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Regulation

GCSE (9 to 1) subject-level conditions and requirements for British Sign Language

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Applies to England

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About this document

This document is part of a suite of documents which sets out the regulatory requirements for awarding organisations offering GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1).

We have developed these requirements with the intention that GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) should fulfil the following purposes:

- to provide evidence of students' achievements against demanding and fulfilling content;
- to provide a strong foundation for further academic and vocational study and for employment; and
- to provide (if required) a basis for schools and colleges to be held accountable for the performance of all of their students

Requirements set out in this document

This document sets out the GCSE Subject Level Conditions for British Sign Language. These conditions will come into effect at 12.01am on Thursday 13 November 2025 for all GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) in British Sign Language.

It also sets out our requirements in relation to:

- assessment objectives – awarding organisations must comply with these requirements under Condition GCSE(BSL)1.2; and
- assessment – awarding organisations must comply with these requirements under Condition GCSE(BSL)2.3.

With respect to all GCSE qualifications (graded from 9 to 1) in BSL, awarding organisations must also comply with:

- our [General Conditions of Recognition](#), which apply to all awarding organisations and qualifications;
- our [GCSE Qualification Level Conditions](#); and
- all relevant Regulatory Documents.

Condition GCSE(BSL)1: compliance with content requirements

Condition GCSE(BSL)1.1

In respect of each GCSE qualification in British Sign Language which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must:

- (a) comply with the requirements relating to that qualification set out in the document published by the Secretary of State entitled '[British Sign Language GCSE subject content](#)',
- (b) have regard to any recommendations or guidelines relating to that qualification set out in that document, and
- (c) interpret that document in accordance with any requirements, and having regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

Condition GCSE(BSL)1.2

In respect of each GCSE qualification in British Sign Language which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must comply with any requirements, and have regard to any guidance, relating to the objectives to be met by any assessment for that qualification which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

Condition GCSE(BSL)2: Assessment

Condition GCSE(BSL)2.1

Condition GCSE4.1 does not apply to any GCSE qualification in British Sign Language which an awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available.

Condition GCSE(BSL)2.2

In respect of the total marks available for a GCSE Qualification in British Sign Language which it makes available, an awarding organisation must ensure that:

- (a) 40% of those marks are made available through Assessments by Examination, and
- (b) 60% of those marks are made available through assessments set by the awarding organisation that are not Assessments by Examination.

Condition GCSE(BSL)2.3

An awarding organisation must ensure that in respect of each assessment for GCSE qualification in a British Sign Language which it makes available it complies with any requirements, and has regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual

and revised from time to time.

Condition GCSE(BSL)3: Access to dictionaries

Condition GCSE(BSL)3.1

An awarding organisation must take reasonable steps to ensure that no Learner has access to a dictionary:

- (a) when taking any assessment for a GCSE Qualification in British Sign Language which it makes available, or
- (b) during any period of formal preparation time prior to such an assessment.

Condition GCSE(BSL)3.2

For the purposes of this Condition ‘formal preparation time’ is a period of time immediately prior to the assessment during which the Learner is provided with previously unseen information relating to the assessment and is allowed to prepare for the assessment under conditions (including conditions as to supervision) which have been specified by the awarding organisation.

Assessment objectives – GCSE qualifications in British Sign Language

Condition GCSE(BSL)1.2 allows us to specify requirements relating to the objectives to be met by any assessment for all GCSE qualifications in British Sign Language.

The assessment objectives set out below constitute requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(BSL)1.2. Awarding organisations must comply with these requirements in relation to each GCSE qualification in British Sign Language they make available or propose to make available.

| Objective | | Weighting |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| AO1 | Demonstrate understanding of recorded and interactive British Sign Language | 35% |

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| AO2 | Produce British Sign Language as rehearsed and unrehearsed language | 30% |
| AO3 | Articulate signs with accurate use of lexicon and grammar, and with appropriate use of interaction strategies | 20% |
| AO4 | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the history of British Sign Language | 15% |

Requirements in relation to assessments for GCSE qualifications in British Sign Language

Condition GCSE(BSL)2.3 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to assessments for GCSE Qualifications in British Sign Language.

We set out our requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(BSL)2.3 below.

Language and accessibility of assessments

In designing and setting the assessments in relation to assessment objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3, an awarding organisation must:

- (a) produce a single set of assessments designed for Learners who have no prior knowledge of British Sign Language before taking the qualification,
- (b) take all reasonable steps to –
 - (i) maximise the accessibility of the assessments for those Learners who, without such steps, would require a Reasonable Adjustment in relation to the qualification under Condition G2.2^{[footnote 1](#)} (where permitted), and
 - (ii) ensure that those Learners are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged in comparison with other Learners.

Where assessment objective AO4 is not assessed through a separate Component, an awarding organisation must adopt the same approach for that assessment as for

the other assessments for the qualification.

In its assessment strategy, an awarding organisation must explain and justify its approach to the accessibility of its assessments.

