

# **Controlled Assessment in Modern Foreign Languages**

**Final report**



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# Summary

# Summary

In summer 2011 Ipsos MORI carried out an evaluation of Controlled Assessment (CA) for Ofqual on behalf of the three regulators in England, Wales (Welsh Government) and Northern Ireland (CCEA). Of the nine subjects covered in the research programme, we found that teachers of modern foreign languages (MFL) have particular concerns about CA. The current piece of research aimed to explore in more detail the causes and nature of those concerns, and to identify areas for review that might address them. Ipsos MORI, working with language teaching specialist Bridget Smith, carried out 35 depth interviews with teachers, five depth interviews with AO MFL representatives, and four focus groups with language teachers to investigate the problems in more detail and generate possible areas for review that might address the issues teachers have experienced.

## Issues experienced and perceived causes

The teachers who participated in the research fell across a broad spectrum of opinion about CA: a minority were largely positive about CA or had experienced a few isolated problems, while most had more significant concerns, and a few were firmly opposed and advocated a return to terminal exams or coursework in future. Although the issues that teachers had experienced were not universal, there were some common themes in the discussions.

### **Most teachers feel that teaching time is reduced and learning is narrowed by CA.**

Often, teachers feel that this is primarily a result of the impact that CA is seen to have on teaching and learning leading up to assessments and the frequency of assessments, rather than the time used in task-taking and the formal CA preparation time. Teachers feel that they have no alternative but to concentrate their teaching on the topics and language that are part of CA assessments at the expense of other topics, and to focus on the vocabulary and structures their students need to gain high marks in the assessments rather than teaching more broadly. Teachers behave in this way, whilst recognising that it is not necessarily best teaching practice, because of the perceived high-stakes nature of assessments, which is exacerbated by the weight they carry. Because CA is always imminent in Years 10 and 11, teachers say they and their students feel pressured into focussing on the assessment tasks; also, many teachers we spoke to feel that students at this level need to be closely directed to produce the language needed to access the marks they deserve.

Several teachers feel that students' **skills development is skewed** towards those language skills covered by CA, and that reading and listening skills suffer. This is partly another consequence of teaching being focussed around the assessments, which carry a 60% weighting.

Some teachers perceive that **assessments test memory rather than language skills**, and this can undermine their confidence in the validity of the assessments. Teachers say that students often learn their written and oral material by rote, and simply reproduce it during the task-taking. Although teachers do not seem to encourage this type of learning, many feel that it is an inevitable consequence of setting and preparing assessments in advance, as students see learning pieces by rote as the means by which to prepare for the assessment and to gain the best possible marks. Several teachers note that this approach is less successful for weaker students who struggle to learn large chunks of text. Furthermore, it means that students are not being tested on their ability to manipulate language, and that speaking tasks are less spontaneous than they might be. Many teachers feel this is a concern in particular for writing where the production of the final task is totally independent. In contrast, the interactive nature of speaking means the teacher can have some input to encourage other language from their students.

The **grades awarded to written assessments by AOs** are a significant concern for a large number of participants: several teachers feel the marking had been unfair, inconsistent, or simply odd. Teachers quoted examples of what they felt were weaker students receiving higher grades than apparently more able students, and some teachers working across a few languages felt that outcomes were inconsistent across languages. There were also instances of student work being marked down for 'lack of spontaneity' when this was not a criterion in the AO specification. A lack of clarity amongst teachers about how the marking schemes are applied, and the specific criteria used to assess student work, contributes to this issue.

Most teachers we spoke to say they find it **difficult to mark the speaking work**, and most find speaking more difficult to mark than writing. Many teachers say they cannot conduct and mark the oral assessments simultaneously and have to review the recordings to mark them, which adds to their workload. Most teachers say they did not receive any training on marking oral assessments despite this being a new requirement. Across the research, we found little evidence of teachers taking advantage of (or being comfortable with the idea of using) the more flexible options for oral assessments, such as doing speaking assessments in class and/or recording only one of the two speaking assessments.

Many teachers find the **AO requirements unclear**. For example, some teachers we spoke to are unsure what preparation can and cannot be done by students at home; and in the focus groups teachers debated how different a task has to be from previous tasks to be considered legitimately a 'new' task. Factors such as perceived ambiguous language in the specifications ('may' rather than 'must'), the changes to AO specifications over time, and teachers finding it difficult to contact AO staff for advice contribute to the lack of clarity teachers feel exists around the guidelines. Teachers often perceive that **AO representatives cannot provide clear answers**: for example, they described experiences such as senior examiners at AO training sessions being unable to provide clarification on some aspects of the assessments. In general, the lack of clarity in the requirements adds to teachers' concerns about whether they are correctly following the assessment guidelines, whether centres are implementing the guidelines consistently, and whether their interpretation of the guidelines might be disadvantaging their students.

It should be noted that **some teachers welcomed many aspects of CA**, although most have reservations or concerns about at least one element. For example, some teachers like the centre-designed options which allow more creative teaching practices, and some praised the new oral assessments as being much less daunting for students than previous oral examinations. Other teachers feel the staged nature of CA makes MFL a more appealing option to students by making the assessments feel more manageable than a terminal examination. Some other issues that were raised by teachers are not specific to MFL; for example, problems in dealing with pupil absence was a common theme in the focus groups, as was the increased stress that pupils face when doing CA in several subjects at once.

## Areas for further consideration

Teachers suggested a number of potential means of addressing their concerns that may merit further consideration:

- To address concerns surrounding teachers' confidence in the standard of marking, teachers say they would like more clarity about the marking of writing assessments, including more exemplar materials to illustrate how the mark scheme works. Teachers also called for feedback about the marks awarded to their students' scripts.
- To address concerns about marking oral assessments, many teachers say they would like more training on how to mark oral assessments, and more clarity about the criteria used by AOs (e.g. spontaneity). Some teachers and AO representatives

say they would prefer a return to AOs marking orals and teachers marking written work.

- Teachers called for better means of contacting AOs with queries, and expressed a desire for more consistent and clear information from AOs. Teachers suggested that they could submit questions to AOs before meetings, and that AOs could set up a network of regional advisors so that teachers knew who to contact with queries. Teachers also feel AOs should take responsibility for actively updating teachers about changes to the specification in future, rather than teachers having to check their AO's website.
- Some of the ideas teachers expressed entail a change to the set-up or structure of tasks. Some teachers advocate a return to equal weighting for the four skills. However, they feel that this should also mean a reduction in the CA task requirements. Some teachers are in favour of removing the preparation time for writing and instead allowing access to resources during task-taking to reduce the scope for rote learning. Others are in favour of keeping the preparation time but want to be able to give feedback to students, so the time is educationally more productive. A number of teachers suggested having shorter tasks and/or fewer tasks to reduce the amount of preparation time needed. A few teachers are in favour of AOs setting the date of tasks and/or the task itself to discourage absenteeism; others do not like this option because it removes the scope for centre-designed options.

# Introduction

# Introduction

## Background and aims of the research

This research – an in-depth review of Controlled Assessment (CA) in Modern Foreign Language (MFL) GCSEs – follows on from a broader evaluation of Controlled Assessment in GCSEs conducted in 2011.

The original evaluation covered a range of subjects, and aimed to investigate teachers' views and experiences of Controlled Assessment after its first two years of operation. The subjects covered were: Business, Design Technology, English, English Language, English Literature, French, Geography, History and ICT. The findings from this piece of research gave a strong indication that French teachers had particular issues in relation to CA that differed from the broadly logistical issues reflected by teachers of other subjects covered: this finding was consistent from the telephone survey of 800 teachers of these nine subjects, depth interviews with MFL and other teachers and stakeholders, and the concerns raised by various stakeholders prior to the project.

Ofqual, working on behalf of the three regulators, commissioned Ipsos MORI, working with Bridget Smith, a language teaching specialist, to explore the issues experienced by MFL teachers, and to identify how any problems might be mitigated.

This report is based on 35 interviews and four focus groups with MFL teachers and five interviews with representatives from each of the awarding organisations (AOs).

Please note that although only French was covered in the main survey, given that the requirements for French, German and Spanish are the same, we have assumed that the findings relating to French also apply to German and Spanish and more widely to other languages with CA. This assumption is also supported by comments from stakeholders and teachers throughout the research undertaken.

## Methodology

This research consisted of qualitative depth interviews and focus groups with teachers of MFL and depth interviews with representatives from each of the five awarding organisations (AOs) offering GCSEs in MFL.

### Depth interviews with MFL teachers

Thirty five depth interviews were conducted in November/December 2011. Interviews were administered over the telephone, with each one lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted using a discussion guide, which was drawn up by Ipsos MORI and Bridget Smith, in consultation with the three regulators. A copy of the discussion guide can be found in the appendix.

In order to capture opinions from a range of MFL teachers, quotas were set on a number of factors, including:

- AO used at teacher's centre
- How well or poorly the teacher thinks their AO manages Controlled Assessment
- Whether the teacher has difficulties meeting the requirements of Controlled Assessment

Table 1 shows the profile of completed interviews achieved with MFL teachers by AO.

| Table 1 Profile of completed interviews with MFL teachers |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| AO  | Number of interviews achieved |
| AQA   | 6                             |
| CCEA  | 11 <sup>1</sup>               |
| Edexcel   | 6                             |
| OCR   | 6                             |
| WJEC  | 6                             |

Teachers were recruited by a specialist recruiter. The majority of MFL teachers interviewed were recruited from the main quantitative survey evaluating Controlled Assessment completed in June and July 2011. Respondents who said they were willing to be re-contacted for further research formed the sample for this qualitative research, which allowed the recruitment of teachers with a range of views about Controlled Assessment (both positive and negative). Due to the limited number of MFL teachers from centres using CCEA who completed the quantitative survey in June/July 2011, a small number of additional teachers using CCEA were provided directly from the regulators. As these teachers had not completed the main Controlled Assessment evaluation survey, no information was held about their views towards Controlled Assessment. A short screener questionnaire was therefore administered to collect this information and ensure we spoke to teachers with a range of views about CA.

No incentives were given to participants at this stage in the research.

### Focus groups with MFL teachers

Four focus groups were carried out with MFL teachers in January and February 2012. The location of the focus groups were as follows:

- Belfast
- Cardiff
- London
- Manchester.

Each focus group lasted around 90 minutes, and was conducted using a discussion guide, which was drawn up by Ipsos MORI and Bridget Smith, in consultation with the three regulators. A copy of the discussion guide can be found in the appendix.

Reflecting the geographical variation in uptake of the different AOs, the focus group in Belfast consisted only of teachers using the CCEA specification, whilst the group in Cardiff was exclusively teachers using the WJEC specification. To compensate for this, the London and Manchester groups did not include teachers using either of these specifications, and were instead intended to have teachers using AQA, Edexcel and OCR.

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<sup>1</sup> In the quantitative survey conducted in summer 2011, interviews with teachers using the CCEA specification fell slightly short of target. To compensate for this, additional qualitative interviews with these teachers were conducted to ensure that their views were fully expressed in this research.

Loose quotas were set on how easy or difficult it has been for the teacher's centre to implement CA. This was done to capture a range of views of CA, and to enable the project team to understand whether there are any differences in approach and experience that might make some teachers more positive.

A degree of flexibility was needed in the implementation of the quotas, in particular in Belfast, where it was particularly difficult to find participants who found it easy to implement. Table 2 shows the breakdown of participants by views of CA.

| <b>Location</b> | <b>Number of participants who found CA easy to implement</b> | <b>Number of participants who found CA neither easy nor difficult to implement</b> | <b>Number of participants who found CA difficult to implement</b> |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| Belfast         | 1  | 0  | 6   |
| Cardiff         | 3  | 1  | 4   |
| London          | 3  | 1  | 2   |
| Manchester      | 5  | 0  | 2   |

It was found that having mixed views in the groups, wherever possible, was helpful as it provided balance to the views expressed and also allowed teachers to compare practices and the effect that these have on how manageable they feel that CA is.

Teachers were recruited by a specialist recruiter. As for the teacher depth interviews, some of the sample was drawn from the quantitative evaluation of CA. However, there was insufficient sample for all the teachers to be drawn from this and therefore some teachers were recruited through their centre. As was the case for the depth interview recruitment, where teachers had not completed the main Controlled Assessment evaluation survey a short screener questionnaire was administered.

