



Department
for Education

Natural history GCSE proposed subject content

Government consultation

Launch date 12 June 2026

Respond by 4 September 2026

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Introduction

In March 2025, the Department for Education confirmed that the subject content for a new natural history GCSE would be developed and consulted on following the completion of the Curriculum and Assessment Review. The Review's final report was published in November 2025 and the department is now in a position to share proposed subject content for consultation.

This new natural history GCSE will provide students with a knowledge-rich, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study. Our intention is that the GCSE will appeal to students from a variety of different backgrounds and will be enriching wherever in the country they live.

Throughout the content development process, we have been guided by the principle that students should have the opportunity to engage with, learn about, and understand the natural world as it exists all around them. We have therefore ensured there is substantial coverage of habitats, species, and human influences found in the UK. We have also applied this to the fieldwork requirements. Fieldwork is an essential element of the study of natural history and our intention is that it can be delivered flexibly, adapted to the diverse contexts in which schools operate. We have suggested a number of ways in which schools may wish to deliver fieldwork requirements but we are not prescribing a single approach to delivery that all schools must follow. We believe this will support schools to deliver rich and meaningful experiences that are both practical and tailored to local contexts.

The natural history GCSE will give students the opportunity to work towards a rigorous qualification that is internationally recognised and accepted in school and college performance tables. Our intention is that the GCSE will support students to progress to further academic and vocational study, training or employment. Study of the natural history GCSE will particularly complement study of biology and geography GCSEs, and will give students a good foundation on which to study A levels such as environmental science. It will also support progression to post-16 vocational options, including relevant V Levels and T Levels.

The GCSE sits alongside initiatives such as the National Education Nature Park, whose cross-curricular resources support learning in other GCSE subjects while helping all young people connect with the natural world and understand their role within it.

The department has worked closely with and would like to thank Cambridge OCR, who put forward the proposal for the GCSE, and our subject experts, Stephanie Holt of the Natural History Museum and Elena Lengthorn of the University of Worcester, who have hugely contributed to the development of the proposed subject content, ready for public consultation.

We would also like to thank the other awarding organisations and the many stakeholder organisations and individual experts we have worked with for their constructive engagement to date.

The department is now seeking views on the proposed subject content via this public consultation.

Who this is for

- Secondary teachers
- Head teachers and principals
- Awarding organisations
- Students
- Parents and carers
- Initial teacher training providers

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 12 June 2026.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team at nhgscse.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, 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

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) after Ofqual has completed its consultation on the assessment arrangements for the natural history GCSE.

Confidentiality of your responses

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: [DfE personal information charter](#).

Please also see the privacy notice published alongside this consultation.

About this consultation

The department is consulting on the proposed subject content requirements that will form the basis of the new GCSE in natural history. These requirements are designed to become a regulatory document which will set out in technical language the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for the GCSE. The subject content provides the framework for awarding organisations to create the detail of qualification specifications; these specifications will set out for teachers in more detail what students will study.

Whilst the responsibility for specifying the subject content of the GCSE lies with the department, the determination of assessment arrangements is the responsibility of Ofqual, the independent regulator.

Ofqual will run a separate consultation on the assessment arrangements for the natural history GCSE, which is expected to launch later this year alongside the first phase of reformed GCSE subjects. This approach will allow Ofqual to consider the assessment arrangements for the natural history GCSE in the context of the wider programme of GCSE reform. This will ensure that they are developed in line with Ofqual's updated GCSE regulatory requirements, such as revised expectations for exam time and assessment design.

While the department is seeking views at an earlier stage, we recognise that Ofqual's consultation may raise points relevant to the subject content. For this reason, although we are consulting now, we do not expect to publish the final subject content and government response until after Ofqual has completed its consultation, so that any issues emerging from this process can be fully considered before the content is finalised.

This consultation solely seeks to gather public feedback on the proposed subject content; we will use the feedback provided to finalise the subject content. The delivery of the GCSE is the responsibility of awarding organisations who choose to offer it. These organisations will develop specifications accordingly. Any awarding organisation that offers the GCSE will provide resources to support schools, and stakeholder organisations can also support its teaching.

