Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for evidence

About this call for evidence

This call for evidence will seek views on a range of topics that are in scope of the Curriculum and Assessment Review. The call for evidence is split into the following nine sections:

Section 1: About CLiE

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

• Organisation

3. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the below best describes which part of the sector your organisation represents?

- Other (please describe)

Founded in 1980, the Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLiE) is a committee of experts in language with a special interest in education and language teaching. It is an umbrella organisation of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain (LAGB) and the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) and encompasses representatives of 19 member organisations involved in teaching English, EAL, ESOL, EFL, MFL, and home, heritage and community languages. CLiE builds bridges between researchers (linguists) and practitioners and provides evidence-based feedback on education policy, curriculum and assessments to the Department for Education, the Minister of State for Universities, etc.

CLiE is responding to the 2024 DfE curriculum and assessment review on behalf of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain (LAGB) and the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) as well as member organisations who do not submit their own response. 22 people from 9 stakeholder organisation contributed to this response. CLiE was supported by members of BAAL (Dr Lucy Henning, Dr Jennifer Marshall and Dr Jane Woodin), and the LAGB (Dr Yuni Kim) who we thank for their contributions. In the response we focus on our area of expertise, i.e. languages and linguistics.

4. What is the name of your organisation? CLiE

5. What is your role within the organisation? chair

6. What is your name? Eva Duran Eppler

7. What is your email address? <chair@clie.org.uk>

8. Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response? Yes

9. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential? No

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?*

We will first lay out our overall position, which provides the necessary context for our responses to this and subsequent questions, before we respond directly to question 10.

Curricula, assessment systems and qualification pathways are inextricably linked. Data gathered through assessment has the potential to reveal inequalities in attainment and raise concerns about provision which can challenge and support schools to improve their practice (Stannard and Huxford 2007; Demie 2019).

Our main argument in this section and our response as a whole is that successive UK governments' commitment to high standards within the state education system, as evidenced by high-stake summative assessment (Isaacs 2018, Winke 2020, French, Dickerson and Mulder 2024), has reduced its capacity to support school improvement and led to a narrowing of the curriculum (Boyle and Bragg 2006, NEFR 2024) and qualification pathways (Ramakrishnan 2019, Education Policy Institute 2024). The assessment system narrows the curriculum because content that is assessed dictates what is taught, how it is taught and how intensely it is taught (Hargreaves, Quick and Buchanan 2023).

Two thirds of young people who achieve five GCSEs and their support systems (schools, teachers, tutors and carers) have made this narrow system work for themselves. But it is all pupils, including the 'forgotten' vulnerable third who do not receive a passing grade in English (or maths) at GCSE (British Academy 2023, see also Section 3), who deserve a broader, more flexible and motivating curriculum and assessment system and a chance through alternative qualification pathways.

We argue that an education system that achieves the goals outlined on p 7 of the introduction to this review requires at least two things: first, a broader curriculum that is not unnecessarily curtailed by statutory assessment (Hargreaves et al. 2023), and second, sufficient well trained teachers with a manageable workload and a degree of autonomy (Hollmann et al. 2021, DfE 2018, 2019).

A broader curriculum has been shown to increase overall academic performance and hence the quality of the workforce as a whole. According to a British Academy (henceforth BA, 2019) report, 90% of studies on the cross-curricular effect of learning a modern foreign language found a positive subsequent impact on English language learning, literacy, maths and science. Similar effects have been shown for home, heritage and community languages (ASCL 2022).

In response to Question 10, some serious far-reaching questions need to be asked as to what might be termed 'working well', especially for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and home, heritage and community languages (HHC). For MFL, attainment, uptake and student motivation are below expectations, and evidence points towards the current MFL curriculum and assessment system mainly suiting a privileged minority of pupils (Lanvers 2017, Parrish 2024).

There are, however, strengths in the system.

a) curriculum

The Key Stage 3 curriculum allows some degree of flexibility within the programmes of study. A certain amount of curriculum breadth is also guaranteed in KS 4 with schools being required to provide opportunities for students to take a course of study in the areas of the arts, technology, humanities or modern languages.

The English Language A Level curriculum is generally well received as broad, reflective of the real-life context of students and thus motivational (Graham et al. 2026) and offering insights into the nature of language and also language variation. The decline in interest in English Language post-16 is mainly attributed to the current format of the English Language GCSE (see our response to Questions 12, 19-20, 44 and 47). Like the *Coalition for Language Education,* we suggest that the English Language A-Level curriculum should be built on much more widely across the curriculum for language(s).

Direct post-implementation evidence regarding the effect of changes to the Modern Foreign Language (MFL) Curriculum in 2024 is not available yet. Several aspects of the core word lists in the new MFL GCSE have been examined through peer-reviewed research (see Marsden and collaborators 2023, 2024). The authors suggest that, if the MFL GCSE exams, the amount of time in the curriculum devoted to them, and teacher expertise and supply remain more or less as they are in the near future, then these aspects could be considered as 'working well'. Academic evaluations based on the pedagogical approach (Milton & Hopwood 2022, Pachler and Broady 2022), on the other hand, suggest that the 2024 changes might have a negative impact on uptake, proficiency and student motivation. Therefore, the debate around word lists is currently unresolved and requires further investigation and discussion.

Anticipating later comments in this response on teacher training, we believe that critically evaluating research evidence should form part of teacher training, as it does in other disciplines such as Speech and Language Therapy (SLT).

b) assessment system

Recent policy measures have supported access to languages other than English as curriculum subjects in KS3 and KS4. This includes GCSE qualifications in 14 home, heritage and community languages. While this provides a certain level of stability for take-up in languages at GCSE level, the actual availability of GCSE examinations in home, heritage and community languages is considerably more limited in practice (Fahim, Kim and Eppler 2024).

c) qualification pathway

The opportunity for students to combine more academic qualifications with technical and vocational ones at Level 3 is seen as a strength of the qualification pathway system. Evidence on the working of T levels is still limited and their success will depend on their coverage of subject areas. The decoupling of AS and A-Levels and subsequent demise of AS levels has had negative consequences for qualification pathway choice (see Section 6) and has led to students taking fewer qualifications at Level 3 (NFER 2024). Of these reduced choices, young people are also taking a narrower selection of subjects, and increasingly only take subjects within one subject group (BA 2024).

We concur with other stakeholders (such as the BA) that major curriculum reform seems unrealistic without additional investment. Within fiscal limits, ensuring that as many children as possible benefit from the education system, and recruitment and retention of teachers with relevant subject knowledge and expertise, such knowledge of and about language, should therefore be the priority.

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?*

Our response is divided into sections relating to the three areas identified in the question: (a) curriculum, (b) the assessment system and (c) qualification pathways, though we have more to say regarding (a) than (b) and (c).