Eight attendees were recruited for each group, in the expectation that six would attend. Table 3 shows the final number of attendees at each group.

| <b>Location</b> | <b>Number of participants</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Belfast         | 7                             |
| Cardiff         | 8                             |
| London          | 6                             |
| Manchester      | 7                             |

Focus group participants in London were given a £95 incentive. Participants in the Manchester, Belfast and Cardiff groups received £75. The difference in the size of the incentives reflects the relative difficulty of recruiting teachers for research in the different areas.

### **Depth interviews with AO representatives**

Five depth interviews with representatives of each of the AOs were conducted in November and December 2011. All interviews were administered over the telephone with each one lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted using a discussion guide, which was drawn up by Ipsos MORI and Bridget Smith, in consultation with the three regulators. A copy of the discussion guide can be found in the appendix.

AOs provided the details of the most appropriate individuals to be included in the research. A specialist recruiter scheduled the interviews.

No incentives were given to the AO representatives.

### **Limitations of the research and interpretation of the results**

This research was designed to look at issues with the application of CA to MFL. It does not address issues that may exist with any individual specifications.

It should be noted that this report is based on qualitative research. It is based on the views of a selected sample of teachers and not a large, randomly selected sample. It is therefore not a quantitatively representative view of MFL teachers, but is reflective of the type of views held by MFL teachers towards Controlled Assessment.

All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and the majority were transcribed. Where interviews were not transcribed, the interviewing team took substantive notes during the interview itself. The team held three analysis sessions; one part-way through the depth interviews discussing the main findings of the interviews to-date, and to assess whether the discussion guide required any amendments; and a second one once all telephone interviews had been completed. A third analysis session took place after all the focus groups had been completed.

# Implementation of CA

# Implementation of CA

This chapter looks at the implementation of the three stages of CA in MFL (task setting, task taking and task marking) in order to determine what challenges are being posed at each stage. It will also look at views of the consistency with which CA is being implemented in different centres.

## Task setting

Of the three stages of CA, task setting appears to be the least problematic. Teachers say that it does not cause them any serious problems and, in fact, that they find it relatively easy. In part this seems to be because, for those teachers who did coursework under the legacy specifications, the process of task setting for CA is not very different. Furthermore, being able to use or adapt AO tasks also makes the process easier for some teachers.

*I find setting the task easy...it's pretty much the same [as coursework].*

Teacher, Depth Interview

There was some variety in teachers' approaches to task setting. A number of teachers say that they set their own tasks, and these teachers are very positive about their ability to do this. They say that designing their own tasks allows them to tailor the assessment to their scheme of work, and means that they can set tasks that are interesting for their students and that are in keeping with their ability and interests.

*The one good thing is that because we're with Edexcel we can do this Centre Devised Option. And we do like that because that means with a good group, or actually with any group, you can do what you want...You can do a film, a period of history, a book, all of these things.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, it should be noted that setting tasks for students is also seen by both teachers and AO representatives as requiring a degree of confidence and experience that not all teachers may have. Furthermore, for one teacher the ability to set their own tasks for students, whilst welcome, is also stressful because of the sense of responsibility they feel for their students and the importance of getting it right.

*They [are not creating their own tasks] because they may have been successful at teaching the legacy specification...so they are reluctant to make a departure from that without a lot of necessary guidance. It's a lack of confidence, and it would be seen as a risk for them.*

AO representative

Those teachers who use AO-provided tasks say that they do this because it is easier and less time-consuming for them. Some teachers feel that CA is in general very time-consuming and are, therefore, reluctant to undertake something that may increase this, particularly when a straightforward solution is available.

*I try to stick to [the AO tasks] just to be on the safe side...it's easier.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

A second variation in approach to task setting relates to whether or not teachers adapt tasks to meet the needs of different students with different levels of ability. Once again, there is a fairly even split between those teachers we spoke to who do adapt tasks and those who do not. Importantly, a key factor in this appears to be whether or not departments set their students by ability, with differentiating tasks easier in those schools that do. Those teachers who do not adapt tasks for students of different abilities offer a number of reasons for this, including that they do not have students with a wide range of abilities, they feel they can accommodate all abilities within one task, and adapting tasks would involve too much additional work.

*The French grouping is streamed by ability so we can [adapt tasks]... We find the presentation works better for the lower ability groups and you can gear more complex topics to the more able groups. The difficulty is where you have Spanish and German and they are mixed ability classes... We wouldn't give individualised tasks to them; it works better for teaching purposes if they are all doing the same tasks.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

*I wouldn't [adapt tasks]. If a good task is set it allows the weaker pupils to manage and it allows the better pupils to show what they can do... It's complicated enough for us and it's better if we all do the same task... We're trying to keep it as simple as possible.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

## Task taking

Task taking can be seen to consist of two phases: the formal preparation time once the task has been set and the assessments themselves. Whilst some teachers see this process as being fairly smooth, many experience a variety of difficulties. These are influenced by a number of factors, including class size, the way in which lessons are timetabled in the teacher's centre, the legacy specification that they used and their perception of their students' diligence.

Teachers often conceptualise the task preparation as including the teaching time leading up to the point where the task is set. Typically, teachers spend a significant amount of time covering a topic before setting and administering a controlled assessment. Indeed, they often say that they spend more time teaching topics where there will be a controlled assessment at the end as they want to ensure that their students perform as well as possible. A major concern that teachers have about CA is that they feel that teaching and learning is focused more heavily on the language required for the topics on which they will base the controlled assessments. Teachers feel that teaching and learning is narrowed because of teachers' and students' awareness that a controlled assessment on the topic is planned; the effect is that teachers concentrate on particular structures and vocabulary that will enable their students to gain the highest marks, and spend less time on topics or related language that are not needed for controlled assessments. Students learn particular phrases and grammar needed immediately for upcoming assessments, rather than learning structures and vocabulary more generally. We discuss this further in the section on 'The Impact of CA', below, but it is important to note that CA is seen to impact on teaching substantially, and that preparation is seen to go well beyond the one to two weeks of formal preparation time allowed for tasks. It is also important to note that, whilst these behaviours are not in the *requirements* of CA, they are also seen by teachers to be a direct consequence of the way that CA is set up. Given the 60% weighting CA carries, many

teachers feel they have no choice but to behave in this way, despite their awareness that it is not best practice, in order to ensure that their students perform to the best of their ability and secure the highest mark that they are able to at the end of the GCSE course.

#### *Formal preparation time for CA*

Whilst there is no consensus on whether or not the amount of preparation time for speaking and writing is appropriate, with some teachers saying that it is too long and others feeling that it is too short, a large majority of teachers say that they do not spend the full time in class preparing, either for the speaking or the writing. Rather, the time is split between class and home. Indeed, the change in the specifications by some AOs to allow them to do this is seen by some teachers as a change for the better.

*CCEA have changed it this year and they are allowed to do it in school and at home and that definitely works better. The fact that CCEA have done this with regard to the writing has taken a big pressure off us, because, well, you're essentially gaining back two weeks of teaching.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

The most common reason offered for splitting time in this way is that teachers cannot afford to spend the full amount of time in class on the preparation of four assessments when they have the rest of the specification to teach. Those teachers who feel that preparation time is not educationally productive, given the limitations on the feedback that they can give to their students, are particularly inclined to say this.

*In class we will give about three hours and then they use the rest themselves... there's not six hours to give over to...preparation of a task*

Teacher, Depth Interview

A handful of teachers we spoke to say that they feel able to allow their students to spend a considerable (or in one case all) of the preparation time at home because they are confident that the students are motivated and will do the work. Conversely, a couple of teachers with what they see as less motivated students say that they feel compelled to spend the bulk of the preparation time (though not all) in class to ensure that their students produce something at the end of the process.

*I think the maximum we've ever used was two hours of classroom time for preparation... But that's probably because we're very fortunate, because our kids on the whole are pretty well-motivated so we know that if we don't use the lesson time, they're going to do it at home*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Whilst teachers are, by and large, pleased that students can prepare for their assessments at home, several did comment that this makes it impossible for them to be sure that students have not received any outside help, or that they are not spending more than the allotted amount of time on them. This was a view that also emerged in the focus groups. Given that one of the aims of CA was to reduce concerns about plagiarism that were seen to undermine the credibility of coursework, a small number of teachers say that this challenges the reasoning for the new approach. This was especially the case for teachers who had previously undertaken the terminal exam, perhaps because the issue of plagiarism was less of a concern for them previously and they are therefore experiencing what is, for them, a new problem.

*We can't monitor what they do at home; so it seems a little bit silly that OCR have said six hours when we cannot monitor that at all; we're trusting the students to be honest which some might be but equally some won't be at all.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

*[OCR] said they can take their stuff home, and...[they might be] getting someone else to write their stuff for them, then they'll learn it off by heart...But because they're not with me I cannot prove that so I have to take their word for it. And they might be lying through their back teeth to me or they might be telling me the truth, I just don't know.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

It also emerged in the focus groups that there is considerable uncertainty amongst teachers about what can and can't be done at home, including what can be taken into and out of the classroom during the formal preparation period. Teachers felt that there was a certain vagueness and inconsistency of guidance relating to this and practice varied across centres and across awarding organisations.

*It's very confusing. Are they allowed to carry on working at home or shouldn't they?*

Teacher, Focus Group, Manchester

Just a very small minority of teachers say that all of the preparation for CA is done in class, on the grounds that this is a requirement of the AO rules.

#### *Approaches to taking the assessments*

When it comes to taking the assessments themselves, teachers describe very different approaches for the speaking and the writing.

For the speaking assessments, some teachers say that they go off-timetable for the day, whilst cover is provided for them, and students come out of classes to do their assessments. These teachers say that this is the most efficient approach to conducting the assessments, and that it avoids spending large amounts of class time on them (which would make the process too time-consuming for those with large classes). It is also seen to make recording the tasks more reliable and straightforward. In addition, conducting assessments out of class is also seen to be preferable as teachers feel that students would be uncomfortable being assessed in front of their peers and would perform less well. However, it should be noted that this approach is reliant both on centres being willing to pay for cover, and also on the goodwill of other teachers to release students from lessons.

*What the Exam Board thinks we're all doing, is examining them in our lessons as part of our day-to-day lessons. I don't do that, because it's ridiculous. I am not going to have 14 students sit in silence, whilst one person actually speaks in front of the whole class. I don't do that because it's unfair.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

*We do rely on the goodwill of other teachers as we do bring them out of their lessons to come and do their speaking task.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

A less widely reported approach is to conduct the speaking assessments in class time, although the assessments themselves are still usually conducted in a separate room. This approach is more common amongst teachers with smaller class sizes, for whom the time and management implications are less pronounced. One teacher who does speaking assessments in this way says that the process would be made much easier for them if their school permitted them to go off timetable. A number of teachers were not happy about the extra time they had to spend outside normal teaching time conducting speaking assessments. However, one teacher in a focus group was happy to conduct the speaking assessments in class while other students worked independently and, contrary to most other teachers' opinions, did not feel that there was an issue with recording quality.

A very small number of teachers feel that they cannot do speaking assessments in class time, but neither can they go off timetable for the day; these teachers say that they conduct CA speaking assessments outside regular school hours, during lunchtime or during study leave. One teacher in a focus group said she conducts some speaking assessments without recording them, which is permitted, however no other teachers we spoke to during the course of this research feel sufficiently confident to mark on the spot without re-listening to the evidence.

A distinguishing feature of CA in MFL is that it offers teachers the opportunity to set group tasks for the speaking assessment, where this is allowed under AO specifications. In theory, this could reduce some of the logistical challenges of organising one-to-one speaking assessments. However, no teachers, either in the depth interviews or the focus groups, said that they have done this, with many stating that they would not consider such an approach. Similarly, AO representatives say that they have not seen examples of teachers adopting this new approach to speaking.

There are a number of reasons why teachers say that they do not do group tasks. There is a feeling that such tasks would be hard to assess, due to the requirement that each student has to speak for a certain amount of time during the assessment. Teachers also say that they are concerned that one student would dominate in any such assessment and that this would undermine other students' chances of doing well. Another concern is that students would be too nervous undertaking such a task in front of their peers and this would, once again, cause them to under-perform. Teachers also have logistical concerns about the quality of recording in classroom sessions, and the impact of background noise, as well as the ability of external examiners to differentiate between the students who were speaking.

*We've definitely not headed down this road where the students kind of work together and record something between the two of them or in a small group with a view to having that done as a Controlled Assessment, because to me that seems very difficult to sort of assess in practice who has done what and what grade you would give.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

As with the creation of new tasks, AO representatives attribute the reluctance of teachers to do group tasks to a lack of confidence, as well as to the logistical problems described by teachers in conducting the assessments.

