

HIGHER EDUCATION

# bulletin

SPRING 2014

**A LEVEL AND GCSE REFORM**

**ENGLISH LITERATURE IN REFORMED  
PERFORMANCE TABLE MEASURES**

**THE GROWING MATHS LANDSCAPE**

**A FOCUS ON MODERN FOREIGN  
LANGUAGES**

**WHAT IS A GCSE?**





**Welcome** to the Spring 2014 issue of HE Bulletin.

Qualifications that students take from age 16–18 are the subject of much debate and change.

The current government has made it clear that it feels there needs to be major change within all qualifications that are taken at level 3. It has embarked on a programme of reform for both academic and vocational qualifications. There has been a period of intense discussion throughout the second half of 2013, between the awarding organisations, Ofqual, the exams' regulator, and the Department for Education (DfE). A series of consultations has been completed and, as we go to press, final details about changes to A level are being confirmed. In Policy Update on page 5 we provide a summary of those changes.

The decline in the take up of modern foreign languages (MFL) at A level has raised concerns and prompted news stories. We ask two of our MFL forum members to share their views and respond to some of the concerns.

The place of maths in the curriculum is growing and developments at GCSE and level 3 are outlined by our maths subject specialists on page 8.

During such a period of change, communication with our higher education (HE) colleagues is vitally important. If you would like any more information or would like to share any views or thoughts on any of the articles in this issue, please do get in touch.

**Sally Brown**

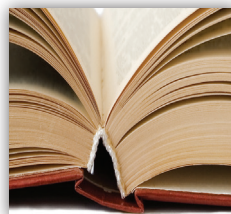
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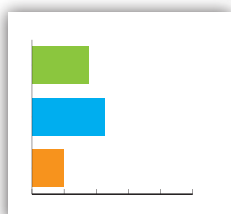
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# Policy Update

## A Level Reform

Decisions on A level reform are drawing to a close. The launch of two parallel consultations outlined the proposed changes to A Levels.

The DfE's consultation, **New A levels**: subject content consultation (<https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/>) sought to consult on the recommendations of Professor Mark E Smith's report on the review of current GCE specification content for the following subjects: art and design; business; computer science; economics; English; (English language; English language and literature and English literature), geography; history; psychology; sociology and science. Professor Smith's report outlined proposals for change following a series of meetings with awarding organisations in the summer. Awarding organisations presented evidence to support, or not, changes to content. OCR drew heavily on its subject consultative forums throughout this process and we would like to thank all our HE members for their assistance with this.

Ofqual's Consultation on **The regulatory requirements of new A levels** (<http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/a-level-regulatory-requirements-october-2013/>) set out subject-by-subject arrangements. It sought views on its intention to put in place a better balance between exam and non-exam assessment, as well as some very specific questions about the assessment of practical work in science. The Ofqual consultation also confirmed that the AS will remain at the same level as it is currently. That it will be a stand-alone qualification decoupled from the A level, but its purpose remains to encourage learners to take a broader range of subjects. Where possible, the AS will allow for co-teaching in most subject areas. The assessment will be wholly examined with the result not contributing to the A level.

Both consultations have now closed and OCR and other awarding bodies are awaiting the outcomes. Final outcomes from both consultations are due by the end of March.

At the time of going to press we have had information from the Secretary of State that geography will be delayed. It will be redeveloped for first teaching in 2016, alongside maths and languages.

Some other technical issues still to be resolved are those such as how to award the A\*. The awarding of A\* is currently calculated by marks awarded in the A2 modules. How the A\* will now be calculated is part of the discussions between Ofqual and awarding organisations' technical teams.

## Subjects to be developed for teaching in 2016

Maths, further maths, and modern foreign languages and ancient languages will be developed for first teaching in 2016. The development of maths and further maths was delayed at the recommendation of Professor Smith. These subjects will undergo a different process and be reviewed by the new A Level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) which has been established by the Russell Group. Geography will now also be part of this process.

Further information about the role of ALCAB and membership of the subject panels can be found on the ALCAB website at: [www.alcab.org.uk](http://www.alcab.org.uk)

## The other A level subjects

The development of other A level subjects is currently under review. Awarding organisations have been asked to put forward to the DfE the list of subjects they would like to see redeveloped.

# Policy Update

## Overview of Changes

The proposed new subject content for A levels is designed to:

- engage A level students in deeper learning and improve their opportunities to demonstrate better synoptic understanding
- ensure A level students are better prepared for higher education
- enable the removal of modular structures and the transition to a linear examination at the end of two years of study

- deliver more external assessment where appropriate.

Each A level must cover all subject and general criteria where they exist:

- A levels and AS will be assessed in a linear way
- there will be no more than three components per qualification (at A level)
- a variety of question types will be employed (extended writing, multiple choice and low-tariff questions)

- assessment will be synoptic
- each GCE specification must be developed in conjunction with external partners, particularly those from HE
- AS qualifications will be stand-alone and marks from the AS will not contribute to the A level
- AS qualifications will be the same standard as the current AS level but cover half the content.

|                |  |   |
|----------------|--|---|
| <b>AS</b>      | Stand-alone qualification<br>Content will be a subset of the content of the corresponding A level<br>Set and assessed at the same level as now<br>Co-teachable<br>100% exam with the exception of art and design.  |   |
| <b>A level</b> | Assessment – proposals considered alongside proposals to GCSEs and on a subject-by-subject basis<br>Written exams the default method of assessment<br>Non-exam assessment should only be used when it is the only valid way to assess essential elements of the subject. | Define the percentage of maths to be allocated to exam and non-exam assessment in each subject.<br>Require the separate reporting of performance in practical assessments in biology, chemistry and physics.<br>Require a non-exam assessment of fieldwork skills in geography. |

