Response ID ANON-B1Q8-JBPM-5

Submitted to Curriculum and Assessment Review
Submitted on 2024-11-21 14:50:33

Foreword from the Review Chair

Background to the Review

Why does the Review matter?

What is in scope of the Review?

About this call for evidence

Who is this call for evidence for?

Section 1: About you

1 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Section 1: About you

3 If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the below best describes which part of the sector your organisation represents? [If more than one applies, please select the one that you think is most important to understanding your consultation response.]

Charity, social enterprise organisation or non-profit organisation

Please describe:

4 What is the name of your organisation?

Organisation name:
British-German Association (BGA)

5 What is your role within the organisation?

Job role:

Regions, Partnerships and Schools Lead

Section 1: About you

6 What is your name?

Name:
Arne Muus

7 What is your email address?[Please note: If you are willing to be contacted about your submission, please provide your email address. You do not have to give your email address, and your views will be considered whether or not you provide this.]

Email address:
a.muus@britishgermanassociation.org

8 Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?[Please note: The Review may wish to contact you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.]

Yes

9 Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

Reason for confidentiality:

Definitions

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

10 What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What is working well?:

11 What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What should be improved?:

As a long-established UK charity with over 700 members and a network of over 550 secondary schools, we are concerned about the decline in language learning in English state schools. Language skills equip pupils to deal with a wide range of social situations. They also boost cognitive development and open up career opportunities for learners. As the evidence we are submitting shows, wider language teaching is key to breaking down the barriers to opportunity, delivering better life chances and enabling more young people to get on. In order to support our response, we have submitted a paper on "Modern Foreign Languages in a Modern Curriculum" to curriculum-assessment.review@education.gov.uk, which contains bibliographic details and links to the studies and data we cite. Our paper is also available to download from https://britishgermanassociation.org/11849-2.

In view of their extensive benefits, modern languages should have a secure place in the curriculum, be fairly assessed and form part of a variety of qualification pathways – including GCSE and A level but also extending to technical and vocational qualifications. Learners should be encouraged to study a range of languages at least to GCSE, and the curriculum design and accountability measures should signal clearly to school and trust leaders that language learning offers demonstrable benefits to attainment, progress and success across the curriculum.

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

12 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Barriers for socioeconomically disadvantaged:

Research by the British Council suggests that schools in areas of social deprivation are less likely to offer a range of languages [British Council, Language Trends England 2024]. German – typically the second or third language on offer – can serve as an indicator of a broadly-based language curriculum. At key stage 4, it is offered by only 39% of state-funded secondary schools in England (based on responses to the British Council's Language Trends England 2024 survey; the true figure is likely to be lower), and these schools have a significantly lower percentage of disadvantaged pupils (21%) than other schools (30%; based on 2022–23 key stage 4 data, using schools entering at least one GCSE candidate in German as an approximant for schools teaching German). Schools with German GCSE candidates performed better than other schools on key indicators such as pupils' Attainment 8 scores (48.5 versus 42.3); Progress 8 measure (+0.12 versus -0.11); and EBacc APS (4.27 versus 3.63). They also had higher shares of pupils achieving strong EBacc results – grade 5 or above – in English (62% versus 53%) and maths (52% versus 44%).

As set out in our answers below, research indicates that language learning supports pupils' attainment and progress across the curriculum. Independent schools are clearly aware of these benefits, showing much stronger language provision than state-funded schools. (For comparison with the figures quoted above, 74% of independent schools offer German at key stage 4, based on responses to the British Council's Language Trends England 2024 survey). However, the breadth and depth of language education in English state-funded schools is currently determined by socioeconomic factors. In order to overcome divides that perpetuate the class ceiling, all children and young people in state-funded education should benefit from a broad and high-quality language curriculum up to key stage 4 and beyond.

13 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

Barriers based on protected characteristics:

There are obvious barriers to access and participation for pupils with English as an additional language, and these were compounded by school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic [Scott, R. (2021). Language and learning loss: The evidence on children who use English as an Additional Language].

