



Department
for Education

Chinese and Japanese AS and A level subject content review

Government consultation response

July 2023

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Introduction

Background

In April 2023, the Department launched a consultation to seek views on changes to the subject content for Chinese and Japanese AS and A levels. The proposals were for 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. The public consultation exercise sought views on making these changes and allowed respondents to express comments, views, or concerns. This document provides a summary of responses and the Government's response to the consultation.

Who was this for?

Students, including private candidates, with experience of, or considering taking, 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;
and

Careers advisors.

Consultation period

The consultation ran for 5 weeks from 26 April to 31 May 2023. Responses could be submitted via the Government's online consultation portal, or by email.

Proposals

The consultation sought views on:

- Questions and responses expected in English when assessing comprehension (listening and reading) skills, unless writing skills also intentionally being demonstrated.

- Questions on literary works or film provided in both the language of study and in English.

Methodology

The consultation asked respondents 16 questions in total: 8 personal questions; 6 questions on the proposals; and 2 equalities impact questions. Questions 9 and 10 were split into two parts, where technical detail on whether questions and responses for comprehension (listening and reading) *must* or *should* be expected in English was consulted upon. Questions 9 and 12 made proposals for Chinese AS and A level subject content only; questions 10 and 13 made proposals for Japanese AS and A level subject content only. Respondents were asked to indicate on a rating scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each proposal. Respondents were also invited to give a text response in support of their answer on the rating scale.

Respondents could choose to respond to questions included in the consultation; they did not have to respond to them all. We have provided the total number of responses received for each question. We have also provided tables of the responses to the closed questions. In some cases, there are instances where percentages total something other than 100%. This is due to the rounding of the individual percentages.

Qualitative analysis of responses given in the free text boxes was carried out using an inductive approach, whereby feedback was read to determine the themes to be created. All responses to the free text questions have been read in full, with the themes presented summarising the main points raised. This summary is not intended to be an exhaustive record of all the points made and the absence of a particular issue does not indicate that it has been ignored or that it is of lesser importance.

To note, most responses relate to the exams rather than the curriculum itself but the end point of an exam will inform the teaching needed to prepare students for this so it is still of value for informing the subject content and curriculum.

Summary of responses received

In response to the consultation, the Department for Education (DfE) received contributions from 177 respondents, all of which were received through Citizen Space, our online consultation platform. Respondents were invited to indicate the capacity in which they were responding, by self-identifying the group to which they belong. The total numbers of respondents for each respondent group are set out in the tables below, based on these descriptions.

Respondents were firstly asked to state whether they were answering as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. We received a total of 177 answers to this question. The breakdown is as follows:

Type of response	Total	Percent
Individual	125	71%
Organisation	52	29%

Of the 125 who said they were responding as an individual, they self-identified into the following groups:

Description of individual that responded	Total	Percent
Languages teacher	72	58%
Teacher, other	2	2%
Pupil	21	17%
Parent/carer	3	2%
School/college leader	8	6%
University professor/lecturer	9	7%
Other* ¹	10	8%

¹ Respondents who selected 'other' included, but were not limited to, retired teachers, language consultants and translators.

Those who said they were responding on behalf of an organisation were asked what type of organisation it was. We received 52 answers to this question. The breakdown of these organisations is as follows:

Type of organisation that responded	Total	Percent
School or college	42	81%
Subject association	1	2%
Teachers' union	0	0%
Awarding organisation	1	2%
Publishing company	0	0%
University	6	12%
Other* ²	2	4%

Other questions that were asked within the 'personal information' section of this consultation requested respondents' names and email addresses; whether they would be happy to be contacted directly about their response; and whether they would like their response to be kept confidential. There was no requirement for respondents to provide any of this information and all views were considered regardless of whether this information was given.

² Organisations that selected 'other' included charities and foundations.

Question analysis: Proposal 1

This section provides a breakdown of the responses received for each consultation question following a categorisation process and the Government's response.