| Subject                         | Current weighting of non-exam assessment in A levels | Proposed contribution to grade of exam and non-exam assessments in A levels | A qualification requirement, separately reported, assessed by teachers and moderated by the exam boards |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Biology                         | 20–30%   | 100% exam   | Yes of practical skills   |
| Chemistry                       | 20–30%   | 100% exam   | Yes of practical skills   |
| Physics                         | 20–30%   | 100% exam   | Yes of practical skills   |
| Psychology                      | None   | 100% exam   | No  |
| English Language                | 15–40%   | 80% exam, 20% non-exam  | No  |
| English Literature              | 15–40%   | 80% exam, 20% non-exam  | No  |
| English Language and Literature | 15–40%   | 80% exam, 20% non-exam  | No  |
| History                         | 15–20%   | 80% exam, 20% non-exam  | No  |
| Geography                       | None   | 80% exam, 20% non-exam  | No  |
| Art and Design                  | 100%   | 100% non-exam   | No  |
| Business                        | None   | 100% exam   | No  |
| Computing                       | 15–40%   | 80% exam, 20% non-exam  | No  |
| Economics                       | None   | 100% exam   | No  |
| Sociology                       | None   | 100% exam   | No  |

# Policy Update

## Summary of key subject changes

| Subject  | Proposed change  | AS  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Art and Design</b>  | A new emphasis on drawing.   | A new emphasis on drawing.  |
| <b>Business Studies</b>                                      | Change of title to Business<br>Greater emphasis on the application of quantitative skills.   | Greater emphasis on the application of quantitative skills..  |
| <b>Computing</b>   | Change of title to Computer Science<br>New aim to encourage students to develop computational thinking skills<br>Greater mathematical content.   |   |
| <b>Economics</b>   | Greater emphasis on the application of quantitative skills<br>Revised, more up-to-date content to include, for example, financial regulation and the role of central banks.  |   |
| <b>English Literature</b>                                    | Strong focus on advanced literary studies and the reading of major literary genres<br>The study of a minimum of eight texts which must include at least three pre-1900 works including one Shakespeare play and a post-2000 work (to ensure historical coverage)<br>An examination on an unseen text set in a context to be defined by the awarding organisations, designed to ensure greater breadth of reading and a greater critical and comparative understanding of literature. | AS students will be required to study a minimum of four texts. Including one pre-1900 text<br>No requirement to study an unseen text.               |
| <b>English Language</b>                                      | Minor revisions to clarify requirement for students to study social, historical, geographical and individual varieties of English.   |   |
| <b>English Language and Literature</b>                       | Students will study at least six substantial texts: at least three from the genres of prose fiction, poetry and/or drama and at least three other texts, one of which must be non-literary<br>The inclusion of specific language levels (eg phonetics, phonology and prosodics).   |   |
| <b>Geography</b>   | A proposed core of physical and human geography of at least 50%<br>Students required to undertake individual research and investigative work including fieldwork<br>Greater emphasis on the application of quantitative skill.   | A proposed core of physical and human geography of at least 50%<br>No requirement to undertake research and investigative work including fieldwork. |
| <b>History</b>   | A requirement for students to study topics from a chronological range of at least 200 years<br>Minimum percentage of British history to be studied drops from 25% to 20%<br>A historical enquiry that is independently researched<br>An expectation that A level students will demonstrate complex understanding of historical concepts, producing analytical substantiated judgements.  |   |
| <b>Science:<br/>biology chemistry<br/>physics psychology</b> | Strengthened and more consistent mathematical requirements<br>More precise descriptions of mathematical content<br>Detailed exemplifications of how these skills are to be applied<br>Mathematical skills required beyond grade C at GCSE<br>A new appendix sets out detailed practical skills and behaviours essential for further study and successful scientific research.  |   |
| <b>Sociology</b>   | Very minor, small, wording changes<br>A modernising of content.  |   |

# Policy Update

## GCSE Reform

In October, the DfE and Ofqual announced changes to GCSEs. The table below gives a brief summary of overall changes to GCSE criteria for revised GCSE in English and maths. GCSE content in both subjects will be more challenging and the assessment more rigorous. The new GCSEs in English and maths will be in schools and ready for first teaching in September 2015. Other GCSE subjects have had their development delayed by a year, but will be ready for first teaching in 2016.

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| Grading | New 1–9 grading scale (9 being the top level)   | No comparison between old and new grades. Ofqual published proposals in December about where and how standards should be set. |
| Linear  | Fully linear  | Content will not be divided into modules – all assessment will be at the end.   |
| Exam    | Default method of assessment  | Ofqual will announce decisions on non-exam assessment on a subject-by-subject basis.  |
| Tiering | Will be used only for subjects where a lack of it would cause problems at either end of ability range | Where used, model will be decided on a subject-by-subject basis.  |

## Changes by subject

| Subject                   | Content  | Assessment   |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| <b>English Language</b>   | Will encourage the study of literature for those who do not take the English literature GCSE.  | 100% untiered exam<br>20% of the marks allocated to accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG)<br>Speaking skills will be teacher assessed, will not contribute to final grade; will be reported separately on certificate. |
| <b>English Literature</b> | Will involve students studying a range of whole and challenging texts in detail including Shakespeare, 19th century novels, romantic poetry and other high-quality fiction and drama<br>Will be examined on 'unseen' texts to encourage wider reading. | 100% untiered exam<br>5% of the marks will be allocated to accurate SPAG.  |
| <b>Mathematics</b>        | Will demand deeper and broader mathematical understanding<br>Will focus on the fundamental mathematics required for further education and employment<br>Greater coverage of ratio, proportion and rates of change<br>Will require more teaching time.  | 100% overlapping tiered exam<br>Foundation tier will cover grades 1–5<br>Higher tier will cover grades 4–9.  |



# English Literature

## An Update: English literature in reformed performance table measures

Concerns about the future for English literature at both secondary and tertiary level, following changes to school performance measures, were raised by members of our English Consultative forum and voiced by Professor Robert Eaglestone and Simon Kovesi in their article for the Times Higher Education, 'English: why the discipline may not be too big to fail'.