*It's unfamiliarity with the specification. I think...teachers wanted to play safe...On the other hand, they do find controlled assessment speaking quite time consuming and logistically quite a challenge to fit it in. So, it may be that they feel that they've got enough on without attempting more ambitious task types.*

AO representative

In contrast to the approach for the speaking assessments, almost all teachers say that they conduct the writing assessments in normal lesson time. Whilst this appears to work quite

well in most instances, a small number of teachers say that they only have 35 or 45 minute lessons. In these circumstances, conducting hour-long writing assessments becomes far more complicated as teachers have to negotiate their students' release from other classes to complete the assessments. Indeed, to avoid this, a few of these teachers say that they only give their students 45 minutes to complete the task, rather than the full hour.

*We never have one hour lessons....so for the write-up I have to ask another department to release them. It's very complicated.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

A small minority of teachers say that they feel conducting writing assessments in class time undermines their seriousness. As a result of this, and to avoid interruptions, one teacher says that her centre conducts their writing assessments at an examination centre.

In addition to the implications of where and how the speaking and writing assessments are conducted, teachers also raised broader issues relating to the organisational burden of CA, the amount of time that the assessments themselves are taking up and the problems caused by absent students.<sup>2</sup> These concerns were raised by a relatively small number of teachers in the depth interviews, and those that did raise them tend to be teachers in large schools with big GCSE MFL cohorts.

However, the issue of absent students was more prominent in the focus groups. In the groups, teachers expressed concern that diligent students who are legitimately absent on the day of the assessment, for example due to illness, are being penalised by the fact that they are not able to take the assessment once they have returned to school, and that they instead have to prepare a totally new assessment. This process also creates a large amount of additional work, and a fresh logistical burden, for teachers. However, the focus group discussions highlighted that the definition of what constitutes a new assessment varies across awarding organisations and is not always understood consistently by teachers. For example, in some cases, repeating the same task but changing one bullet is seen as acceptable, one teacher reported she had heard you '*just have to tweak*' the task and another had had it confirmed by her AO that they could '*reword that same task and then offer it to them again*'. For at least one awarding organisation, however, the task must be completely different. There was also concern in the groups that because students know that CA is a '*moveable feast*', they do not take it seriously and cause considerable complications by failing to attend school on the day of the assessment.

*If a student is off within that six-week period, you're supposed to set them a different task. Now I've got a student this year who is disabled and she is rarely in for any longer than a two-week period because she always has to have visits to the hospital...Am I supposed to set her a different task? I think it's a bit discriminatory.*

Teacher, Focus Group, Manchester

A key change from the legacy specifications is that CA permits students to do more than the two speaking and two writing assessments that are submitted to the AOs. In practice, most teachers say that they do two writing and two speaking assessments. For these teachers, the time demands of CA are such that they say they cannot do more than this. Indeed, in the focus groups it was suggested that doing multiple tasks is so time-consuming that the number of tasks should be reduced. Teachers who previously used CCEA specifications are particularly likely to say that they find conducting assessments too time consuming to do more than two speaking and two writing; it seems likely that this is because under the legacy

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<sup>2</sup> These are issues that were found in the main survey evaluation conducted in the summer of 2011 to be of concern to other subject teachers too.

specification all CCEA candidates did terminal exams, and the shift to CA is therefore a bigger change for these teachers.

*I would be at pains to decide when we could fit [additional assessments] in. It's been difficult enough getting the four tasks sorted without putting in more than that...It would mean that you'd not have the teaching time to prepare adequately for listening and reading.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Despite this, some teachers are doing more than the minimum four assessments. Indeed, one teacher says that they do as many as five speaking assessments. These teachers say that additional assessments, whether in writing, speaking or both, depending on the needs of their students, are helpful because they provide practice and reassurance to students. It should be noted that in some, though not all cases, the teachers who do this are those with smaller class sizes, for whom CA poses fewer logistical challenges.

*Students appreciate [doing additional tasks]; particularly with the speaking because they're not necessarily prepared and experienced in speaking at length, so perhaps the first one or two are a bit iffy and could be used as a practice, you know and getting used to dealing with that situation.*

Teacher, Interview

CA was intended to give teachers the freedom to organise assessments at a time that suits them and their students. In practice, many teachers say that they do have this flexibility (and some who did coursework under the legacy specification say that this was also the case previously). However, other teachers say that this theoretical freedom is constrained by the need to coordinate CA within the school as a whole in order to avoid clashes with other subjects. Another constraint, mentioned above, is the need to negotiate time from other subjects' lessons to complete the hour writing assessment where schools do not have double periods.

*We have total freedom. But that was also the case with coursework.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

*There isn't a huge amount of freedom... I have to sit down with the whole calendar of events throughout the year and by the time I do that and try to figure out, when we can actually do a task and how we can actually get something taught in between times, that time is very tight.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

The scope for choosing the timing of CA means that teachers can run the assessments at any point during the GCSE course. In practice, a number of teachers feel that it is better to run the assessments in Year 11. This is largely because they think that their students accumulate the skills that they need to do well in the assessments over time, and would not therefore be ready in Year 10. It is also to enable students to build up confidence in their ability, particularly in the case of speaking, which teachers feel students are especially nervous about. The trade-off of this approach is that it can result in additional time pressures in Year 11, whilst also creating a period of 'continual assessment' which places an undue burden on students.

*[Conducting CA in] Year 10 just seems nonsense, because how can they possibly be as good in Year 10 as they are in Year 11? I mean they might be as good at learning rote fashion a chunk of text but they're not going to be able to operate spontaneously as well.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, some teachers do run assessments in Year 10 and, whilst a small number say that this can be challenging for less able students, or that their marks are less good in Year 10, these teachers do, on the whole, feel that this approach works. These teachers say that doing assessments in Year 10 can give students the opportunity to repeat the assessments if they underperform, even though they might not intend to do additional assessments at the start of the course. Alternatively, teachers say that they treat assessments in Year 10 as practices (it is notable that many of these teachers also say that they do more than the minimum number of assessments), which give students the opportunity to see what the required standard is and get used to controlled conditions.

*It shows them now what they've got to do ready for the next speaking assessment. It's also getting them used to performing in exam conditions. It is good practice.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Undertaking assessments in Year 10 is also seen by a small number of teachers to enable them to 'get [CA] out of the way' more quickly, enabling them to focus on the rest of the course, which may otherwise be subsumed by the demands of CA.

### *Planning notes*

In general, teachers are relatively satisfied with the planning notes that students are allowed to take into their assessments. Teachers say that they can provide reassurance or act as useful prompts to those students who have put the work in and are able to use them properly. To ensure that this is the case, many teachers say that they provide guidance to their students on how best to use them, such as which kinds of words might be most helpful and what exactly they are allowed to write on them.

*I think that's really helpful because they usually put their participles or they put structure words down and that seems to help them sort of think it out.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, a number of teachers say that they feel that the planning notes can be less useful for their less able students, who do not fully understand how best to use them and can sometimes get confused about what exactly they are allowed to put on them. For example, one teacher using the AQA specification says that their students struggle to understand that they are not permitted to include conjugated verbs in their notes.<sup>3</sup>

Both teachers and AO representatives are confident that the planning notes are being used as they were intended to be. Teachers say that they are very strict on what can be included, and that they check the planning notes before assessments start to ensure that they have been completed correctly.

## **Task marking**

### *Marking the speaking*

One notable difference between the legacy specifications and CA is the requirement that teachers mark the speaking assessment themselves. AO representatives say that, prior to implementation, they were concerned that this would cause problems and that teachers would not be happy about doing it.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that a key difference in the planning notes between specifications is whether or not candidates are permitted to include conjugated verbs. The CCEA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC specifications permit this, whilst the AQA specification does not.

*We thought that they wouldn't like the fact that they had to mark speaking tasks, we anticipated that.*

AO representative

In practice, some teachers are happy with marking the speaking, and say that they do not find it particularly difficult. However, this group is in the minority, and it is notable that a few of these teachers have previous experience of marking speaking exams, for example as examiners working for an AO.

More commonly, AO representatives' fears appear to have been well-founded, as marking the speaking is unpopular. The view was expressed in both the depth interviews and the groups that marking the speaking has added to teachers' workload and is both difficult and time consuming, because of the importance of getting it right and the need to follow specifications that some teachers find confusing. Indeed, many teachers called for the AOs to mark the speaking.

*We have to mark all of the orals, and that is really tough...They've literally added to our workload by giving us the speaking to mark, and then we've obviously got to have moderation meetings about that, so that's another evening at the end of school.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Marking the speaking is taking a large amount of time for many teachers partly because they are not marking during the speaking assessment itself, as was intended. Teachers say that doing this means that they cannot focus on the assessment properly, whilst a small number feel that being able to see when their student is struggling affects their judgement and they can give a more impartial mark when listening back to the recording later. For a small number of teachers, the time demands of marking are made worse by the need to upload the speaking assessments, which they say can be difficult and take some time.

*I'm now expected to conduct the speaking exam, follow the conversation, time it, record it, and mark it. And truthfully I'm not able to mark it accurately as I go along. I try to band it as I go along, so it means then I have to go home in the evenings or whatever and mark it all over again.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

AO representatives feel that the burden of marking the speaking has contributed to CA's unpopularity with MFL teachers. However, if teachers are finding marking the speaking burdensome, many of them also acknowledge that it will get better as they get used to it and become more confident. In this context, having their marks accepted by the AOs can be a helpful confidence boost. Indeed, one AO representative said that, whilst the requirement that teachers mark the speaking is unpopular, teachers are also getting it right, with 80% of marks submitted being accepted.

### *Marking the writing*

Under CA, the marking of the writing assessments is done externally. Many teachers are positive about this, at least in principle, as they feel that it removes some of the burden from them, particularly given the requirement that they mark the speaking. In addition, a small number of teachers say that marking the writing externally means that there is greater consistency.

*I mean, given we were having to mark the speaking we were happy enough that CCEA were marking the writing.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, for some teachers, any theoretical time saving brought about by external marking is negated by the fact that, despite the requirements of CA, they are, in practice, marking pieces internally regardless. There are two main reasons for doing this: firstly, it enables teachers to give students feedback on their work to help them improve; secondly, where teachers are doing more than two writing assessments it enables them to select the best two to send off to their AO.

*It's a good thing to – obviously – mark them and be able to talk to students about; "At the moment you're on this grade."*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, whilst it is common for teachers to review their students' work, some are also less confident about allocating a mark, in part because of their concern that the exam board might award a different mark. This is a problem because teachers feel that their reluctance to give marks can be demoralising for students, who want feedback.

This tendency amongst many teachers to mark their students' writing assessments may be at the root of another common comment about the marking: a number of teachers in both the depth interviews and the groups have serious concerns about the way in which the AOs are marking the writing assessments, and about the mark schemes, which many teachers feel are lacking in clarity. Many teachers previously marked their students' coursework and were confident in this process and the application of the assessment criteria. Now they set and prepare candidates for CA writing, but then have no involvement in its assessment.

There are a range of concerns in relation to the assessment of writing. Some teachers perceive, contrary to the views discussed above, that there is a lack of consistency in the way assessments are being marked. Others feel that examiners are getting their students' rank order wrong, with much less able students gaining better marks than those who teachers expect to perform best. Another concern is that examiners are marking too harshly or are simply getting it wrong; in some cases, teachers have seen their students receive marks one or two grades lower than they expected based on their own assessment of the work they produced under CA. Finally, a concern emerged in the focus groups that different standards are being applied to different languages within the same awarding organisation, with some appearing to be marked more harshly than others. Teachers feel that these perceived discrepancies in marking are often inexplicable; in one case a centre had set the same written task for French, German and Spanish GCSE and marked and moderated them all internally prior to sending them away. Despite being marked and moderated by the same teachers, the centre found that their French and German marks were in line with what they expected, whilst their Spanish assessments were awarded much lower marks, which in some cases affected the outcome by as much as two grades. Some teachers feel that the uncertainty caused by this confusion is putting students off studying languages.

*We weren't very happy with the marking of the writing. We had some very good pupils for example getting less than some pupils in the second group so that was a bit odd. So I couldn't say it's working very well.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

*I think it's marked very hard and the reason I think that is because an awful lot of children are able to produce very, very good French because they're learning things off by heart. But then children are getting pulled up on things which I don't think are [fair].*

Dissatisfaction with the standard of external marking is, in some cases, exacerbated by a perceived lack of feedback provided by AOs, which some teachers say exam boards justify on the grounds that CA is marked externally, like an exam. Even where teachers have not challenged marks, they feel that the lack of detailed feedback is unhelpful in pedagogical terms as they cannot tell their students which areas they need to improve. Where teachers are unhappy with marking this problem is compounded and is the cause of considerable frustration. This frustration is exacerbated since, as stated above, many teachers were used to marking writing coursework and receiving feedback.