Proposed subject content

The proposed subject content for natural history is divided into 3 sections, and 3 appendices. Combined, these requirements will enable students to extend the knowledge they have gained of the natural world during key stage 3. The subject content reflects the core components of natural history as a subject discipline and will enable students to not only study the natural world but explore and develop an understanding of it. The subject content also aims to instil a sense of responsibility for

its protection, equipping learners with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to a sustainable future.

The department believes that the subject content we are presenting for consultation represents a substantial, engaging, and worthwhile course of study. It is the product of detailed engagement with awarding organisations, subject experts, and key sector stakeholders.

In developing the subject content, we have carefully considered what should be included given the size and level of the qualification. It is a key principle when developing a new GCSE that its size and rigour must be comparable to other GCSEs. We have therefore had to make decisions about what content should be included. We present the key elements of the subject content, alongside rationale for the decisions we have made, below.

One of the core aims of the natural history GCSE is for students to acquire deep knowledge of the species and habitats that make up the natural world in the UK, as well as how these species and habitats interact with one another.

The subject content seeks to enable students to gain a profound understanding of the distinct features and uniqueness of the natural world in the UK. Students will learn about the characteristics of the main wildlife groupings, which will enable them to identify species they may see in their natural habitats. This focus on species and habitats – and the specific requirements contained within the proposed subject content – will ensure students gain excellent breadth and depth of knowledge of a range of key elements of the natural world.

Studying human interaction with nature is essential for educating students about fostering a sustainable and responsible relationship with the natural world. This knowledge is crucial for supporting and conserving habitats and species. The content focuses on understanding the effects of a range of human activities on wildlife and habitats, and exploring how different conservation and habitat-management methods can preserve and enhance biodiversity.

Through development of the subject content, we have heard clearly that fieldwork is integral to the study of natural history. It plays a key role in providing students with practical experience to support the knowledge they have been taught and the skills they would need to take most advantage of their time outdoors. For this reason, we are proposing an ambitious fieldwork requirement of 20 hours, which goes further than other GCSEs, and will allow students to fully consolidate and extend their learning beyond the classroom.

Within this requirement, we have been mindful of potential delivery challenges for schools. We have therefore used the metric of 'hours' (which contrasts with metrics used for fieldwork in other subjects, such as GCSE geography) to make clear that the

requirement can be structured flexibly across the duration of the course, including during regular timetabled lessons. Specifications must allow schools to choose locations for fieldwork based on their own local contexts and circumstances, as long as students are able to meet specification requirements. While schools may consider locations in their local areas and further afield, we also encourage schools to consider using school grounds as a location for fieldwork study.

The proposed subject content requires students to understand how climate change – both natural processes and human-accelerated factors – affects habitats, species and ecological relationships. While climate change is not the primary focus of the qualification, students will be able to build on learning in other subjects and apply this knowledge to the study of the natural world, including how species respond to changing environmental conditions.

The department is seeking your views on the proposed subject content published alongside this consultation. Ofqual will consult on assessment arrangements later this year.

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 an alternative format of the form.

By email

- nhgcse.consultation@education.gov.uk

By post

Qualifications Policy team
Department for Education
4th Floor
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Please only use this option in exceptional circumstances.

Deadline

The consultation closes on 4 September 2026.

Equality impact assessment

An equality impact assessment (EIA) has been conducted and is published alongside this consultation. The EIA will be kept under review and if new relevant information comes to our attention, it will be considered and factored into the EIA.

Environmental principles

The environmental principles duty requires ministers to have 'due regard' to the environmental principles policy statement. The department has taken this requirement into account when developing the proposed draft subject content and will continue to review. If new relevant information comes to our attention, it will be considered, and due regard will be demonstrated.

Questions

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

- Personal information
- Subject aims
- Subject content
- General
- Equalities
- Environmental principles

You may want to answer all or just some of the questions, as some questions may not be particularly relevant to you. In either case, your answers will be carefully considered. A link to the subject content is included towards the beginning of this consultation which can be used for your reference should you wish. A brief rationale for certain inclusions has also been included underneath questions where appropriate.