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/english-why-the-discipline-may-not-be-too-big-to-fail/3/2008473.article>

Reforms to GCSE English will see the current three qualifications (language, literature and a joint language and literature qualification) end and a new compulsory GCSE in English language and an optional GCSE in English literature created. The new English language GCSE will be very different – focusing on communication in many forms, it will strip out most of the literature, while the new English literature will be heavier and more challenging. The change in the performance measure meant English literature did not form part of the English Baccalaureate measure, (the performance measure of schools based on the percentage of students who obtain a C, or better, in a series of core subjects: English language, mathematics, two sciences, a foreign language and history or geography). The DfE has tried to incentivise schools to take literature by allowing the English language scores of those who take it to be given a double weighting, but the concern is that many schools may still react by dropping English literature and concentrating on easier subjects.

It seems these concerns may have been listened to and the DfE has announced a change in its position.

The following is a statement from DfE:

"We want to ensure that schools with good teaching in English Literature receive sufficient credit in the new accountability framework. We have therefore decided to adapt the position of English Literature in the Progress 8 measure."

The original position was:

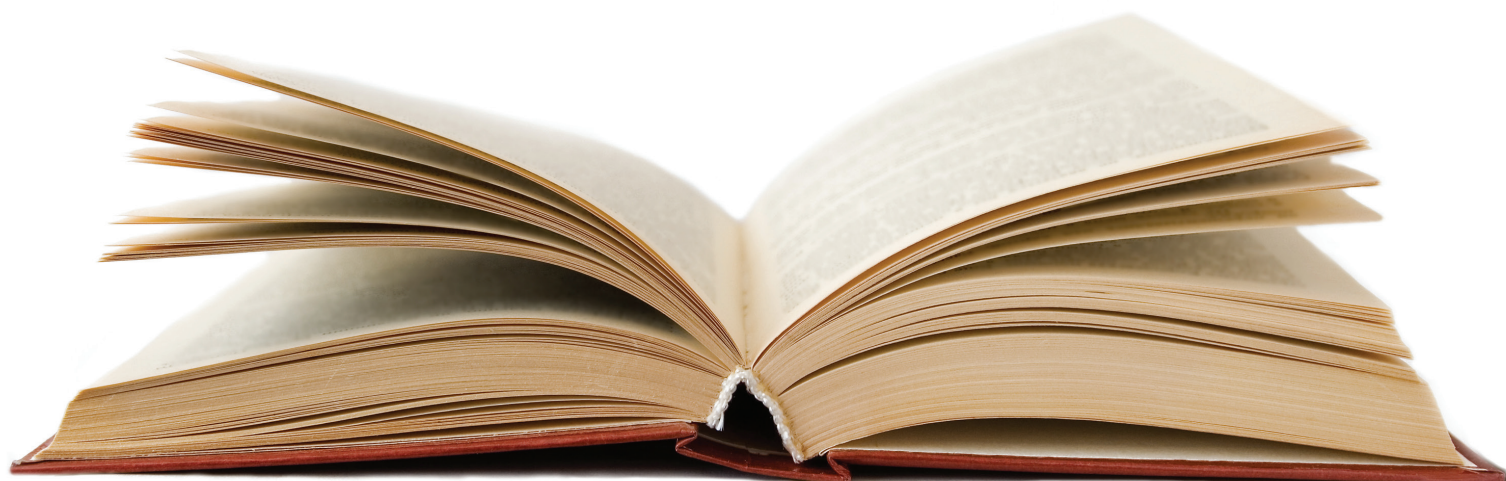
- English Language would be double weighted if a pupil also took English Literature.
- English Literature can be counted in the 'open group' of subjects.
- The new position is:
  - The best of English Language and English Literature will be double weighted, provided a pupil has taken both qualifications.
  - The second best score of English Literature and English Language can be counted in the 'open group' of subjects, if it is one of the pupil's highest scores in this group.

The DfE has said it will give English Literature parity with English Language in other headline performance table measures in 2016 tables.

Therefore:

In the measure showing the percentage of pupils achieving a C grade, or better, in English and maths, a pupil would have to achieve a C in either English Literature or English Language to satisfy the English requirement (in 2016, a C in Combined English would be sufficient).

In the EBacc measure, a pupil must study both English Language and English Literature, and achieve a C grade, or better, in at least one of these qualifications to satisfy the English requirement (in 2016, a C in Combined English would be sufficient).



# The Growing M

The current government has stated its intention to put an emphasis on the teaching and learning of maths. This intention is coming into being and changes within the reform agenda demonstrate this. GCSE maths will be bigger, meaning that it will occupy more time in the curriculum – exactly how much more is as yet unconfirmed but early indications suggest an increase in teaching time of 30%. Reformed A levels will see an increase and definition of the mathematical content contained in the specification. Reform to A level maths and further maths is being given additional time and, as we have said previously, will be delayed until 2016 to ensure some problems of linearity and the place of the AS can be resolved. And finally, the announcement of a qualification called ‘Core Maths’, designed for post-16 students who have succeeded at GCSE but who do not wish to study A Level Maths. The maths team at OCR sets out its intentions for this qualification.

## Core Maths

### The need

“There is a wide consensus amongst politicians, employers, HE tutors and others that students in England should, like their counterparts in the vast majority of other countries, continue to study mathematics to the age of 18.”<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that:

- the UK is almost alone among developed nations in having so small a proportion of 16 year-olds continuing with mathematics<sup>2</sup>
- about 200 000 undergraduates each year are reported by their HE institution to need some mathematics or statistics in their course, but have not done any mathematics since age 16<sup>3</sup>
- a large number of primary school teachers, responsible for the next generation’s success or otherwise in mathematics, have done no mathematics since obtaining a weak pass in GCSE Mathematics at age 16<sup>4</sup>
- many students following level 3 courses need more mathematics to support their studies<sup>5</sup>
- employers report a ‘skills gap’ in mathematics among their new recruits.<sup>6</sup>

### Progress so far

The government has already decided that students who have not achieved an A\*–C GCSE in English and mathematics by age 16 will continue to study towards achieving them as a part of their 16–19 study programmes. This comes into effect in September 2014 and will be enforced through funding arrangements.<sup>7</sup>

This leaves the students, perhaps 35% of the cohort, who achieve grade A\*–C in GCSE mathematics but who then drop the subject.

The Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME) has produced a series of reports to highlight the needs of these young people and to propose a way forward.<sup>8</sup> Ministers have expressed their support for the aspiration to have all 16–18 year-olds studying for an appropriate mathematics qualification by 2021.<sup>9</sup>

The DfE and Ofqual are working now to develop criteria for suitable qualifications, so that courses are ready for first teaching in September 2015. These have the



<sup>1</sup> ACME (2012) Post-16 Mathematics: A strategy for improving provision and participation Foreword, page 1

<sup>2</sup> Nuffield Foundation (2010) Is the UK an outlier? An international comparison of upper secondary mathematics education Participation Rates, page 8

<sup>3</sup> ACME (2011) Mathematical Needs - Summary Key Message 4, page 3

<sup>4</sup> Vordeman (2011) A world-class mathematics education for all our young people Section 4.1 page 35

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Porkess (2012) The Future of Statistics in our Schools and Colleges Section 7.4 page 40 onwards (published by The Royal Statistical Society and The Actuarial Profession)

<sup>6</sup> See review of reports in Grayson (2013) Research summary – A brief review of employers’ views on numeracy Section 1.1 page 3 (published by Cambridge Assessment Research Division)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/qandlearning/programmes/a00225749/post-16-eng-and-maths>

<sup>8</sup> ACME (2011) Mathematical Needs: The Mathematical Needs of Learners

ACME (2011) Mathematical Needs: Mathematics in the workplace and in Higher Education

ACME (2011) Mathematical Needs - Summary

ACME (2012) Post-16 Mathematics: improving provision and participation

ACME (2012) Post-16 Mathematics: planning for success

<sup>9</sup> Michael Gove (2011) Speech to the Royal Society, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/michael-gove-speaks-to-the-royal-society-on-maths-and-science>



# Maths Landscape

(rather awkward) working title of Core Mathematics. The DfE commissioned ACME to set up an expert panel to develop guidelines for Core Mathematics qualifications.

Core Maths is a level 3 qualification with the following design features:

around half the size of an A level

designed to be taught over two years

at least 80% external assessment

some synoptic assessment

grading to be pass/merit/distinction.

Final details are to be published by March 2014 with first teaching expected in September 2015. Support in the form of funding, £7.5m (x2), is to be given to early-adopter sites and £2.5m to be given to a Core Maths support programme.

## Introduction to Quantitative Methods

OCR's response has been to develop a quantitative maths programme which has arisen from consultation with users of maths and a partnership with Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI). OCR has developed, with MEI, a new unit in Quantitative Methods, for first teaching in September 2014. This is aimed at students who need mathematical support for their other A levels but who are not studying AS or A Level Mathematics; this is a subset of the students at which Core Mathematics will be aimed.

One important aim for the qualification is to encourage students to develop the skills to engage with mathematical problems arising in other subjects, employment and everyday life. To facilitate this, students are taught three problem-solving cycles: modelling, statistical problem-solving and solving financial problems. Students have to submit one piece of coursework in which they tackle a statistical problem; they have to use technology appropriately to do so. The expectation is that students will use data from one of their other subjects for their statistical coursework. In the exam paper they will be expected to show that they can transfer the same skills to solve problems in other contexts; a pre-release document might allow them the chance to familiarise themselves with a new context for the exam questions.

The new unit counts as a stand-alone qualification, or can be combined with already-existing units Statistics 1 and Decision 1 (from the A Level Maths suite) to make up an AS in Quantitative Methods.

More details can be found at: [www.ocr.org.uk/igqm](http://www.ocr.org.uk/igqm)



# In Conversation

Amid raising concerns about the decline in take up of modern foreign languages, two Higher Education members of OCR's Modern Foreign Languages Subject Forum share their views.

## **How would you sum up your current concerns for modern foreign languages?**

JW: There is a fundamental problem with the place of languages within our education system and with the perception of their value. A socio economic dimension to the concerns also exists: the decline in take up at GCSE and A level has disproportionately been felt in the state sector, with language learning thus acquiring a creeping association with privilege rather than universal entitlement. Furthermore, languages at school are seen as hard, and achieving good results in language exams is perceived as a barrier to school achievement in league tables.

OGC: Every year at A level results time, newspaper reports point to the decline in languages as an academic subject. There is a number of elements to get to work on: changing attitudes (the feeling that English is a global language and therefore 'enough'), facing issues (the perception that A Level Languages are tough, and hard to get higher grades in), and addressing some of the effects of the decline in languages in schools and universities (the growing concentration of languages in private schools and 'top' universities), just for starters!

## **What is happening to languages departments in your university?**

JW: A number of universities are reviewing the viability of existing degree programmes in languages. There has been a massive drop in the number of degree programmes available in the last 10 years as a result. Unfortunately, such closures are affecting those universities with more applied language degree programmes more than the more traditional universities.

OGC: Lancaster University University responded very proactively to these challenges (as many universities are now

doing) by starting to offer degrees in languages where a student does not need to have an A level in the language. They need a good GCSE (with grade A) as the minimum requirement to prove that they have an aptitude for language learning. We call this the 'intensive route'. The courses ab-initio students take have more contact hours and require more independent work. In this way we have given the opportunity to many students who couldn't take their preferred language all the way to A level to excel at languages. For an advocate of languages such as me, this is rewarding and exciting!

## **We are entering a stage of proposed reform to A levels with changes such as stand-alone AS, linearisation of A levels and reduced resit opportunities. What are your views on how this will impact on languages at school level?**

JW: I am worried that students who might have taken AS previously to see how it went and then decide whether to continue to A2, may now not choose a language at all. I would have preferred the AS to continue to exist as a staging post and exit qualification. I believe that the fact that the A level grade will reflect the language and topic knowledge competence achieved at the end of both years is a good one, which should be beneficial to students for whom the leap from GCSE to A level is particularly challenging.

