



Department  
for Education

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# **Reformed GCSE and A level subject content consultation**

## **September 2014**

**To** Schools; colleges; organisations representing school teachers and lecturers; subject associations; parents; young people; higher education; further education; academies; employers/business sector; local authorities; teachers; and awarding organisations.

**Issued** 25 September 2014

**Enquiries to** If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the Department on 0370 000 2288

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# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Reformed GCSE and A level subject content consultation  | 1  |
| September 2014  | 1  |
| Contents  | 3  |
| 1. Executive summary  | 4  |
| 2. Coverage of this consultation  | 5  |
| 3. Background and context of the consultation   | 6  |
| 4. Proposed changes to GCSE and A level subject content   | 9  |
| 5. Consultation questions   | 13 |
| 6. Equalities Impact  | 14 |
| 7. How to respond   | 15 |
| 8. Additional copies  | 15 |
| 9. Plans for making results public  | 15 |
| 10. Downloads   | 15 |
| Annex 1: Subject experts consulted by awarding organisations in the development of proposed subject content | 16 |

# 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The government is reforming GCSEs and A levels to ensure that they prepare students better for further and higher education, and for employment. GCSEs are being reformed so that they set expectations which match those of the highest performing countries, with rigorous assessment that provides a reliable measure of students' achievement. The new A levels will be linear qualifications that ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge needed for progression to undergraduate study.
- 1.2. Reforms to these qualifications are already underway. [GCSE subject content](#) in English literature, English language and mathematics was published in November 2013, and the new qualifications will be taught from September 2015. [GCSE subject content](#) in ancient languages, geography, history, modern foreign languages and science, to be taught from September 2016, was published in April 2014.
- 1.3. At AS and A level, [subject content](#) in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology was published in April 2014. These new qualifications will be taught from September 2015.
- 1.4. We are now developing a further set of GCSEs, AS and A levels to be taught from 2016. Between July and September we consulted on proposed subject content for GCSEs in art and design, computer science, dance, music, and physical education, and AS and A levels in dance, music, physical education, modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography. We will be publishing final content this winter. We are now consulting on some of the remaining 2016 subjects: GCSEs in citizenship studies, cooking and nutrition, drama, and design and technology; and AS and A levels in drama and theatre. We plan to consult on GCSE and A level religious studies content later this year. AS and A level design and technology subject content requires further development to fully reflect the changes being introduced in the GCSE and will be introduced for first teaching in September 2017.
- 1.5. Ofqual has [consulted](#) on proposals for the final phase of reform and will announce its decisions shortly. It is planned that reformed GCSEs and A levels in remaining subjects will then be introduced for first teaching from 2017.

## **2. Coverage of this consultation**

**2.1.** This consultation seeks views on proposed subject content for qualifications which will be introduced from September 2016.

**2.2.** The proposed subject content requirements are designed to become regulatory documents which set out the minimum knowledge, understanding and skills needed for GCSE and A level qualifications. They provide the framework for awarding organisations to create the detail of qualification specifications.

**2.3.** This consultation covers:

- proposed content for GCSEs in citizenship studies, cooking and nutrition, drama, and design and technology
- proposed content for the AS and A level in drama and theatre

**2.4.** Whilst responsibility for specifying the subject content of GCSEs and A levels lies with the Department for Education (DfE), responsibility for determining the assessment arrangements lies with Ofqual, the independent regulator. Ofqual is therefore consulting in parallel on GCSE and A level assessment arrangements for these subjects, including the assessment objectives. In order to understand how students will be expected to engage with these subjects it is important to consider both the content and the assessment objectives. The Ofqual consultation can be found [here](#)

### **3. Background and context of the consultation**

#### **GCSE reform**

- 3.1.** The primary purpose of GCSEs is to evidence the progress and achievement of students of all abilities against demanding and fulfilling subject content. GCSEs must also enable progression to further vocational and academic study. The new qualifications will remain universal qualifications which are accessible, with good teaching, to the same proportion of students as currently sit GCSEs at the end of key stage 4. At the level of a pass (currently indicated by a grade C) there must be an increase in demand, to reflect that of high-performing jurisdictions. At the top end, the new qualifications should prepare students properly to progress to A level or other study.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The GCSE reform process to date**