*We don't get feedback, only a breakdown of the marks. And that doesn't tell you what pupils are doing wrong.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Concerns about marking culminate in comments made by many teachers that their students received poorer marks than they anticipated, particularly for the written assessments. It should be noted that this was not the case for all teachers – some say that their marks were as expected, or even better – but nevertheless for those teachers who feel that there were problems with marking, this has a negative impact, both on their opinion of CA, and on their confidence in their own abilities as teachers.

*[I was] positive, about CA...but now I just think the mark scheme doesn't fit or make any sense or is apparently useable. And the expectations are too high.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

It should be noted that, despite the widespread concern about the marking of the written assessments in the teacher interviews, this did not emerge as a concern in the interviews with AO representatives. One AO is planning to run training sessions this year for teachers whose speaking marks had been changed by the AO moderators, to give them a better understanding of how the mark scheme works.

## Consistency of implementation

In the main survey that preceded this piece of research into MFL one issue to emerge relates to teachers' concerns that the same AO requirements are being implemented differently in different centres, meaning that those teachers who are interpreting the AO rules more strictly are inadvertently disadvantaging their own students.

These concerns remain in this piece of research, albeit to a lesser extent. Several teachers say that they can understand how the pressure on teachers to achieve good results could lead them to give too much help to their own students. In addition, teachers say that under CA so much is down to centres that it leaves greater scope for the misinterpretation (deliberate or otherwise) of the requirements. In the focus groups, this issue was perceived to be exacerbated by the language used by the AOs in the specifications. Participants said that use of ambiguous language such as 'should' or 'may' left greater room for interpretation of the requirements.

In the depth interviews, concerns about implementation centred on the issue of time, and how guidance relating to the amount of time that students should have to prepare for CA is interpreted. For example, one teacher says that they have heard of teachers giving their

students the task title before half term, thereby securing an extra week for preparation. It should be noted that some teachers acknowledge that concerns about consistency of implementation are not unique to CA and would have applied equally to coursework.

*There's a lot of talk of how different schools are abusing the system as it is at the moment. So that would be a real concern for us because from our own professional point of view we would want to do everything right and have it fair and stick to the rules, but you know that means that in the long run your own candidates are being disadvantaged because other schools are not adhering to rules that they don't necessarily see the value in.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Concerns about implementation are not universal, however, and a number of teachers say that they are now less concerned about this than they were previously.

AO representatives are aware that there is some concern about the implementation of CA. However, they do not have a clear idea of what could be done to counteract this, simply saying that where there is evidence of discrepancies they conduct investigations, or emphasising the importance of training and clear guidance.

#### **AO findings**

AO representatives are aware of the logistical problems reported with CA in some schools, and in particular concerns about the amount of time it is taking.

AO representatives say that teachers are often not taking the opportunities to create their own tasks, or to undertake group tasks. They feel this is because of a lack of confidence amongst teachers.

Whilst AO representatives are aware that internal marking of the speaking is not a popular change, the issue of perceived problems with the marking of the writing did not arise in AO interviews.

AO representatives are satisfied with the planning notes and how they are working. No representatives say that there are any plans to amend these in the near future.

# Impact of CA

# Impact of CA

## Impact on teaching and learning

Teachers were asked to consider whether the introduction of CA has any impact on teaching and learning in MFL. Most teachers in both the focus groups and the depth interviews believe that CA has a negative impact on their ability to teach a range of language skills in depth and they express considerable doubt about the educational value of CA. Where teachers are negative about CA, these concerns about its educational impact often seem to be the most important factor. It is also notable that the minority of teachers who feel that CA has had no impact, or even a positive impact on teaching and learning, are also considerably more positive about CA as a whole.

It should be noted that the perceived negative impact of CA on teaching and learning often arises as a result of teacher behaviour that is not a requirement of CA (for example, focussing on CA topics to the detriment of students' wider linguistic education). However, teachers themselves feel that that the weighting of CA, and the pressure of the assessments mean that they have no choice but to behave in this way in order to enable their students to achieve the best marks possible. Some of the adverse impacts of CA on teaching and learning are unintended consequences of the way the assessments are currently structured.

Concerns about the educational impact of CA operate on a number of levels. Many teachers we spoke to say CA narrows the curriculum in key stage 4 as teachers report that they focus on the topics identified for assessment at the expense of the others; students' language abilities therefore suffer as teachers 'teach to the test'. One teacher even commented that they are nervous about digressing into areas that are not directly related to forthcoming assessment. Many also say that CA limits the range of grammar and structures that they teach. Once again, this is the result of teaching to the test; teachers concentrate on the grammar and structures required for each assessment. They are focusing on teaching 'stock phrases' and particular structures they believe will help their students gain higher marks. These observations apply equally to the impact of CA in writing and in speaking, and are seen to be exacerbated by the amount of time that CA is seen to take up.

Most teachers also say that CA is having a negative impact on their students' learning and the development of their language skills. Their main concern, and it is a concern that was expressed repeatedly in interviews, is that CA is seen to promote rote learning. This is a concern expressed by teachers using all AOs, including those with a broadly positive attitude towards their AO. Teachers feel that rote learning is the inevitable consequence of an assessment process where students know the task that they will do in advance of sitting the assessment itself, and have to produce their best work within a limited time frame. In this context, teachers say that students, regardless of the instructions given by their teachers, will seek to rote learn in order to maximise their chances of doing well. It was suggested that it would be a better educational experience to let students write their final piece, with access to resources under supervision, but reduced preparation time. Although this tendency to rote learn is seen to be particularly strong for CA in writing, it is also seen to operate at the expense of more general fluency and range in speaking. The effectiveness of rote learning for students is questionable for weaker students, who teachers say often do not understand the mechanisms of the language sufficiently, and who also do not have the capacity to rote learn large chunks of text.

*You just ask them to go away and learn 200 words of French and write it out again. So it's not really doing what its designed to, it's not testing their ability to write in French, its testing their ability to learn French.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

*If you tell someone you want to speak about holidays and you've taught them how to do it previously they're bound to...go and learn it. It is a memory test.*

Teacher, Focus Group, Cardiff

*If they think that 16 year olds are going to go in and write this spontaneously having just done a bit of research, it's not going to happen. They want to do well and they want to feel secure with this and then they're going to learn it. They really are.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, it should also be noted that a small number of teachers say that, whilst rote learning means that weaker students do not develop their language skills, CA also enables them to perform better in assessments as they do not have to operate spontaneously and know the areas they will be assessed on in advance.

Many teachers feel that their students learn what they need to for the assessment, but do not develop the skills to apply their language in other contexts. There is also a perception among the teachers interviewed that students have more limited knowledge in relation to the topics they cover. They have an in-depth knowledge of the vocabulary and structures for the topics chosen for CA and gaps in other areas.

*If I go through the perfect tense or the imperfect, they're not necessarily listening for the mechanics of that, they're listening for the sentences that they can use when talking about a past holiday, or key phrases they can learn. And because we've got quite bright students, they're just going to think of shortcuts and what they need to do to pass the exam.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

In a number of cases, this narrow coverage and learning for the test is seen to have particularly serious consequences for students who go on to study a modern foreign language at AS level. These teachers feel that as a consequence of spending less time on grammar and structures and only learning what they need for the CA tasks, students are ill-prepared for the demands of a level 3 course. A similar concern was expressed in one of the focus groups, in which teachers said that, as a result of CA, the 'gap' between GCSE and AS/A2 has become simply too big and that, in turn, this could have negative implications for the study of languages at university level.<sup>4</sup>

*We've got a really good set of GCSE results, but as we go through to AS, we've got grammar gaps, which are quite evident because they haven't learned the grammar behind the concept, they've just learned what they need to get through the controlled assessment.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

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<sup>4</sup> There was also some indication of this in the quantitative survey, in which 5% of French teachers spontaneously said that a drawback of CA is that students are less well-prepared for A-level, which is significantly higher than the average of 1% across all nine of the subjects covered by the research. See Ipsos MORI, *Evaluation of the Introduction of Controlled Assessment: Report on Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, October 2011.

In both the depth interviews and the focus groups, it was felt by some teachers that the focus on CA in speaking and writing has had a negative impact on students' listening and reading skills and that they now spend less time developing and practising these. One teacher commented that progression in languages is cumulative and that CA does not support teaching the skills together and makes teaching 'very bitty'. Some teachers believe that this focus on speaking and writing is a consequence of the 60% weighting of CA; teachers say that it is such a large part of the overall results that it is natural that they should prioritise it over the other skills which are worth less.

*I know that I am sacrificing reading and listening skills, because I am not doing as much of that. I am certainly not doing as much listening.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

The concerns detailed above about rote learning, teaching to the test, and the negative impact on reading and listening that the focus on CA is having are also shared to a certain extent by AO representatives.

It should be noted that these views were expressed by many of the teachers involved in the research and the AO representatives, but are not universal. A few teachers say that the introduction of CA has had no impact on their teaching; that they cover the same amount of language; and that CA can encourage a range of teaching. One teacher even feels they can encourage students to be more creative through CA. In terms of students' language skills, these teachers also feel that CA has either had no impact compared to previous specifications or actually supports the development of students' language skills. One teacher noted that their students are more confident in speaking because they know in advance what they will be talking about and another said that their students appreciate the less formal atmosphere. In one centre a teacher noted that students' standard of writing has improved as a result of CA because they are focusing more on the kind of language structures that will improve writing overall and not just for a single task. Interestingly, whilst there are certain similarities between these teachers, such as adopting an approach to the speaking assessments that involves assessing students outside the classroom, feeling confident in their understanding of the marking criteria for writing, and believing that their students benefit from CA (for example thinking that it is less 'scary' for them than the coursework/terminal exam approach), it does not appear that they, or their centre, is doing anything exceptional. In a few cases, teachers are taking advantage of being able to develop units of work and assessment tasks related to areas that they perceive their students will find more motivating, for example the study of a film or researching a celebrity.

*We feel that our language courses really prepare these girls well for citizenship because they are discussing and debating matters now at GCSE ... to do with healthy living, to do with fashion, to do with relationships within families....*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Teachers interviewed were asked whether the amount of feedback permitted by their awarding organisation had any impact on teaching and learning. The awarding organisations are quite specific about what constitutes permitted feedback and at least two have produced a pro-forma for this purpose for use during the CA preparation period. Most teachers give very little or no feedback to their students during the preparation period, and say that this is in keeping with their AO's specification. Where feedback is given, it is very general, for example advice that students check their verb endings. Again, this is seen to be in line with the specifications. There is some dissatisfaction with the feedback arrangements, which are

seen by some teachers to undermine learning. Several teachers are frustrated that they are not allowed to support their students even in a quite general way, in particular for speaking where they say it is hard to listen to incorrect pronunciation and not be able to say anything. These teachers feel that preparation for CA becomes a process of preparing incorrect language which is then reproduced for assessment.

In addition to this dissatisfaction, a degree of confusion emerged in the focus groups about what feedback is permitted during the preparation period. Teachers challenged each others' practices according to their interpretation of the specifications, whilst some expressed considerable concern about inadvertently contravening the requirements. It also appears that there has been some relaxation of the feedback requirements, but that not all teachers are aware of this or it has been expressed in meetings but not in written guidance.

*I only know that because of it verbally coming up in a meeting, but I don't think it's ever been written down anywhere.*

Teacher, Focus group, Cardiff

The feedback the teachers say they give following the assessment is varied but often quite limited. Many teachers said they give students a general idea of how they have performed, but not a mark as they realise the AO may award a different mark. Usually they give some feedback in order for students to make improvements next time, with one teacher going so far as to photocopy the writing in order for students to see where their mistakes are. Again many teachers feel overall that restrictions on the type of feedback is de-motivating and does not support learning. One teacher commented that '*Students need a dialogue and things explained to them*'. One teacher also feels that opportunities for feedback are more flexible in other subjects.

## The impact of CA on students

When asked about the impact of CA on their students, most teachers say that for both speaking and writing, it is very stressful. Several feel that, whilst speaking has always been particularly stressful, this has been exacerbated by the requirement that students complete at least two speaking assessments. They also say that the pressure to complete the writing task in one hour is very stressful, in particular for weaker students. One teacher commented that it '*always seems there is a test around the corner*' and others that their students feel that they are constantly being assessed. Several teachers also feel that having CA in all their other subjects adds to the overall pressure. Some teachers feel that CA has affected students' enjoyment of MFL and has taken the fun out of lessons, even to the extent of putting students off continuing their study post-GCSE.

