

GCSE Modern Foreign Languages: Decisions on Conditions and Guidance



In December 2014 we published a consultation about the rules and guidance we proposed to put in place for reformed GCSEs (graded 9 to 1) in modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish).

This consultation set out draft Subject Level Conditions and guidance which would apply to all reformed GCSEs in French, German and Spanish.

We have reviewed the responses to the consultation and are now announcing our decisions. We are also publishing a more detailed analysis of the responses alongside this document.¹

Conditions and requirements for GCSE modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish)

Content requirements

We proposed that all reformed GCSEs in French, German and Spanish should comply with the subject content requirements published by the Department for Education,² and with our assessment objectives.

Respondents did not raise any significant concerns with this approach, which is consistent with our requirements for other reformed GCSEs. We are therefore confirming these proposals.

Tiering

We have previously confirmed that all assessments for GCSEs in French, German and Spanish should be tiered. We proposed that awarding organisations should use an overlapping tiers model (grades 1–5 available at Foundation Tier, grades 4–9 available at Higher Tier). We also proposed that awarding organisations should ensure that grades 4 and 5 are comparable, irrespective of the tier the student was entered for.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-modern-foreign-languages

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-modern-foreign-languages

Respondents supported the use of an overlapping tiers model, but some expressed concerns about how this will work in practice.

There are different approaches awarding organisations could take to secure cross-tier comparability, and we do not want to rule out legitimate approaches. It is for awarding organisations to demonstrate how and why their chosen approach is appropriate.

We have therefore confirmed our consultation proposals around tiering.

Assessment requirements

We proposed to introduce a range of requirements relating to assessment:

- Rules which permitted (but did not require) awarding organisations to publish vocabulary lists, so long as they did not make assessments predictable.
- Rules on the length of listening assessment.
- Rules governing the spoken language assessment:
 - A requirement that assessments are taken from the end of April to the beginning of May.
 - Requirements that the assessment is set and marked by the awarding organisation.
 - A requirement that schools provide the awarding organisation with recordings of the assessment for marking.
 - Limits on the time a student has to prepare for the spoken language assessment and the length of the assessment, and restrictions on the types of tasks for the assessment.

Respondents broadly supported most of our proposals, but views were mixed on our proposals for vocabulary lists. Some respondents welcomed our focus on limiting predictability; others felt it would be unfair to test students on vocabulary that had not been included in a vocabulary list.

Our view is that restricting assessment to words on published vocabulary lists would make assessments too predictable. It could also lead to teachers focusing on a limited range of vocabulary, which would conflict with the curriculum aims. We have therefore decided to confirm our proposals in respect of vocabulary lists. We have also clarified that any vocabulary lists should be included in the qualification's specification.

Some respondents also commented that a fixed window for the spoken language assessment could mean students in some years are unfairly disadvantaged because of the timing of Easter. We accept this concern, and have amended our requirements to allow awarding organisations to adjust the assessment window to fit around Easter.

Access to dictionaries

We proposed to prohibit the use of bilingual dictionaries in all assessments for GCSE French, German and Spanish.

Respondents' views were mixed. The majority of respondents supported our proposals, but some felt that effective use of a bilingual dictionary was a useful skill that could be tested. One awarding organisation commented that both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries should be prohibited.

We remain concerned that allowing bilingual dictionaries in assessments would compromise the validity of assessment. We accept the comment that monolingual dictionaries could pose similar risks, and have amended our requirements to prohibit all dictionaries.

Guidance for GCSE modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish)

Guidance on subject content

We proposed to introduce guidance which clarified how awarding organisations should interpret the subject content requirements around translations and reading comprehension. We also proposed some guidance around the language of stimulus materials.

Respondents broadly supported our approach to assessing translation and reading comprehension.

A number of respondents sought further clarity on our guidance around the language of stimulus materials. Some responses also indicated that our proposals could be read in ways we had not intended.

For clarity, the subject content document sets out detailed requirements in relation to the language used in rubrics, instructions to candidates and questions. We did not propose any further requirements or guidance on the language of rubrics, instructions or questions, and do not intend to do so now.

Our proposed guidance was intended to clarify that stimulus materials could be provided in either English or the assessed language. Following consultation, we have

decided to withdraw this guidance because it is unnecessary – neither the subject content nor any of our requirements prevent awarding organisations from using stimulus materials in English or the assessed language.

Guidance on assessment

We proposed to introduce guidance which clarified our requirements around vocabulary lists. We have discussed the key issues raised above. In line with our decision to confirm our requirements, we are also confirming our guidance on this issue.

Following consultation, we have also decided to introduce additional guidance which clarifies our requirements around the timing of the spoken language assessment.

Guidance on assessment objectives

We proposed to introduce guidance clarifying the interpretation of our assessment objectives.

Respondents did not comment in detail on our proposals, although some were concerned they did not clearly outline expectations of students.

We have amended the wording of some of our guidance to make our expectations clearer, but have not made any substantial changes.

Other issues

Some respondents raised concerns that preventing mixed-tier entry could disadvantage some students, particularly those with dyslexia or disabilities that affect phonological processing. Others were concerned that requiring equal weighting for the four skills would exclude some disabled students who can currently take modern foreign languages GCSEs.

We have already considered these concerns in response to an earlier consultation,³ and they informed our earlier decisions on tiering and the weighting of different skills. The responses to this consultation have not raised any new issues that cause us to revisit these decisions.

³ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141110161323/http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/modern-foreign-and-ancient-languages>

Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published final Subject Level Conditions⁴ and Subject Level Guidance⁵ for GCSE modern foreign languages.

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-modern-foreign-languages

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-modern-foreign-languages