in schools, further and higher education, in the workplace and in the community.

The APPG on Modern Languages' website is:

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/thought-leadership/appg>