

Decisions on developing new A and AS levels in modern foreign languages for first teaching in 2018



From 1 December 2016 to 18 January 2017 we consulted on ‘Developing new A and AS levels in modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) for first teaching in 2018’.¹

Its purpose was to gather public views on our proposed approach to assessment and the assessment objectives and their weightings, for AS and A level modern foreign language qualifications, based on the new content the Department for Education (DfE) has now published² for Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish and Urdu.

We reviewed the responses and a more detailed analysis of those responses is published alongside this document.³

Summary of our decisions

Responses were largely positive. Approximately two thirds of respondents who expressed a view in relation to the questions we asked either agreed or strongly agreed that qualifications based on this content should be entirely assessed by exam. A similar proportion agreed with the assessment objectives we proposed. Those who disagreed were concerned about the absence of content related to speaking, and the proposed title of the subject content. As these relate to issues beyond the scope of our consultation, they have not prompted us to make changes to our proposals. Following consultation, we took the following decisions:

- New AS and A levels in modern foreign languages that meet the DfE’s content requirements for languages with “smaller cohorts” will be assessed by exam only. This reflects the requirements of the subject content. Unlike the other subject content for reformed modern foreign languages, the subject content for

¹ Following their consultation, DfE have decided to change the title of the subject content document. We will consult separately on our requirements for the title of qualifications in these languages.

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-as-and-a-level-languages-with-smaller-cohorts - following consultation, DfE has retitled the subject content as ‘Modern foreign languages (smaller cohorts) GCE AS and A level subject content’.

³ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-new-mfl-as-and-a-levels-for-first-teaching-in-2018

new AS and A levels in languages with “smaller cohorts” does not require the assessment of a student’s spoken skills in a language.

- The assessment objectives for qualifications based on this content are set out in the table below. They include an emphasis on the culture and society of the country or countries where the language is spoken, and a requirement for critical analysis and evaluation. This represents a change in emphasis when compared with the assessment objectives for pre-reform qualifications in modern foreign languages. The assessment objectives are coherent with the new content and with the assessment objectives for the other reformed modern foreign language AS and A levels.
- The weightings of each of the assessment objectives are appropriate for the content as they reflect the importance of the different skills and the requirement for integrated skill assessment.
- A single set of assessment objectives will apply to all languages developed to meet the new subject content requirements. Absolute weightings will be used, rather than the ranges often used for AS and A level qualifications. In contrast to pre-reform modern foreign language qualifications, the same skills will be assessed in each of the different languages. The absolute weightings will help to promote comparability of requirements across exam boards and across the different languages. This is also the approach for qualifications based on the other subject content requirements for reformed modern foreign languages.

	Assessment objective	Weighting	
		A level	AS
AO1	Understand and respond in writing to spoken language drawn from a variety of sources.	20%	20%
AO2	Understand and respond in writing to written language drawn from a variety of sources.	30%	30%
AO3	Manipulate the language accurately, in written form, using a range of lexis and structure.	30%	30%
AO4 (AS)	Show knowledge and understanding of, and respond critically to, different aspects of the culture and society of countries/communities where the language is spoken.	n/a	20%
AO4 (A level)	Show knowledge and understanding of, and respond critically and analytically to, different aspects of the culture and society of countries/communities where the language is spoken.	20%	n/a

- Some of the responses addressed the title of the DfE's subject content. The titling of its content document is a matter for the DfE. We will consider the titling of these qualifications as we consult on Conditions and Guidance for these languages.
- We received comments related to the DfE's subject content proposals. We passed these to the DfE, so they could consider them as part of their own consultation analysis.

Equalities assessment

The responses highlighted no substantive new issues in addition to those we considered in our original assessment of potential equalities impacts that we set out in our consultation⁴. We considered concerns about the accessibility of different types of assessments, including listening, in responding to earlier consultations on qualifications that meet the subject content requirements for other reformed modern foreign languages.⁵ The responses have not raised any new issues.

Respondents raised potential impacts relating both to the requirements of the subject content and to our principles on the form assessments must take.

The subject content requires students to be assessed on their listening skills. We set out in our consultation the main impact that we identified: that our decision to assign 20% of the total marks for students' response to spoken language may have a negative impact on some students. Deaf and hearing-impaired students are most likely to be disadvantaged by this decision. To remove or reduce this disadvantage, students with these disabilities may have adjustments made to the way their assessments are conducted, as our impact assessment sets out in more detail.

The reasonable adjustments currently made to the conduct of listening assessments for deaf and hearing-impaired students should continue to be available to students taking the new A level and AS qualifications in modern foreign languages. Students will be able to apply for an exemption from the component if they cannot attempt any part of the assessment.

Other concerns raised by respondents related to fairness in grades awarded to native speakers and non-native speakers, and to the value of the diversity of languages taught, learnt and used in this country. It is not clear, however, how these concerns might affect students because of their protected characteristics. Some respondents also suggested that students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia might perform better in a speaking assessment. We will not require exam boards to provide

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-new-mfl-as-and-a-levels-for-first-teaching-in-2018

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcses-as-and-a-levels-reform-of-subjects-for-september-2016

speaking assessments because they are not required by the subject content. We passed these comments to the DfE as they related to its subject content proposals and to issues around the teaching of languages.

We did not identify anything further about the proposed changes that would have an adverse impact on students because of their racial group, sex, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sexual orientation or as a result of gender reassignment.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

These decisions will result in two regulatory differences when compared to the pre-reform qualifications in these languages. These are both the result of the requirements of the subject content, and our principles on what form assessments may take, as set out in our consultation.

- We will introduce a requirement that all assessments for qualifications based on this subject content must be by exam because all of the content can be validly assessed in an exam. This will give exam boards less flexibility in the design of these qualifications compared with in the pre-reform qualifications where they were permitted to include non-exam assessment if they wished. In practice, the impact of this requirement is limited, as only one of the languages that will be subject to these requirements currently includes any non-exam assessment. We did not identify any additional costs that relate specifically to our new requirements. Exam boards have told us that the delivery of speaking assessments is costly and complex for them to manage. It is likely, therefore, that costs to exam boards that currently assess speaking skills will be reduced.
- We will introduce new assessment objectives that align with the new content requirements and include set weightings for each assessment objective. This is a change from the current position, where exam boards can choose the weighting of assessment objectives from a range. While this will give exam boards less flexibility in the design of their qualifications, it will ensure consistency of approach across exam boards and across the different languages.

We received no further comments and identified no further impacts on exam boards, teachers or students resulting from our regulatory changes.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



© Crown copyright 2017

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: publications@ofqual.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofqual.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346