

AS and A Level Modern Foreign Languages: Decisions on Conditions and Guidance



In February 2015 we published a consultation about the rules and guidance we proposed to put in place for reformed AS and A level qualifications in modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish).

This consultation set out draft Subject Level Conditions, requirements and guidance which would apply to reformed AS and A level qualifications in modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish).

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

Conditions and requirements

Content requirements

We proposed that all reformed AS and A level qualifications in modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish) should comply with the subject content requirements published by the Department for Education,² and with our assessment objectives.

Most respondents did not comment directly on this proposal. Those who did broadly supported our proposed approach, although some respondents were concerned about the scope for the rules to change in the future.

To confirm, our proposals would not allow us to make arbitrary changes to our rules and guidance in the future. As with all our other rules and guidance, we would always need to consult before making changes to the subject-specific rules and guidance for AS and A level modern foreign languages.

The rules we proposed around the subject content are identical to those for other reformed AS and A level qualifications, and we see no reason to take a different

¹ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/as-and-a-level-reform-regulations-for-modern-foreign-languages

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-as-and-a-level-modern-foreign-languages

approach for modern foreign languages. We have therefore decided to confirm our consultation proposals.

Assessment requirements

We proposed to introduce conditions and requirements setting out the approach that exam boards should take to the following:

- Vocabulary lists
- Access to texts in exams
- Non-exam assessment.

Some respondents questioned the value of vocabulary lists at AS and A level, particularly if exams have to range beyond them. Our view remains that, provided they do not make exams predictable, vocabulary lists could be a useful aid to teachers and we do not want to prevent exam boards from using them. Nor do we want to require that they do use them. We have decided to confirm our proposals.

Respondents did not comment on our proposal to prevent students taking their own copies of set texts into exams. We remain of the view that allowing students to take in their own texts creates significant scope for malpractice, and that the best way to preserve the integrity of the exams is to prevent this. We are confirming these proposals.

Respondents broadly welcomed our approach to non-exam assessment, but some did raise concerns about:

- the length of the A level assessment;
- the timing of the assessment – some respondents suggested it should be held later; and
- allowing teachers and/or external examiners to conduct the assessment – respondents felt this could unfairly advantage or disadvantage some students.

To confirm, the proposed length of the A level non-exam assessment includes 5 minutes for the student to prepare for a discussion. So the actual time spent being examined is less than it might appear.

The reason we proposed to have non-exam assessment take place in April and May was to avoid clashes with the main exam season – which would create logistical problems for schools. We remain of the view that it would be seriously disruptive to exam scheduling if the non-exam assessment took place any later in the year.

All the evidence we have seen suggests that there is simply no alternative to allowing a mix of teacher-conducted and examiner-conducted assessments. Some schools would not have the expertise needed to conduct assessments themselves and, at present, exam boards cannot recruit sufficient examiners to assess all students in all schools. And our proposed rules would require exam boards to take steps to ensure that no student is unfairly disadvantaged as a result of any differences in the conduct of assessment.

We have therefore decided to confirm our main proposals in respect of assessment requirements. But we have made some changes to the drafting and presentation of these requirements to make them clearer.

Access to dictionaries

We proposed that students should not have access to dictionaries in exams, or in any period of formal preparation time prior to exams.

Most respondents who commented supported this proposal, but some felt that allowing access to dictionaries would make assessments more realistic.

On balance, we remain of the view that allowing access to dictionaries could compromise the validity of assessments. We have therefore decided to confirm our proposals here.

Guidance

We proposed to introduce guidance to clarify:

- our approach to the use of vocabulary lists;
- the length of translation exercises;
- the timing of non-exam assessment; and
- the interpretation of our assessment objectives.

Although respondents largely supported our proposed guidance, they did identify some areas where our guidance was not as clear as we had intended.

We have made drafting changes to clarify our expectations.

Other issues

One respondent expressed concerns about the future of languages other than French, German and Spanish at GCSE, AS and A level.

To confirm, we have not taken any decisions that would restrict the future availability of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in other languages. Exam boards are free to develop AS and A level qualifications in other languages, provided they meet the relevant rules and standards.

Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published final *Subject Level Conditions and Requirements*³ and *Subject Level Guidance*⁴ for AS and A level modern foreign languages.

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-modern-foreign-languages

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-guidance-for-modern-foreign-languages