Question 9.1

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?

There were 169 responses to this question, as follows:

Responses to Q9.1	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	123	73%
Agree	32	19%
Don't know	6	4%
Disagree	3	2%
Strongly disagree	5	3%

Question 9.2

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?

There were 165 responses to this question, as follows:

Responses to Q9.2	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	106	64%
Agree	28	17%
Don't know	7	4%
Disagree	5	3%
Strongly disagree	19	12%

92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal that, for Chinese AS and A levels, questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *must* be in English, while 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal that questions and responses *should* be in English for comprehension (listening and reading tasks) in Chinese AS and A levels, while 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Of the respondents who answered agree or strongly agree to Q9.1, 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed with Q9.2. Of the respondents who answered disagree or strongly disagree to Q9.1, 2% agreed or strongly agreed with Q9.2.

Question 10.1

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?

There were 156 responses to this question, as follows:

Responses to Q10.1	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	91	58%
Agree	28	18%
Don't know	28	18%
Disagree	4	3%
Strongly disagree	5	3%

Question 10.2

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?

There were 155 responses to this question, as follows:

Responses to Q10.2	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	82	53%
Agree	25	16%
Don't know	28	18%
Disagree	5	3%
Strongly disagree	15	10%

76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal that, for Japanese AS and A levels, questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *must* be in English, while 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal that questions and responses *should* be in English for comprehension (listening and reading tasks) in Japanese AS and A levels, while 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Of the respondents who answered agree or strongly agree to Q10.1, 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with Q10.2. Of the respondents who answered disagree or strongly disagree to Q10.1, 2% agreed or strongly agreed with Q10.2.

In the free text box below the rating scale questions, many respondents explained that they had chosen 'don't know' for Japanese because they were answering in the capacity of a Chinese language teacher, with no experience of teaching the Japanese course specification.

Question 11

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?

There were 89 responses to this free text question. Note: brackets indicate the number of submissions which mentioned each theme. Some respondents may have provided an answer which fell into multiple themes.

73 responses agreed with aspects of the proposals, with the following themes emerging:

- Fairness (38); non-native speakers are more at a disadvantage than native speakers.
- More appropriate measure (34); proposed changes will better test comprehension as writing is a different skill that can be tested in other ways.

- Difficulty (32); character based languages are harder to learn for native English speakers, the standard expected is harder than at university, and should not have the same expectations/content as non-logographic languages which don't take as long to learn.
- Other lesser mentioned themes included more flexibility in how to answer and potential to improve student performance.

'By answering listening and reading questions in English students can present their comprehension of the target language. Writing in Chinese is totally another skill.' (**Organisational response from School/ College Language Teacher**)

'The level of challenge at A Level is not commensurate with the demands of either GCSE Chinese or university study of Chinese. It's important that hard-working non-native students can get the grades which fairly reflect their effort and progress, in line with the grades they are able to achieve other subjects.' (**Organisational response from School/ College Language Teacher**)

There were 30 responses that suggested additional changes, with the following themes emerging:

- Keep questions and/or answers in target language with different adjustments to the question (10) including answering in hiragana/pinyin, note taking in target language, audio questions, copy answer from text/ gap filling, online testing, multi-choice answers, real life situations.
- Separate exam (9) for native speakers and non-native speakers.
- Other suggestions included additional materials (vocabulary lists, dictionaries), essay needs more attention, non-specified changes to examination and marking is needed.

'For the reading paper in both Chinese and Japanese, it could mimic the IB Ab Initio and Standard paper whereby students identify and copy the correct answer from the text. Everything is in the target language but there is not manipulation of language or new language required.' (**Individual response from a Languages Teacher**)

There were 5 responses in disagreement to the proposals, with reasons such as the suggested changes may make the paper more challenging or are not synonymous with supporting learning Chinese or Japanese.

