



Department
for Education

GCSE Modern Foreign Language (MFL) subject content review: public consultation

**Launch date Wednesday 10 March 2021
Respond by Wednesday 19 May 2021**

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Introduction

In November 2019, the Department for Education announced that a review would be launched into the GCSE Modern Foreign Language (MFL) subject content. This review related to French, German and Spanish GCSEs only. The Department is now seeking views on the proposed changes within the revised subject content.

Who is this for?

- Secondary MFL teachers
- Head teachers
- Heads of Department (MFL)
- Awarding organisations
- Students

Issue date

The consultation was issued on Wednesday 10 March 2021

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation, you can contact the DfE MFL policy team by e-mail:
MFL.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail:
Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288.

The Response

This consultation closes at 11:59pm on Wednesday 19 May 2021. The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) by July 2021.

Confidentiality of your response

Information provided in your response to this consultation, 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

In November 2019, the Department for Education announced that it would be convening an expert panel to test and develop potential changes to the subject content for French, German and Spanish MFL GCSEs only. The panel has now made its final recommendations which have been reflected in the revised subject content document. The Department is seeking your views on the changes that have been made.

Our ambition is to produce a subject content that aligns more closely with the Teaching Schools Council's 2016 MFL pedagogy review and, in doing so, ensure the subject content reflects research in language curriculum and teaching and make language GCSEs more accessible and motivating for students.

The recommendations of the panel focus primarily on specificity, particularly in relation to vocabulary and grammar. A precise specification of vocabulary and grammar to be taught is critical for those following a language GCSE course. The review also sought to reduce volume and make the course less burdensome for teachers and students. By streamlining the content in this way, students can be confident that they will only be tested on what they have been taught and exams can only contain what is specified in the content.

The revised subject content sets out all the vocabulary and grammar needed for GCSE. It is recognised that many students will already have covered some of the language content prior to the start of their GCSE course but it cannot be assumed that all students starting their GCSE course will have covered the same content beforehand.

The vocabulary specified for teaching will be informed by the frequency of occurrence in the language and, as such, will be well suited to communication about a wide range of common themes and topics.

The revised GCSE subject content will require students to understand written texts and spoken extracts comprising defined vocabulary and grammar relevant to tier. Students are expected to write text in the assessed language accurately and translate in writing vocabulary items and short sentences from the assessed language to English and vice versa, using the grammar specified for each tier. The subject content will require students to undertake

dictation exercises, role play simulating a variety of contexts and answer questions about a visual stimulus.

In parallel with this consultation, Ofqual is consulting on the assessment arrangements, including assessment objectives and their weightings.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations 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 download a word document version of the form and email it to us.

By E-mail: MFL.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

Deadline

The consultation closes at 11:59pm on Wednesday 19 May 2021.

Questions

The questions that will form this consultation have been split into the following categories:

- Personal information
- Vocabulary
- Themes and topics
- Question types
- Grammar
- General

You may want to answer all or just some of the questions, but please note that some questions may not be particularly relevant to you.

We have included a link to the revised subject content towards the beginning of this consultation which can be used for your reference should you wish. A brief rationale for certain changes has also been included underneath questions where appropriate.

Q1 - 9: Personal information

It would be helpful if you would first give some information about yourself as context to your other responses.

1. What is your name?

First Name

Last Name

2. What is your email address?

If you enter your email address you will automatically receive an acknowledgement email when you submit your response.

Email address:

Please note: It is helpful to have your email address if we want to contact you about your answers to the questions in this consultation. You do not have to give your email address, and your views will be considered whether or not you give your email address.

3. Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?

We may wish to speak to you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.

(required) Yes; No

4. Are you responding as an individual or part of an organisation?

(required) Choose an item.

5. If you are responding as an individual, how would you describe yourself?

Choose an item: (insert options)

If 'other' selected, please specify here:

.....

6. If you are responding for an organisation, what type of organisation is this?

Choose an item: (insert options)

If 'other' selected, please specify here:

.....

7. What is the name of your organisation?

.....

8. What is your role within the organisation?

.....

9. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

- Yes
- No

Q10 - 14: Vocabulary

10. Do you agree with the requirement that 90% of words must be taken from the top 2,000 most frequently occurring words in the most widely spoken standard forms of the language?

The subject content stipulates that at least 90% of words selected must be from the 2,000 most frequent words occurring in the most widely spoken standard forms of the language. Research indicates that a relatively small number of high-frequency words represent a large proportion of the total words in written text or speech and that the 2,000 most frequently occurring words represent around 80% of the words in any written text and upwards of 90% of words in informal conversation.

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain your answer here:

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11. Do you agree with the requirement for foundation tier students to know no more than 1200 words and higher tier students to know no more than 1700 words?

The subject content expects students to know 1200 words for foundation tier (papers capped at grade 5), and a further 500 words for higher tier (papers capped at grade 9). The 'number of words known' that has been documented by research usually reflects receptive (listening and reading) vocabulary knowledge, which is larger than productive (speaking and writing) knowledge. In the proposed new content, students will be required to demonstrate both receptive and productive knowledge of all words on the list. Given this, it was determined that it would not be helpful or motivating to require students to use more words productively than research has suggested can be known receptively for the top levels.