14 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Barriers based on SEND:

15 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]

Enablers:

Research has shown that the advantages of learning an additional language apply irrespective of socioeconomic background, socioeconomic status, or baseline skills. Details can be found in our response to question 21. Additionally, language learning puts pupils whose first language is English and pupils with English as an additional language on a more equal footing, with obvious benefits to attainment, progress, access and participation. This makes modern languages one of the great levellers of educational opportunities.

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

16 To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at primary level (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim? [Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.]

English and maths - primary content:

There is ample peer-reviewed evidence that learning and speaking another language improves cognitive abilities in children [1]. Research suggests that bilingualism enhances executive function [2], which is a major predictor of academic success – particularly in maths and reading [3]. Several studies have shown that foreign-language acquisition boosts the development of the first language, with children exposed to a second language outperforming their peers in verbal tasks and reading tests [4, 5]. Additionally, children with bilingual experience show significant advantages in cognitive flexibility [6] and selective attention [7], which are key to processing complex information and improve learning across the curriculum [8].

In order to reap these non-linguistic benefits, it is not necessary to become highly skilled in another language. Instead, exposure is key, with studies showing increases in executive function with longer bilingual experience rather than with proficiency [9]. A stronger focus on modern languages at primary level would therefore support better progress also in English and maths.

Sources:
[1] Fox, R., Corretjer, O., & Webb, K. (2019). Benefits of foreign language learning and bilingualism: An analysis of published empirical research 2012–2019. Foreign Languages Annals, 52(4), 699–726. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12424
[2] Bialystok, E. (2015). Bilingualism and the Development of Executive Function: The Role of Attention. Child Development Perspectives, 9(2), 117–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12116
[3] Best, J. R., Miller, P. H., & Naglieri, J. A. (2011). Relations between executive function and academic achievement from ages 5 to 17 in a large, representative national sample. Learning and Individual Differences, 21, 327–336. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2011.01.007
[4] Marini, A., Eliseeva, N., & Fabbro, F. (2019). Impact of early second-language acquisition on the development of the first language and verbal short-term working memory. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 22(2), 165–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1238865
[5] Steele, J. L., Slater, R. O., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J., Burkhauser, S., & M., B. (2017). Effects of Dual-Language Immersion Programs on Student Achievement: Evidence From Lottery Data. American Educational Research Journal, 54(1S), 282S–306S. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216634463
[6] Marzecová, A., Bukowski, M., Correa, Á., Boros, M., Lupiáñez, J., & Wodniecka, Z. (2013). Tracing the bilingual advantage in cognitive control: The role of flexibility in temporal preparation and category switching. Journal of Cognitive Psychology, 25(5), 586–604. https://doi.org/10.1080/20445911.2013.809348
[7] Blom, E., Boerma, T., Bosma, E., Cornips, L., & Everaert, E. (2017). Cognitive advantages of bilingual children in different sociolinguistic contexts. Frontiers in Psychology, 8(552), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00552
[8] Yang, S., & Yang, H. (2016). Bilingual effects on deployment of the attention system in linguistically and culturally homogeneous children and adults. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 146, 121–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2016.01.011
[9] Bialystok, E. (2015). Bilingualism and the Development of Executive Function: The Role of Attention. Child Development Perspectives, 9(2), 117–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12116

17 To what extent do the English and maths primary assessments* support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim? *These include SATs at the end of key stage 2, the phonics screening check and the multiplication tables check.

English and maths - primary assessment:

18 To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?

English and maths - secondary content:

19 To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

English and maths - qualifications:

20 How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

Support for learners who do not achieve level 2 by 16:

21 Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?

Challenges with curricula and assessment - changes to overcome these:

The cognitive advantages of language learning, as set out in response to question 16, are independent of socioeconomic status, cultural background, and baseline skills. Bilingual children from low socioeconomic backgrounds outperform monolingual children on working memory tasks [10], and show faster learning and stronger skills in maths [11] regardless of cultural and linguistic context [12]. Even the most socially and economically disadvantaged bilinguals show cognitive advantages over those speaking only a single language [13]. Language learning is therefore uniquely suited to help overcome challenges relating to socioeconomic disadvantage and EAL in English and maths.