An awarding organisation must ensure that the Assessments by Examination for the qualification:

(a) do not reward either the use or quality of English or British Sign Language (where the latter is permitted as a Reasonable Adjustment) in the evidence generated by a Learner in the assessment, and

(b) assess only a Learner's –

(i) comprehension skills, including their knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary and grammar set out in the specification, and

(ii) knowledge and understanding of the history of British Sign Language.

Vocabulary and grammar

An awarding organisation must ensure that the specification for a GCSE qualification in British Sign Language which it makes available sets out the vocabulary list for the qualification. The specification must also visually illustrate the signs that a Learner will be expected to know, including any regional variations the awarding organisation intends to use for each of those signs. Visual illustrations of the signs must, where appropriate to the sign, be presented using video recordings or 3D images.

An awarding organisation must take all reasonable steps to ensure:

(a) that the use of regional variations in the assessments for the qualification do not advantage one group of Learners over another, and

(b) that a Learner is appropriately credited for the correct use of a regional variation in the assessments which are not Assessments by Examination, even where that regional variation does not appear on the vocabulary list

In its assessment strategy, an awarding organisation must set out its approach to:

(a) compiling the vocabulary list,

(b) ensuring appropriate coverage in the assessments of the vocabulary and grammar requirements set out in the specification,

(c) regional variations within the assessments which are not Assessments by Examination, including how it will ensure that –

(i) the use of a particular regional variation which is not included in the vocabulary list is correct, and

(ii) a Learner is appropriately credited for the correct use of a regional variation, particularly where marks are awarded for accuracy,

(d) assessment of a Learner's ability to infer plausible meanings of single signs,

(e) ensuring only limited inclusion of unfamiliar vocabulary where this is not required for the assessment, and

(f) providing the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary in assessments.

Use of stimulus materials

In respect of each GCSE qualification in British Sign Language which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must produce Stimulus Materials for:

(a) the Assessments by Examination, and

(b) where necessary, the assessments which are not Assessments by Examination

Those Stimulus Materials must comprise recorded material using British Sign Language for the purposes of assessing Learners' comprehension (in line with assessment objective AO1). They may also include Stimulus Materials in other formats, as appropriate to the assessment.

In its assessment strategy, an awarding organisation must set out its approach to:

(a) assessing Learners' understanding of its Stimulus Materials,

(b) ensuring that those Stimulus Materials will support valid and accessible assessments,

(c) ensuring Learners have sufficient time in the assessments to view any recorded material used as Stimulus Materials as well as to consider and respond to each question or task,

(d) the number of extracts that will typically be used in a single assessment,

(e) the duration of the extracts and typical breadth of coverage of vocabulary and grammar,

- (f) the number of marks available in relation to the size and content of each extract,
- (g) ensuring that the quality, pace and context of British Sign Language used in each extract is appropriate for the qualification, and
- (h) the use of the productive lexicon within the Stimulus Materials.

Forms of non-examination assessment

Condition GCSE(BSL)2.2(b) states that an awarding organisation must ensure that, of the total marks available for a GCSE Qualification in British Sign Language, 60% of those marks shall be made available through assessments set by the awarding organisation which are not Assessments by Examination.

In respect of the assessments which are not Assessments by Examination, an awarding organisation must ensure that:

- (a) 20% of the total marks available for the qualification are made available through a BSL Portfolio,
- (b) 40% of the total marks available for the qualification are made available through an Interactive Assessment, and
- (c) taken together, the BSL Portfolio and the Interactive Assessment meet the requirements set out in paragraphs 8(b) and 8(c) of the document published by the Secretary of State entitled '[British Sign Language GCSE subject content](#)'.

The BSL Portfolio

An awarding organisation must ensure that the 20% of the total marks available for the qualification which are made available through BSL Portfolio, are comprised as follows:

- (a) 10% through marks available in respect of assessment objective AO2 in relation to the production of British Sign Language as rehearsed language, and
- (b) 10% through marks available in respect of assessment objective AO3.

An awarding organisation must ensure that each BSL Portfolio is designed and set to require each Learner to respond to a brief set by the awarding organisation that:

(a) requires the Learner to complete the following two tasks using British Sign Language –

- (i) tell a story prepared in advance by the Learner, and then answer questions on that story, and
- (ii) take part in a conversation, on a separate topic from the story told by the Learner, structured by Stimulus Materials provided by the awarding organisation, and

(b) allows the Learner to generate evidence that their productive and interactive use of British Sign Language can be understood by a proficient user of British Sign Language.

An awarding organisation must not communicate the brief that it has set for the BSL Portfolio to Centres before 1 November in the academic year in which a Learner taking the BSL Portfolio is due to take the Assessments by Examination for the qualification.

An awarding organisation must ensure that a Learner may choose to tell their story either:

- (a) in response to Stimulus Materials provided by the awarding organisation, or
- (b) on a topic of the Learner's own choosing that will enable them to address the requirements set out in the specification for the qualification.