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain your answer here:

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12. Do you agree that the vocabulary lists proposed for GCSE should set out all content required for GCSE, even though in many cases some of this may have been learnt prior to the start of the GCSE course itself?

It cannot be assumed that everyone who enters a GCSE language course will be entering with a similar level of language proficiency. Additionally, scenarios can arise where a secondary school student might decide to take a language at GCSE, having not done it in previous years.

- Yes
- No

13. Do you agree that cognate words (words which are very similar or the same in English and the assessed language) should be included and counted in the defined vocabulary in a way which reflects their frequency of occurrence in the assessed language?

In the revised subject content, the 1200 (foundation) and 1700 (higher) word lists will include cognates in a way which reflects their frequency of occurrence. This proposed change means that unspecified cognates will no longer be included in assessments with the expectation that students will be able to guess their meaning.

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain your answer here:

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14.1. The revised subject content expects higher tier students to read texts that may include a small number of words that fall outside the vocabulary list defined by the awarding organisation. English meanings of such words must be supplied adjacent to the text for reference. Do you agree that no more than 2% of words in any given higher tier text that fall outside the vocabulary list defined by the awarding organisation, must be included in an adjacent glossary?

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain your answer here:

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14.2. All proper nouns (such as cities or countries) that are not listed in the most frequent 2,000 words and are not deemed to be easily understood, can be included in an adjacent glossary. Do you agree that such words can be included in an adjacent glossary?

- Yes
- No

Q15 - 16: Themes and Topics

Q15. Do you agree with the proposal not to require overarching themes and specific topics in the revised subject content?

The overarching themes listed in the current content document are very broad. However, perhaps because they were not accompanied by specified vocabulary, there was a tendency still to design teaching and assessment around very specific thematic topics. This, in turn, encourages the teaching of topic-specific and specialised vocabulary, rather than the most important words for general communication and understanding. Students are most likely to recall and be able to use a word when they have encountered it in a number of different contexts, rather than in only one 'topic'. Because of this, and because we are specifying the vocabulary to be taught and assessed, specific topics or overarching themes will not be listed in the revised subject content.

- Yes
- No

Q16. Do you agree that teaching and assessment will instead be informed by the vocabulary specified for teaching given that, due to its high frequency, this vocabulary can cover a range of topics?

Topics will no longer be informed by themes required in the content, but rather exam boards can develop themes informed by the word lists. It is intended that this will remove large portions of extraneous content and will mean that students are less likely to encounter specialist vocabulary at the expense of more useful vocabulary.

- Yes

- No

Q17 - 22: Question types

Q17. Do you agree that, where questions are designed to test comprehension of written and spoken texts in the assessed language, they will be constructed in English?

This is an important distinction in the proposed new content when compared to the current one and aims to reduce the double count of error in reading assessments. Students can sometimes be confused by either the rubrics or questions when they are in the assessed language, resulting in them not demonstrating the language they know because they have not understood what the question is asking them to do. In practice, this change will eradicate instances where students are being penalised for misunderstanding the question, then penalised again for errors in the answer which may arise from misunderstanding of the question rather than misunderstanding the text the question was on.

- Yes
- No

Q18. Do you agree that all rubrics will be in English?

- Yes
- No

Q19. Do agree with the requirement for students to read aloud short sentences from the written form of the language and demonstrate understanding of them?

- Yes
- No

Q20. Do you agree with the requirement that students undertake dictation exercises from short spoken extracts, with credit for accurate spelling?

- Yes
- No

Q21. Do you agree that, where students are expected to understand spoken extracts, these extracts will be delivered at a pace which is no faster than a moderate pace?

- Yes
- No

Q22. Do you agree that, whilst students will continue to learn about the culture of the countries where the language is spoken, cultural content will not be specified or tested in the revised subject content?

An appreciation of culture, history, geography and working environments of the countries and communities in which the language is spoken is an integral part of a well-designed language course and is likely to be motivating and interesting for students. It is important that students should continue to be taught the language in the context of the countries and communities where the language is spoken. However, it is not proposed that we specify or test specific cultural content. Doing so would increase the burden of content to be taught and would be difficult to specify and list for each language. To test cultural knowledge without specifying what the knowledge is would introduce an unacceptable element of unpredictability for teachers. It would also detract in terms of teaching time from the teaching and practice of the language, mastery of which then gives access to wider cultural content at the next stage of education. Therefore, it is proposed that students will continue not to be marked on their cultural knowledge.

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain your answer here:

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Q23: Grammar

Q23: Do you consider the grammar annexes to be comprehensive, unambiguous and easy to understand?

GCSE students will be expected to develop and use their knowledge of grammar throughout their course. The grammar requirements for GCSE are set out in two tiers: foundation and higher. Students will be required to use their knowledge of grammar from the relevant lists, appropriate to the language studied and to the relevant tier of entry. Students entering higher tier assessments will be required to apply all grammar listed for foundation tier in addition to the grammar listed for higher tier. These lists describe grammatical features of the most widely used standard varieties. The lists are written from the point of view of English-speaking students of the language, and so include some reference to certain cross-linguistically complex relations with English. Students will be required to demonstrate both receptive and productive knowledge of the grammar from the list

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain you answer here:

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Q24: General

Q24. Do you consider the revised subject content to be unambiguous, clear and easy to understand?

- Yes
- No

If 'no' selected, please explain you answer here:

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Department
for Education

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