Sources:
[10] Blom, E., Küntay, A. C., Messer, M., Verhagen, J., & Leseman, P. (2014). The benefits of being bilingual: Working memory in bilingual Turkish–Dutch children. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 128, 105–119. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2014.06.007
[11] Choi, J. Y., Jeon, S., & Lippard, C. (2018). Dual language learning, inhibitory control, and math achievement in Head Start and kindergarten. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 42, 66–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.09.001
[12] Barac, R., & Bialystok, E. (2012). Bilingual Effects on Cognitive and Linguistic Development: Role of Language, Cultural Background, and Education. Child Development, 83(2), 413–422. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01707.x
[13] Nair, V. K., Biedermann, B., & Nickels, L. (2017). Effect of socio-economic status on cognitive control in non-literate bilingual speakers. Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 20(5), 999–1009. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728916000778

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

22 Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects* where: a) there is too much content; not enough content; or content is missing; b) the content is out-of-date; c) the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy);d) there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)?Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate.*This includes both qualifications where the government sets content nationally, and anywhere the content is currently set by awarding organisations.

Subject content:

23 Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

Changes to ensure curriculum is more diverse and representative of society:

24 To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about, and respect, others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Respect for others:

Modern language teaching is a proven way of fostering positive engagement with others. Exposure to a second language promotes effective communication by enhancing perspective taking, i.e. the ability to understand another speaker's intention [14]. By extension, multilingualism has been linked to "openness" – the ability to appreciate new ideas and adapt to other cultures and societies [15]. Combined with the increased cognitive flexibility in people with additional-language skills, this leads to stronger out-group acceptance, making it an important factor in prejudice reduction and promoting social cohesion [16]. These benefits do not depend on mastery of the language but are gained through exposure [17]. A stronger role of languages in the curriculum will therefore positively impact social cohesion and mutual respect.

Sources:
[14] Fan, S. P., Liberman, Z., Keysar, B., & Kinzler, K. D. (2015). The exposure advantage: Early exposure to a multilingual environment promotes effective communication. Psychological Science, 26(7), 1090–1097. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615574699
[15] Korzilius, H., Van Hooft, A., Planken, B., & Hendrix, C. (2011). Birds of different feathers? The relationship between multicultural personality dimensions and foreign language mastery in business professionals working in a Dutch agricultural multinational. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35(5), 540–553. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.02.018
[16] Mepham, K. D., & Martinovic, B. (2018). Multilingualism and Out-Group Acceptance: The Mediating Roles of Cognitive Flexibility and Deprovincialization. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 37(1), 51 –73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X17706944
[17] Fan, S. P., Liberman, Z., Keysar, B., & Kinzler, K. D. (2015). The exposure advantage: Early exposure to a multilingual environment promotes effective communication. Psychological Science, 26(7), 1090–1097. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615574699

25 In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study, and what could we change to better support this?

Primary - skills and knowledge needed for life and further study:

Employers report that "too many young people leaving education do not have the basic skills – communication, teamwork, problem solving – needed to thrive in the workplace." [Labour Party, Breaking down the barriers to opportunity]. Some of the prime benefits of language learning are: effective communication; improved perspective-taking and greater openness (which bolster teamwork); cognitive flexibility and enhanced creativity (which support problem solving). This makes improved language provision an obvious tool for tackling these shortcomings.

26 In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

Secondary - skills and knowledge for life and further study:

Career pathways in which languages complement specific skills exist across the educational spectrum, from academic to vocational and technical training routes. Thus, every young person can benefit from language learning and use linguistic skills to create opportunities for themselves, helping them to achieve and thrive in a wide range of employments.

A 2014 survey by the British Academy found that 89% of UK SMEs (which then, as now [18], accounted for 99% of all private sector businesses) saw speaking an additional language as a useful asset for employment [19]. 54% of SMEs agreed that languages were as important as STEM subjects, and almost the same share considered school leavers (51%) and graduates (53%) who only speak English to be at a competitive disadvantage when entering the job market [20].