Government response

We are grateful to all those who took the time to respond to the consultation. The DfE has considered the range of responses received which, alongside continued conversations with stakeholders and representative bodies, have helped inform decisions on next steps and the drafting of amendments to the subject content.

As outlined in the consultation document, it is intended that proposal 1 will focus student learning and assessment on the particular modern language skill in question, without logographic language challenges unintentionally obstructing the demonstration of that skill.

We welcome agreement from the majority of respondents that the changes would help to improve the fairness of the qualification, that it would address concerns regarding the difficulty levels and would be a better test of comprehension skills. We note a higher number of respondents in support of the proposal that questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *must* be in English (92% for Chinese AS and A levels and 76% for Japanese AS and A levels), in comparison to those in support that questions and responses in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks *should* be in English (81% for Chinese AS and A levels and 69% for Japanese AS and A levels).

We also note respondents' suggestions for additional changes to the comprehension section of the qualification. Many of these suggestions do not directly relate to or necessitate changes to the subject content, for which the DfE is responsible. We are grateful to respondents for raising these suggestions and will be sharing this feedback with Ofqual and Pearson Edexcel.

Following the feedback for proposal 1, we will be making changes to the subject content (for Chinese, this refers to [the Modern Foreign Language AS and A level subject content](#) and, for Japanese, this refers to the [Modern Foreign Language AS and A level subject content for smaller cohorts](#)), to enable English to be used when asking and answering questions in comprehension (listening and reading) tasks. The expectation will be that questions and responses to comprehension tasks *must* be in English. It is to be noted that the changes made to the subject content will be added as an annex in both cases and will apply only to Chinese and Japanese. The changes will be made for first teaching of the new subject content to commence in September 2024, with first assessment in 2026.

Question analysis: Proposal 2

Question 12

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?

There were 170 responses to this question, as follows:

Responses to Q12	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	140	82%
Agree	16	9%
Don't know	6	4%
Disagree	4	2%
Strongly disagree	4	2%

91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed 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, while 4% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Question 13

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?

There were 157 responses to this question, as follows:

Responses to Q13	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	105	67%
Agree	17	11%
Don't know	27	17%
Disagree	4	3%
Strongly disagree	4	3%

78% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed 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, while 6% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Question 14

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?

There were 86 responses to this free text question. Note: brackets indicate the number of submissions which mentioned each theme. Some respondents may have provided an answer which fell into multiple themes.

73 responses agreed with aspects of the proposals, with the following themes emerging:

- Aids understanding of question (32); less chance for misinterpretation and helps with being able to answer correctly as writing is being tested instead of comprehension.
- Fairness (28); non-native speakers are more at a disadvantage than native speakers.
- Difficulty level (27); memorising and writing characters is challenging.
- More appropriate measure (15) as better tests their writing ability and can demonstrate their skill.

'Reading characters is very challenging, if questions in literature and films are presented in Chinese only, any misunderstanding of the question could lead to a completely wrong answer, which wouldn't best demonstrate students' writing and understanding of the literature or films.' (**Individual response from a languages consultant**)

'You cannot guess characters in Chinese as there is no alphabet so if you can't understand the question as you are non-native, how are you meant to write a good essay' (**Individual response from a pupil**)

There were 40 responses that suggested additional changes, with the following themes emerging:

- Writing skills tested differently (19); discussing literature is very nuanced and students would better be able to demonstrate their understanding in English as is done at university. Currently too much time is spent on teaching for this paper where stock phrases are learnt and language that is not useful for everyday real-life situations. Many question if the point of the literature paper to measure writing or cultural understanding, with many suggesting it should be the latter as it

currently does a challenging hybrid of the two. Writing skills would be better tested through questions on the four themes of study.

- Additional materials (11); use of a dictionary, vocabulary list or writing on computers to better reflect workplace skills.
- More choice (9); in books and films of study as well as questions on the exam paper like in other language papers.
- Curriculum content (9); should have more focus on culture and skills that will be useful for work in these countries.
- Separate exams (6); different level exams for native and non-native speakers.