(a) **The curriculum**

Aspects of the current curriculum in both English and MFL could be improved in order to stimulate children's interest in language. There is at times an overemphasis on some aspects of grammatical structure, with less space for developing a broader knowledge about language and linguistics. In Ofsted's Curriculum Review Report on English, the term "grammar" is used 14 times, but "linguistics" appears only twice, and then only in the list of references. It is as if Knowledge about Language (KAL) - a core element of the 1989 National Curriculum for English - had never been (Ofsted 2022). Improving this aspect of the curriculum relating to Knowledge about Language (KAL) and literary culture would offer students the option to connect with the diverse languages, literacies and cultural backgrounds that many children bring to school, and hopefully increase uptake in these subjects post-16 (Cenoz, Gorter and May 2017, NATE 2021). Making aspects of the MFL curriculum more age-appropriate, more diverse, and more relevant to the modern use of language in society is expected to have the same effect. Little account is taken of developments in AI, and the continuing need to learn languages, despite the improvement of apps to offer translation (see question 53 on technology).

A further issue concerns children who have recently arrived in our country. Those arriving in the UK during KS3-5 are often at a disadvantage because of their lack of English skills (Ashlee 2024). Urgent action is needed to provide an appropriate school curriculum for new arrivals, with intensive English language tuition alongside other subjects. Extending educational funding for new arrivals to age 23-24 (similar to provisions for those with EHCPs) would provide the additional time needed to attain qualifications. Schools should offer intensive English tuition alongside other subjects to address these learners' unique needs and support their integration into the education system.

Other countries that achieve great success in language learning, for example the Netherlands and Finland, offer students the opportunity to develop 'language awareness', which focuses on both acquiring knowledge about language and learning how to explore language (see the Association for Language Awareness). In the past, many language awareness programmes included preparatory phases in which different languages were sampled, multilingual awareness was developed and skills needed for a life of language learning were explored, a kind of apprenticeship in language learning (Donmal-Hicks 1997; Nupponen, Jeskanen and Rättyä 2019). A language awareness approach would require collaboration between first and second language teachers, so that greater understanding of the nature and power of language in society is developed; furthermore, teacher language awareness is also essential, which stresses the need for collaboration in a whole school approach to language development in the curriculum. Evidence shows us that language awareness is a good predictor of learners' ability to learn new languages. Language awareness can be taught alongside and 'with' one or more foreign languages at primary school - the two are mutually beneficial and a programme that combines the two is feasible. For example, various studies have shown that knowledge about the first language (English) supported the learning of the second (French): Mc Manus and Marsden 2018, McManus and Marsden 2019a, McManus and Marsden 2019b. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that increased skills in language awareness can a good predictor of learners' ability to learn new languages (Kasprowicz, Marsden and Sephton 2019, Roehr-Brackin and Tellier 2019). Initiatives like WoLLoW (World of Language, Languages of the World) exemplify how students can explore links between languages and become more articulate communicators.

(b) **Assessment**

We recommend the inclusion of formative, continuous and multiple assessments in evaluating English and MFLs. For the performance of oral skills in particular, high-stake summative single assessments are very unsuitable. This change would align with the welcome current re-emphasis on oracy. See further Botes, Dewaele and Grieff 2020.

(c) **Qualification pathways**

We recommend the introduction of Diploma in Languages and International Communication (DLIC), which was proposed and discussed in 2010 (FE News 2009). We recommend that more students be given the chance to study a community language at GCSE and beyond (Fahim et al. 2024). These measures would benefit student engagement and motivation, societal needs for languages, social cohesion, tolerance and understanding, as well as intercultural communicative competence (Handley 2011, Humphries, Carruthers and Henderson 2024)

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?*

We note barriers for children from poor families in (a) first-language English, (b) MFL, (c) English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) and (d) community languages (CL).

(a) **L1 English**

A long tradition of research supports the claim that poor children tend to have a 'vocabulary gap' compared with their peers from richer families (Quigley and Coleman 2019; Ma, Fan and Chen 2024). Caution should be exercised in making generalisations about family practices, but this is serious because vocabulary size is probably the strongest determinant of reading success (Biemiller 2007). It is true that some details of the vocabulary gap have been disputed (Sperry, Sperry and Miller 2019) but the available evidence does at least seem to show large variation between children in the size of their vocabularies, whether or not this variation is related to socio-economic status (SES). This being so, schools should find ways to help all children grow their vocabulary. Unfortunately, the current insistence on synthetic phonics (see also questions 16 and 17), with its disregard of meaning, may have the opposite effect, because successful reading requires two things: being able to identify written words but also knowing what those words mean. Children should be encouraged to look actively for an unfamiliar word's meaning, but synthetic phonics teaching may exacerbate this 'vocabulary gap'.

What is certain is that SES is related to success in reading. In 2023, in the reading assessment at the end of KS2, only 60% of disadvantaged students reached the expected standard as compared to 78% for other students (DfE 2023). Moreover, vocabulary is the main predictor of reading success (Lesaux and Kieffer 2010). Since success in later reading correlates with successful initial reading (Shanahan and Lonigan 2010), it is important to make sure that synthetic phonics does not add an extra impediment to vocabulary growth, and therefore also to reading development.

(b) **MFL**

Evidence shows that in areas where there is socioeconomic disadvantage, the number of pupils choosing to study languages is very low indeed and at crisis point. Issues are outlined in a NALA report (NALA 2020), which recommends that the current GCSE should be heavily revised to make it more accessible to disadvantaged children. The uptake of MFL at school is closely linked both to

social class (or wealth) and also to pupils' gender (see e.g. MacDonald 2023). Foreign-language advisors also report that for MFL, teacher recruitment is a critical issue which disproportionately impacts schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. These schools are also far less likely to have access to visits to other countries or to employ a foreign-language assistant than most independent schools.

(c) **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

The UK recognises the right to education for displaced children, but our education system is failing many of them (Ashlee 2024). These learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL) are some of the most disadvantaged children and young people, because they may arrive in the UK with limited or no English skills, and in some cases with little or no prior education.

Whilst children and young people may acquire good basic communication skills (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills or BICS) in 2 years of schooling, it takes about 6 years to acquire the academic language proficiency (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency or CALP), including broader vocabulary, that is vital for educational success (Cummins 2008). Later arrivals to the UK are therefore at a great disadvantage in their chances of achieving their potential for further study. The development of pupils' English as an Additional Language (EAL) is a daunting task for teachers as well as for the children. More specialist ITE qualifications in EAL would inject expertise into the system. Specialist ITE routes for school teachers in the 1980s were discontinued by the then conservative government, and ITE training can only offer limited input, given the short duration of PGCE courses in particular. Specialist routes for FE teachers of ESOL still exist in theory, but are increasingly rarely offered, so NATECLA reports that they are unavailable for trainee teachers in most parts of the country. The option to gain QTS with a specialism in EAL/bilingualism would provide schools with in-house expertise. At present, development in understanding the nature of bilingual learning depends on occasional CPD and commitment from interested staff. Every school, especially those in an area of high immigration, ought to have a teacher with expertise in this area who can advise colleagues, which means that there should be a route to formal accreditation in home, heritage and community languages. This idea is supported by evidence from focus groups with multilingual pupils and interviews with school staff members (Humphries, Carruthers and Henderson 2024).