Question 1 to 9: Personal information

The following 9 questions are about your personal details and contact preferences. It would be helpful if you would first give some information about yourself as context to your other responses.

1. What is your name?

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:

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?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

The department may wish to contact 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.

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

(required) (insert options): Individual; Organisation

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

(required) Choose an item: (insert options): Student; Parent/carer; Teacher; Head teacher/principal; Other.

If 'other' selected, please specify here:

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

(required) Choose an item: (insert options): Awarding organisation; School; College; Stakeholder organisation; Initial teacher training provider; Other

If 'other' selected, please specify here:

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7. What is the name of your organisation?

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8. What is your role within the organisation?

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9. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential and not list your name when publishing the consultation response on GOV.UK? Please note this question applies to all (individuals and organisations).

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

Question 10: Subject aims

The next question asks about the aims of the GCSE subject content.

10. Are the subject aims easy to understand, clear and unambiguous?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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Question 11 to 14: Subject content

The following 4 questions are about the requirements set out in the subject content.

11. Paragraphs 7 – 12 of the proposed subject content detail the requirements for the study of habitats and wildlife in the UK. Do you agree with these requirements?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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12. Paragraph 13 of the proposed subject content details the requirements for the study of human influence on the natural world. Do you agree with these requirements?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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13. Paragraphs 14 – 20 of the proposed subject content detail the requirements for fieldwork. Do you agree with these requirements?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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14. Paragraphs 18 and 19 of the proposed subject content set the fieldwork requirement using a metric of ‘hours’, differing from the metrics used in some other GCSE subjects. This is to support schools to structure fieldwork flexibly across the duration of the course, including during regular timetabled lessons, if they wish. Do you agree with using a metric of ‘hours’ for the fieldwork requirement?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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Question 15: Appendix 1 – Use of mathematics and statistics in natural history

15. Are the proposed range and extent of mathematical and statistical techniques, set out in Appendix 1, easy to understand, clear and unambiguous?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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Question 16 to 17: Appendix 2 – Examples of wildlife typically found for each habitat

16. Appendix 2 provides a list of different types of species within each of the following 6 habitats (Urban, Freshwater, Woodland, Grassland, Farmland and Marine).

The department has proposed this is an advisory list from which awarding organisations can use to create their own, equivalently sized list for each habitat, when writing GCSE specifications. Do you agree the list set out in the subject content should be advisory?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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17. Are the requirements, set out in Appendix 2, easy to understand, clear and unambiguous?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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Question 18: Appendix 3 – Habitat coverage requirements

18. Appendix 3 provides a list of illustrative options for focus of study for each habitat.

Are the requirements, set out in Appendix 3, easy to understand, clear and unambiguous?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If no or you wish to give further detail on your views, please explain:

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Question 19: General

The following question is general and allows you to provide feedback on anything that you wish to, which has not been asked.

19. Is there anything you would like to feed back that is not covered in the questions above?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If yes, please explain:

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Question 20 to 21: Equalities

The following 2 questions are about equalities.

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, ministers must have ‘due regard’, when making decisions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to protected characteristics. The Department for Education has been taking this requirement into account in developing the proposed draft subject content.

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

20. Do any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific groups, in particular those who share a 'protected characteristic' (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation)?

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If yes, please explain:

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21. How could the proposed subject content of the GCSE be altered to:

- **better eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;**
- **better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;**
- **better foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?**

Please provide evidence to support your response.

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Question 22: Environmental principles

The environmental principles (EP) duty came into force on 1 November 2023. In accordance with the Environment Act 2021, ministers must have ‘due regard’ to the environmental principles policy statement when making decisions on new or revised policy. The Department for Education has been taking this requirement into account in developing the proposed subject content.

The introduction of the EP duty means we must assess the effects of any new or significantly revised policy on the environment.

22. Do any of the proposals have the potential to have an effect, positive or negative, on:

- **the use or management of land in the UK;**
- **the atmosphere;**
- **any type of inland, coastal or marine water body;**
- **wildlife;**
- **the supply of raw materials from natural sources;**

- **opportunities for outdoor recreation?**

(required) (insert options): Yes; No

If yes, please explain:

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Department
for Education

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