'Summarizing and distilling information in English after reading a Chinese or Japanese text is a much more reliable indicator for deep-level comprehension (unless one specifically wishes to test language only). The value of the A-level in Chinese remains too much focused on basic character acquisition and does not expose students to learn and reflect on some of the key features of Chinese history, culture and civilization. We teach our students some very basic Chinese, but we fail to teach them how to "think Chinese". The latter should be the added value of such an A-level.'
(Individual response from a University Professor)

'I realise this consultation is only about asking the question in English -- this certainly must be done -- but I'd argue strongly that students should be responding in English too. Some of these students are very fluent and could easily work in a Chinese business environment. The issue is though that responses to literature have to be nuanced. If the focus of the response is purely on 'how do I write this word' then the natural instinct is to use the characters that are easier to write, and/or to memorise stock responses in advance. This is of far less educational value. If instead we can get students to engage genuinely with the text and write a proper response, we are halfway to a genuine understanding and meaningful engagement. If you insist on them writing in Chinese, they will simply memorise stock 'literary' sentences (as is often done in Chinese secondary schools) which they will never use again in real life.'
(Individual response from a University Professor)

'Requiring candidates to respond to literary works and film tasks in the target language has significant drawbacks. The vocabulary and expressions used in literary reviews in the target language are often uncommon, and it's not a skill that foreign language learners of Chinese and Japanese would typically continue using in university or their professional lives.' **(Organisational response from School/ College Language Teacher)**

There were 24 responses specifically about the question wording: 12 specified questions should be in both languages to aid understanding, 11 said it should be in English only to prevent possible confusion/ misinterpretation with nuances in the wording, and 1 said there should not be so much English in teaching and exams.

Government response

The DfE welcomes the broad support across respondent groups to proposal 2 and the recognition that such a change would aid understanding of the task, would improve fairness and would better allow students to demonstrate their writing ability.

We have considered the concerns raised by respondents about the language of response to questions on literary works or film, with many suggestions that the language of response should be English. In our consultation, we said that 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. A change of this scale could not be achieved by September 2024 and it is the case that, without changing wider aspects of the content and assessment requirements, permitting responses in English for literary works or film would not give students sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills in the language of study.

The current subject content requires students "to respond critically in writing, in the language of study" to the literary works or film they have studied. It is not the DfE's role to stipulate how such a critical response is assessed because assessment is separate to subject content requirements. Following feedback to this consultation, we will continue to gather views to understand the challenges experienced in this section of the Chinese and Japanese qualifications. This will inform the DfE's considerations on the subject content expectations for A level qualifications in these two subjects in the longer term.

As a result of the responses, we will make changes to the subject content (for Chinese, this refers to [the Modern Foreign Language AS and A level subject content](#) and, for Japanese, this refers to the [Modern Foreign Language AS and A level subject content for smaller cohorts](#)), to allow for questions to literary works or film to be in both English and in the language of study. It is to be noted that the changes made to the subject content will be added as an annex in both cases and will apply only to Chinese and Japanese. The changes will be made for first teaching of the new subject content to commence in September 2024, with first assessment in 2026.

Question analysis: Equalities Impact Assessment

Question 15

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

There were 164 responses to this question, as follows:

Answers to Q15	Total	Percent
Yes	27	17%
No	136	83%

No respondent identified any impact on age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Those who answered 'yes' to question 15 raised concerns about the impact on students of different nationalities and students with SEND. Themes emerging from this question are set out below (note: brackets indicate the number of submissions which mentioned each theme. Some respondents may have provided an answer which fell into multiple themes):

- Discrimination against non-native speakers (23)
- Testing methods and marking (13); need reviewing to make the exams fairer for all.
- Other lesser mentioned themes included; changes will make a difference, non-comparability to other languages, SEND pupils need consideration.