OGC: The resit culture made fair comparison between candidates' language proficiency problematic, so I won't be sorry to see this reduced. The stand-alone aspect of the AS, on the other hand, seems very problematic for languages so I am relieved that this is being delayed till 2016 and considered separately.



**Jocelyn Wyburd** is Director of the University of Cambridge's Language Centre.

## **What do you see as the role of a stand-alone AS in languages in the future?**

JW: For students not choosing to take a language at A level – I would like to see the AS in a language being marketed as one of those 'facilitating subjects' which will ensure an A level student can demonstrate breadth of general education, alongside specialism in their chosen A level subjects. I believe it is massively important for scientists and engineers, etc, to demonstrate that they have an AS in a language – as part of their portfolio of key competences for the global society, as well as indicators of broader academic ability.

OGC: I am looking forward to reading the proposals because I still need to be convinced that this can be made to work for languages.



**Olga Gomez-Cash** is Director of Admissions and Communications, Department of European Languages and Cultures, University of Lancaster

### **What is the role of higher education in the development of new A and AS levels?**

JW: I believe in a partnership between academics who deliver language degrees, university researchers in languages education and lead practitioners in schools working with the exam boards. I do not believe that all aspects of the specifications should be developed in higher education without reference to those with expertise in the delivery of courses to sixth formers.

OGC: Language learning is cumulative so HE has an important part to play in ensuring that A levels foster continuity of subject-specific knowledge.

### **You have been involved with OCR's MFL Subject Forum for some time, what value do you see in this form of consultation?**

JW: Breaking down some of the barriers of understanding and perception between the different sectors; reflecting on recent developments, bringing together different perspectives on policy issues, trends and statistics; taking time out to hear about initiatives, the findings from research and surveys and to contemplate the latest proposed changes from government.

OGC: The OCR Forum has been invaluable in keeping up to date with the changes in education policy, understanding the work of examining boards and language teachers who support students through their GCSEs and A levels. Through regular exchange of information, I have been able to gain real insight into the stages of language learning and evaluation. For me, it has reinforced a sense of community for those of us who work in languages.

### **There is currently a focus on the lower percentage of A\* grades awarded at A level in languages – how important to you is this issue?**

JW: I think this issue is highly problematic if there is a perception which develops in schools that it is 'harder' to achieve certain results than in other subjects, or that it is harder to predict an A\* accurately.

OGC: I signed the recent letter in the Guardian about this, as schools tell me it is a factor in why pupils do not take language A levels. The difficulty of achieving an A\* in a language is making teachers wary of encouraging their best pupils to take languages. Given the

present situation that language study is in, this is an important issue.

### **What would be your key messages to 16 year-olds considering taking languages at A level?**

JW: My key messages are that going beyond GCSE and into A level gives you the opportunity to: (1) explore in greater depth, the underlying social and cultural features of another country through the medium of its language, and (2) expand your competence levels to allow you to express your own thoughts and opinions about the issues and topics which concern you through the medium of the language – something which you are only just beginning to do hesitantly at GCSE level – rewarding all your previous hard work with a tool you can really use. Furthermore, the A level is a fantastic base to build on for your future.

OGC: I would empathise that it is a good 'facilitating' subject to be taking at A level, that it can multiply their employability and open up a myriad of cultural opportunities. If they are considering university, then it is important for them to realise that the language can be taken up again in many ways, not just as single or combined major but as a minor or an elective element of a degree. Some of my most enthusiastic students are those who study language and related cultural studies as a refreshing balance to a very different subject, such as accounting and finance.

### **Post note**

On A Level Results Day, Spring 2014, it was announced that the exam boards would be launching a research project into MFL at A level to try to understand issues affecting subjects such as German and French. Of particular interest is the issue of falling entry, relatively low proportion of A\* outcomes and perceptions of these qualifications by candidates, teachers and other stakeholders. The Joint Council for Qualifications will be publishing a report on this later this Spring. It is hoped that such research will feed into the development of the new reformed A levels in these subjects, currently scheduled for first teaching in September 2016. OCR hopes to feed this research into the development of its MFL qualifications for new teaching from 2016.



# Master class...



...lessons in Modern Foreign Languages for trainee and newly qualified teachers.

An innovative pilot for OCR's MFL team, led by Katherine Smith, working in collaboration with Sally Hinchliff at Sheffield Hallam University's Department of Education, brought together pupils learning French and Spanish and trainee and newly qualified teachers to watch and learn from excellent practitioners of MFL.

Pupils from Birley Community College enjoyed four lessons delivered by MFL teachers from Sheffield and Cambridge following themes they are studying in their school curriculum.

The pilot's aim is to give teacher trainees the opportunity to observe good practice in MFL with an immediate feedback session for questions about MFL teaching and learning. Pupils in future events will be drawn from widening participation cohorts with Routes into Languages who is collaborating with OCR in this new venture.

Sue Connor, former MFL teacher at Chaucer school, started the day off with a recap on holidays and worked with pupils to build up extended sentences in the target language, helped along by a few furry friends! After a short break,

pupils went into a session on hobbies and past times delivered by Beatrice Jimenez-Montes from Notre Dame School. But gone are the days when language learning involved sitting behind a desk and chanting verbs. Pupils had to find their text, posted around the classroom, with missing words which they then had to relay to their team members to build up a complete picture in Spanish. To add a further layer of difficulty, the challenge was also time bound and as the pressure built up, the room was full of activity as the pupils' competitive streak came to the fore.

After the morning session, trainee teachers had the opportunity to question the excellent practitioners about techniques and classroom management while the pupils had a welcome break to eat their lunch and prepare for the afternoon session.