Turning to qualifications for students rather than teachers, the qualifications currently available for ESOL were designed for adult learners and do not focus sufficiently on development of the cognitive academic language (CALP) needed for further study in FE and HE. Qualifications designed for English speakers, such as Functional Skills and GCSE English, are even less appropriate. Alternative qualifications for ESOL young people would be helpful in improving attainment and recognising achievements on their journey from BICS to CALP (as explained above). There is a similar need for more appropriate qualifications in Home and Heritage Languages (HHLs) which are intrinsically motivating and challenging for adolescent speakers of these languages. So we need a set of qualifications specifically for home speakers which are at a much higher level than current MFL GCSEs so as to give credit for native-speaker fluency and knowledge – rich in content, including listening and reading comprehension, some creative writing, with a better assessment of oracy. Such exams should fully assess intercultural competence for these bilingual and bicultural learners (Humphries, Carruthers and Henderson 2024).

One result of the poor support for multilingual immigrant children is that many of them abandon their home language in favour of English. For example, in the survey reported in Fahim (2023), 76 per cent of recent school leavers from 'underrepresented groups' reported having knowledge of at least one community language, but 82 per cent of this sample chose not to pursue a qualification in it.

(d) **Community Languages (CL)**

More than 1 in 5 children in England are growing up multilingual. These children are a genuine asset to the country's future, but opportunities for assessment of heritage languages have dwindled in recent years, making it difficult for heritage language skills to be evidenced appropriately, on a par with English. At the same time, most teachers feel unsure about facilitating multilingualism and multiliteracy or about teaching language awareness (Cunningham and Little 2022). A curriculum review that actively responds to the country's growing multilingual population in a positive way is necessary to avoid a 'hierarchy of languages' that further disadvantages those who are marginalised because their languages are valued less.

This situation is not inevitable, so improvement is possible and realistic. For example, between 2002 and 2012 OCR offered exams, called Asset Languages exams, which gave credit for knowledge of 25 languages, while the *Our languages* project in 2007-9 successfully paired supplemental community schools with mainstream schools (Cartwright 2009). The most important goal should be to respect the languages of migrant communities, to value them as highly as the more familiar languages, and to encourage the next generation to be proud of their ability to speak them. The present arrangements seriously disadvantage these communities and risk losing the important national asset that their linguistic abilities constitute (Lamb 2020).

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.)?*

Our submission focuses on three characteristics: (a) language impairment, (b) race and ethnicity, and (c) gender.

(a) **Language impairment**

One important barrier to attainment, progress, access and participation in education is the absence of regular language assessments, which impedes identification of language difficulties and therefore hinders access to learning and overall participation in life. The manifesto for the ATLAS project (ATLAS 2024) calls for ongoing attention to the educational needs of language-impaired children and estimates that about 10% of children suffer from some form of language impairment. It estimates that failure to improve the vulnerable language skills of a current UK cohort of 3-year-olds (14%) will cost society £330M later in life, and calls for more systematic testing for language disorders, more support for affected children, more training for teachers and more public awareness of the issues. In contrast, the current curriculum and assessment do not include any provision for children and young people with language disorders, whether on their own or in combination with other conditions (e.g., ADHD, ASD, learning disability). This is a cause of concern.

(b) **Race and ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity underlie barriers for students in all areas of language education: a racially-exclusive, 'eurocentric' curriculum; lack of representation in teachers and diversity cultivated within the MFL classroom; the general low status of MFL within the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community; and the low status of HHLs compared with English and the 'big 3' foreign languages, Spanish, French and German (Fahim 2023).

(c) **Gender**

In MFL, boys do less well, on average, than girls: girls are more than twice (2.17 times) as likely as boys to achieve a pass (Level 4) in an MFL GCSE, and just 38 per cent of boys sat GCSE languages in the 2018 cohort, compared to half (50 per cent) of all girls (British Council 2020). Indeed, gender is a stronger predictor of success in languages than a pupil's level of disadvantage: a female pupil from a poorer background is likely to outperform a male pupil from a more affluent background. The conclusions of the report suggest that poor performance by boys in MFL may in part be due to low expectations. However, these conclusions are based on an atypical sample of schools, and most schools may not be able to produce the same effects.

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?*

Pupils with SEND continue to be excluded from MFL teaching (Peate 2022). The (flawed) thinking is often that they need to improve their English and will not cope with learning another language. This is especially so if they happen also to be multilingual (with EAL), often being told to focus on English over the HHL. Curricular attainment cannot and should not be placed above maintaining a child's linguistic and cultural heritage. HHLs can and should be used to meaningfully explore linguistic connections between languages, helping children to draw on their full linguistic repertoire. SEND students may face special challenges in MFL learning (Fahim 2023). Given these constraints, SEND children may benefit more from a training in Language Awareness than from learning a single foreign language.

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]*

Unfortunately we cannot see any enablers. One general weakness in the current system is the assumption that one curriculum and one qualification suits all. Another, which may be related to the curriculum, is the severe shortage of teachers in most subjects, but especially in MFL.

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.]*

The current curriculum at KS1 and 2 is explicitly geared towards the recognition of technical aspects of language, that is, gaining 'an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language'. In addition, the curriculum aims to get pupils thinking about their audience and how to engage them in different ways using different language techniques (such as exploring different spoken registers). As a result, by the end of KS2, students are potentially empowered through building their communicative awareness via language use and adaptation. However, in the following we present arguments and evidence for the enhanced integration of language aspects, concerns regarding phonics, and the provision of a broader range of literacy developments.

The aspects of language awareness initiated at KS1 and KS2, whilst providing a linguistic foundation for students, are not reinforced and developed at KS3, where the focus of the curriculum shifts towards more discourse-based observations of language and literary texts. Therefore, a greater sense of coherence and relevance of linguistic conventions could be achieved by developing aspects

of language-in-use in KS1 and 2. Indeed, this would help to further strengthen students' communicative competence in both written and spoken language. Students would be better able to see the connections between the technical aspects of language and their practical application, how to design language for different audiences/purposes, and how to engage readers and listeners in different ways. For an example of this joined-up approach, see Tolentino and Lawson 2017 and Theodotou 2017.

A further issue with the current curriculum is the lack of understanding of the language development of both monolingual and multilingual learners. Ongoing language development, beyond initial acquisition, requires support for a range of complex grammatical structures in speech, writing, and reading. Alongside this, the recent interest in promoting oracy also must ensure that students develop a range of registers, and that this range is not solely predicated on the features of formal writing. This, in turn, relates to the development of literacy skills within the KS1 and KS2 classroom. In terms of teaching children to read, it can be argued that we need less emphasis on phonics and a greater focus on a range of approaches, recognising that children learn and acquire language skills in different ways (see Gregory 2016). We acknowledge and appreciate the employment of linguistic terminology within the phonics curriculum. However, many teachers do not have the linguistic knowledge to critique learning and instructional approaches to phonics, and, thus, now have limited awareness of alternative strategies if phonics fails for particular students (Beard et al 2018).