- 3.2.** DfE consulted widely with subject experts, education experts, schools and teachers to develop the GCSE content for reformed GCSEs in English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. We published GCSE subject content in English language, English literature and mathematics in November 2013, for first teaching from September 2015. We then published GCSE subject content in ancient languages, history, geography, science, and modern foreign languages in April 2014, for first teaching from September 2016.
- 3.3.** The Secretary of State announced the second stage of GCSE reform in April 2014. GCSEs in art and design, citizenship studies, computer science, dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education, and religious studies will be reformed for first teaching from September 2016. We consulted on proposed subject content for art and design, computer science, dance, music, and physical education from July to September. This consultation seeks views upon proposed subject content for GCSEs in citizenship studies, cooking and nutrition, drama, and design and technology. We will publish a Government response to this consultation and the final content in the winter.
- 3.4.** The GCSE in cooking and nutrition is a new GCSE, intended to build upon the best of previous titles such as food technology, home economics, and hospitality and catering. With its introduction there will no longer be a food element included in the design and technology GCSE. This is in response to the feedback we have received from subject experts who have worked with awarding organisations on reforming that title. They advised that a food qualification at this level should focus on ensuring students acquire a good understanding of food and nutrition together

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<sup>1</sup> For more information please refer to Ofqual's consultation on how standards should be set for new GCSEs: <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/setting-the-grade-standards-of-new-gcses-april-2014/>.

with excellent cooking skills. It was felt that this would not fit with the changes proposed for GCSE design and technology. Creating two qualifications (GCSE design and technology, and a separate GCSE in cooking and nutrition) provides students with a much richer educational experience in each subject.

**3.5.** Awarding organisations have worked with subject associations and other subject experts to develop the subject content for design and technology and drama. As part of the development process awarding organisations were required to:

- involve subject experts in the development of content to ensure that the qualification is fit for purpose
- ensure that the proposed content increases the level of demand, and is sufficiently robust and challenging
- consider the equality impacts of the proposed changes
- work with Ofqual to ensure that the content can be regulated

**3.6.** The Department has led on developing content for cooking and nutrition and citizenship studies. As part of the development process the Department has worked closely with subject experts who have helped to draft the content as well as awarding organisations and Ofqual.

**3.7.** The organisations consulted for all GCSE subjects are listed in Annex 1.

### **A level reform**

**3.8.** The primary purpose of A levels is to prepare students for undergraduate study. The purpose of AS qualifications is to enable students to broaden the range of subjects they study post-16, and to support progression to further study or employment. Reforms to AS and A levels are intended to ensure that they continue to meet this purpose, in particular, responding to concerns from higher education institutions that students lack some of the skills necessary for undergraduate success.<sup>2</sup> The new A levels will be linear thus allowing more time for teaching and for students to develop a deep understanding of their subject. The process for reform gives universities a greater role in the design and development of the new qualifications.

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<sup>2</sup> 2012 Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, Fit for Purpose? The view of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels, <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-04-03-fit-for-purpose-a-levels.pdf>, Cambridge Assessment, What are the impacts of qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds on higher education? A survey of 633 university lecturers, <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/images/116010-cambridge-assessment-he-research-survey-of-lecturers-executive-summary.pdf>.

## The A level reform process to date

- 3.9.** A review of A level subject content was conducted between April and July 2013 by the four awarding organisations for A levels in England. The review was independently chaired by Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice Chancellor of Lancaster University. As a result of this review [subject content](#) in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology was published in April 2014. These new A levels will be taught from September 2015.
- 3.10.** Responsibility for reviewing subject content for the remaining facilitating subjects, modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, and geography, which are to be taught from September 2016, was remitted to a new independent body, the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB).<sup>3</sup> ALCAB provided recommendations on these subjects and we consulted on them from July to September. We will publish final subject content this winter.
- 3.11.** In April 2014, the Secretary of State announced that a further set of A levels would be reformed for first teaching from September 2016. These are: dance, design and technology, drama and theatre, music, physical education, and religious studies. We consulted on proposed subject content for dance, music, and physical education from July to September and we are now seeking views on proposed subject content for the A level and AS in drama and theatre. We will publish a Government response to this consultation and the final content in the winter.
- 3.12.** As a result of the degree of change being proposed for GCSE design and technology, and the need to ensure that the AS and A level ensure progression from the GCSE, subject content for AS and A level design and technology will be developed for first teaching in 2017.
- 3.13.** Awarding organisations were asked to develop AS and A levels through the same process as for GCSEs, with an additional requirement to draw on advice of experts from higher education institutions to ensure that the proposed content facilitates progression to higher education and builds upon the revised GCSE content.
- 3.14.** The organisations consulted for A level drama and theatre are listed in Annex 1.