*With the oral...there used to be just one oral which, would terrify the life out of every student, and now there are two and that's really ridiculous...they're tortured by that.*

Teacher, Focus Group, London

*[It is stressful]. I think it's because they're doing it in every subject, I think that they're constantly under pressure throughout Year 11 and Year 12 now<sup>5</sup>. They are constantly preparing for and doing controlled assessment tasks.*

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<sup>5</sup> Teacher was from Northern Ireland: Year 11 is the equivalent of the English Year 10, and Year 12 the equivalent of Year 11.

However it is also the case that some teachers say that their students find CA less stressful than the previous terminal examination for speaking because it is more manageable for them and they have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the process and the language required, with far less unpredictability than previously. For writing too, some teachers say that students are less stressed because they know what they are going to write about and they are able to prepare accordingly.

**AO findings**

Three of the awarding organisations support the view that CA has led to a narrowing of the coverage of the specification, and that there is widespread evidence of rote learning, particularly in relation to CA in writing, but also in speaking. However, although one AO representative suggested that increased teacher training might help address it, no AO representatives say that they are planning any actions to tackle these issues.

AO representatives say that teachers are questioning CA's educational value, and also say that it appears that listening and reading are receiving less emphasis.

However, one AO representative does believe that there are educational advantages to CA and that it is a good response to the Dearing review of languages.

# **Views on the mechanisms of CA**

# Views on the mechanisms of CA

## *Task Length*

Teachers are generally positive about the length of the speaking and writing tasks. In particular, several say that the new task length of four to six minutes is more appropriate than the old speaking exam as it is more manageable for students.

*Because [the speaking assessment] is only four to six minutes and they've only one task to do it's much more manageable for everybody. You can see the top band. You can see the whole range and it's much more practical from the teaching point of view.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, some teachers do have concerns in relation to both the most and the least able students. A small number feel that expecting weaker students to write for an hour is too much to ask, whilst others say that students are expected to speak for too long and relating to one context or task in the speaking assessments, with a small number saying that students would struggle to speak in this way in their own language. Conversely, other teachers say that the length of both tasks does not give the most able the opportunity to demonstrate their ability.

*I think about 200 words is good for the writing, although I think it's quite a big article for the weaker pupils. And I think that it might be better to be a little bit more flexible because there is a huge range of abilities out there in MFL, so 200 is quite a lot for the very weak ones but it's not enough for the very good ones.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

However, these opinions could be expressed about the length of any assessment, regardless of the format, and the overall opinion of teachers does seem to be that the lengths of the tasks are more or less correct.

## *Levels of control*

Teachers say that the levels of control during the assessments themselves are correct.

However, there is a sense amongst some teachers that the levels of control during the preparation time are too high. In particular, as noted previously, some teachers are frustrated at not being able to correct students' pronunciation during the preparation time for speaking, or by their inability to comment on the detail of their work for the writing assessment, problems that are seen to be a result of the AO specifications, which teachers say prevent them from doing these things. These teachers say that this is unhelpful from an educational perspective, as it means that students are simply learning their own mistakes. It should be noted that different AOs have different requirements relating to feedback during the preparation time, and, therefore, different points were raised depending on which AO an individual teacher uses.

*[During the preparation time] we're not allowed to record their speaking task or to record their answers that they've done, so how will they ever know how to correctly pronounce the things that they prepare?*

Teacher, Depth Interview

## Weighting

Some teachers feel that that the weighting of 60% given to CA is appropriate, and even beneficial, in that it accurately reflects the amount of work and effort that students put into their speaking and writing. However, many teachers are critical of it and feel that a return to equal weighting for the four skills would be preferable. This is a view that is broadly shared by the AO representatives.

The most common reason for dissatisfaction with the weighting of CA is the belief that the skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking are interdependent, and all four are needed to be proficient in a language. Both AO representatives and teachers say that, under the 60% weighting, listening and reading are being devalued, despite being as important as the productive skills.

*Educationally there is no rationale to move it to 60% and the danger is that a child who isn't as good in one of the productive skills, is now being penalised more than a child who is good at the productive skills. The great thing about languages before was if somebody was great at reading but not very good at speaking they could compensate whereas now there isn't that parity between the skills. We're effectively saying we value speaking and writing more than we value listening and reading.*

AO representative

A second concern about the weighting, which is related to that described above, is that it influences teacher behaviour in a way that is detrimental to students' learning; many teachers say that the weighting means that they focus excessively on CA, because it represents such a large part of the final mark and they are anxious that their students should perform well.

Finally, a small number of teachers also say that they feel that the current weighting penalises less able students. This is because they feel that the CA skills (speaking and writing) are thought to be more difficult for students than reading and listening. Less able students, they say, are no longer able to rely on these to boost their mark as they only represent 40%, a problem that would be compounded for these students where teachers are focussing on CA skills at the expense of reading and listening.

### AO findings

AO representatives are broadly satisfied with the levels of control, though one did suggest that it would be helpful if the levels of control were the same for writing and speaking, as the speaking assessments are currently being seen by teachers as harder.

Most AO representatives share teachers' concerns about the levels of weighting, saying that they would prefer a return to an equal weighting across all four skills.

# **AO specifications and guidance**

## AO specifications and guidance

The views of the AO specifications and guidance were very mixed: in the depth interviews many teachers said that they have no difficulties with them, but a large minority find them muddled and confusing. This confusion was particularly notable in the focus groups, where teachers who had been confident that they were following the requirements were challenged by others in the group who had interpreted them differently, leading to discussions about what is and is not permitted.

Areas in which teachers feel that there is a lack of clarity include the rules concerning the adaptation of tasks for different assessments; the amount of feedback that they are allowed to give; what students are able to take home whilst preparing for assessments; the mark scheme for both the speaking and the writing and the planning sheets. At least some of this confusion is a result of perceived ambiguities in the language used; for example, it is not always clear whether a given practice is mandatory or merely recommended, because of use of language such as 'may' or 'might'.

*I do think that again there's been some uncertainty with task setting about whether it's better to include your bullet points, and is it better to say 'you may include' or 'you must include'. I sensed there was a bit of ambivalence about that last year when we were contacting the Board. But then, it very clearly said in the exam report after this summer (June 2011) that it's much better to say 'you may include'. But, again, that's ambiguous isn't it?*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Any pre-existing confusion is also made worse by a widespread concern that additional information about the specification or changes to it are not communicated widely enough. Some teachers say that they were not informed of amendments that were issued mid-way through the year, or that they only discovered them 'by chance', for example when looking at the AO website. Similarly, there was criticism in the focus groups of the way in which information that is given out in training sessions or meetings is not shared more widely with those not able to attend on the grounds that this is unfair. For example, in the Cardiff group several teachers who had recently attended a meeting said that teachers can underline student errors during the preparation period, causing considerable discussion because those who had not attended were not aware of this and the teachers felt that it is not in any guidance and seems to go against the AO's own rules. Teachers do not feel that communicating in meetings or posting information online is sufficient; they want clarifications and changes to the specifications to be communicated directly to all teachers involved.

*I would say generally it's good, although there are occasions where they change something and they don't actually tell you or they've told someone but that information hasn't got to me... they changed something sort of halfway through last academic year where... previously the students were not allowed to use their own notes, their own exercise books and worksheets in the preparation time and then it changed that they were.*

Teacher, Depth Interview

Teachers are also concerned about inconsistencies within CA itself and between languages. In the focus groups, the validity of having small differences in the requirements for speaking and writing, for example in the number of words allowed on the planning sheets, was questioned and teachers said that differences such as this are unhelpful and can cause confusion as teachers have to check themselves to ensure that they have applied the right

rule to the assessment. On the issue of consistency between MFL subjects, there is a feeling amongst some teachers that the mark schemes for some MFL subjects are more lenient than others. This was strongly criticised as teachers feel that there should be parity across languages.

Where teachers have contacted the AO with questions, levels of satisfaction were variable, with attitudes towards the smaller awarding organisations, WJEC and CCEA generally, (although not invariably), being more favourable than those towards OCR, Edexcel and AQA in the depth interviews. That being said, there is at least a degree of criticism of all the AOs, with teachers feeling that responses to queries are too slow, or that it is simply too difficult to get proper advice or clarifications from them. In some cases, teachers say that they have been passed around multiple people before receiving an answer. Similarly, there is criticism that AO representatives leading training days or at meetings sometimes are unable to answer questions; this can undermine confidence in CA amongst teachers as it leads to the impression that *'it's like the blind leading the blind.'*

All of these issues add to the concern, previously discussed, that specifications are not being interpreted consistently across schools, to the disadvantage of some students. Again, this complaint was not limited to a particular AO. Teachers worry that pressure on schools to improve GCSE results has encouraged some teachers to exploit ambiguities in the rules in order to boost their students' results.

*You get kids who sometimes say, 'You know, I've got a mate in another school and in the oral the teacher just has the answers in front of them and they can read it upside down.' Okay, you can blame that teacher and say, 'That's unethical, what you're doing', and it is, so... why not have a system in place which doesn't allow for that?*

Teacher, Depth Interview

There is very little concern about differences between AO requirements (partly because many teachers had not researched other AOs). A few had switched AO, or considered switching, because they believed that another AO provided better support or a more interesting specification, but there is no feeling amongst teachers that variations between AOs are systematically disadvantaging their students. There was at least one teacher however, in a focus group, who had changed AO following the first award because of dissatisfaction with their results.

# **Areas for further consideration**

## Areas for further consideration

The aim of this piece of research is not only to identify the issues with CA for MFL but also to identify possible solutions. In particular, this was the goal of the four focus groups that were conducted, in which teachers were asked to discuss and consider potential solutions to the challenges that they have experienced. This chapter therefore sets out teachers' views on what might help resolve the problems discussed in the body of the report.

It seems reasonable to expect, and many teachers involved in the research agree, that at least **some of the issues with CA will improve over time** as the new specification beds in and teachers become accustomed to what is required. For example, in the depth interviews several teachers said that they believe that the challenges they have experienced in marking the speaking assessments will ameliorate as they become more used to doing something that is, for most teachers, quite new. Similarly, it is likely that the problems that some teachers report with uploading the recordings of the speaking assessments will improve as they get to grips with the technology. Despite this, there is a strong sense amongst teachers that many of the issues will not simply get better over time and that some kind of intervention is needed to address them.

There do seem to be some steps that centres could take to support the implementation of CA. One of these is **supporting teachers to go off-timetable to conduct speaking assessments out of class time**. It is notable that those teachers whose centres do this find the process of conducting the speaking assessments easier than those who are required by their centre management to conduct all speaking assessments in class. The benefit would be particularly significant in centres with large numbers of candidates.

A second step centres could take is to **challenge the perception amongst some students, described in the focus groups, that CA is a 'moveable feast'**, and that if they are nervous or do not like the topic they can simply not attend on the day of the assessment and complete a different assessment at a later date. Such absences cause extra work and considerable logistical challenges for teachers and a firm approach from centres, making it clear that attendance at assessments is mandatory, might help to reduce them. It might also be helpful if the AOs distributed **guidance about how to deal with student absence** to help teachers address this issue.

However, whilst there are some steps that centres could take to resolve issues with CA, most suggestions for improvement from the teachers themselves relate to either changes in the regulations or AO requirements. In particular, there is a strong desire for **greater clarity, consistency and appropriate delivery of communications from the AOs**. Teachers feel that the information provided by AOs is too fragmented; that the language used in guidance is sometimes ambiguous (for example, 'students may...') or that guidance is simply unclear (for example in relation to the feedback that is allowed during the preparation time); that the messages given out in meetings or during training days often differ from what is in the guidance; and that changes are not communicated widely enough. On this last point, there was a strong feeling in the groups that putting information on the internet, or sharing it at meetings at which not all teachers are present is not sufficient, and that the **burden should be on the AOs to ensure that any changes are communicated to all teachers**, rather than teachers having to go online to find them. Resolving these concerns would help to give teachers confidence that they are implementing CA correctly, whilst also challenging the view, expressed by some teachers, that the AOs themselves do not know that they are doing and CA in MFL is a case of *'the blind leading the blind.'*

In addition to consistency of communication, teachers also expressed a desire for **consistency both within AOs' CA requirements themselves and across languages**.