In the context of Brexit, the CBI highlighted the national importance of foreign language skills and the cultural understanding they foster, stating in its 2019 Education and Skills Survey report that, "for the government vision of 'Global Britain' to be delivered, businesses need people who can communicate with customers and suppliers around the world" [21]. More recently, the British Chambers of Commerce's 2024 Youth Skills Manifesto called for language learning at least to GSCE level because language skills "support businesses to understand the culture of overseas markets and to communicate for international trade purposes" [22].

Language learning and its associated benefits are not an end in themselves, but an important career driver in combination with other relevant skills [23]. In higher education, this is amply demonstrated by the wide choice of joint-honours degrees combining a non-linguistic subject and a language. A recent snapshot survey of the UCAS website showed just over 1,000 such courses offered by over 50 UK universities, ranging from Accountancy and German at the University of Aberdeen to Zoology and a Modern Language at the University of Manchester (based on a search for university courses involving French, German, Spanish or Any Modern Language and a second, non-linguistic subject at https://www.ucas.com on 10 September 2024).

Sources:
[18] Hutton, G. (2024). Business Statistics (House of Commons Library Reseach Briefing). Retrieved September 10, 2024, from https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06152/SN06152.pdf
[19] British Academy. (2014). Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) Language Survey. Retrieved September 10, 2024, from https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1838/Born-Global-SME-Language-Survey-Summary.pdf
[20] Ibid.
[21] CBI. (2019). Education and learning for the modern world: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey report 2019. Retrieved September 10, 2024, from https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/3841/12546_tess_2019.pdf
[22] British Chambers of Commerce. (2024). Youth Skills Manifesto: 2024. Retrieved September 10, 2024, from https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Youth-Skills-Manifesto-FINAL.pdf
[23] Beadle, S., Humburg, M., Smith, R., & Vale, P. (2016). Study on foreign language proficiency and employability: executive summary. European Journal of Language Policy, 8(2), 243–253. Retrieved September 10, 2024, from https://muse.jhu.edu/article/645983

27 In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

16-19 - skills and knowledge for life and further study:

The British Academy's 2023 report, Languages Provision in UK Further Education, found that 90% of responding FE students (whether they were studying a language or not) considered languages "important" or "very important", citing diversity and inclusion, communication with speakers of other languages, and cultural awareness as the main reasons [24].

The CBI's Head of Education and Skills, Robert West, responded to the report by saying: "Employer demand for foreign language skills has significantly increased over the last few years, but uptake of these subjects at schools and colleges remains way too low. This report shows that reversing this trend is critical to increasing the UK's global competitiveness and to ensuring young people have the high level of cultural awareness that supports a successful career. That means investing in vocational language training at FE colleges, as well as encouraging more young people to study languages at GCSE and A-level." [25]

Sources:
[24] Collen, I., Henderson, L., Liu, M., O'Boyle, A., & Roberts, J. (2023). Languages Provision in UK Further Education. Retrieved September 10, 2024, from https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/4540/Languages_Provision_in_UK_Final_v2.pdf
[25] Bawden, A. (2023, January 30). UK business groups call for more foreign-language teaching in colleges. Retrieved September 10, 2024, from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jan/30/uk-foreign-language-teaching-colleges-further-education

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

28 To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

primary - broad and balanced:

29 To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and, qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

secondary - broad and balanced:

Modern language teaching in English state-funded schools is in decline. Over the last 20 years, the number of pupils in England taking modern language GCSEs has dropped by 34%, with rises in Spanish and other languages masking a steep drop in French, by 56%, and German, by 71%. The inclusion of modern languages in a broader national curriculum that applies to both maintained schools and academies has the potential to reverse this decline.

The Government's decision to make EBacc language entry a headline performance measure is a welcome step, but more will need to be done to ensure that the benefits and opportunities offered by languages are available to all.

30 To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

16-19 - broad and balanced:

The situation of modern languages at 16–19 is no less concerning than at GCSE. While the number of all modern language A levels sat in England in 2024 is down by 24% against the 2004 figure, the fall in French and German over the same period stands at 47% and 65%, respectively. Again, the inclusion of modern languages in a broader national curriculum that applies to both maintained schools and academies has the potential to reverse this decline.

