



Department
for Education

Reformed A level and AS subject content consultation: modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts)

Government consultation

Launch date 1 December 2016

Respond by 18 January 2017

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Introduction

This consultation asks for views on AS and A level subject content for Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Greek, Modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese, Polish, Turkish and Urdu. New qualifications based on this content will be first taught in schools and colleges in Autumn 2018.

Who this is for

We are in particular seeking views from:

schools, colleges and further education institutions
teachers, and organisations representing school teachers and lecturers
subject associations
parents and young people
higher education institutions
employers/business sector
local authorities
awarding organisations

Issue date

This consultation was issued on 1 December 2016.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation, contact:
0370 000 2288 and ask for Andy Fisher or email:

SmallerCohortLanguages.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website, please use the [DfE Contact us page](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#)

About this consultation

The government is reforming qualifications at GCSE, AS and A level, to ensure that students are well-equipped for further and higher education, and for employment. The first set of reformed subjects were taught from September 2015, and further subjects will be taught from 2016 and 2017. The remaining 13 subjects, to be taught from September 2018, include 12 modern foreign languages¹: Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Greek, Modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese, Polish, Turkish and Urdu. This consultation seeks views on the draft content for AS and A level qualifications in these languages.

Subject content requirements become regulatory documents which set out the minimum knowledge, understanding and skills needed for AS and A level qualifications, or GCSEs. Subject content provides the framework for awarding organisations to create the detail of qualification specifications.

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for the subject content of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications. Ofqual, the independent regulator, is responsible for determining the assessment arrangements. Ofqual is therefore consulting in parallel on assessment arrangements for these subjects, including the assessment objectives. For a full understanding of how students will be expected to engage with these qualifications, readers of this document are encouraged to consider both the content and the assessment arrangements. Ofqual's consultation on the assessment arrangements can be found on their website.

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

We would like to hear your views on our proposals.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible. Submit your response to <https://consult.education.gov.uk>

¹ The other subject is Biblical Hebrew, which will be developed separately.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may access a Word document version of the form, available on the consultation page (address as above) and email it or post it.

By email

SmallerCohortLanguages.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

By post

Andy Fisher
Dept for Education
Floor 2, Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
London SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes at 17.00 on 18 January 2017.

Background to the consultation

AS and A level reform

The main purpose of A levels is to prepare students for higher education. The purpose of AS qualifications is to enable students to broaden the range of subjects they study, and to support progression to further study or employment. The changes we are making to these qualifications will ensure that they remain fit for purpose, and in particular respond to the concerns of higher education institutions – that students lack some of the knowledge and skills necessary for undergraduate success². The new A levels are linear, which means that all examinations will be at the end of the two-year course, allowing more time for teaching and for students to deepen their understanding of the subject. The AS is entirely decoupled from the A level, so that the marks do not count towards the A level grade.

The AS and A level reform process to date

A review of AS and A level subject content was conducted in 2013 by the four awarding organisations for A levels in England, independently chaired by Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice Chancellor of Lancaster University. The subject content in a range of subjects was published in April 2014, for first teaching from September 2015. This did not include modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics or geography, and Professor Smith recommended a further review which considered the content for these subjects.

This further review was completed by the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) appointed by the Russell Group of universities. As a result, new AS and A level qualifications in some modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Russian), Ancient Greek, Latin and geography were taught from September 2016. New AS and A level qualifications in mathematics and further mathematics, and a range of other subjects, will be taught from September 2017. A level qualifications in the languages which are the subject of this consultation, along with Biblical Hebrew, will be taught from September 2018.

² 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 reform process for modern foreign languages AS and A level (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts)

The Department engaged an expert drafter to develop content for AS and A level qualifications in the 12 modern foreign languages listed below and in paragraph 3 of the content document. The drafter worked with other experts – representatives of leading universities, awarding organisations and Ofqual – to produce content for rigorous academic qualifications designed to equip students for progression to higher education. This content is largely identical to the main content for modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Russian), published in 2015. There are, however, some key differences, as described in the purpose and rationale below.

Proposal and rationale

This section describes the rationale for this draft subject content. The full draft subject content can be downloaded from <https://consult.education.gov.uk/>

The draft content is designed specifically for AS and A levels in the following modern foreign languages: Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Greek, Modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese, Polish, Turkish and Urdu. Specifications for these 12 languages must offer levels of demand and challenge which are broadly comparable to specifications for languages governed by the main content for modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Russian), published in 2015. The key difference is that students will not be required to demonstrate speaking skills in any of the 12 languages to which this consultation applies, in the light of particular challenges in assessing these skills, including difficulties in recruiting trained examiners with the specialist expertise.

In the absence of requirements for students to demonstrate speaking skills, it remains important to secure a level of demand and challenge which is broadly comparable to specifications for languages governed by the main modern foreign languages content (2015). We therefore propose that students will be required to apply language skills (listening, reading, and writing) in combination, responding to spoken and written sources addressing common subject matter. This offers a distinct level of challenge by asking students to apply three skills in response to suitably challenging material.

In addition, **in the subject content to which this consultation applies:**

- The requirement to develop language knowledge, understanding and skills through language skills and strategies, including comprehension and communication strategies - which is in the main content for modern foreign languages (2015) - remains part of the course of studies but will not be

assessed. These skills and strategies include, for example, 'repair' – in which a speaker quickly corrects the vocabulary or grammar of their first response – or when a speaker identifies an equally suitable way of expressing something. In the absence of a speaking assessment for the languages to which this consultation applies, it is not possible to assess whether or not students have used these skills and strategies. Therefore, while the aims and objectives state that specifications must enable students to develop language learning skills and strategies, as part of their course of studies, this is not included in the more detailed content requirements – as there will be no direct assessment of the extent to which students have developed those skills and strategies.

- The research requirements have been amended to allow for the absence of a speaking assessment.
- There is a requirement to study *society past and present*, instead of *social issues and trends*, as one of the areas of interest. By requiring the study of society in the past as well as the present, the content will secure a suitable level of academic challenge in the source material used by students.
- The reference to *camera work*, as an example of a feature to which students must offer a critical and analytical response, is replaced by *use of language and cinematic technique in the analysis of film*. This provides a broader indication of the range of features that should be studied for this requirement.
- There is no explicit requirement to study sources from online media (although students are still permitted to do so, where appropriate).
- The proposed title of the content, modern foreign language AS and A level (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts), has been drafted to provide a clear distinction between students who have completed qualifications based on this content and students who have completed qualifications based on the main content for modern foreign languages (which includes the assessment of speaking skills).

Consultation questions

1. This content is largely identical to the main content for modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Russian), published in 2015. There are, however, some differences, as described in the proposal and rationale above. The key difference is that students will be required to apply three skills (listening, reading, and writing) in combination, responding to spoken and written sources addressing common subject matter taken from suitably rigorous sources (paragraph 10 of the content document). This is designed to develop practical language skills, in place of the requirement to demonstrate speaking skills which is included in the main content requirements for modern foreign languages.

Is the requirement to apply three skills in combination suitable, and will that requirement help to secure a level of demand in the content overall which is comparable to that required for French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Russian?

Do you have any comments on the other differences described in the proposal and rationale above?

2. The proposed title of the content for this qualification, modern foreign languages AS and A level (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts), has been drafted to make a clear distinction between students who have completed qualifications based on this content and students who have completed qualifications based on the main content for modern foreign languages (which includes the assessment of speaking skills).

Do you have any comments on the proposed title?

Equalities impact

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must have “due regard”, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to relevant protected characteristics. It would therefore be very helpful to understand whether, 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.

Consultation questions

1. 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' (disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation)?

Please explain, and provide any evidence you may have, to support your response.

2. How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it?

Please explain, and provide any evidence you may have, to support your response.



Department
for Education

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