There was a feeling in the focus groups that small differences in the requirements for different parts of CA, such as differences in the number of words that students are allowed to have on their planning sheets for speaking and writing assessments, are confusing, ostensibly purposeless, and add to the burden on teachers as they are required to keep track of such minutiae. Equally, some teachers feel that differences in grade boundaries or interpretations of mark schemes and assessment criteria make some languages more challenging than others, and that this is not fair. A review of such differences, resulting in changes where possible or an explanation of why they are there would help give teachers more confidence in CA.

It would also be helpful if **AOs provided more exemplar materials** to teachers. These might include examples of marked pieces of work at each grade to help teachers understand the mark scheme, lack of understanding of which is currently a source of considerable confusion and dissatisfaction, and more examples of possible tasks and best practice.

There is also a desire for **greater clarity about the way writing is marked**. Teachers in both the depth interviews and the focus groups had serious concerns about the way in which the writing assessments in particular have been marked. Many who had accurately marked writing coursework for a number of years are unable to understand how their understanding of standards now seems markedly different from the expectations in CA. These concerns seriously undermine teacher confidence and are an important source of dissatisfaction with CA. Teacher concerns include feeling that the marks awarded by AOs have been inexplicably lower than those they were anticipating; that weaker students have been given better grades than those who are stronger; and that in the speaking students have been marked down for issues such as a lack of spontaneity, which teachers did not think was a requirement. These concerns are exacerbated by a perceived lack of feedback. Teachers want to know the basis on which the marks have been awarded and where and why their candidates have lost marks. Indeed, even a number of teachers in the depth interviews who are satisfied with the marking would welcome a greater degree of feedback as they feel it would be of educational value to their students.

Teachers also say that they want AOs to **improve the ways in which they deal with queries**. Some teachers described being passed around multiple people before they were given an answer to their question, whilst others feel that the standard waiting times for responses are too long. Some teachers say that even relatively senior AO employees or examiners are unable to answer questions about CA in meetings or training sessions and that this undermines confidence in the AOs themselves. It was suggested that **teachers should be able to submit questions before meetings**, to allow the AO time to formulate a response which could then be both given in the meeting and circulated to those who were not present. A further suggested way of making improvements in this area was that AOs might employ **regional representatives**, able to provide a more personalised service, with quicker response time and better knowledge of the area.

In addition to these changes in approach from AOs, there is also a considerable appetite amongst teachers for more large-scale changes to CA. One of the major changes suggested by a number of teachers which enjoyed widespread support is a **return to equal weighting for the four skills**. The current 60% weighting of speaking and writing is seen by many teachers to contribute to the issues with CA. For example, some teachers feel that it is undermining the development of listening and reading language skills because it encourages a focus on writing and speaking, simply because they form the larger part of the final mark. Similarly, the weighting is seen to contribute to the large amount of time that teachers feel that CA is taking up as the weighting imbues the assessments with disproportionate significance and teachers seek to ensure that their students do as well as possible. Some teachers also feel that the weighting favours those skills that students find hardest, or that it disadvantages those students whose listening and reading are stronger than their writing and speaking. There are also questions about the educational validity of

the 60% weighting; some teachers say that in languages all four skills are interdependent and equally important. Prioritising two of them is therefore simply seen to be wrong.

However, it should be noted that several teachers feel that any reduction in the weighting should be accompanied by a proportionate reduction in the amount of material that has to be covered in CA, otherwise it will be meaningless. Furthermore, a small number of teachers involved in the research also feel that the current weighting is proportionate as it mitigates the stress of the exams and favours work produced at a time when students are able to work hard and perform at the highest level of which they are capable.

An additional change that might be considered is the **removal of the preparation time for writing and instead permitting access to resources during task taking**. This could also be applied to speaking where students might know the general topic of one task in advance, but not the task itself. It seems probable that this would help address some of the concerns about CA. Currently, there is a feeling amongst some teachers that the preparation time is educationally useless as they are not allowed to help, and they feel that students are simply learning their mistakes in this period. There is also widespread agreement that the preparation time makes rote learning inevitable as students know what the task is in advance of the assessment; removing or severely reducing the preparation time would help to counter this. It would also help to address concerns about help students may be getting at home.

Some teachers feel that concerns about the value of the preparation time could also be addressed by **allowing more feedback**. For example, some teachers would like to be able to give generalised, class-feedback where a number of students are making the same mistake, whilst others feel that they would like to give more specific, personal feedback than is on the current forms, which they feel are not necessarily helpful to students.

A number of teachers suggested having **shorter tasks** as a solution to some of the issues with CA. It is felt that this would help reduce the amount of preparation time that assessments require. There is also a feeling that this would make the assessments less intimidating, particularly the speaking task, as a number of teachers feel that the current requirements are simply too demanding.

Some teachers feel that CA would be improved if there were **fewer tasks**. This would help to reduce the amount of time that it takes up. Additionally, it would also counter the feeling amongst some teachers that requiring students to do two speaking assessments places an undue amount of stress on them. However, it should be noted that it seems likely that taking this approach would also contribute to the narrowing of teaching that many teachers feel has been a result of CA and also reduce the amount of assessment evidence through which students can demonstrate their skills.

It was suggested by some teachers that the AOs should **set the date of the task and/or set the task itself**. Those teachers advocating this feel that AO-set tasks would help to counter the current perceived tendency of teaching to the task as teachers themselves would not know what it is. This would, however, mean that those teachers who currently appreciate the opportunity to tailor their tasks to their students' interests and abilities would lose this advantage. In the Belfast group, a couple of teachers also thought that if the AOs set the date of the task this would help to discourage pupil absence for frivolous reasons.

There is also a desire amongst some teachers for **greater flexibility where students have been absent for valid reasons**. There is a concern that the current requirement that students who have missed an assessment due to illness must prepare and sit a new task is unfair, and possibly even discriminatory against those students with special needs. Additionally, some teachers feel that current requirements place an additional burden on them. It was suggested in one group that this could be addressed if the requirements were changed so that those pupils who had missed an assessment for a valid reason, and had

evidence, (such as a doctor's note), should be allowed to sit the same task within a set period, for example within two weeks of the assessment.

Many teachers want to **return to the AOs marking the speaking assessment**. Teachers feel that requiring them to mark the speaking has increased their workload, particularly as many say that they are not able to mark during the assessment itself. There is also support from the AO representatives for this, though it should also be noted that one AO representative feels that changing this at this stage might cause more problems than it solves. This is due to their perception that teachers do not like significant changes being made mid-way through the life of a specification.

There are currently many misconceptions about CA and the reasons why it was set up in its current form. For example, some teachers feel that the decision that teachers should mark the speaking assessment was taken by the AOs as a cost-saving measure. Some teachers do not know the reasons why there are two speaking assessments. Those teachers who previously did terminal exams sometimes feel that CA was introduced to solve a problem, plagiarism, which did not exist. These misunderstandings and gaps in awareness contribute to negative attitudes towards CA. It could be helpful, therefore, if the AOs or the regulators provided **more explanation of why CA is being used in languages and why particular features exist**.

The possible solutions to CA detailed above have arisen, for the most part, from suggestions made by teachers themselves. However, it is important to note that there are teachers for whom the problems with CA are so severe that the only answer they see is to return to terminal exams and/or coursework, usually favouring whichever they had used previously. This view was expressed by a large number of participants in both the depth interviews and the focus groups.

# Conclusions

## Conclusions

Previous research about the experience of CA amongst a range of subject teachers found that MFL teachers have more concerns about CA than teachers of other subjects. There appears to be a number of reasons why MFL teachers seem disproportionately to feel that CA is not working for their subject, but a key reason is the impact that teachers feel it is having on teaching and learning.

There is widespread concern among many of the teachers we spoke to that CA is encouraging behaviours such as teaching to the task and rote learning; that it is resulting in a narrowing in students' knowledge; that the application of grammar and knowledge of the language being studied are suffering; and that listening and reading are being neglected as teachers focus on writing and speaking. It is important to note that whilst these were certainly not the original aims of CA, they are nonetheless seen by many teachers to be a direct, and in some cases inevitable, consequence of the way in which it has been set up. These consequences are in part down to students' strategies and perceptions of the best ways of gaining high marks on assessments; students resort to rote-learning for assessments as the means of preparing themselves thoroughly, and teachers say students pick up on particular phrases and grammar that will help them in imminent assessments rather than learning more broadly. Teachers themselves often feel they are teaching a narrower range of topics because they feel the need to focus on vocabulary and grammar that will help students in assessments rather than teaching them how to apply language in different contexts.

In addition to these concerns about teaching and learning, there are also concerns that CA is too time consuming, administratively demanding and that the guidance and advice issued by AOs lacks clarity, is poorly communicated and occasionally contradictory or inconsistent.

The potential solutions detailed above, which for the most part come from teachers themselves, would address some of these issues. However, it is important to note that many of the solutions involve some form of trade-off and there is no one answer that would satisfy everyone. For example, reducing the number of tasks might satisfy those teachers who feel that CA is too time-consuming, but it might also aggravate concerns about a narrowing of teaching. Equally, whilst having AO-set tasks might help reduce concern about teaching to the test, it would potentially cause opposition amongst those teachers for whom being able to create their own tasks is a major advantage of CA.

Furthermore, teachers in the focus groups also stressed that it is important that any changes to CA should not make it less attractive to students, and that there should be parity between MFL and other subjects. There is concern about the level of uptake of languages at GCSE level, and teachers feel that MFL is already perceived by students as being more difficult than other subjects. For that reason, some teachers say that, whilst they might in principle favour a return to terminal exams on educational grounds, in practice such a change would simply mean that even fewer students would choose to study languages and CA should therefore be retained.

Whilst it seems likely that some of teachers' concerns about CA for MFL will improve over time as teachers grow accustomed to the system and best practice is established, it is also the case that many of their most important concerns – that CA inadvertently narrows teaching and adversely impacts students' language skills – are unlikely to go away without substantial changes to the specifications and/or guidance.

# Appendix

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Teacher depth interview discussion guide

### Controlled Assessment MFL Interviews: Teachers

#### Discussion Guide 21/11/2011: Final

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| <p><b>Aims and objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To follow up the main stage evaluation of Controlled Assessment (CA) which found that there are greater concerns amongst teachers about the application of CA to French than any other subject</li> <li>▪ To identify the particular concerns and problems associated with MFL CA</li> <li>▪ To identify the perceived causes of these concerns and problems</li> <li>▪ To identify best practice and ways of overcoming barriers to the successful application of CA to MFL</li> </ul> | <p><b>Approximate timings (mins) and interviewer instructions</b></p>                     |
| <p><b>1. Introduction and explanation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thank participants for taking part</li> <li>▪ Introduce self, Ipsos MORI, Ofqual and explain purpose of interview</li> <li>▪ Confidentiality: reassure participant that all responses are anonymous and that information about individual cases will not be passed on to Ofqual</li> <li>▪ Get permission to record interview</li> <li>▪ Confirm AO used</li> </ul>   | <p>Up to 5 mins</p>   |
| <p><b>2. Introductory questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Could you start by telling me about your current role?</li> <li>▪ And how long have you been teaching for?</li> </ul>   | <p>5 mins</p> <p><i>Interviewer note: If teaches languages other than French will</i></p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can I just check, do you teach any languages other than French?</li> <li>▪ And what kind of centre do you teach in (secondary comprehensive, grammar, independent etc)?</li> <li>▪ And how many pupils do you have in your centre?</li> <li>▪ And how many pupils do you generally have studying French in each of year 10 and Year 11?<br/>(Establish numbers for other languages if applicable)</li> <li>▪ Before the introduction of Controlled Assessment, did your centre do writing coursework or did your students take the terminal exam?</li> </ul>   | <p><i>need to check whether issues discussed throughout interviews relate only to French or to other languages too</i></p>           |
| <p><b>3. Centre approach to CA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What support or guidance do you receive in relation to CA?</li> <li>▪ Since the introduction of CA, have you received any training in how best to organise, run and mark the assessments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> What did this training consist of?</li> <li>○ Who set up the training?</li> <li>○ Did you find it helpful or unhelpful?</li> <li>○ What, if anything, would have made it more helpful?</li> <li>○ <b>IF NO:</b> Would you have liked training?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>What training would help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you have any systems in place to evaluate how CA is working in your centre? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are you able to feedback about any issues?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What changes, if any, have been made to the way in which your centres manages CA over time?</li> <li>▪ What, if anything, could your centre do to make the process of CA easier?</li> </ul> | <p>5 mins</p> <p><i>This section seeks to find out whether the centre's approach to CA 'works' and why it does/doesn't work.</i></p> |

#### 4. Task setting

5 mins

I'd now like to talk about the three stages of Controlled Assessment: task setting, task taking and task marking. For each one I'd like to talk about how you approach it, whether you find it easy or difficult and what, if anything would make it easier.