For example, a broader range of meaningful, rigorous and high-value pathways in languages post-16 would help more young people to succeed in languages, raising standards across the curriculum and helping learners to thrive in their chosen career.

31 To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

support for creative skills and access to creative subjects:

Creative skills are essential to equip learners with the right tools for today's job market. However, creative subjects – as traditionally defined – are not the only part of the curriculum that will develop these skills in children and young people.

Learning a foreign language in a classroom "dramatically increases" the four components of divergent thinking ability – fluency, elaboration, originality, and flexibility – that are markers of enhanced creativity [26]. A variety of studies supports the conclusion that bilingualism is linked to creative thinking, prompting calls for all children to be given the opportunity to develop second- and third-language skills to support their development [27]. Languages therefore need to have a secure place in the curriculum, alongside creative subjects, throughout primary and secondary education.

Sources:
[26] Ghonsooly, B., & Showqi, S. (2012). The Effects of Foreign Language Learning on Creativity. English Language Teaching, 5(4), 161–167. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n4p161
[27] Fürst, G., & Grin, F. (2018). Multilingualism and creativity: a multivariate approach. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 39(4), 341–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1389948

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

32 Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

Explanations of trends or suggestions to address:

Take-up of modern languages, at both key stage 4 and 16–19, has declined significantly over the last 20 years. (See our responses to questions 29 and 30.) The reasons for this are to be found on both the "supply" and "demand" sides.

Languages have not been a mandatory part of the national curriculum at key stage 4 since 2004. Additionally, 80% of mainstream state secondary schools in England are now academies, which currently do not follow the national curriculum, and this share is set to rise as more schools convert to academy status. Only around 17% of English state-funded secondaries still chose to mandate MFL learning at key stage 4 in 2024 (based on responses to the British Council's Language Trends England 2024; the true figure is likely to be lower), so the vast majority of pupils in state-funded education are not required to learn a language beyond age 14.

While most secondaries continue to offer at least one modern language at key stage 4, there are several factors that discourage uptake: adverse grading (see our responses to questions 41 and 48), linear assessment (see question 48), pupil attitudes and teacher supply (both of which are outside the scope of this review).

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

33 To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?

secondary - benefit from vocational qualifications:

34 To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

vocational offer - equip for further study and improvement suggestions:

As set out in our responses to questions 26 and 27, career pathways in which languages complement specific skills exist across the educational spectrum, and both FE students and employers value language skills in technical and vocational qualification pathways. The curriculum should ensure that learners acquire the necessary language skills pre-16 to progress to 16–19 pathways which meet employer demands.

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

35 Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stage 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?

volume of assessment at key stage 1 and 2:

36 Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment improvements:

37 Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment, without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment improvements to experience:

38 What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment works for ALL learners:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

39 Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

volume of assessment at GCSEs:

40 What more can we do to ensure that: a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?

GCSE assessments - support development of knowledge and skills and considers wellbeing:

41 Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

changes to GCSE qualification content or assessment:

Modern languages have for many years ranked among the most harshly graded GCSE subjects. In other words, the same pupils achieve notably lower grades in modern language exams than in their mandatory English language and maths exams. In 2022, three of the four most adversely graded GCSE subjects were German, French and Spanish [28], and grading disadvantages in these subjects continued to be evident in 2023 [29]. This is despite adjustments having been made each year since 2022, based on Ofqual recommendations dating back to November 2019 [30].

In a bid to make language GCSEs more attractive to pupils, the last government announced changes to the exam specifications for languages [31]. Teaching based on the new exam specifications began this academic year, with first exams in 2026, but the new specifications are unlikely to have a significant impact unless the issue of severe grading is addressed.

