



Department  
for Education

# **Proposed changes to subject content for Chinese and Japanese AS and A levels**

**Government consultation**

**Launch date: 26/04/2023**

**Respond by: 31/05/2023**

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## Introduction

Chinese and Japanese are both difficult languages to learn for native English speakers<sup>1</sup>. Feedback from stakeholders, including teachers, students and experts, is that even the most dedicated students of Chinese and Japanese are falling several grades short of their predictions in Chinese and Japanese A levels.

To provide a suitable post-16 qualification that is accessible for all students, we are proposing small changes to the AS and A level subject content, which will apply only to Chinese and Japanese, as exceptions to the Modern Foreign Language subject content and subject content for smaller cohort languages.

Subject content sets out what students should know, understand and do in a course.

Currently, [the Modern Foreign Language AS and A level subject content](#) sets the content requirements for Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian.

The [Modern Foreign Language AS and A level subject content for smaller cohorts](#) sets the requirements for Japanese, Portuguese, Polish and a range of other community languages.

Studying Chinese and Japanese languages requires students to use logographic characters in comprehension (listening and reading) and writing tasks, where the questions are also written in the language of study. The logographic characters present students with a challenge that is distinct from other languages. It is therefore appropriate for any changes to be made both to Chinese and Japanese AS and A levels.

The changes proposed to Chinese and Japanese would allow English to be used in aspects of these subjects where the language of study may make it too challenging for students to meet the requirements of their tasks. Such exceptions for questions to be in English are already included in the current GCSEs for both Chinese and Japanese. This consultation will help gather views on these proposed changes and the impact they may have.

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<sup>1</sup> The Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office expects adult learners to require over 2.5 times the number of hours of training to get from zero language skills to a proficient user of Mandarin or Japanese, compared to the number of hours to reach the same standard in French and German.

## Who this is for?

This consultation is likely to be of interest to:

- Students, including private candidates, with experience of or considering A level Chinese or Japanese, and their parents and carers
- Teachers of these qualifications
- School and college leaders and heads of other types of exam centre
- Teaching unions
- Teaching associations
- Exams officers
- The awarding organisations that will provide the exams
- Those who use qualifications to make selection decisions: universities and employers
- Careers advisors

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 26 April 2023.

The consultation will be open for 5 weeks, starting on 26 April 2023 and ending on 31 May 2023 at 11:59. This window for consultation has been agreed on the basis that any announcements relating to the outcome can be issued early enough to give appropriate preparation time for students, teachers and awarding organisations. It is intended that any changes made to the subject content will be reflected in A level specifications for first teaching in 2024 and first assessment in 2026 (no AS levels are currently offered in these languages).

The DfE recognises that the period in which the consultation will be open is a busy time for teachers and students, with there being overlap with many language speaking exams. It is intended that the 5 week window will provide sufficient time to respond.

## Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the DfE Modern Foreign Languages policy team by email:

[mfl.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:mfl.consultation@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## **Additional copies**

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## **The response**

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in Summer 2023.

## **Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?**

Information provided in response to consultations, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department for Education will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and, your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this consultation. Your information will not be shared with third parties unless the law allows it.

You can read more about what the DfE does when we ask for and hold your personal information in our [personal information charter](#).

## About this consultation

The current expectation for modern language subject content to be taught and assessed only through the language of study contributes to the difficulty of Chinese and Japanese A levels for relatively new learners in England. The logographic writing system of Chinese and Japanese means that, for non-native speaker students used to alphabetic writing systems, logographic characters are not decodable, or “guessable”, as they might be in other modern foreign languages.

The current subject content requires students to read and respond to a variety of texts and listen and respond to spoken passages from a range of different contexts and sources. When comprehension (listening and reading) questions are asked in the language of study and responses to comprehension (listening and reading) questions require writing in the language of study, the student’s writing skills are implicitly part of the task.

Writing is not the skill being assessed in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks and thus may unintentionally obstruct students being able to demonstrate their comprehension skills. The skill of writing is assessed elsewhere in the examinations. The first proposal in this consultation is therefore to change this so that:

When assessing comprehension (listening and reading) skills, questions and responses are expected in English.

The current subject content also requires students “to respond critically in writing, in the language of study” to the literary works or film they have studied. Where a student does not understand the question written in the language of study of Chinese or Japanese, this can result in them not being able to fully demonstrate their language and their critical response skills. The skill of reading and understanding the question is implicitly part of the task.

Writing is the skill being assessed in the critical response to literary works or film and thus inclusion of reading skills in this section (which are assessed elsewhere in the examination) may unintentionally obstruct students being able to demonstrate their writing skills. The second proposal in this consultation is therefore that:

Questions on literary works or film are provided in both the language of study and in English. This will ensure that students understand the task being set in the exam.

Students’ responses to questions about the literary works or film are still expected in the language of study of Chinese or Japanese. This is because the Chinese and Japanese examinations must still assess students’ ability to write in the language of study, which is an important part of learning a language.

We are not planning to make any changes to the speaking requirements in the subject content or assessments. This is because speaking skills are demonstrated orally. Other language learning skills, including communication strategies such as adjusting the message, circumlocution, self-correction and repair strategies, can be used in this context, whereas they cannot be used in the comprehension or literary works and film

sections of the examination. For Japanese, there is no speaking element within the current qualification and no change to this is included in the proposal.

We are also not planning to make any changes to the translation requirements from the language of study into English in either the subject content or assessments. This is because reading and understanding the passage to translate is part of a translation task and therefore an important part of A level assessment.

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. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) to submit your response.

## **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 request and complete a word document version of the form.

### **By email**

- [mfl.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:mfl.consultation@education.gov.uk)

## **Deadline**

The consultation closes on 31 May 2023.

# Proposal 1 – Expectation for questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks to be in English, unless writing skills are also intentionally being demonstrated.

## Proposal and rationale

The proposal is that questions that assess students' Chinese or Japanese listening and reading skills are asked and answered in English, unless writing skills are intentionally also being demonstrated through a multi-skilled task.

At present, students read and respond to comprehension (listening and reading) questions in the language of study. This consultation proposes that, when assessing comprehension skills, students answer in English. This could be introduced in one of two ways: we want to gather your views on whether exam boards **must** or **should** require students to answer in English. For both options, students will not be able to choose their language of response.

A **must** would leave no option for exam boards to ask questions and expect responses in the language of study.

A **should** would give some flexibility for exam boards to ask questions and expect responses in the language of study.

This proposal focuses student learning and assessment on the particular modern language skill in question, without logographic language challenges unintentionally obstructing the demonstration of that skill.



Consultation questions for Proposal 1:

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that, for Chinese AS and A levels, questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *must* be in English, unless writing skills are also intentionally being demonstrated?**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that, for Chinese AS and A levels, questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *should* be in English, unless writing skills are also intentionally being demonstrated?**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that, for Japanese AS and A levels, questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *must* be in English, unless writing skills are also intentionally being demonstrated?**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that, for Japanese AS and A levels, questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *should* be in English, unless writing skills are also intentionally being demonstrated?**

**Do you have any comments to explain your views on the different ways of asking and answering questions in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks, or other considerations for demonstrating these skills?**

## **Proposal 2 – Providing questions for literary works and film tasks in both the language of study (for Chinese and Japanese) and in English.**

### **Proposal and rationale**

Not knowing the meaning of a character can prevent a student from understanding the question. When questions for literary works and film tasks are provided only in the language of study, then the skill of reading and understanding the question is implicitly part of the task.

The proposal is that questions for literary works and film tasks in Chinese and Japanese AS and A levels are provided in both the language of study and in English. Responses to literary works and film questions are not included in this consultation and students will still be required to answer literary works and film questions in the language of study. This is because the examinations must still assess students' ability to write in the language of study.

This proposal facilitates questions being easily understood and that the contextual language of study is also provided through the questions.

Consultation questions for Proposal 2:

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that, for Chinese AS and A levels, questions for literary works and film tasks are provided in both the language of study and in English?**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that, for Japanese AS and A levels, questions for literary works and film tasks are provided in both the language of study and in English?**

**Do you have any comments to explain your view or any feedback that should be considered about the language used in these questions to demonstrate the required skills for Chinese and Japanese A levels?**

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State, when exercising the functions of the Secretary of State, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;

- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Department has considered the impact of these changes on groups of people who share particular protected characteristics. We have not identified any aspects of our proposal that would have a negative impact on students or teachers who share particular protected characteristics. These changes should ensure that the assessments and full grade range are appropriately accessible to non-native speaker students. We are keen to hear any views on the impact of the proposed changes on people with protected characteristics, and suggestions for mitigating any negative impacts of the changes.

Questions:

**Do you consider there to be any potential equality impacts on those who share protected characteristics that we have not identified?**

**Do you have any suggestions for how any potential negative impacts on particular groups could be mitigated?**



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