- Thinking about task setting, how do you normally approach this?
  - Do you use the tasks provided by [AO] or do you make up your own tasks?
  - **IF USE AO TASKS:** Do you adapt the tasks in any way?
  - Do you have a different approach for speaking and writing?
  - Do you do the same for all languages?
  - Do you adapt tasks for students of different abilities?
- How easy or difficult do you find setting tasks for CA?

PROBE: Is it easier or more difficult than setting tasks for coursework?

- **IF DIFFICULT:** What is it that makes it difficult?
- Is there anything that would make it easier for you?
- **IF EASY:** Is there anything in particular that supports task setting to go well?

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| <p><b>5. Task taking</b></p> <p>I'd now like to move on to talk about task taking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In your experience, is task taking for MFL CA a smooth process or is it difficult?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: How, if at all, does this differ for writing and speaking?</p> <p>PROBE: Why is this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF DIFFICULT:</b> What would make it easier?</li> <li>○ <b>IF SMOOTH:</b> In your experience, is there anything in particular that helps it to run smoothly?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How much freedom do you have in deciding the timing of the assessments?</li> <li>▪ How do you usually go about the process of task taking for CA in your centre?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: How do you approach the speaking tasks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you do them in or out of the classroom? Why?</li> <li>○ What are the implications of this?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How often do you assess your students?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Do you only do the minimum of 2 written and 2 oral assessments or more frequent assessments? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is the impact of this on students?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When do you usually assess your students?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Does the timing of CA task taking matter?</li> <li>○ Are there any particular benefits to assessing them in year 11 rather than year 10?</li> <li>○ What are the implications of this?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How much preparation time does your AO specification allow for tasks?</li> <li>▪ How does this compare with the time you actually spend</li> </ul> | <p>10 mins</p> |
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preparing for the tasks?

- Is the length of the preparation time appropriate for speaking/for writing?
- Does all the students' preparation take place in school?
- In your opinion, is the length of the actual CA tasks correct?

PROBE: For written and oral. Are they too long or too short? Why?

- In your opinion are the levels of control correct?

PROBE: Too high? Too low? About right?

- How helpful or otherwise are the planning notes used for MFL CA for your students?

PROBE: For written and oral.

- Did you provide any guidance to your students about how to make best use of them?
- Are you aware of any misuse of the planning notes? IF YES: How are they being misused? How could this be stopped?
- What sort of feedback about students' work does your [AO] specification allow you to give?
  - What do you think about this?
  - What is the impact, if any, on teaching and learning?
- What impact do you think MFL CA has on your ability to teach a range of language skills in depth?

PROBE: Why do you say that?
- What impact do you think MFL CA has on the development of students' language skills?
  - Why is this?
  - Does this differ for high, medium and low ability students? If so, how? How could the experience be improved for each?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do your students find CA stressful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why/why not?</li> <li>○ Is the writing CA more/less stressful than coursework? Why?</li> <li>○ Is the speaking CA more/less stressful than the previous terminal examination? Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What impact, if any, has CA had on students' enjoyment of MFL?<br/> PROBE: Why? Is it different for students of different abilities?</li> </ul>   |               |
| <p><b>6. Task marking</b></p> <p>I'd now like to think about task marking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How do you find task marking works for CA Speaking? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you find it easy or difficult?</li> <li>○ How does this differ from writing coursework? Is it better or worse?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ As you know, written work is now marked externally. What do you feel are the benefits or drawbacks of this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ How do you decide on the best two pieces of CA writing to submit?<br/> PROBE: In practice, do teachers actually mark the CA writing before sending it to be externally marked?</li> <li>▪ What impact, if any, has the marking of CA had on teacher work load? Why?</li> <li>▪ Were your students' performances in line with your expectations?<br/> PROBE: <b>IF NO:</b> Did they do better or worse than you expected? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why do you think this is?</li> <li>○ Were the outcomes different for different skills?</li> <li>○ Is this the same for all students or does it vary according</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <p>7 mins</p> |

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| <p>to their ability?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have your views of CA changed at all as a result of your students' results?</li> <li>▪ Are there any other benefits of CA that you can identify that we have not already discussed?</li> <li>▪ Are there any other problems that you can identify that have arisen as a result of MFL CA?</li> <li>▪ What could be done to address these?</li> </ul>   |               |
| <p><b>9. AO specifications and guidance</b></p> <p>I'd now like to move on to talk about the AO specification you use and any guidance that you have received from [AO].</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How clear do you find [AO]'s specification in relation to MFL CA?<br/> PROBE: What is good/bad? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What could be improved?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Some teachers are concerned that different centres are interpreting advice from the same AO differently. Is this something that you are aware of? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ IF YES: Is this of concern for you?</li> <li>○ What do you think could be done to ensure consistency across all centres?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Are you aware of any variations between the different AO's specifications in relation to French? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is this a cause for concern for you?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ How helpful or otherwise has the guidance that you have received from [AO] been?<br/> PROBE: Written guidance? Web guidance? Telephone support? INSET meetings?<br/> PROBE: Why? Was it clear enough? Would you have liked any additional support?</li> </ul> | <p>5 mins</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you had any occasion to contact (AO) with a problem, complaint or an enquiry? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Were you satisfied with the response?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Do you feel that the overall weighting of CA (60%) is appropriate relative to other skills and content coverage (language structures and topics)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF NO:</b> What impact does this have?</li> <li>○ <b>IF NO:</b> In your opinion, what should the weighting be?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |               |
| <p><b>10. Conclusions</b></p> <p>I'd now like to ask you a few concluding questions before we finish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overall, would you say that CA has been a problem or not in the first year? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> Do you envisage that this will get better over time?</li> <li>○ Why/why not?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What lessons have you learnt from the first year of CA?</li> <li>▪ Do you plan on making any changes to the way that MFL CA is implemented in your centre? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> What will you change?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ In principle, do you feel that CA is suited to MFL? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why/why not?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What would improve MFL CA?</li> </ul> <p>We've now come to the end of the interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is there anything else you would like to add or any questions you would like to ask?</li> </ul> <p><b>THANK AND CLOSE.</b></p> | <p>5 mins</p> |

## Appendix 2: Teacher focus group discussion guide

### Controlled Assessment Focus Group Discussion Guide

#### Discussion Guide 17/01/12 Final

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Aims and objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To follow up the main stage evaluation of Controlled Assessment (CA) which found that there are greater concerns amongst teachers about the application of CA to French than any other subject</li> <li>▪ To identify the particular concerns and problems associated with MFL CA</li> <li>▪ To identify the perceived causes of these concerns and problems</li> <li>▪ Most importantly, to identify best practice and ways of overcoming barriers to the successful application of CA to MFL (MODERATOR TO STRESS THAT THIS IS THE PRIMARY AIM OF THE GROUP AND TO ENSURE AT LEAST HALF THE DISCUSSION TIME FOCUSSES ON SOLUTIONS (EITHER AS THE GRID IS POPULATED, OR IF THIS DOES NOT WORK FOR THE GROUP, AT THE END AS SEPARATE DISCUSSION))</li> </ul> | <p><i>Moderator note:</i><br/><i>Many of the probes will come out naturally in the conversation. Those questions that are in bold are key questions to ask.</i></p> |
| <p><b>1. Introduction and explanation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thank participants for taking part</li> <li>▪ Introduce self, Ipsos MORI, and explain purpose of group</li> <li>▪ Confidentiality: reassure participant that all responses are anonymous (MRS Code of Conduct) and that information about individual cases will not be passed on to Ofqual/DfES/CCEA</li> <li>▪ Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers, all opinions are valid</li> <li>▪ Get permission to record interview</li> <li>▪ Introductions: Names of participants, type of school, AO used, subjects taught and number of pupils taking subject at GCSE, whether did terminal exam or coursework in the past</li> </ul>   | <p>5 mins</p>   |

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| <p><b>2. Attitudes towards CA</b></p> <p><b>I'd like to begin by talking generally about Controlled Assessment in MFL.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>How do you feel that CA is currently working in your school? What do you like most/ least about it?</b></li> <li>▪ MODERATOR – WRITE UP THE KEY ISSUES ON A FLIPCHART AS THEY'RE RAISED – ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO RAISE ALL THE KEY ISSUES/ PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED, AS WELL AS ANY POSITIVES</li> <li>▪ Has this got better or worse since it was first introduced?</li> </ul> <p>Explain to participants that in the main part of the discussion we want to explore the key issues they've encountered with CA, what impact they have on teachers/ students/ teaching and learning, and, most importantly, what solutions they can suggest for each. (NB – add the issues mentioned in above discussion to the table as we go)</p> <p>Explain we're keen to hear about different experiences – so might be that you have found some things easy and others have found it difficult, and it's especially useful for us to hear about those differences so we can understand why and see whether it might suggest any solutions.</p> <p><b>MODERATOR NOTE:</b></p> <p>THE MODERATOR IS TO USE THE ISSUES FROM THE 'GRUMP DUMP' AND ANY OTHERS THAT EMERGE DURING THE GROUP TO POPULATE THE GRID BELOW. THE MAJORITY OF THE GROUP SHOULD BE SPENT DISCUSSING THE IMPACT OF THESE ISSUES AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, SOLUTIONS TO THEM.</p> <p>IF THIS FORMAT IS NOT WORKING FOR THE GROUP, OR IF PROMPTS ARE NEEDED PLEASE USE THE DETAILED DISCUSSION GUIDE AS REFERENCE FOR DISCUSSION. IN PARTICULAR, IF PARTICIPANTS ARE STRUGGLING TO IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS, PLEASE REFER TO SECTION 8.</p> <p>PLEASE NOTE THAT WHILST THE MAJORITY OF THE GUIDE IS INTENDED AS A FALL-BACK, THE CONCLUDING QUESTIONS, (SECTION 9) SHOULD BE ASKED IN ALL GROUPS.</p> <p>SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT ARE DISCUSSED MAY BE A RESULT OF TEACHING PRACTICES – THE MODERATOR IS TO <b>CAREFULLY</b> PROBE THROUGHOUT FOR WHETHER THIS IS THE CASE (E.G. IN RELATION TO ISSUES SUCH AS ROTE LEARNING) AND, WHERE RELEVANT, IDENTIFY THE REASON WHY THOSE PRACTICES ARE BEING PURSUED.</p> <p><i>We will produce a large version of this grid on flip chart paper and put</i></p> | <p>10 mins</p> <p><i>“Grump dump” – we ask participants a few open questions about CA so they can get main issues about CA off their chests/ out of the way – that way we can move on to develop some of these ideas and develop solutions during the remaining time</i></p> |
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*on the wall – moderator to add to the grid during the discussion.*

| <b>Issue</b>   | <b>Impact</b> (on teachers, students, learning)  | <b>Solution</b>  |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Task preparation<br>(teaching time leading up to setting the tasks) |  |  |
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| 2. Task setting  |  |  |
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| 3. Task taking   |  |  |
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| 4. Task marking  |  |  |
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| 5. Specification and guidance  |  |  |
| <i>e.g. Frequent changes to specification</i>                          | <i>Uncertain about guidelines; lose faith in the assessments; feel sense of unfairness as other schools have applied rules less strictly</i> | <i>Produce a short summary of the guidance with all key things we need to know in one place. Make sure any changes to the specification are circulated to heads of MFL</i> |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 6. Other issues (including weighting)                                  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

NB – the following can be used as prompts during the interview to help populate the grid above if required, although we will let participants guide the discussion/raise the key issues they've encountered, the impacts of these and suggest solutions.