Sources:
[28] Thomson, D. (2023). Revisiting subject difficulty at Key Stage 4. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from FFT Education Datalab: https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2023/06/revisiting-subject-difficulty-at-key-stage-4
[29] Thomson, D. (2024). Languages are still harshly graded at GCSE. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from FFT Education Datalab: https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/04/languages-are-still-harshly-graded-at-gcse
[30] Ofqual. (2019). Grading standards in GCSE French, German and Spanish. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5dc0a8cd40f0b63796dc4c2c/Grading_standards_in_GCSE_French_German_and_Spanish_-_FINAL65571.pdf
[31] Department for Education. (2022). Reforms to encourage more students to take up language GCSEs. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reforms-to-encourage-more-students-to-take-up-language-gcses

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

42 Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?

support pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3:

43 Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?

support pupils who do not meet expected standard at key stage 2:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

44 To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions:

In recognition of the importance of language skills, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) entry performance measure, introduced in 2010, includes a language pillar. However, its effect on language take-up at key stage 4 was short-lived, with the combined number of GCSE entries in England for the "big three" languages of French, German and Spanish rising from 2011 to 2013 before dropping off again.

While 81.7% of GSCE pupils entered the EBacc humanities pillar in 2023, only 44.7% took a language – a reduction on the previous year and part of an overall downward trend since 2013. This makes it highly unlikely that the DfE's original target of 90% of pupils entering all five EBacc pillars by 2025 will be achieved. Clearly, the message that language skills are vital is not being taken seriously enough by school and MAT leaders for them to encourage stronger take-up in their schools or trusts. One reason for this is no doubt the negative impact that harsh marking in languages at GCSE would have on other performance measures if more pupils were to enter languages. Therefore, while the government's decision to make EBacc language entry a headline performance measure is a welcome step, further adjustments to performance measure mechanisms are likely to be required to achieve stronger take-up.

45 How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

accountability system support and recognise progress for ALL pupils:

46 Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?

accountability system changes to support SEND or socio-economically disadvantaged:

Given the equalising benefits of language learning across socioeconomic backgrounds, stronger incentives for pupils to learn languages to key stage 4 (and beyond) will positively impact progress for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

47 To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners?a) Level 3 b) Level 2c) Level 1 and entry level

extent to which programmes and qualifications meet needs and aspirations of learners:

48 Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications, and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners:a) AS/A level qualificationsb) T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmesc) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3d) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

changes to programmes and qualifications:

As at GSCE, language exams are above average difficulty at A level, as confirmed by an Ofqual investigation in November 2018 [32]. Despite this, no adjustments to grading or content have been made since then. Pupils aiming to achieve the highest possible grades to support their educational progression will understandably choose more favourably graded subjects. Changes are urgently required to address this imbalance.

Additionally, many of the pupils staying in school education post-GCSE used to take four AS levels, continuing three of them to full A level. This changed in 2016, when it was decided that AS levels would no longer contribute to 50% of the final A level grade. Instead, a linear approach with single final exams for both AS and A levels was adopted, making the two qualifications incompatible. Since then, fewer and fewer schools have been offering standalone AS levels. Since languages used to be a popular choice at AS level, this change has led to reduced take-up of languages post-16 [33]. A return to modular assessment structure for AS and A levels would ensure a broader curriculum post-16 and benefit language learning in particular.

Given the relevance of language skills in technical careers, as set out in our responses to questions 26 and 27, the introduction of a language element for T levels might also be considered.

Sources:
[32] Ofqual. (2018). Inter-subject comparability in A level sciences and modern foreign languages. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bf433ff40f0b60783ad9374/ISC_Decision_Document_20.11.18.pdf
[33] British Council. (2020). Language Trends 2020. Retrieved August 21, 2024, from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_2020_0.pdf

49 How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

improve understanding on how programmes and qualificatoins will prepare them for future:

Evidently, the importance of languages to progression into university courses and employment is not understood by many learners. School and MAT leaders, as well as career advisers, have a key role to play in conveying an accurate picture of both the personal and professional benefits of language skills. More needs to be done for the messages from employers and higher education institutions to be heard in secondary schools.

50 To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?

scope and flexibility to support learners changing course:

51 Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

skills, subjects or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19:

See our response to question 26.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

52 How can the curriculum, assessment and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?

wraparound support enabling transitions between key stages:

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

53 How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?

how can technology be used to improve delivery of curriculum, assessment and qualifications :

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

54 Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Any further views: