

Modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts)

Draft GCE AS and A level subject content

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,500 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 young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. 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 understands the reasons behind the proposal to apply three skills in combination - listening, reading and writing - and appreciates the difficulty in assessing the spoken element in these languages. However it is imperative that the examinations in the three assessed skills are equally comparable in terms of rigour. We support the aims and objectives of the proposed alternative content and support the wide ranging proposed new content with its emphasis on cultural understanding of the differing countries.
- 3 We would not want to jeopardise the future of these valuable qualifications for students and appreciate the difficulties in securing oral examiners for the oral component of the examination.
- 4 In addition to high level practical language skills assessed in the reading, writing and listening, the content of AS and A level in modern languages must provide depth of knowledge, understanding and intercultural competence, and foster a range of transferable skills such as communication skills, critical thinking, autonomy, resourcefulness, creativity, and linguistic, cultural and cognitive flexibility; all of which are of value to the individual, to wider society, to higher education and to employers.
- 5 ASCL recognises that the numbers entering for some of the proposed 12 lesser taught languages are very small; in fact the numbers for A level Gujarati in 2016 were only 19, Bengali 46 and Dutch 128. We therefore appreciate the commitment to ensuring the ongoing range of lesser taught languages is maintained and understand the impact this has on the cost-effectiveness of the development of the qualification.
- 6 Whilst we understand the inclusion of the 12 languages listed in the consultation document, we are concerned that some languages that have been offered previously are not included and would like clarification on the future of these other lesser taught languages under reformed A levels, given the proposed modifications to the assessment arrangements.

- 7 Given the proposed removal of the speaking component of the reformed lesser taught languages, ASCL believes that it is important that the demand and challenge of the specifications is comparable across all modern foreign language examinations.
- 8 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.

Martin Ward
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