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<sup>3</sup> It was decided that A levels in modern foreign languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography required more significant change and development time and that these subjects would be reformed for first teaching in 2016. Following a request from the Department, the Russell Group of universities set up ALCAB to review subject content in these subjects, together with ancient and classical languages.



## **4. Proposed changes to GCSE and A level subject content**

- 4.1.** This section outlines the proposed changes to current GCSE and A level subject content. The full subject content can be downloaded from the consultation page on GOV.UK.

### **Citizenship studies GCSE**

- 4.2.** The revised subject content aims to enable students to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of citizenship concepts, and to apply this knowledge to issues and debates in a range of local and global contexts. These concepts have been extended so that students experience a greater breadth of knowledge, particularly in areas of the political system, the legal system and international governance.
- 4.3.** Students will critically analyse the different concepts and make connections between them. This additional requirement will enable students to engage in debate, written argument and evaluation of evidence to a greater depth than the previous GCSE.
- 4.4.** Students will also have the opportunity to understand the processes of active citizenship such as lobbying, petitioning, demonstrating and volunteering. Additionally, students will now need to discuss real-life examples of active citizenship which demonstrate how citizens attempt to improve or change their community by working together. Improving the understanding of the underlying nature of active citizenship will enable students to take more effective citizenship action of their own. This understanding must be demonstrated through at least one in-depth critical investigation leading to a planned course of informed action in the GCSE.
- 4.5.** The subject content also specifies that citizenship studies GCSE short courses should cover half of the content of the GCSE and specifies what content should be covered.

### **Cooking and nutrition GCSE**

- 4.6.** There are currently three qualifications which relate to food and cooking – home economics, design and technology: food technology, and hospitality and/or catering. Ofqual has identified the risks to comparability of standards presented by overlapping content in different qualifications, which could be addressed by creating a single qualification. Subject experts were concerned that retaining the food technology content within the new reformed design and technology GCSE would prevent both cooking and nutrition, and design and technology from focusing on the essential knowledge and processes needed for each subject. We are therefore introducing a new GCSE in cooking and nutrition.

- 4.7.** This new qualification is not solely based on the previous food technology, catering or home economics content, but draws upon and expands the best aspects of all three, while also including more of the scientific knowledge underpinning the preparation and cooking of food. The purpose of the qualification is to equip students with an in depth knowledge of cooking and nutrition, as well as the practical ability to apply this knowledge when cooking. The core knowledge will enable students to choose ingredients to cook with, taking account of nutritional needs and through a detailed knowledge of cooking processes, prepare a wide range of recipes.
- 4.8.** The qualification will encourage students to make informed decisions about a wide range of further educational opportunities and career pathways as well as to develop vital life skills that enable them to feed themselves and others affordably and nutritiously, now and later in life.

### **Design and technology GCSE**

- 4.9.** The new design and technology GCSE removes the range of titles that are currently offered, each of which is focused on separate material areas (such as resistant materials, textiles or graphics). In their place is one single title - design and technology - in which students study a broader range of materials; choose an area of interest, such as fashion or mechanical systems, to study in more depth, and can combine materials from different material groups in their products.
- 4.10.** For the first time the content sets out the iterative design process which all students should understand and be able to demonstrate. Subject experts have advised that this process of design is at the core of contemporary practice. The new qualification will therefore prepare students for further study and careers in design.
- 4.11.** In addition to the demands of the design process, the subject has been made more challenging by including an expectation that all students will know and understand the properties of a wide range of materials and components that are not specific to one material area, rather than specialising in one particular material area initially. This is in addition to the need to have an in depth technical knowledge of the materials, techniques, equipment and processes used in their chosen area of interest.
- 4.12.** Together these changes aim to ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to design and make products or prototypes, using the best material, equipment and techniques, that solve real world and relevant problems across a range of contexts.

## **Drama GCSE**

- 4.13.** The content for Drama GCSE has been set out in more detail. To ensure greater depth and breadth of study at GCSE, all students will study a minimum of one complete play or script and two key extracts from a second text. The current content only requires students to study one text, which does not need to be complete.
- 4.14.** All students will need to know and understand the range of ways to communicate meaning in drama, for example, through the use of performance space, the relationship between performers and audience, production design such as set design, and the actor's vocal and physical interpretation of character. There is greater emphasis on a student's knowledge of the social, cultural and historical context, for the first time requiring them to know and understand the theatrical conventions of the period in which the texts they study were written.
- 4.15.** All students will have the opportunity to participate in two performances, one of a devised<sup>4</sup> piece and one extract from a performance text. This is in response to stakeholders' request to include an explicit reference to the devising process. The content also specifies in greater detail the skills students must apply when creating live theatre, such as research and interpreting texts. Currently, students are only required to develop the ability to apply performance and/or production skills.

