

Consultation on the proposed changes to the assessment for modern foreign languages GCSEs

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 22,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

B. Answers to specific questions

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the requirement for GCSE MFL assessments to use words that are not on the vocabulary list should be removed for all GCSE modern foreign languages on a permanent basis?

3. ASCL supports the proposal to remove the expectation that students understand and respond to abstract and unfamiliar material. This adjustment was made for 2022 and pupils and teachers benefited from this approach.

Do you have any comments about the proposal to remove the requirement for GCSE MFL assessments to use words that are not on the vocabulary list for all GCSE modern foreign languages on a permanent basis?

4. It is important that this change does not lead to an increase in the demand of the tasks. For this reason, we believe that exam boards should still be able to include vocabulary covered in Key Stage 3 as part of the assessment (e.g. simple vocabulary and cognates/near cognates) which are not listed in the specification. This is because excluding such items from the assessments could lead to an undesirable increase in the demand of the tasks. We also believe this will increase the flexibility for exam boards with their assessment design.
5. Assessments must be fair and accessible for all pupils and there is a need for parity across all language assessments.

Are there other potential equality impacts that we have not explored?

6. No.

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

7. There must be safeguards that vocabulary lists do not lead to a very Western-centric focus at GCSE. Vocabulary lists also need to take account of current political developments in the field of social justice.

Are there potential costs or burdens associated with removing the requirement for assessments to use words that are not on the vocabulary list that we have not identified above?

8. No.

Are there any additional steps we could take to reduce the costs or burdens of our proposal?

9. As this change took place in 2022 as a support for students, we recommend the continuation of this.

C. Conclusion

10. I hope that this is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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