Furthermore, the early emphasis on developing a set of skills and knowledge (including phonics) in print literacy, pays little attention to the prominence of digital literacies, the multimodal nature of communication, and the multilingual nature of a globalised society. Thus, children are often working hard within the classroom to secure skills that have decreasing prominence and relevance outside the school (Schmidt 2020). The advances in digital literacies over the past thirty years have shown that the future of literacy is unpredictable (Hackett 2022), and an essential skill is to be able to adapt and change according to the contexts where the reading and production of texts is required. These are skills in creativity and adaptability that need to be built on across the curriculum ensuring that children, as literacy practitioners, remain resourceful and adaptable (Gregory, Long and Volk 2004).

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*.

The English assessments, namely the phonics screening check (PSC) and KS2 SATs, are produced as a summative judgement rather than a tool to support the daily, ongoing, formative assessment of children's engagement with the primary school curriculum. The result of this is that teachers 'teach to the test' (Ofsed and Spielman 2018; Sellgren 2018) and this has the effect of narrowing the focus of what is taught to the students and inhibiting/discouraging schools from flexibility of delivery and engaging with a wider variety of texts (see answer to 16 above). The following argument illustrates these particular issues as they relate to the KS2 writing assessments and the PSC.

The curriculum leading up to the English writing assessment at the end of KS2 gives pupils a relatively broad foundation of the basics of English. The two aspects of the assessment (the portfolio of writing and the Grammar Punctuation and Spelling [GPS] exam), however, should work better together to show to pupils that one aspect (GPS) feeds into the other (portfolio of writing). Also, as noted in Gonzalez-Diaz et al 2024, the teacher assessment exemplification materials, and the criteria published within these to assess the portfolios of writing, represent a construct of quality that is not fixed. As a result, it is difficult for practitioners to know exactly how to apply them systematically and objectively to the writing pieces they have to assess. Furthermore, students may find themselves with little understanding of grammatical and punctuation effects and appropriateness of

use, due to the simple learning of features which are required to meet expected standards. This reduces students' ownership of their own learning, as well as reducing the agentive capacity to make creative and appropriate use of the communicative repertoire they are acquiring.

Furthermore, whilst the PSC is a useful tool, it is not always an indicator of reading fluency. Teachers both want and need to monitor the progression of a child's understanding of phoneme-grapheme correspondences, but additional and more nuanced approaches need to be explored. There is a wide body of evidence in experimental linguistics (see, for example Perfetti et al 2002 for a view of relevant literature) that indicate phonic decoding is not always the primary strategy used when reading English (Ziegler and Goswami 2006). Instead, readers draw on other strategies, linked to syntactic probability, morphology, semantic field and pragmatic knowledge. The PSC thus only assesses one element of a child's reading development in English, and more information is needed to usefully assess what further support an early reader might need. For example, prior to the phonics screening check, the end of Key Stage Assessments for children in Key Stage 1 included a 'running record/miscue analysis', a widely recognised method of reading assessment that enables teachers to pay close attention to the strategies a student brings to the reading of a text. Such an assessment, combined with a discussion of the meaning of the text, can offer a rounded picture of a child's reading capacity together with an indication of what further teaching might be needed (Goodman 2015).

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?*

Before providing our views on English, important notes about the label of the area (English) are necessary. The general term 'English' doesn't allow for sufficient clarity over the areas and purpose of study covered by such a blanket term. For example, the distinct sub-strands of Language/Linguistics and Creative Writing are not recognised as such (to the extent that the current GCSE examinations for English Language are rooted in principles of English Literature and Creative Writing, rather than reflecting the breadth and depth of language study). Indeed, teachers and students would benefit from a clearer distinction between 'knowledge of grammar' as supporting effective communication, and the 'linguistic study of grammar' as related to human language development and analysis. The following illustrates how the Language and Linguistics strand of the curriculum can be developed in order to give greater clarity regarding the topic of study and how strands of English can reflect and support a deeper understanding of human activity in the world.

The current curriculum leaves one of the main objects of inquiry of science, human language, completely neglected, with no lessons dedicated to its scientific study. This deprives UK children of knowledge about the key ability that underpins human cognition and civilisation. For example, the study of Computational Linguistics is key to Artificial Intelligence development, contributing the understanding to create speech recognition software, speech synthesis technology, and computer-mediated language learning. In addition, the development of sociolinguistics within the curriculum will allow students to develop a wider understanding of the social impact of language from the consideration of taboo language over time, construction of personal identities, race and gender and the multilingual nature of society, for example. Topics such as these will also inform students' developing critical capacities to engage with their literary studies in line with recent moves to decolonise the literature curriculum. The aim should be not to tell the students what to think, but, instead, arm them with the tools and the knowledge to develop their own avenues of thought, which will support them in further study.

Furthermore, promoting analytical grammar study within the KS3 and KS4 curricula (where it currently isn't represented) would allow children to train in scientific reasoning without the need of

laboratory resources. Language analysis "is an exercise in scientific construction from an early age. [It] provides an excellent instrument for introducing children from a wide variety of backgrounds to the principles of scientific thinking" (Larson 2010, p.17). Therefore, one way of understanding analytical grammar teaching is akin to the sciences in that it is an inquiry-oriented subject which promotes the processes of generating questions, designing tasks to answer those questions, establishing hypotheses, making predictions, gathering data, and using the derived evidence to propose an explanation of that data.

The diversity of strands within the field of English Language and Linguistics demonstrates its importance, reach and relevance across the curriculum, further study and the world beyond formal education. This diversity, therefore, needs to be understood by curriculum designers so that this can be reflected in pedagogical approaches to the study of 'English'.

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?*

In this response we rely on and defer to the expertise provided to CLiE by its membership organisation NATECLA, who have evidence for the following claims:

a) late arrivals to the UK need two provisions. First, a pre-16 curriculum (and possibly qualifications) for English that are designed to support English language development for life in the UK and for accessing the school curriculum. Currently there is not enough focus in schools on ensuring that EAL pupils make progress in their English, and as a result, many late arrivals, especially in KS4, make very poor progress. GCSE English is entirely unsuitable for most of them (Ashlee 2024). Second, qualifications or assessments for maths that do not rely on a good level of English language skills but assess the maths skills that they already have and are learning. A good knowledge of English is assumed in all school assessments, and this denies EAL pupils the opportunity to show what they already know and can do.

b) 16-19 ESOL students need access to ESOL Skills for Life qualifications which support language learning. These qualifications focus on learning a new language in appropriate stages from Entry 1 to Level 2 and are therefore attainable for young people. Functional Skills English and GCSE are often used for 16-19s for funding reasons, and also as they have better recognition than ESOL qualifications, but they do not support appropriate language teaching and learning, except when they are offered in conjunction with ESOL, in a separate cohort of ESOL learners with an ESOL teacher (Roden and Osmaston 2021).

16-19 ESOL students also need maths qualifications at Entry levels that are dependent on understanding maths rather than language. This would allow them to demonstrate their maths skills without requiring the high level of English that is needed in qualifications such as Functional Skills maths. Once their English has improved, achievements are often higher in maths GCSE for ESOL learners than for others who are resitting. (College ESOL managers' evidence)

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)?*

Firstly, we would question the implication of the wording above that students who do not achieve level 2 qualifications in English and Maths would not thrive as citizens within our society. This

implication itself is reinforcing inequalities by inhibiting people obtaining work and professional experience in which they would thrive.