'It is unfair for non-native speaker students to take the same exam and have the same mark scheme and criteria with native speaker students. There's a huge gap between their language proficiency, especially in terms of literary and film works. Non-native speaker students might have brilliant ideas and logical and persuasive arguments, however, when put them in a foreign language, they can't make themselves expressed completely due to their limited language capacity.' **(Individual response from a Languages Teacher)**

'Non-native speakers of Chinese face systemic discrimination in achieving the highest grades, unlike European languages where they do frequently achieve the highest grades. The certainty that a non-native speaker cannot achieve better than a B grade at A Level, strongly discourage learners from taking the subject because this has a severe negative impact on university applications. The senior school uptake of Chinese A Level has fallen dramatically. This in turn has also impacted the uptake of Chinese at GCSE level.' **(Individual response from a Lead Teacher)**

Question 16

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

There were 44 responses to this free text question. Note: brackets indicate the number of submissions which mentioned each theme. Some respondents may have provided an answer which fell into multiple themes.

No new themes emerged as a response to this question. Rather, previous themes have been re-iterated or further detail added to previously mentioned points. These are as follows:

- Exam suggestions (32)
- Different written paper (11); an essay specifically to test writing and character ability that isn't discussing literature and has a wider choice of question topics.
- Separate exams (9); for native and non-native speakers.
- Marking and grade boundaries (6) need altering.
- Other themes included; suggestions for a speaking exam, requirement of exam support materials, and that more work is needed.
- Positive steps (6); the suggestions in the consultation is a move in right direction.

Government response

The DfE recognises that some pupils (including those with and without particular protected characteristics) face greater barriers in their education than others. Equalities considerations have been at the forefront of the development of these proposals and the responses to this consultation have, and will continue to, inform and progress our thinking. We have noted views from respondents on potential disproportionate impacts of the subject content changes on pupils with certain protected characteristics, particularly pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and on pupils of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. It is the DfE's view that the overall impact of these proposals on the majority of students will be positive as they will ensure that the assessments and full grade range are appropriately accessible to all students.

Some feedback to this question identified impacts on specific requirements within the assessments. Both exam centres and Awarding Organisations have an obligation to make reasonable adjustments to the examinations and these comments have been passed on to Ofqual and Pearson Edexcel for consideration.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded to the consultation

- Becket Keys Church of England Secondary School
- Beths Grammar School
- Brighton College
- British Association for Chinese Studies
- Cambridge University
- City of London School
- City of London School for Girls
- Cleeve School
- Downe House School
- Eton College
- Gosforth Academy
- Harris Academy South Norwood
- Harris Federation
- Harris Girls' Academy Bromley
- IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society
- Jesmond Park Academy and Newcastle SWIRE.
- Katharine Lady Berkeley's School
- KCS Wimbledon
- Kensington Park School
- Kind Edward VI Aston School
- King's College London
- Kingsford Community School
- Lancaster University, Department of Languages and Cultures
- Magdalen College School
- Manchester Grammar School
- Melbourn Village College
- Newcastle University
- Norwich School

- Notting Hill and Ealing High School NHEHS
- Oxford High School GDST
- Pearson
- Pinner High School
- Prior Park College
- Queen Mary's Grammar School
- Queen Mary's High School
- Reigate Grammar School
- Rossall School
- Royal Russell School
- Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys
- St Gabriel's School
- St Mary's Calne
- St Paul's Girls' School
- Stowe School
- Swire Chinese Language Foundation
- Tapton School
- The Godolphin and Latymer School
- The GORSE Academies Trust
- The Japan Foundation, London
- The King's School, Canterbury
- The Open University
- The Perse School
- University College London - Institute of Education
- University of Cambridge
- University of Oxford
- University of Sheffield
- University of St Andrews
- University of Westminster
- Uppingham School
- Upton Hall School

- Whitgift School
- Wimbledon High School
- Wolfreton School and Sixth Form College



Department
for Education

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