

## **Consultation on changes to the subject content 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. Key points**

3. ASCL is concerned about the decline in languages, particularly post-16, and the recruitment and retention issues around language teachers.
4. We believe the learning of languages should be stimulating and rewarding for pupils, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to become global citizens. The opportunity to learn languages needs to be open to all.

#### **C. Answers to specific questions**

**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?**

5. 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 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?**

6. 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 is likely to lead to increased demand in the tasks. We also believe that inclusion of this vocabulary will increase the flexibility for exam boards with their assessment design.

7. Assessments must be fair and accessible for all pupils and there is a need for parity across all language assessments

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

8. There must be safeguards to ensure 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.

**Do you have any suggestions for how any negative impact on particular groups could be mitigated?**

9. No.

**D. 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.

Suzanne O'Farrell  
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