Ofqual has set no minimum or maximum duration for the BSL Portfolio. However, an awarding organisation may:

- (a) state in its brief that, where the BSL Portfolio is less than 5 minutes in duration, there is a risk that the Learner may not provide sufficient evidence to meet the expectations in the criteria set by the awarding organisation under Condition G1.3, and/or
- (b) set a maximum duration for the BSL Portfolio of no less than 10 minutes.

A BSL Portfolio must be delivered by a Centre by a Teacher of the qualification under conditions specified by the awarding organisation.

In respect of each BSL Portfolio, an awarding organisation must ensure that:

- (a) the Centre which delivered the assessment provides the awarding organisation with a complete and unedited audiovisual recording of the evidence generated in that assessment, and

(b) that recording is retained by the awarding organisation for a sufficient period of time to allow for the completion of –

- (i) all relevant enquiries about results and appeals, and
- (ii) all appropriate steps to correct or, where relevant, to mitigate the effect of any failure discovered through such enquiries about results and appeals.

That recording may comprise either:

- (a) a single recording of both tasks in the BSL Portfolio, or
- (b) separate recordings of –
 - (i) the story told by the Learner and the follow-up questions on that story, and
 - (ii) the conversation.

The awarding organisation must provide the Centre with instructions about the audiovisual recording, including ensuring that:

- (a) the recording must capture any sound, and
- (b) the face, hands and signing space for both signers (Learner and Teacher) must be clearly visible and unobstructed.

Evidence generated by a Learner in a BSL Portfolio must be marked by the awarding organisation or a person connected to the awarding organisation.

The Interactive Assessment

An awarding organisation must ensure that the 40% of the total marks available for the qualification which are made available through the Interactive Assessment, are comprised as follows:

- (a) 10% through marks available in respect of assessment objective AO1 in relation to demonstrating understanding of interactive British Sign Language,
- (b) 20% through marks available in respect of assessment objective AO2 in relation to the production of British Sign Language as unrehearsed language, and
- (c) 10% through marks available in respect of assessment objective AO3.

An awarding organisation must ensure that each Interactive Assessment is designed and set to require each Learner to undertake at least three tasks set by the awarding

organisation that:

- (a) allow the Learner to generate evidence that their productive and interactive use of British Sign Language can be understood by a proficient user of British Sign Language,
- (b) in at least one task, allow the Learner to respond to Stimulus Materials set by the awarding organisation,
- (c) may include role plays, semi-structured conversations, responses to visual Stimulus Materials and/or other activities specified by the awarding organisation, and
- (d) are designed to have a total duration of 12 to 14 minutes.

An awarding organisation must design and set each Interactive Assessment on the basis that:

- (a) each Learner shall have the same amount of formal preparation time (as defined in Condition GCSE(BSL)3.2) in relation to the assessment and that period of time must be between 12 and 15 minutes, and
- (b) the total period of time spent by each Learner in taking the assessment shall not exceed 14 minutes.

The timeframe of 12 to 14 minutes which underpins the design of the Interactive Assessment is based on the time needed for a typical Learner with no prior knowledge of BSL to demonstrate their attainment. However, some Learners may complete the assessment in a shorter time.

It is important that a Learner is rewarded for the level of attainment they have demonstrated in the assessment. As such, an awarding organisation must ensure that each Learner is rewarded, according to the mark scheme, for the evidence that they have generated in the Interactive Assessment, including where that assessment is completed in a shorter timeframe than 12 to 14 minutes.

An awarding organisation must ensure that a Learner completes the Interactive Assessment within a period of up to 5 weeks in the months of April and May in the academic year during which that Learner is due to take the Assessments by Examination for the qualification.

An Interactive Assessment must be delivered by:

- (a) a Centre by a Teacher of the qualification under conditions specified by the awarding organisation, or
- (b) where requested by the Centre, by the awarding organisation or a person

connected to the awarding organisation.

In respect of each Interactive Assessment, an awarding organisation must ensure that:

- (a) a complete and unedited audiovisual recording is made of the evidence generated in that assessment, and
- (b) that recording is retained by the awarding organisation for a sufficient period of time to allow for the completion of –
 - (i) all relevant enquiries about results and appeals, and
 - (ii) all appropriate steps to correct or, where relevant, to mitigate the effect of any failure discovered through such enquiries about results and appeals.

The awarding organisation must provide the Centre (and, if necessary, its own Assessor) with instructions about the audiovisual recording, including ensuring that:

- (a) the recording must capture any sound, and
- (b) the face, hands and signing space for both signers (Learner and Teacher) must be clearly visible and unobstructed.

Evidence generated by a Learner in an Interactive Assessment must be marked by the awarding organisation or a person connected to the awarding organisation.

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1. Condition G2.2 states that a Learner may be assessed in British Sign Language where it is permitted by an awarding organisation for the purpose of Reasonable Adjustment. ↩

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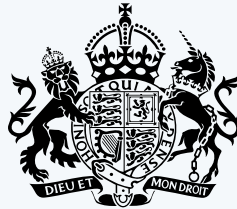
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