Jane Driver, Head of the St Neots Learning Partnership, came from Cambridge to deliver a session on the use of target language, ensuring that pupils had maximum exposure to Spanish as well as lots of fun learning through mime and speed dating activities.

To round off the day, the pupils enjoyed a game of 'Cops and Robbers' with Ms Jimenez-Montes as they used the phrases they had learned during the morning session to work their way across the cops and robbers board in their teams.

Pupils described the day as "Awesome", "Fantastique" and "A really fun day" – good news for a subject that often seems to get a bad press.

The whole event was filmed by a professional film crew and film clips can be found on the OCR CPD hub at [www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk](http://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk)

Following the success of the first master class event, a second event, coordinated by Sarah Schechter from Routes into Languages East, went ahead with Anglia Ruskin teacher trainees in Chelmsford.

We are looking forward to rolling out the programme with Routes into Languages across the regions in the coming year.

Please contact [Katherine.Smith@ocr.org.uk](mailto:Katherine.Smith@ocr.org.uk) if you are interested in running one of these with your teacher training department.



# What is a GCSE?

Ofqual will shortly be consulting on the range of subjects that should carry the GCSE title. It is not Ofqual's aim to stop important, established subjects being called GCSEs, but it will be looking at the principles that enable everyone to be clear on what a GCSE is.

OCR believes that GCSEs remain fundamental to underpinning the National Curriculum, motivating young people at a crucial period in their education, providing information to students about further education choices, and providing institutions with information for selecting students for both further and higher education. OCR believes these purposes remain critical. Even in schools where the National Curriculum is not mandatory, the GCSE is usually the mainstay of provision, meaning that a common core curriculum exists which provides the distinctive flavour of the English education system – one which has been successfully exported to many parts of the world.

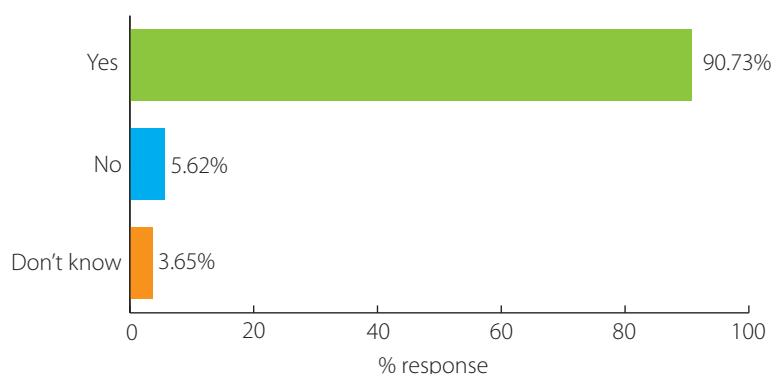
We wanted to hear the views of our stakeholders, including those at higher education institutions and so we asked 'What is a GCSE?'

OCR asked the following survey questions:

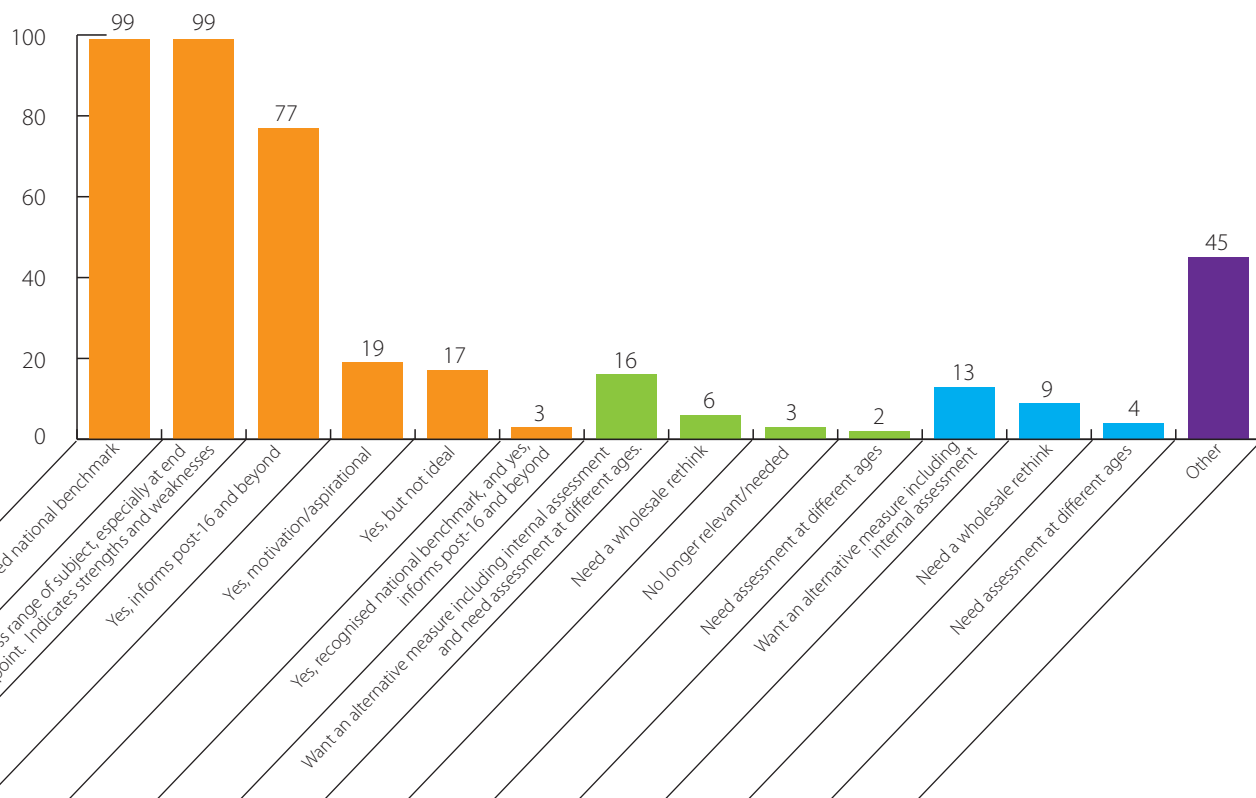
1. With the raising of the participation age, the concept of a school leaving certificate has been challenged. Do you believe GCSEs are required at all?
2. In your view, which subjects should carry the GCSE title?
3. Are there any subjects which, in your view, should carry the GCSE title but should retain a modular structure? If yes, which subjects and why?
4. Are there any subjects which, in your view, should carry the GCSE title and will require non-exam assessment? If yes, which subjects and why?
5. Are there any subjects which, in your view, should carry the GCSE title and will require tiered exams? If yes, which subjects and why?