## **Drama and theatre AS and A level**

- 4.16.** The title of the qualification has been changed from 'drama and theatre studies' to drama and theatre in response to a suggestion from subject experts and in line with the renaming of business studies A level to business A level.
- 4.17.** To provide better progression to higher education, academics advised that the content needed to encourage students to become critical and independent thinkers. The content therefore ensures that students are able to develop an analytical framework informed by the knowledge and skills they have gained and apply what they have learnt through research to their practical work.
- 4.18.** Also on the advice of academics, the number of substantial plays to be studied has been reduced from four to two, to allow greater depth of study. Breadth has been increased by requiring students to study three key extracts from plays, and a minimum of two influential theatre practitioners and/or companies (an increase from one). We would appreciate views on whether this is the right way to balance depth and breadth of study with the size of the qualification.

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<sup>4</sup> A unique performance developed by students in response to stimulus.

**4.19.** The AS and A level content now covers in much greater detail both the knowledge and skills required. For example, the knowledge students should gain in relation to the theatre practitioners has now been set out in detail, including knowing the historical, social and cultural context the practitioners were working in and how they collaborated with or influenced others. The performance requirements have also been clearly defined: students must participate in a minimum of one performance from a text at AS and two performances at A level (one devised and one from a text), and all students will use the working methodologies of the practitioners studied in their own work.

## 5. Consultation questions

1. Is the revised GCSE content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please consider:

- whether there is a suitable level of challenge
- whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to further academic and vocational education
- whether the amount of content in the qualification is appropriate and, if not, whether you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

Please provide evidence to support your response.

- (a) citizenship studies
- (b) cooking and nutrition
- (c) design and technology
- (d) drama

2. Is the content for citizenship studies GCSE short course appropriate? Please consider:

- whether the content reflects what students need to know, including whether it reflects the national curriculum requirements
- whether the amount of content in the qualification is appropriate and, if not, whether you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

3. Is the revised A level content in drama and theatre appropriate? Please consider:

- whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to undergraduate study

Please provide evidence to support your response.

4. Is the revised AS qualification content in drama and theatre appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.

## **6. Equalities Impact**

- 6.1.** In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must have “due regard”, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to relevant protected characteristics. It would therefore be very helpful to understand if, in your view, there is any potential for the subject content to have a disproportionate impact upon any student with relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. It would be particularly helpful to understand if any respondents have evidence to support concerns they may have about such impacts.

### **Questions:**

5. Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific students, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'? (The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.) Please provide evidence to support your response.
6. How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content of GCSEs and/or A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it? Please provide evidence to support your response.

## **7. How to respond**

7.1. Consultation responses can be completed online at:  
[www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations).

or by emailing or posting a completed response form:

by email: [GCSEandAlevelSeptember.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:GCSEandAlevelSeptember.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk)

or by post: Alex Smith, Floor 2, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith St, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT, UK.

## **8. Additional copies**

8.1. Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.

## **9. Plans for making results public**

The consultation will close on 20 November 2014. The response will be published on the consultation page on gov.uk early in 2015.

## **10. Downloads**

The proposed GCSE and A level subject content can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.

## **Annex 1: Subject experts consulted by awarding organisations in the development of proposed subject content**

Subject experts were consulted as part of the subject content development process including representatives from the following organisations:

Citizenship: Citizenship Foundation, Association for Citizenship Teaching, pfeg, MyBnk

Cooking and nutrition: Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, The Springboard Charity, Quintin Kynaston school, LEON, All Saints Educational Trust, Food and Drink Federation, Design and Technology Association, Public Health England, British Nutrition Foundation, Ofsted

Design and technology: Design and Technology Association, Technology Education Research Unit - Goldsmiths University of London, TechSoft UK, Royal Academy of Engineering, James Dyson Foundation, Textiles Association

Drama: National Drama, SCUDD (The Standing Conference of University Drama Departments), Saint Benedict Catholic Academy, National Theatre, The Compton School, University of Winchester, University of Wolverhampton, University of Reading