



## Summary Consultation Response, June 2021

### Proposals for GCSEs in French, German and Spanish (First teaching from 2023)

#### The contribution of Modern Languages in the curriculum

Modern Languages are a subject of critical importance to schools in the independent sector. These are subjects in which our students achieve very good outcomes, and which are highly valued by families and learners. Students from our schools contribute significantly to the numbers of pupils studying languages at GCSE and A-level across the country<sup>1</sup>.

Modern Languages are the subject in which students learn to communicate across borders, not just by learning new words and grammar, but also through the visceral experience of contact with new cultures, ways of life, ways of seeing and ways of thinking. Languages thus offer not just practical life-skills but also tremendous value in terms of social cognition and preparation for life in the modern, multilingual world. This is why languages matter.

#### Our response to the consultation

ISMLA welcomes the political intent to put languages on a strong footing and to help teachers and learners understand what is expected of them in key public examinations. But, ISMLA member schools are deeply concerned by the [proposals](#) published by the Department for Education, for the following key reasons

<b>Purpose and rationale</b>	The key purposes of Modern Languages being communicative tools and means of intercultural learning are lost. We call for a more inclusive, sector-wide discussion on curriculum aims and goals.
<b>Content and standards</b>	The lexical content proposed represents a significant reduction in learning, and will lead to a decline in standards. The words proposed do not form a communicative lexicon nor one which matches students' expectations.
<b>Culture</b>	The proposals are contradictory in terms of cultural learning: such learning is presented as integral to a well-designed course, yet at the same time the consultation documents clarify that to teach this would unjustifiably increase the burden of content to be taught. For ISMLA, cultural learning and linguistic learning are inalienable from one another; culture is a key driver of value, appeal and motivation in our subject.
<b>Timing and approach</b>	Our schools find the timing of this approach unwelcome and unhelpful, given the pressures under which schools are operating post-lockdown and during the TAGs process. We regret that no Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out, and we regret that the consultation contains so many leading questions and questions to which no discursive response is allowed.
<b>Mixed economy</b>	Given the wide variety of curriculum languages offered by our schools, including Italian, Russian, Mandarin, Arabic, and others, ISMLA schools are concerned about the suitability of this approach for these languages and about the creation of a two-tier system for Modern Languages.

#### Next steps

Alongside the APPG for Modern Foreign Languages and other key organisations, we call upon the Department for Education to pause indefinitely the further implementation of these proposals, to allow for terms of engagement to be agreed which enable meaningful input and co-design from across the languages sector.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.isc.co.uk/media/6686/isc\\_census\\_2020\\_final.pdf](https://www.isc.co.uk/media/6686/isc_census_2020_final.pdf)



We asked our member schools to briefly describe the new GCSE proposals and this is what they have said:

### The critical view:

reactionary	badly-timed	muddled	1980s
unappealing	unnecessary	cultureless	ridiculous
uninspiring	unhelpful	naïve	unfathomable
demotivating	short-sighted	depressing	old-fashioned
unclear	boring	death-knell	vague
archaic	off-putting	reductive	rushed
unimaginative	restrictive	limiting	bizarre
utilitarian	backward	dangerous	why?
dull, dull, dull	purposeless	uninspiring	
misguided	onerous	unfit for purpose	

### The supportive view:

a good effort  
radical  
intriguing  
necessary  
interesting  
refreshing  
achievable  
simple  
adaptable  
inclusive