



Department
for Education

Proposed permanent removal of the expectation that students engage with unfamiliar and abstract material in modern foreign language (MFL) GCSEs

Government consultation

Launch date: 29 September 2022

Respond by: 20 October 2022

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Introduction

For examinations 2022, the Department for Education (DfE), in partnership with Ofqual, introduced a number of adaptations to GCSE qualifications, in order to support pupils who had faced disruption to their teaching and learning as a result of the Covid-19 health pandemic. As part of this package of support, adaptations were made to modern foreign language (MFL) GCSEs – specifically, the removal of the regulatory requirement that exam boards must include unfamiliar vocabulary within their assessments.

Whilst this adaptation was originally a covid-response measure, the department is proposing that the change made to languages GCSE qualifications in 2022 is implemented on a permanent basis, from summer 2023, and beyond. Doing so would align with the department's longer-term strategy for language GCSEs, particularly in light of the publication of the [revised GCSE French, German and Spanish subject content](#), which will be taught from September 2024, with first exams 2026. The subject content for these revised qualifications stipulates that vocabulary that is not included in a pre-defined vocabulary list cannot feature in assessments, unless they are appropriately glossed, or part of an inference or dictation task. There are currently no such limitations relating to the existing subject content for languages, as the current expectation is that students understand and respond to abstract and unfamiliar material.

The department is, therefore, consulting on minor amendments to the [current subject content for MFL GCSEs](#) and is seeking your views on the proposed changes. As well as aligning more closely with department policy on languages, these changes are intended to offer exam boards greater flexibility when it comes to assessment design, offer greater parity between languages, and make assessments fairer and more accessible across the board.

Given the intention is to make these proposed changes permanent, Ofqual has separately launched its own consultation on amending their subject level conditions and guidance and assessment requirements for all GCSE language qualifications.

Who this is for

This consultation is likely to be of interest to:

- students, including private candidates, who are expecting to take GCSE MFL exams in summer 2023 and beyond, and their parents and carers
- teachers of these qualifications
- school and college leaders and heads of other types of exam centre
- unions
- teaching associations

- exams officers
- the exam boards that will provide the exams
- those who use qualifications to make selection decisions: further and higher education institutions and employers

Issue date

The consultation will be open for 3 weeks, starting on 29 September 2022 and ending on 20 October 2022 at 11:59. This window for consultation has been agreed on the basis that any announcements relating to the outcome can be issued early enough in this academic year, giving appropriate preparation time for students, teachers and exam boards ahead of next summer's exams.

Enquiries

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

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

This consultation is due to end at 11:59 on 20 October 2022. The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in before the end of the 2022 calendar year.

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

The Department for Education is seeking your views on the proposed changes to the GCSE MFL subject content to permanently remove the expectation that students understand and respond to unfamiliar and abstract material. In line with this, Ofqual are consulting on removing their requirement that exam boards include unfamiliar vocabulary (i.e., words that are not included within a board's published vocabulary list) as part of their assessments. The intention is that the proposed changes will take effect from summer 2023 for all GCSE language qualifications.

At present, GCSE assessments in languages actively require students to be examined on content that students did not specifically know they had to learn, and teachers did not specifically know they had to teach. We think that, by permanently removing the expectation that students understand and respond to unfamiliar and abstract material – alongside Ofqual removing their requirement for unfamiliar vocabulary to be assessed - examinations in GCSE languages will be fairer and more accessible for all students.

This consultation seeks only to remove the subject content expectations that mandate boards to include unfamiliar and abstract material in their assessments. As such, boards may still choose to use additional vocabulary if they deem it appropriate to do so for certain tasks within an assessment. Any additional vocabulary might be glossed or provided in a glossary on the question paper where appropriate to the task and intended level of challenge.

Following the removal of the requirement that exam boards include unfamiliar vocabulary in all MFL assessments in 2021, Ofqual launched a [consultation](#) to extend this amendment to the summer 2022 series. As part of this, Ofqual asked:

“To what extent do you agree or disagree that for GCSE MFL we should carry forward the arrangements for 2021 into 2022 in relation to... avoiding the use of unfamiliar vocabulary”

The proposal received strong levels of support across all areas of the sector. In total, 90% of respondents agreed with the proposal, with 74% of respondents strongly agreeing and 16% agreeing. One of the respondents that agreed said:

“I agree wholeheartedly with the carrying over of the vocabulary, glossing and writing changes implemented for 2021.”

Of the 5% of respondents that disagreed, they usually did so because they wanted assessments to remain as intended. One respondent said:

“By June 2022, students should have had the opportunity to catch-up on missed learning, so I see no reasons to not make the exam as before.”

Given the overwhelming support that the proposals have received in previous years, the department feel it appropriate that they are retained on a permanent basis, from 2023, and are consulting on this basis.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](https://www.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 request and complete a word document version of the form, via email:

MFL.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

Deadline

The consultation closes on 20 October 2022.

Questions

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: 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 responding as an individual or part of an organisation?

Choose an item.

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

Choose an item: (insert options)

If 'other' selected, please specify here:

.....

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

Choose an item: (insert options)

If 'other' selected, please specify here:

.....

6. What is the name of your organisation?

.....

7. What is your role within the organisation?

.....

Proposals

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove the expectation that students understand and respond to abstract and unfamiliar

material (such as unfamiliar vocabulary) from the subject content for all GCSE modern foreign languages, on a permanent basis, from 2023?

This will be done by removing, from the current GCSE MFL subject content document, references to 'abstract material' from the listening section, and 'unfamiliar material' from the reading section.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. Do you have any comments about the proposal to remove the expectation that students understand and respond to abstract and unfamiliar material (such as unfamiliar vocabulary) from the subject content for all GCSE modern foreign languages, on a permanent basis, from 2023?

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Equalities Impact Assessment

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State, when exercising the functions of the Secretary of State, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;

- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

As part of our proposals set out above, the department have given careful consideration as to how any of the changes might have an impact, whether positive or negative, on students who take a GCSE in languages, or the teachers teaching them. We have not identified any aspects of our proposal that would have a negative impact on students or teachers who share particular protected characteristics. We will undertake a full equality impact assessment as part of our response to this consultation.

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

- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain what they are

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

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Department
for Education

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