A snapshot of the findings from over 2000 respondents is set out below. The full report will be available in March and any questions can be emailed to [Mary.Brennan@ocr.org.uk](mailto:Mary.Brennan@ocr.org.uk)

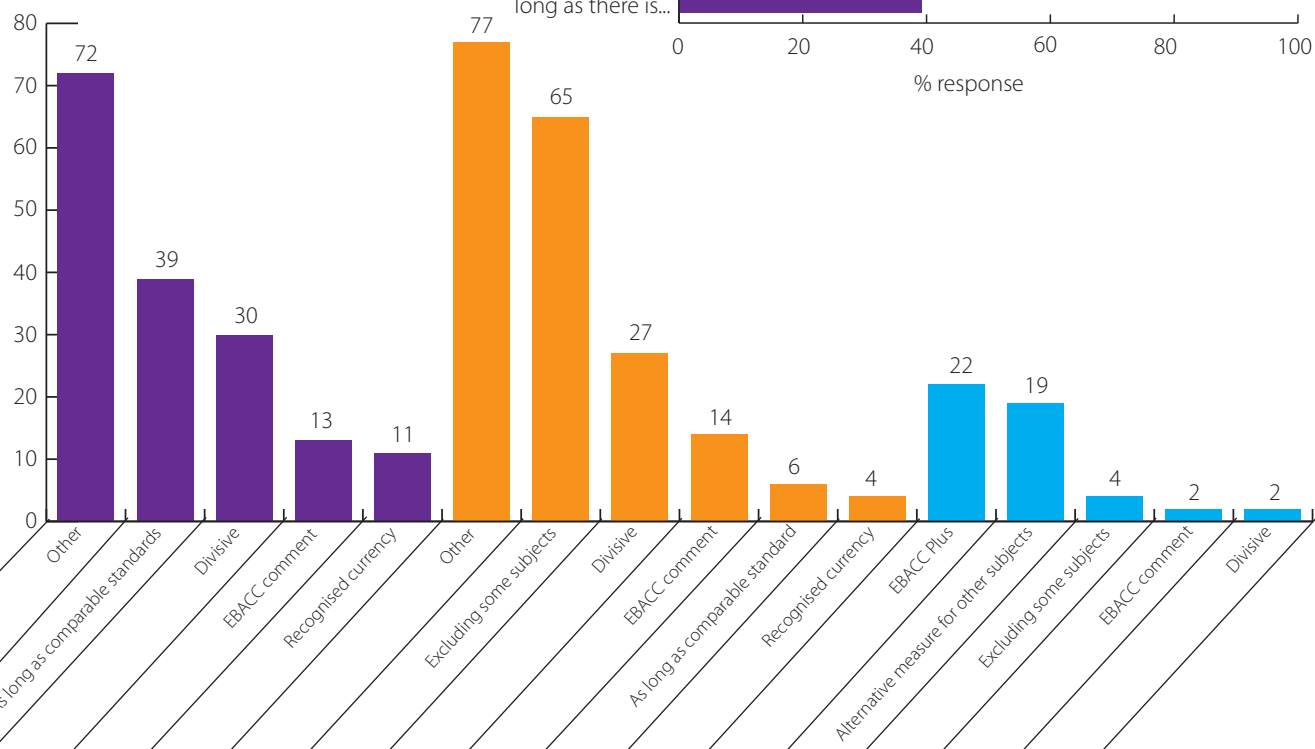
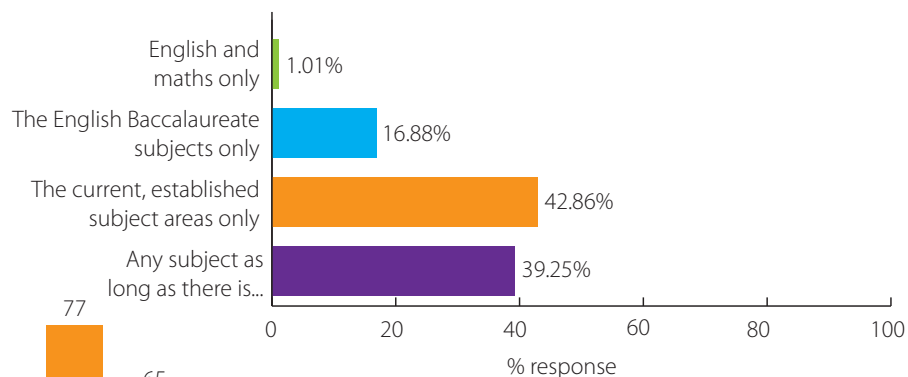
## 1. With the raising of the participation age, the concept of a school leaving certificate has been challenged. Do you believe GCSEs are required at all?



# What is a GCSE?



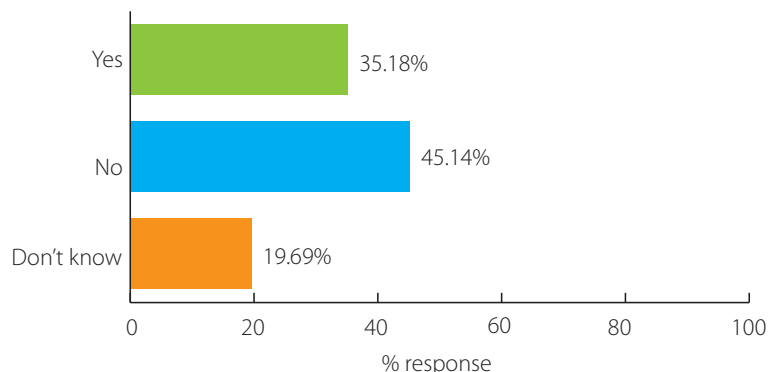
## 2. In your view, which subjects should carry the GCSE title?