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| <p><b>3. Task preparation</b></p> <p><b>By task preparation we mean all the teaching leading up to setting the task.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Has the introduction of CA changed the way you teach languages?</b></li> </ul> <p>PROBE: impact on teaching of vocab, grammar and structures, entire topics?<br/>         PROBE: impact on balance of time spent on different skills of reading/writing/listening/speaking?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Why does CA mean that you have changed your teaching of the language?</b></li> <li>▪ <b>What are the implications of these changes for teaching and learning?</b></li> </ul> |  |
| <p><b>4. Task setting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>How do you usually approach task setting?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you use the tasks provided by your AO, adapt AO tasks or do you make up your own tasks?</li> <li>○ Are the AO requirements supportive or restrictive?<br/>                     PROBE: If you adapt, how and why?</li> <li>○ Do you adapt tasks for students of different abilities?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |  |

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| <p><b>5. Task taking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Overall, would you say that the process of task taking is easy or difficult?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PROBE: Which bits are easy and which are difficult? And why?</li> <li>PROBE: For timing issues, problem of absent pupils, logistical difficulties</li> <li>○ How does this differ for speaking and writing?</li> <li>○ Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>How do you organise actually taking CA in your school?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparation time: how much time do you spend and how does this compare with what your specification allows?</li> <li>○ Do candidates do their preparation in or out of the classroom?</li> <li>○ What are the implications of this?</li> <li>○ Tasks: For speaking: In class time or off timetable?</li> <li>○ In or out of class?</li> <li>PROBE: For the implications of different approaches.</li> <li>○ For writing: In classroom or somewhere else?</li> <li>○ Is the length of the tasks correct?</li> <li>○ And are the levels of control correct? For writing and speaking?</li> <li>PROBE: Why/why not? What would be better?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Do you conduct more than the minimum numbers of assessments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ When do you do take the assessments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Year 10 or Year 11 (in NI: Year 11 or Year 12)?</li> <li>PROBE: Why? Do you do the speaking and writing at different times? What are the implications?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What kind of feedback does your AO allow you to give students whilst preparing for and taking assessments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you feel that this is correct?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  |
| <p><b>6. Task marking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>How do you feel that marking the speaking is working?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is it easy or difficult? Timing/workload implications?</li> <li>○ Why and, if difficult, what would make it easier?</li> <li>PROBE: How clear or otherwise do you find the mark</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |  |

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| <p>scheme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you mark the speaking during the assessments or after? Why? What are the implications of this?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>As you know, written work is now marked externally. What do you feel are the benefits or drawbacks of this?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent do you assess pupils' work internally prior to sending it to be marked?</li> <li>○ Were your results in line with what you were expecting?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What level of feedback does your AO allow you to give pupils about their CA? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is this the same for writing and speaking?</li> <li>○ Do you feel that this is appropriate?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Do you feel that the overall weighting of CA (60%) is appropriate relative to other skills and content coverage (language structures and topics)?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why/why not?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  |
| <p><b>7. The impact of CA on pupils</b></p> <p><b>I'd now like to talk about the impact that CA has on pupils.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>What is the impact, if any, of CA on pupils?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PROBE: weaker vs. more able students?</li> <li>○ To what extent, if at all, is CA stressful for them?</li> <li>○ How does this compare with terminal exams/coursework?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>What is the impact, if any, of CA on pupils' enjoyment of learning a language?</b></li> <li>▪ <b>What is the impact of CA, if any, on the development of pupils' language skills?</b><br/> PROBE: For rote learning, development of grammar skills and vocabulary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is this the same for speaking and writing? Why?</li> <li>○ Where impact is seen to be negative: What is it about CA leads to these negative outcomes?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |  |
| <p><b>8. Solutions</b></p> <p><b>A range of solutions have been suggested to the problems with CA. I'd like to talk about to what extent you feel that these would be effective solutions.</b></p>  |  |

- **Speaking: Increasing the level of control?** (MODERATOR TO MAKE SURE THAT IMPLIATIONS OF THIS ARE FULLY UNDERSTOOD – ALSO FOR FOLLOWING POINTS)
  - Less flexibility in task setting – tasks set by AO
  - Including a wider range of purposes for tasks
  - Awarding organisations set periods of time for the speaking assessments
  - AOs marking the speaking
  
- **Speaking: Reducing the level of control?**
  - Wider range of tasks
  - Less prescription in how tasks are set out
  - Centre to decide the number of assessments within parameters, e.g. one assessment containing 2 or 3 tasks
  - Reduce recording requirements
  - Making the assessment more like English, for example groups, not recorded with a rolling programme of visiting AO moderators
  - More flexibility in prompts/notes
  - More flexibility in the length of assessments according to ability
  - More feedback allowed during preparation time
  
- **Writing: Increasing the level of control?**
  - Less flexibility in task setting
  - AOs set tasks
  - Removing preparation time i.e. task set at the beginning of assessment
  
- **Writing: Reducing the level of control?**
  - Greater access to resources during task taking
  - More flexibility in notes/prompts
  - Teachers mark assessments
  
- **Writing and speaking: A combination of elements of higher and lower control?** (MODERATOR NOTE; ENSURE TEACHERS SPECIFY WHICH COMBINATIONS THEY WOULD LIKE AND WHY – MUST BE SPECIFIC)
- 
- **Other?**
  - More focused support/guidance from AOs. E.g. on application of mark schemes, marked exemplars
  - More training
  - More consistency across AOs, e.g. regarding notes, preparation in/outside classroom
  - Overlap of subject matter between speaking and writing as long as purposes clearly different
  - Change weighting to equal weighting for all skills (N.B. in short term changes to weighting might include 5% listening/reading CA; how helpful would this be?)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Integration of skills for CA to support less fragmented approach</li> </ul>   |               |
| <p><b>9. Conclusions</b></p> <p><b>We're coming to the end of the group now. Before we finish, I just have a few final questions.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thinking about all of the things we have talked about this evening, what do you feel are the most important points?</li> <li>▪ IF PARTICIPANTS HAVE EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO RETURN TO COURSEWORK/TERMINAL EXAMS: If the solutions we have discussed this evening were implemented, would you, on balance, support retaining CA or would you prefer a return to terminal exams/coursework?</li> <li>▪ And does anyone have anything that they feel that we have not covered, or that they would like to add?</li> </ul> <p><b>Close: thank participants for coming, reminder of anonymity, distribute incentive.</b></p> | <p>5 mins</p> |

### Appendix 3: AO depth interview discussion guide

#### Controlled Assessment MFL Interviews: AO Representatives

#### Discussion Guide 27/10/2011: Final

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|--|---|
| <p><b>Aims and objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To follow up the main stage evaluation of Controlled Assessment (CA) which found that there are greater concerns amongst teachers about the application of CA to French than any other subject</li> <li>▪ To identify the particular concerns and problems associated with MFL CA</li> <li>▪ To identify the perceived causes of these concerns and problems</li> <li>▪ To identify best practice and ways of overcoming barriers to the successful application of CA to MFL</li> </ul> | <p><b>Approximate timings (mins) and interviewer instructions</b></p> |
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| <p><b>1. Introduction and explanation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thank participants for taking part</li> <li>▪ Introduce self, Ipsos MORI, Ofqual, DfES and CCEA and explain purpose of interview</li> <li>▪ Confidentiality: reassure participant that all responses are anonymous and that information about individual cases will not be passed on to Ofqual</li> <li>▪ Get permission to record interview</li> </ul> | <p>Up to 5 mins</p> |
| <p><b>2. Introductory questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Could you start by telling me about your current role?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Are you only responsible for MFL or are you responsible for other subjects too?</p>   | <p>3 mins</p>       |

### 3. AO approach to CA

10 mins

I'd like to talk now about how [AO] approaches MFL CA.

- How did you develop your specification?
  - How did you decide on your approach to CA?
  - Given the flexibility within the regulations, how did you determine which approach is best?  
  
PROBE: Weighting? Types of sample task? Content coverage?
- When drawing up the specifications, how helpful did you find the regulatory criteria?  
  
PROBE: Why do you say that?
- When drawing up the specifications, did you consult other AOs?  
  
PROBE: Why/why not?
- Are you aware of any difference between your specifications for MFL and those of other AOs?
  - **IF YES:** How do they vary?
  - To what extent do you seek to reduce any variation between your specification and those of other AOs, if at all?
- Do you pilot or consult on your specification in any way prior to implementation?
  - Why/why not?
  - **IF YES:** What piloting/consultation was carried out?
  - Did you make any amendments to the specification as a result of this?  
  
PROBE: **IF YES:** What changes were made?
- Have you made any changes to your requirements for CA since the specification was accredited

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What kinds of changes and why?</li> <li>○ How did you inform centres?</li> <li>○ How did centres respond to these changes?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you had any feedback from centres about your specification?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: For both positive and negative feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>IF HAVE RECEIVED FEEDBACK AND NOT COVERED ABOVE:</b> Have you made any changes to you specification in response to any feedback received?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ IF YES: What changes did you make?</li> <li>○ IF NO: Are you planning on making any changes to your specification, in particular in relation to controlled assessment as a result of any feedback?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Why/why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thinking about the planning sheets that students are allowed to use for their writing and speaking MFL CA, what do you allow students to write on these?</li> <li>▪ How do you decide what is allowed?</li> <li>▪ Are you aware of any variation between your regulations regarding planning sheets and those of other AOs?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> How do they vary?</li> <li>○ In your opinion, is this a matter of concern?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are you aware of any misuse of these planning sheets?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> How are they being misused?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are you planning on making any changes to what is allowed on the planning sheets?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Why/why not?</p> |  |
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| <p><b>4. Implementation of CA in centres</b></p> <p>I'd now like to talk about the implementation of MFL CA in centres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prior to the implementation of MFL CA, did you anticipate that it would cause centres any problems?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Speaking? Writing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Why/why not?</li> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> What kind of problems did you anticipate?</li> <li>○ Did you take any steps to mitigate these anticipated problems?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overall, how do you think CA is working for MFL in centres?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Is it working well or is it proving difficult? Why do you say that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are you aware of any specific problems relating to the implementation of MFL CA in centres?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: e.g. plagiarism, rote learning, impact on teaching/learning time, impact on student enthusiasm for languages, neglect of topics other than those for CA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF AWARE OF PROBLEMS:</b> How have you become aware of these problems?</li> <li>○ In your opinion, what is the cause of these problems?</li> <li>○ What do you think could be done to address these problems?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: Could [AO] specifications be amended to address them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some teachers have expressed concern that the same AO's specifications are being interpreted differently in different centres. As far as you are aware, to what extent is this an issue?</li> <li>▪ How do you ensure consistency of implementation of your</li> </ul> | <p>7 mins</p> |
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| <p>specifications?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Is there anything more that [AO] or anyone else could do to ensure greater consistency of implementation?</li><li>▪ Have the outcomes this summer in CA been as you expected?</li></ul> <p>PROBE FOR: Standards, adherence to the regulations, centre marking, centre satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Why/why not?</li><li>○ Are you planning on making any changes to the specification as a result of this?</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ One of the reasons for introducing CA in MFL was to allow the opportunity for teachers to develop more creative tasks. In your experience, are teachers coming up with their own tasks or are they using those provided by the exam boards? Why do you think this is?</li></ul> |  |
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| <p><b>5. Information and support for centres</b></p> <p>Thinking about the support that you offer to centres using your specifications...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In addition to the specification, do you provide centres with any other sources of information?<br/><br/>PROBE: <b>IF YES:</b> What format does this information come in?</li> <li>▪ What other forms of support do you offer to centres taking [AO] MFL? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you provide clarification regarding the specification?</li> <li>○ Do you provide any advice about how best to implement MFL CA?</li> <li>○ Do you provide any logistical support?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>IF PROVIDE SUPPORT:</b> Who is responsible for supporting centres?</li> <li>▪ What feedback, if any, have you received about the information and support that you provide for centres?</li> <li>▪ Are you planning any additional advice or support for centres?</li> <li>▪ Some teachers have told us that they find that the guidance about CA is 'fragmented' across many documents. What do you think of this?</li> </ul> | <p>5 mins</p> |
| <p><b>6. MFL CA regulations</b></p> <p>I'd now like to talk about MFL CA regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In principle do you think that CA is suited to MFL?<br/><br/>PROBE: Why do you say that?</li> <li>▪ As you will know, CA represents 60% of the weighting for MFL. Do you think that this is an appropriate weighting?<br/><br/>PROBE: Why/why not?</li> </ul>   | <p>3 mins</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF NO:</b> In your opinion, what would an appropriate weighting be?</li> <li>▪ In your opinion, are the levels of control for CA correct?</li> </ul> <p>PROBE: For speaking/writing</p>   |               |
| <p><b>8. Conclusions</b></p> <p>I'd now like to ask you a few concluding questions before we finish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Our survey found that MFL teachers are less positive about CA than other subject teachers. In your opinion, what do you think are the reasons for this?</li> <li>▪ Overall, would you say that MFL CA has been a problem or not in the first year? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>IF YES:</b> Do you envisage that this will get better over time?</li> <li>○ Why/why not?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What changes, if any, are you planning on making to the way [AO] approaches MFL CA as a result of this first year?</li> <li>▪ What would improve MFL CA?</li> </ul> <p>We've now come to the end of the interview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is there anything else you would like to add or any questions you would like to ask?</li> </ul> <p><b>THANK AND CLOSE.</b></p> | <p>5 mins</p> |

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