Indeed, the current requirement for 'passes' in GCSE English and Maths reinforces the ideology that a qualification at GCSE is the 'gold standard', which does not reflect inclusive practice. With respect to the GCSE English Language provision, there is a lack of focus and clarity of design (as discussed in question 18), that would allow it to be used equitably in this way.

An alternative or complementary approach for fluent English speakers is to allow Functional Skills English and maths to be more widely used again - or better, to develop a more appropriate and relevant English qualification. For ESOL learners we need to improve the recognition (in FE, HE and employment) of Level 2 ESOL qualifications, and to fund the IELTS exam so that students in Britain are treated equally to International students when judging their English competence for entry to HE (Roden and Osmaston 2021). The experience of the latter author, a NATECLA trustee and life-long ESOL teacher and ESOL teacher trainer, furthermore suggests that IELTS would also provide positive washback to teaching the more academic language that existing ESOL qualifications do not focus on.

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?*

With a particular focus on students with SEN(D) or those from an EAL background, the Phonics Screening Check presents real challenges for learners. For both these groups of learners, valuable teaching time is lost to a focus on decoding discrete words, some of them pseudowords, which can be considered a misuse of time when real, 'meaningful' vocabulary is required, alongside other strategies for tackling texts. The opportunity is lost to teach children how to use multiple strategies to make sense of language, vital for those with SEND, and those trying to make sense of, and communicate in, a new language. The focus on a narrow set of skills, rather than the capacity to read and produce meaningful texts for a range of purposes and audiences, effectively excludes those children and young people who employ alternative skills and knowledge from progressing (Doak 2024). A critical distinction needs to be made between the equities of being able to access the curriculum and having a curriculum that makes the most of your needs and aspirations.

Finally, whilst teachers, on the whole, embrace diversity in the classroom for the valuable contribution it makes to students' development, the training currently received does not help prepare teachers for the reality of the classroom - alongside pressures of student attainment and professional workload, this has had a significant effect on the retention of teaching professionals. Fischer and Lahmann (2020, p. 129) state that "universities and schools across the globe have the responsibility to prepare and train future teachers to act in culturally and linguistically responsive ways when educating their multicultural and multilingual learners." This responsibility needs to be extended to policy makers and curriculum designers.

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.*

In answering this question, we have focussed on (a) vocabulary in primary and secondary schooling, (b) monitoring word frequency lists in MFL, and (c) improvements to the ESOL Skills for Life qualification.

(a) **Vocabulary focus**

There is an increasing body of research around academic language competence and students' success in school (Nagy and Townsend 2012). Vocabulary knowledge plays a key role in reading in compulsory education and student success measured by SATs (Marshall 2024). A wide range of vocabulary is also needed in schooling to understand the variety of texts students encounter. It is also essential for children and young people to learn about the language–content relationship in each discipline area (e.g. biology, maths, chemistry and so forth) in order to achieve (Schleppegrell and O'Hallaron 2011).

However, teachers of English should not assume that learners from low-income and/or non-white communities are disadvantaged only by a "vocabulary gap" (cf. Ofsted 2022). Similar arguments have been used to promote "synthetic phonics" in the teaching of early readers. But, as Bleiman (2019) has argued, reading and understanding depend not on words alone, but on concepts. English language and literature are full of rich ideas, and young people will arguably be more engaged by ideas than by vocabulary lists or so-called sound-letter correspondences.

The skill to recognise cognate words should be fostered in students to facilitate self-efficacy in vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary learning and vocabulary building strategies should form part of the focus on fostering effective learning strategies, so that students build not only their knowledge but their understanding of how they can build vocabulary at school and during later language learning experiences.

(b) **Monitoring word frequency lists in MFL**

The GCSE modern languages has had specified word lists since the 1980s. However, the current focus is on 1700 highly frequent words. The extent to which this will motivate and lead to higher levels of uptake for GCSE modern languages needs to be carefully monitored. There are arguments that have been very forcefully made that an approach based largely on frequency would limit teaching (to the test) and discourage rather than encourage continued language learning (e.g. Milton (2022).

(c) **ESOL Skills for Life qualifications**

With regard to ESOL Skills for Life qualifications for 16-19s, we identify a number of issues which might be improved. All Awarding Organisation (AO) specifications cover too narrow a range of the whole ESOL Core Curriculum, which leads to negative washback into teaching. The exams should therefore sample from the whole curriculum. The qualifications and the curricula underpinning them need to be more focused on language for education. This means that study for these qualifications should focus on Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) rather than just life skills focused on Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) (on which see Cummins 2008).

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

For the curriculum and qualification content to become more representative of the diversity of UK society, the DfE and exam boards will need to work with the communities to integrate aspects of their languages, cultures and value systems into the curriculum and exams (see our responses to questions 11, 16 and 24 below, and Lamb 2015; Lamb, Hatoss and O'Neill 2019; Matras 2023 and

2024 and the multilingual cities initiative for how to create spaces that are representative of diverse environments).

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?

Our response to this question concerns the limited range of MFL languages in the curriculum, the place of HHCLs, and issues around intercultural education.

(a) **MFL and multilingualism**

For MFL, the learning of languages now focuses heavily on the learning of Spanish or French. German has been in steep decline. Fourteen Home, Heritage and Community Languages are officially on the curriculum and in the exam register, but rarely offered by schools (see question 10). At each Key Stage there is very little focus on the place of languages and KAL and the importance of languages in society at large, be that in the UK or worldwide (see section 2). This has led to an unhealthy view of the status of English with respect to other languages, a very limited understanding of how languages work, and an underplaying of the importance of all languages. For MFL, learners would benefit from a greater appreciation of the multilingual nature of the countries studied, so that, for example, they know more about linguistic diversity in France, as well as knowing where else in the world French is spoken.

(b) **HHCLs**

Bringing pupils' home, heritage and community languages meaningfully into the classroom would encourage both language and cultural awareness. There are many opportunities and activities that do not require teachers to be language experts themselves (see e.g. www.multilingualism-in-schools.net). Once school starts, children quickly get the impression that English is more important than the heritage language, resulting in a shift of language within the family, which can also impact on identity (Little, 2020). Teacher training needs to include this in meaningful ways, recognising multilingualism as a social justice issue. We note that it has been nearly 50 years since the Bullock Report (1975) stated that "[i]mmigrant children's attainment in tests and at school in general is related not only to language but to several other issues, particularly those of cultural identity and cultural knowledge. No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though school and home represent two totally separate and different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart." A good example of how HHCLs can feature in a modern language curriculum is provided by the IB diploma program (see here and here).