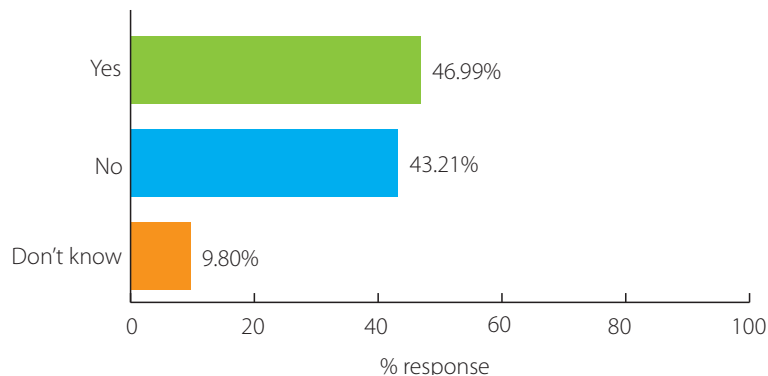


# What is a GCSE?

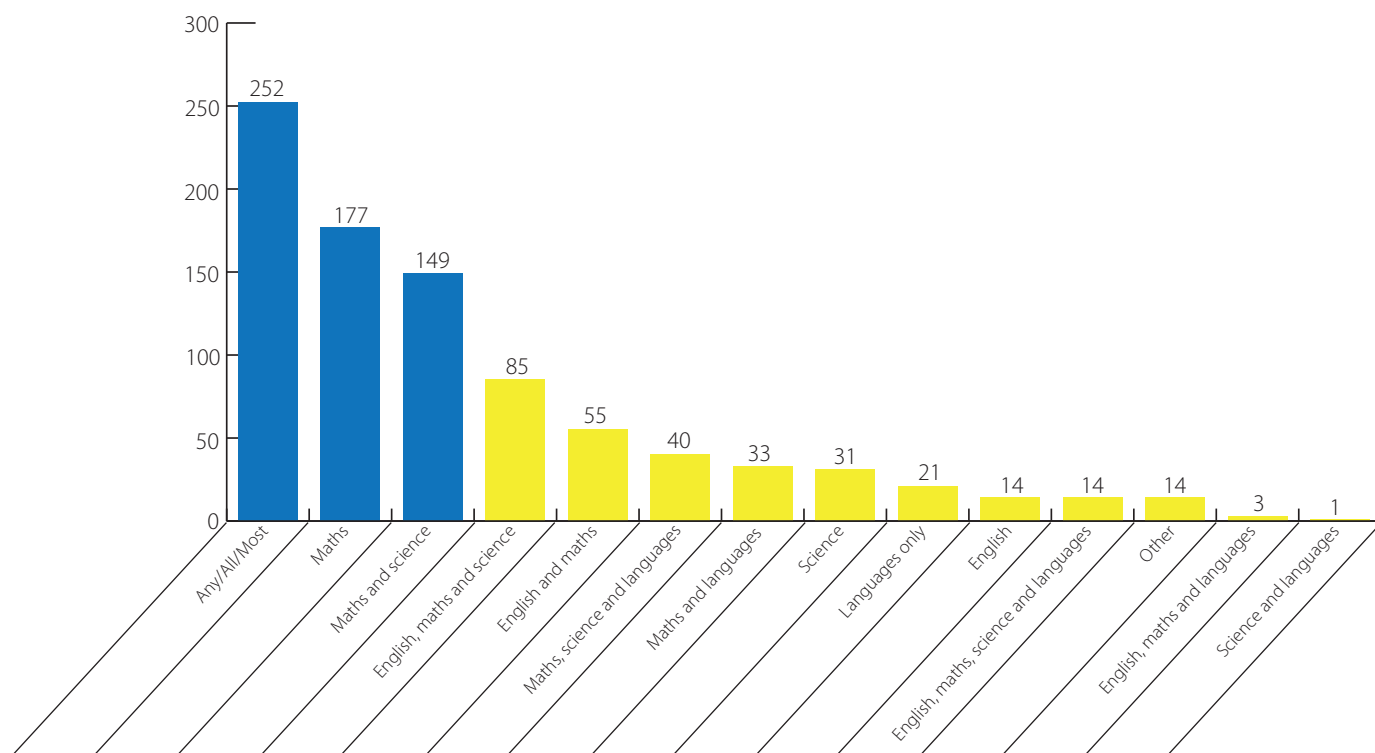
3. Are there any subjects which, in your view, should carry the GCSE title but should retain a modular structure?



4. Are there any subjects which, in your view, should carry the GCSE title and will require non-exam assessment?



5. Are there any subjects which, in your view, should carry the GCSE title and will require tiered exams?





# Who we are

**OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations) is a leading UK awarding body, committed to offering qualifications that engage learners of all ages, at school, college, in work or through part-time learning programmes to achieve their full potential.**

- OCR is a not for profit organisation so success, for us, is measured through the impact and reach of our activities and the scale of our contribution to helping learners realise their aspirations.
- Our purpose is to work in partnership with others to provide qualifications that support education in ways which enable all learners to reach their full potential and to recognise and celebrate their achievements.

Each year more than three million students gain OCR qualifications, which are offered by 13,000 centres including schools, sixth form colleges, FE colleges, training providers, voluntary organisations, local authorities, and businesses ranging from SMEs to multi-national organisations.

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**In the UK, the Cambridge Assessment Group are the only public examination boards affiliated to a university. It plays a leading role in researching, developing and delivering educational assessment to eight million learners in over 150 countries every year.**



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## OCR Resources: *the small print*

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