

Decisions on our rules and guidance for AS and A level modern foreign languages (taught from September 2018)



Summary of our decisions

As we proposed in our consultation, we decided we will permit exam boards to develop AS and A levels in Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish and Urdu against:

- the Department for Education’s (DfE) new subject content for modern foreign languages with smaller cohorts¹; or
- the subject content for modern foreign languages² (which includes a speaking assessment).

We also decided to implement all our proposed rules and guidance for AS and A levels developed against the subject content for modern foreign languages with smaller cohorts.

We have decided these qualifications will need to use a title of the form *Language (Listening, Reading, Writing)*.

Availability of modern foreign languages AS and A levels

We proposed to allow exam boards to develop AS and A levels in Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish and Urdu against either of two different content documents published by the DfE – the modern foreign languages content, or the content for languages with smaller cohorts.

The majority of respondents supported our proposed approach. The one respondent who disagreed suggested we should not “remove” speaking assessments from these languages.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-as-and-a-level-languages-with-smaller-cohorts>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-as-and-a-level-modern-foreign-languages>

This comment reflects a misunderstanding of current qualifications. With the sole exception of Urdu, AS and A levels in these languages do not currently include speaking assessments. Many of the current AS and A levels do not assess listening skills either.

Requiring speaking assessments in all AS and A level languages would prevent exam boards from using the content for languages with smaller cohorts. This would be contrary to both the DfE's curriculum intention, and our earlier decision to adopt the DfE's content into our regulatory framework. It may also threaten the availability of AS and A levels in these languages as exam boards might decide not to offer the qualifications in view of the difficulties and costs associated with assessing speaking skills.

We therefore decided to adopt our proposal unchanged.

Titling of qualifications developed against the content for languages with smaller cohorts

We proposed that AS and A levels developed against the content for languages with smaller cohorts should have a different title from qualifications developed against the modern foreign languages content. Views were mixed on this proposal.

Two respondents supported our proposed approach, noting the importance of being clear about the skills the qualification assessed.

Two respondents, however, disagreed. They both did so because they felt that all modern foreign languages AS and A levels should assess the same skills. They also commented that having a different title could devalue qualifications in these languages.

Our view that it is important to distinguish between qualifications developed against the different subject content requirements remains, because they require students to demonstrate different skills. This is particularly important because our rules will allow qualifications in the same language (but developed against different content) to co-exist. Responses to the consultation, which demonstrate that users may not understand that existing modern foreign languages AS and A levels do not all assess the same range of skills, have only reinforced this view.

The two respondents who commented on our proposed titles both suggested we adopt a title of the form *Language (Listening, Reading, Writing)*, as this provides the best indication of the skills assessed.

We decided that all AS and A levels developed against the content for languages with smaller cohorts must use a title of the form *Language (Listening, Reading, Writing)*.

Our proposed rules and guidance

Most respondents supported our proposed rules and guidance, although one commented that we should use the same rules and guidance for all AS and A level modern foreign languages. Given that the subject content differs, that approach is not feasible. As we explained in our consultation, the only differences between our proposed rules and guidance for these languages when compared with other AS and A level languages relate to differences between the content documents, which in turn reflect the DfE's curriculum intention.

Only one respondent commented on the detailed drafting of our rules and guidance. They noted that our guidance on length of translation tasks in Japanese appeared to allow passages that were too short to secure comparability with other languages. They commented that words in Japanese often use more than one character or phoneme, and therefore that they would expect passages to use more characters in Japanese than words in (for example) German.

While we note this concern, our proposed guidance would not prevent exam boards from using longer passages if that is necessary to secure comparability with other languages. Indeed, our rules would require this. Our consultation proposal reflected the views from the subject community, and took account of both the structure of the language, and the intrinsically more demanding nature of languages with logographic scripts. It is also consistent with the equivalent guidance for Chinese.

Overall, we are not persuaded that a change is needed, and have decided to adopt all our proposed rules and guidance unchanged.

Next steps

We have published the following documents, which give effect to these decisions:

- *GCE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Modern Foreign Languages (Listening, Reading, Writing)*³
- *GCE Subject Level Guidance for Modern Foreign Languages (Listening, Reading, Writing)*⁴

In addition, we have identified, as a result of the definition of *Modern Foreign Language (listening, reading, writing)*, the need to make an amendment to the

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-modern-foreign-languages-listening-reading-writing>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-guidance-for-modern-foreign-languages-listening-reading-writing>

definition of *Modern Foreign Language* in the *GCE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Modern Foreign Languages*. This will ensure it is clear in which case each set of Conditions applies. We have written to exam boards setting out the reason for this change.