(c) **Intercultural education**

Understanding how the languages we use connect with who we are, how we see and relate to others, and what it means to live in multilingual communities should be an essential aspect of the secondary school curriculum. We live in a multilingual and multicultural world where languages are used in a multiplicity of ways; languages index far more than the ability to communicate a message but are closely intertwined with our identities and sense of who we are in the world and our relations with others. Gough (2023) reports that 1.5 million people in the UK are missing out on having the languages they speak legitimised in the school system. While teaching the linguistic codes of all languages spoken by UK citizens is not feasible, understanding the importance and relevance of language and languages to our living together as equals *is possible*, and currently does not feature in the school curriculum. We do not have in the curriculum a focus on the 'intercultural' learning

possibilities in our school curricula. (Inter)cultural competence includes skills and abilities such as curiosity, openness, and the ability to de-centre from one's own position, adopting that of others (Byram 2021). These are not given any place in the language curriculum. These skills are essential for our community cohesion, and inclusion, and there is an obvious place to do this in the languages curriculum. The intercultural dimension could contribute to the understanding of the role and relevance of language/s in our everyday lives, while at the same time offering opportunities for inclusion for students from all linguistic backgrounds (Marshall 2024).

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?*

For languages in primary schools, the curriculum outline is purposefully general to enable schools to develop their own curriculum approach. In theory this sounds good. In reality most primary teachers lack the experience, expertise, training and support to effectively teach another language. Because of a lack of (applied) linguistics in teacher training curricula at HE, they also have insufficient knowledge about language and language analysis skills (Lord Quirk, Citation: HL Deb, 24 April 2013, c427W). This has led to a piecemeal approach with schools often buying in a commercial online resource like this to 'solve their problems' (DfE 2020). This of course often does little to provide quality learning and motivation.

For pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study, they need teachers who have the required professional expertise. Recruitment and training of programmes for language teachers at KS2 (TDA 2007) included links with other training providers in the EU, e.g. IUFMs in France (Asher and Malet 2010). Unfortunately, they have been eroded since. We urge the DfE to look at the models developed at that time and consider re-engaging with partners in other jurisdictions to promote communication and language learning, including in the preparation of language teachers for KS2.

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?*

We address this question with reference to aspects of the MFL curriculum and the position of EAL pupils in secondary schooling.

(a) **MFL curricula**

For MFL, aspects of the curriculum tend to favour a particular and perhaps limited approach to learning languages. Pupils obtain a qualification with limited understanding of how language works and its importance in society. Critical thinking, social and cultural relevance are often lacking. There can be an over reliance on exam board materials and online resources such as these or these 'to get the best grade', which in turn de-skills teachers (Petrie 2012; Hughes 2021) and feeds an uninspiring curriculum (Cairns, Weinmann and McKnight 2024). There MFL curriculum plays an instrumental role in cultivating and raising intercultural understanding, a critical lifelong skill, but the current curriculum underserves the purpose, as it is not taught systematically and does not foster student's reflections about different cultures (e.g., Woodgate-Jones 2009 and references therein).

An area of opportunity concerning the improvement of cultural and linguistic awareness comes from the very presence of multilingual -EAL students in the classrooms, who have been shown to display enhanced metalinguistic abilities (Finch et al. 2018, Finch 2022). The incorporation of linguistics

content has been evidenced to improve both the interest and the development of high language skills in the MFL classroom (see e.g., Corr et al. 2019, Sheehan et al. 2021 and references therein).

(b) **EAL provision**

The school system and the secondary curriculum do not provide well for late arrivals into the UK education system, and some wait for a year for a school place. This is very serious because becoming proficient in the English required for academic proficiency takes over six years (Strand and Lindorff 2020; FE News 2020). This means that the time a pupil arrives in the school system makes all the difference to their attainment. Many of those who arrive during KS4 do not get a school place and are too young to be eligible for college. Others get a place during KS4 but their English is often not good enough to participate in GCSE programmes. These children often waste one or two years of important educational opportunities, sit no external exams and some learn very little English. Although multilingual classrooms are now the norm, funding cuts and lack of policy on EAL mean that many schools are ill-prepared to support pupils with EAL needs and particularly those from refugee backgrounds who may have suffered trauma. College provision can be more suitable, but schools are reluctant to pay for it and/or LAs are unwilling to place under 16s in a college setting. For further discussion, see Bell Foundation 2024.

In order to better support such learners, we suggest:

- all such learners should get a school or college place as soon as possible after arrival in the UK, in a setting that can provide for their English language development. Any funding disincentives for late admissions should be removed for this group of vulnerable learners.
- there should be provision for focused intensive English language support alongside some school curriculum subjects, to promote swift language development, with assessments that are designed for language learners.

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?*

Some colleges offer pathways that combine ESOL learning and qualifications with vocational subjects, thus promoting language development at the same time as allowing students to start on their chosen pathway for the future. This is motivating and helps learners to develop the technical language that they will need, and also allows them to make a start on their route to work or further study as soon as their English allows. However, there are few entry level vocational qualifications available for them, and those that exist are generally aimed at learners with SEND. ESOL learners need qualifications that match their cognitive and linguistic abilities (Working Group on English for Speakers of Other Languages (GB) 2000, Ofqal 2022).

More understanding across FE of ESOL qualifications and language levels would allow more students to follow this type of pathway. Currently, some colleges place barriers to progression for ESOL learners, requiring certain English qualification levels for entry to vocational courses. This often means that learners reach 19 before making enough progress with the subject (DfE 2019).

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?*

We present evidence on two main ways in which the current primary curriculum does not support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum, and suggest changes.

First, CLiE's longstanding position is that Knowledge about Language (KAL), which includes reflective awareness of language structures at sound, word, sentence, and discourse level, is a key but under-supported part of school (including primary) curricula. Crucially, KAL underpins broad success across the curriculum for diverse pupils (Van Essen 1997, Hudson 2024); it is distinct from, and not to be conflated with, prescriptive approaches to 'correct' language use.

Hollmann (2021) (see also the related 2021 CLiE briefing) reviews previous studies and evidence that teacher qualification pathways do not equip them with the knowledge and expertise needed to successfully deliver KAL to their pupils.

To change this state of affairs, we would advocate training of teachers in linguistics.

Second, like in other years that lead up to assessment, the focus in Year 6 is on reading, writing and maths for pupils to pass the SATs (Ofsted 2017, Ofsted 2021). Other curriculum areas are then frequently neglected and subsequently devalued. We refer to the 2017 report of the Parliamentary Education Committee on this issue, which impacts our interest areas of language and linguistics.

To better support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum, we suggest on-going Teacher Assessment of all curriculum areas and expansion of the concept to build a more rounded pupil profile. Consideration will have to be given to training and time issues related to this, but we believe that, with care and thought it could be made manageable for all curriculum areas and give three examples which could be adapted.

1. https://education.gov.scot/media/y2sjwjo1/p7profilelearner1.pdf

2. https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/uploads/documents/Advice/Webinar-Training/Pupil_Profile_secondary.pdf?v=1554807183

3. https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/aug/17/exam-nation-by-sammy-wright-review-testing-times

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?*

In our view, both the secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways for MFL and English could be improved to support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum.

