

GCSE Ancient Languages: Decisions on Conditions and Guidance



In December 2014 we published a consultation about the rules and guidance we proposed to put in place for reformed GCSEs (graded 9 to 1) in ancient languages.

This consultation set out draft Subject Level Conditions and guidance which would apply to all reformed GCSEs in ancient languages.

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

Conditions and requirements for GCSE ancient languages

Content requirements

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

Although this was not an issue we were consulting on, a number of respondents expressed concerns about specific aspects of, and the overall level of demand of, the subject content. Some respondents also suggested that we should not require awarding organisations to comply with the Department for Education's content requirements.

Issues of subject content are a matter for the Department for Education, which considered these concerns previously³ when developing its requirements.

Our view remains that we can regulate GCSEs in ancient languages using the published subject content requirements. Allowing awarding organisations to depart from them would be contrary to the curriculum intention, and would make it difficult to secure comparability between different qualifications.

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

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

³ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-subject-content-and-assessment-objectives

We have therefore decided to confirm our consultation proposals.

Guidance for GCSE ancient languages

Guidance on subject content

We proposed to introduce guidance that clarified the amount of set text students should study. We proposed that awarding organisations should expect students to study at least 120 lines in the ancient language.

Respondents were concerned that this made the qualification too demanding and less accessible, and would create teaching difficulties for schools where ancient languages are taught outside the normal timetable. A number of respondents suggested that we should expect students to study 90 lines, which would be in line with the current Level 2 certificates in Latin offered by one awarding organisation.

Existing GCSEs in ancient languages require the study of 100 lines (at foundation tier) or 135 lines (at higher tier, and in untiered qualifications). Our view remains that reducing the amount of literature studied to below that in any current GCSEs would lower the standard of reformed GCSEs compared to current specifications, and would make it more difficult for awarding organisations to differentiate across the full range of grades.

However, we recognise that there is a legitimate concern about the accessibility of ancient languages GCSEs. On balance, we think that 110 lines of set text would be a more appropriate guideline for reformed ancient languages GCSEs.

In any event, awarding organisations have the flexibility to take a different approach, provided they can demonstrate that their approach is consistent with all relevant subject requirements.

Guidance on assessment objectives

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

A number of respondents reiterated concerns in relation to the overall level of demand of the qualification, and around specific assessment tasks required by the subject content. Again, these are issues of subject content that the Department for Education has already considered.

Some respondents also suggested areas where we could improve the wording and clarity of our guidance. In response to these comments, we have made a number of changes to the wording of our guidance to make our expectations clearer.

Other issues

Some respondents expressed concerns that the removal of tiering in Latin would disadvantage some students, including those with special needs and those from non-selective schools.

We have already considered this issue in response to an earlier consultation.⁴ The responses to this consultation have not raised any new issues that cause us to revisit this earlier decision.

Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published final Subject Level Conditions⁵ and Subject Level Guidance⁶ for GCSE ancient languages.

⁴ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141110161323/http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/modern-foreign-and-ancient-languages/>

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-ancient-languages

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-ancient-languages