

Decisions on changes to Conditions and guidance for GCSE, AS and A level modern foreign languages



In February 2016 we published a consultation about changes we proposed to make to the regulatory arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels in modern foreign languages to ensure awarding organisations design, deliver and award qualifications in languages other than French, German and Spanish in line with our policy decisions.

This consultation set out our proposed approach as well as draft Subject Level Conditions, requirements and guidance which would apply to all new GCSEs, AS and A levels in modern foreign languages.

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

GCSE, AS and A level modern foreign languages

Approach to the assessment of modern foreign languages

We proposed that:

- We should adopt the same approach to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in modern foreign languages, as we did for GCSEs, AS and A levels in French, German and Spanish.
- We should expand the existing GCSE and GCE modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish) Conditions and Guidance documents so that they apply to other modern foreign languages.

Over half of the respondents who commented on the first proposal supported it and more than two thirds who commented on it supported the second proposal. Respondents who did not support the proposals raised concerns that some non-European languages were more difficult to learn than French, German and Spanish and that this should be taken into account.

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

We are already proposing guidance on the length of extended written texts and translation exercises that takes into account differences between non-European languages and French, German and Spanish. The subject content for GCSE modern foreign languages also requires that for languages using logographic scripts all questions and task instructions are in English – and we have revised our guidance to make explicit that this requirement applies across all assessment objectives.

One respondent expressed a concern that assessing the spoken form of the language at AS and A level was not viable for lesser taught languages and that AS and A level qualifications should be developed as part of an alternative approach.

The Department for Education is considering the development of new subject content that will allow exam boards to develop AS and A level qualifications that are of comparable demand to AS and A levels in modern foreign languages but that take these concerns into account. If such content is developed, we would put in place appropriate conditions, guidance and requirements for it.

One respondent requested that awarding organisations should be permitted to set all questions for AS and A level Chinese assessments in English and that the requirement that no more than 10% of the total marks for AO1 and AO2 may be used for responses in English should not apply to AS and A level Chinese.

The regulatory requirements for modern foreign languages do not prevent awarding organisations from setting questions and task instructions in the assessed language, in English or a combination of the two, where appropriate and all the other regulatory requirements are met. However, the subject content does not set out any basis for different expectations about the language of candidate response in modern foreign language qualifications in Chinese compared to other modern foreign languages. Therefore we have no basis on which to set different requirements, and have not changed our expectations in this area.

We have therefore decided to confirm our proposals in this area.

Interpretation and definition of ‘modern foreign language’

We proposed to introduce a Condition on interpretation and definition which sets out what is meant by the term ‘modern foreign language’.

Half of respondents supported the proposal and only one respondent expressed a concern. Most comments suggested it would provide clarity, with other comments merely suggesting that the term was already sufficiently clear.

As the interpretation and definition is necessary for our approach to regulating these qualifications we have decided to confirm our proposal in this area.

Changes and additions to modern foreign languages Conditions and Guidance documents

We proposed:

- To introduce grammar requirements into the assessment requirements for languages where grammar requirements are not fully included in the subject content.

The vast majority of respondents supported our proposal and no respondents expressed any concerns so we have decided to confirm our proposal in this area.

- To move the guidance on the length of translation exercises in the AS and A level Guidance document from the section on guidance on assessment to the section on guidance on subject content.

Half of respondents supported our approach and nearly half neither agreed nor disagreed. Most of the comments suggested that the proposal was sensible and ensured consistency with the GCSE guidance. We have therefore decided to confirm our proposal in this area.

- To set additional guidance relating to the length of translation exercises at GCSE, AS and A level.

Just over two thirds of respondents agreed with our proposal. One organisation requested further guidance for other languages that did not use a Roman script. Other comments noted that Japanese translation exercises, particularly at GCSE, might require a greater number of characters than Chinese to give an equivalent meaning in English.

The guidance we have provided on the length of translation exercises covers a number of languages and we believe that this will be a useful reference point for other languages. It would be impractical to produce guidance for every language. The guidance we have provided relating to the length of Japanese GCSE, AS and A level translation exercises sets a minimum number of characters. It is therefore possible for awarding organisations to use a greater number of characters than we have specified in our guidance, where appropriate.

We have decided to confirm our proposal in this area but we have also added to the guidance to make clear that we expect an awarding organisation to explain in its assessment strategy how its approach to translation exercises for any other modern foreign language qualifications will achieve a level of demand consistent with those languages in which we have provided guidance.

- To set additional guidance relating to the length of an extended written text in the reading assessment at GCSE

Nearly two thirds of respondents agreed with our proposal. As for our proposal to set additional guidance relating to the lengths of translation exercises, one organisation requested further guidance for languages that do not use a Roman script, and other comments noted that Japanese texts, particularly at GCSE, might require a greater number of characters than Chinese to give an equivalent meaning in English.

For the same reasons as specified in relation to our proposal on translation exercises, we have decided to confirm our proposal in this area but we have also added to the guidance. The additional guidance makes clear that we expect an awarding organisation to explain in its assessment strategy how its approach to extended written texts for any other modern foreign language qualifications will achieve a level of demand consistent with those languages in which we have provided guidance.

- To introduce a Condition on the titling of GCSE, AS and A level Chinese qualifications

Nearly half of respondents supported our proposal and a similar proportion expressed neither support nor concern. One respondent suggested removing the word 'spoken' from our proposed titles so that it was clear they referred to speaking as well as listening assessments, and one respondent expressed a concern that it was impractical and confusing.

The inclusion of the word 'spoken' in the proposed titles refers to the spoken form of the language in the qualification and not to the assessment of the qualification so we believe that this will be the most clear title to users of the qualification. We have therefore decided to confirm our proposal in this area.

Additional rules and guidance

In our consultation we also sought views from respondents on any additional rules or guidance that we should introduce. The majority of comments expressed views about aspects of the qualifications that were out of scope for this consultation such as the subject content that had been previously consulted on, or expressed views that had already been made in responding to this consultation.

Equality issues

One respondent raised a concern that our requirements on the titling of Chinese qualifications might lead to racial discrimination but no evidence was provided to support this assertion. One respondent raised a concern that not allowing electronic input of pinyin in Chinese assessments would disadvantage dyslexic learners while

another respondent suggested that speaking and listening assessments are challenging for those with hearing difficulties.

Allowing dyslexic learners to electronically input pinyin in Chinese assessments would alter the demand of the assessments so we do not propose to regulate for this.

We have already considered concerns about the accessibility of speaking and listening assessments in responding to earlier consultations². The responses to this consultation have not raised any new issues that cause us to revisit those decisions.

Next steps

We have published amended versions of our rules and guidance for GCSE, AS and A level modern foreign languages which implement these decisions:

- *GCSE Subject Level Conditions for Modern Foreign Languages*³
- *GCSE Subject Level Guidance for Modern Foreign Languages*⁴
- *GCE Subject Level Conditions for Modern Foreign Languages*⁵
- *GCE Subject Level Guidance for Modern Foreign Languages*⁶

² www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-modern-foreign-languages and www.gov.uk/government/consultations/as-and-a-level-reform-regulations-for-modern-foreign-languages

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-modern-foreign-languages

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-modern-foreign-languages

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-modern-foreign-languages

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-guidance-for-modern-foreign-languages