



Department
for Education

Natural history GCSE

Equality impact assessment

June 2026

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The Public Sector Equality Duty

This document records the analysis undertaken by the Department for Education to enable ministers to fulfil the requirements placed on them by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

The PSED requires the minister 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.

These aims are also known as the 3 limbs of the PSED.

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.

Ofqual will consult on the assessment arrangements for the natural history GCSE later this year, in order to ensure that they are developed in line with Ofqual's updated GCSE regulatory requirements. This consultation will include an EIA on assessment arrangements for the GCSE.

We believe we have a responsibility to equip young people to understand and respect the natural world and contribute to the protection and conservation of the environment. The natural history GCSE will be a key contribution to this and will ensure more young people benefit from the opportunity to learn about the natural world.

Our ambition is to create a natural history GCSE which is knowledge rich, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile for students. The department has worked closely with awarding organisations, subject experts, and stakeholders, to gather input and develop subject content ready for public consultation. Our intention is that, following publication of the final subject content, awarding organisations will be able to develop specifications.

The proposed subject content sets out requirements for:

- demonstrating knowledge and understanding of habitats and wildlife in the UK;
- demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the effects of human activities on wildlife and habitats; and
- carrying out fieldwork, building on the knowledge and understanding gained throughout the programme of study.

The subject content also includes appendices covering: the use of mathematics and statistics in natural history; examples of wildlife typically found for each habitat; and habitat coverage requirements.

While there are existing GCSE qualifications, such as geography and biology, that explore organisms and aspects of their environments, our intention is that the natural history GCSE will be a distinct and valuable GCSE, alongside these. It will enable students to build a body of knowledge of individual characteristics of organisms, by exploring whole organisms in context and human relationships with nature. Students will also study the life cycle of specific organisms, their interdependencies and relationships with other species, pressures and processes. Upon completion of the natural history GCSE, students will be equipped to pursue further study in relevant qualifications, such as A levels in biology, geography and environmental science, if they so wish.

Consideration of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010

The below sets out the positive and negative impacts we have identified when considering the different protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010. We will be asking questions related to equalities in the consultation to identify any further impacts on these groups. We will update this equality impact assessment (EIA) before publishing the final subject content.

Age

Although GCSEs are designed for and typically taken by students aged between 14 and 16 years old, they are not restricted to this age group alone, which means older and younger students can choose to take the natural history GCSE if they wish. For example, adults may be able to study the GCSE as a private candidate or may be eligible for the Adult Skills Fund, which can help fund the course as well as provide additional financial assistance. 16–19-year-old students may be entitled to funding to study the GCSE as part of a study programme at a DfE funded institution. This ensures that the natural history GCSE is accessible to a broad audience, accommodating diverse educational needs.

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, in relation to the protected characteristic of age.

Disability

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, in relation to the protected characteristic of disability.

The GCSE subject content requirements apply equally to all students undertaking this qualification regardless of particular protected characteristics or socio-economic status, including fieldwork, which is an essential aspect of natural history, enabling students to consolidate and extend their classroom-based learning.

We have identified a subset of students for whom participating in fieldwork may be challenging, particularly due to disabilities that may affect their participation. This may potentially have implications for the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The proposed subject content outlines minimum fieldwork requirements, allowing flexibility for diverse and valid approaches. We want to encourage students to do fieldwork in their local areas and further afield, exploring diverse habitats while ensuring accessibility. Schools are equally encouraged to consider using school grounds as a location for fieldwork study, particularly if fieldwork opportunities further afield prove impossible or too impractical, as school grounds can be a source of great diversity. Centres can fulfil the fieldwork requirement by ensuring that students complete at least 20 hours of fieldwork activity, which may be achieved through the study of one or more habitats and structured flexibly across the duration of the course.

Teachers, within this framework, will possess significant autonomy in structuring fieldwork studies and can plan inclusive and engaging fieldwork to align with accessibility requirements for their students. We find assurance in mitigation strategies that are currently employed by many schools for other fieldwork activities, for example, making more use of local/day opportunities, rather than more long-distance school trips, choosing activities which are more accessible. We therefore believe that these mitigations will overall effectively counteract the negative implications, resulting in a neutral impact overall.

To ensure that all students have equitable access to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in a manner that accommodates their specific needs, and depending on the circumstances of individual disabled students, reasonable adjustments may be available to support them, including those with learning disabilities, during assessments. These adjustments aim to facilitate the demonstration of knowledge and abilities related to subject content. Awarding organisations, in compliance with Ofqual's regulatory requirements, must publish details of its arrangements for making reasonable adjustments, including how a student qualifies for reasonable adjustments and what reasonable adjustments will be made.

Gender reassignment

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in relation to the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.

Marriage and civil partnership

We have not identified that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, in relation to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership.

Pregnancy and maternity

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in relation to the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity.

Race (which includes nationality)

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in relation to the protected characteristic of race (which includes nationality).

Religion or belief

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in relation to the protected characteristic of religion or belief.

Sex

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in relation to the protected characteristic of sex.

Sexual orientation

We have not identified evidence that the development of a natural history GCSE and its proposed subject content will result in a negative impact relating to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; the need to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, in relation to the protected characteristic of sexual orientation.

Decision making

As a result of our analysis, we find that we should proceed as planned to consult on proposed content for a natural history GCSE.

The introduction of a new GCSE in natural history signifies a positive step in enhancing students' preparation for the future and promoting their understanding of the natural world. We conclude that this policy will have no adverse or disproportionately negative impact on people who share a protected characteristic in age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Where we have identified a subset of students for whom participating in fieldwork may be challenging, particularly concerning students with limited mobility or some students with SEND, we are reassured by the mitigations currently employed by many schools to ensure accessibility in fieldwork, for example, making more use of local/day opportunities, rather than more long-distance school trips, or choosing activities which are more accessible. However, we cannot guarantee implementation of these mitigations across all schools, and there may be additional challenges for private candidates where a student is not able to find a centre to enter because of the fieldwork requirement. Despite these potential challenges, we have included fieldwork in the subject content because it is considered integral to the study of natural history.

Protected characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral*	No impact
Age			Yes	
Disability			Yes	
Gender reassignment			Yes	
Marriage and civil partnership			Yes	
Pregnancy and maternity			Yes	
Race			Yes	
Religion or belief			Yes	
Sex			Yes	
Sexual orientation			Yes	

*A decision which maintains a positive impact and/or doesn't introduce a negative impact can be assessed as 'Neutral'.

Monitoring evaluation and action plan

One of the key aims of the new GCSE in natural history is to create a rigorous, motivating and stretching course that is accessible to all students.

Whilst the department is responsible for creating the subject content for this GCSE, it will be up to the awarding organisations to decide whether they wish to offer the GCSE and develop the specifications for it. Should awarding organisations offer the GCSE, they may provide resources to support schools. Stakeholder organisations will also support its teaching.

We will seek to review the policy once we have analysed responses from the public consultation. This EIA will also be kept under review and if new relevant information comes to our attention, it will be considered and factored into the EIA. The public consultation on the subject content will include one or more questions on equality impacts.



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