The content and format of the GCSEs in MFL used to take a 'one qualification suits all' approach and omitted a wide variety of relevant linguistic knowledge (cf. CLiE response to 2021 DfE consultation on GCSE MFL), which was therefore not supported in the curriculum. The 2021 Ofsted report on languages education notes that students struggle to see the relevance of MFL to their lives. It is too early to evaluate the changes to the MFL curriculum introduced in 2024, but in the experience of some of us as language advisers to schools, students do not achieve well or remain motivated when taught in a one size fits all approach, and progression to further language qualifications (e.g., EBacc, A-level, HE) is limited as a result (AQi 2022).

We suggest to support the learning of MFL together with other subject areas, such as computing, business, and English, in a holistic way (See *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), Coyle, Hood and Marsh 2010; Dalton-Puffer et al. 2014; Cenoz, Genesee and Gorter 2014).

Second, the current secondary curriculum for English would also benefit from changing in its breadth and balance. Several professional associations, including CLiE (Amos et al. 2024 on behalf of CLiE, EA 2024, NATE 2021; OCR 2024; Oracy Education Commission 2024), have criticised it for its input and output materials. The source texts and texts to be created by students are frequently far removed from the real-life context of many students. Especially the English Language GCSE has been described as 'damaging' [for the subject and uptake of English language and linguistics at A-Level and HE], 'boring', 'narrow', 'uninspiring', 'unpopular', and 'desperately in need of a revamp' (OCR 2024; EA 2024). We agree with the OCR review which notes that redesigning the English Language curriculum is a 'matter of urgency'; and the Oracy Education Commission, which strongly argues for a re-introduction of a spoken component to the English Language GCSE. There are also major issues with transitions (see Section 9). Amos at al. 2024 argue that the 'key stage 4 English Language curriculum should support development of knowledge about language in ways which build on knowledge that has been developed at key stages 2 and 3, as well as support the transition to study key stage 5 English language and literature. This connected approach would promote a coherent development of the literacy, analytical and communication skills which are transferable to higher education and the workplace'.

Hudson 2024 highlights the critical role of Knowledge about Language (KAL) – largely absent from the respective curricula at present – for enabling student achievement simultaneously in English and MFL. Better support for pupils in MFL will increase the attractiveness of MFL and enhance the breadth and balance of their programme of study.

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?*

Unlike the English Language GCSE, the current qualifications pathway leading up to A-level English Language is a pathway where language analysis is taught in a fairly systematic way. To facilitate transitions and increase the uptake of English post-16, a revised secondary curriculum for English Language could look to A-level content for inspiration.

MFL at 16+, on the other hand, is in sharp decline. The demise of the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) qualification is seen as contributing to this decline. In the past, students often used to choose 4 or 5 AS Levels, frequently including a language, in Y12. Some students would then go onto the full A Level as they found they enjoyed studying a language or did well at it. This stage now no longer exists, and the risks of a full MFL A Level are seen as too high by students and schools, who no longer have the teachers with the necessary experience.

Young people with limited and/or no previous education would benefit from a broader curriculum post-16 that helped to fill some of the gaps. In some colleges this is done well, with a broad curriculum including the language of maths, to enable them to succeed in maths; IT to enable them to use computers and office software effectively; digital skills and digital safety, especially for young people at risk from grooming and gangs (such as children in care of the Local Authority); short vocational tasters to give them opportunities to learn practical skills and technical language and decide which courses and jobs might interest them in future.

Many young people with limited and/or no previous education have done very little science and some colleges offer limited science teaching. One way that some colleges introduce a broader curriculum is to embed subjects (such as Humanities) into the ESOL classes, in a method known as *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL). The ability to do this, however, depends on having ESOL teachers with the requisite backgrounds, so there are teacher recruitment and teacher training implications. We suggest the introduction of more science options into *qualifications*

pathways at 16-19 to support learners to study a broad curriculum and, like in question 29, a linking of subject areas such as MFL, English with maths, science, computing, business, in a holistic way to enable young people to be able to convincingly talk and write about these subjects. For more on the importance of language analysis across the curriculum, see Hudson and Trousdale 2019, and associated publications.

A national strategy and/or clearer expectations about what should be provided for 16-19 ESOL learners would help to ensure that this good practice is shared and replicated. Unfortunately, some colleges place too many unnecessary linguistic and qualification barriers to ESOL learners joining vocational and academic courses.

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?*

We would like to comment on creative skills in the context of languages subjects. Both English and MFL curricula have scope to develop pupils' creative use of language through experimentation with different genres and styles, and to develop their imaginations more generally through creative activities, story-telling and -writing. Evidence of the benefits of such activities to students' motivation, development of vision, self and achievement can be found in Scott-Barrett et al. 2023, Qulboyeva 2023, and a recent PhD at the University of Roehampton (Alshobaki, S. 2024. Learners' Visions and Strategy Use in a Vision-Centred Online Arabic Course. PhD thesis. University of Roehampton).

The teaching of MFL lacks the development of creative skills. This is another area worthy of review as pupils often enjoy manipulating language to create different outcomes. There are many good examples of creative use of language including creative, volunteering and sport opportunities, such as creating junk art, participating in charity projects and team sports, they are just not part of the curriculum. Learners generally enjoy activities and many ESOL learners find them very therapeutic and this improves their mental health (see e.g. Jean-Berluche 2024). Overall, we would suggest that creative skills be embedded more deeply and widely across the curriculum in a joined-up way that allows students to develop creative skills of different types and in different contexts. Languages subjects are an area where the expansion of creative provision would be very beneficial and would contribute to developing students' well-rounded creative abilities, which, as one of the transferrable skills that is less amenable or suitable to automation, is increasingly significant and desirable in the world of employment.

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

It is a well-established and documented fact that there has been a marked and continued decline in the number of pupils studying languages in UK and Further Educations (Bowler 2020). CLiE and the associations it represents believe that this is a serious problem for UK society, economy, businesses and politics because widespread monolingualism and monoculturalism limit the UK's ability to reach out internationally.

For the decline in MFL, it would largely be the nature of the curriculum (see Sections 2 and 5 and Question 29 this Section) and the lack of qualified teachers to teach modern foreign languages as well as home, heritage and community languages that are held responsible for the decline in take-up. As already outlined, many pupils experience the MFL curriculum leading up to GCSE as well as the nature of the MFL GCSE as disconnected from their personal life contexts; both the secondary

curriculum and assessment devalue oracy and do not draw on pupils' creative potential (see references for Questions 28, 29 and 31).

To address this "languages crisis", we have already suggested improved transitions between the Key Stages (see also Section 9), an overhaul of the secondary curriculum and the GCSE to make them more relevant to the breadth of UK society and focus on broader skills set, not just literacy.

The languages crisis has a clear knock-on effect not just for languages A-Level but also for university uptake: departments continue to close; cold-spots in access to languages provision in Higher Education are now emerging, resulting in fewer would-be teachers undertaking teacher training in the discipline (Muradás-Taylor & Taylor 2023).

The DfE is clearly aware of the recruitment crisis in MFL and home, heritage and community language teachers (and examiners) and has been trying to address this through various measures. These measures are having some effect. It is, however, yet to be seen if they are sufficient to address the depth of the language and teacher crisis in the UK.

The perspectives of pupils and teachers themselves have not been adequately explored in this context, and are rarely considered (but see Collen 2023, Henderson and Carruthers 2022). To address this, CLiE, the Linguistics Association of Great Britain Education Committee (LAGB EC) and the Linguistics in MFL Project hosted a special session of the 2024 LAGB conference, bringing together teachers and academics to first, better understand the obstacles to uptake of languages in schools and Higher Education; second, to explore what practical interventions could be developed by working collaboratively across the sector (Havinga et al. 2023).

One measure we suggest is to increase the uptake of MFL in HE, to increase student/teacher numbers, by following up on the recommendations for primary and especially secondary education (see previous paragraphs).

In terms of accountability, we have already commented on the narrowing (rather than broadening) influence of the SATS on primary curriculum and assessment (see Question 28). Similar observations have been made for the GCSE examinations which bear the weight of accountability in KS3 and KS4 (through the EBacc and Progress8 measures; Armitage and Lau 2019).

The main issues with primary and secondary accountancy measures are that they place considerable pressure on pupils and their parents (e.g. Ofqual 2017, Nieminen et al. 2021); that they seem to limit/reduce pupils' learning experience and opportunities for holistic and creative development through a narrowing in terms of subject choice (toward pathways likely to maximise schools' competitive standing; see e.g. Parrish 2024), or a devaluing of curriculum areas not involved in or at the margins of accountability measures (see Question 28).

Through pressure on schools to achieve strong GCSE results in one language with all its financial and curriculum time implications, the EBacc has furthermore been shown to have led to a reduced variety of languages being taught (Hagger-Vaughan 2020) and potentially penalising disadvantaged students (see Section 3). This applies particularly to competencies in home, heritage and community languages in which is difficult for students to receive formal recognition outside of a standard GCSE exam.

Linking English and MFL, Hudson 2024 argues that the lack of KAL teaching in school curricula has negatively affected take-up of both English and MFL in the long term. He notes the abolition of grammar from the English O-level examination in the 1960s as a factor in the relative absence of critical thinking about language in school curricula.

Suggested ways of addressing these issues include: allowing curricula to broaden through deemphasising the current focus on some skills and subject areas in accountancy measures, decolonising the curriculum and linking curriculum areas by drawing on teacher expertise across subject areas; as well as increasing teacher autonomy.

Key Stage 4 Technical wards

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?*

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

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*?

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

Primary and national curriculum assessments

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

The current focus of statutory assessment is comprehensive and very narrow. It is the combination of volume and lack of breadth that need careful reconsideration in light of this review. As already noted in Sections 2, 4, 5 and 6, teachers frequently teach to the test (Ofsted 2019, Sellgren 2017 and 2018) and other learning is thus devalued – an example would be the Y1 Phonics test. Here the teaching focuses on passing the test rather than on developing the skill of reading with understanding (see further Hollmann et al 2024).

Another example is the SATS, where the concentration only on literacy and numeracy distorts pupils' education because all other subjects become subordinate in time and effort. That is certainly true in languages where little time is allotted and that time is often eaten into by other things, e.g. EAL 'One third of respondents said that in this school year there has been an impact on allocated languages time because of pupils spending extra time on literacy and numeracy' (British Council, Language Trends 2023).

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?,*

The alternative to the implicit suggestion that that efficacy could be improved by removing exams is to make assessment formative and continuous rather than summative (Lane 2018), especially for vulnerable pupils (Puddy et al. 2007).

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?*

A stronger focus on assessment for learning would not just improve pupils' but also teachers' and carers' experience of assessment (Steel 2019, UCLES 2019, Angus-Cole 2021) . We suggest to value learning in every year group not just at the end of the Key Stage.

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)?*

A careful balancing out of what is meant by accountability in education is required. Biesta (2015, p.83) argues that '…bureaucratic accountability has transformed the practice of providing data in order to show how education meets certain pre-defined standards into an aim in itself, where questions about whether the standards that are being applied are accurate and meaningful expressions of what good education is supposed to be are no longer at the centre of the process. This is particularly true of primary language and literacy assessments which have barely changed since the 19th century (see *The Revised Code* in Maclure 1986). The current assessments focus schools on teaching the narrow set of skills and knowledge that they examine, rather than supporting schools in delivering a richer curriculum, more geared towards the aspirations of their populations, the social and economic needs of the UK and the rapid changes in communication and literacies (Hassett 2006; Papen 2016, Henning 2023). Such assessments also need to be appropriate to the development of children and young people and have a realistic sense of a pace in learning that lends itself to depth and quality rather than markets and competition.

Whilst standards have the potential to ensure equal access to the curriculum and a focus on what is important in schools, what those standards constitute requires greater thought. Ideally, accountable school assessment needs to link to school support that focuses on developing in-school practices of teaching, with close attention paid to the development of teachers. Organisations such as Challenge Partners where schools support schools could be supported by stronger links to accountability systems, including assessment outcomes, and up to date research in language and literacy from a range of academic disciplines working in the field of language, literacy and education.

It would be useful to consider how assessments link to school development support that focuses on the quality of teaching and in-class relationships that foster a strong foundation for learning (Gee 2022). This would include a deeper understanding, sharing and building on of the diversity of language and literacy practices that children and young people value and bring to the classroom.

We recommend the development of a more rounded system of teacher assessment, where all aspects of a child's learning are valued. Teachers would be seen as professionals with expertise. Ongoing teacher assessment is what already happens with English writing in Year 6. This concept can be expanded to build a more rounded pupil profile. Training and time issues related to such a reform would have to be considered, especially at primary PGCE where little time is allocated to language teaching, but with care and thought it could be made manageable for all curriculum areas.

There are many such examples which could be adapted.

- https://education.gov.scot/media/y2sjwjo1/p7profilelearner1.pdf
- https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/uploads/documents/Advice/Webinar-Training/Pupil_Profile_secondary.pdf?v=1554807183
- https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/aug/17/exam-nation-by-sammy-wright-review-testing-times

Secondary assessment

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?*

The amount of GCSEs has been regarded as excessive (Ellito-Major 2019). A smaller number of GCSEs which are better tailored to students' strengths, interests, envisaged life-trajectories etc. could be considered in an education reform.

The 'gold standard' approach of GCSEs also needs serious reform. Measuring what a pupil has learnt all in one go at the end of Year 11 is indeed a questionable, strange approach to learning, particularly as statutory education extends to 18. The approach to GCSEs now means that, for a significant percentage of pupils, learning now stops in the majority of subject areas at 16. Lifelong learning is not relevant to many (Lüftenegger et al. 2012). As many as one fifth (Elliot-Major and Parson 2022) or one third give up on education at this point and the constant promise of the 'opportunities GCSEs will bring' is seen as a lie (BBC 2013). Many students give up on the education system at a younger age. If far greater use is made of technology, then the focus should be on continuous learning and continuous, adaptive assessment (see question 53).

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?*

Like other stakeholders, we believe that the reliance on end-of Key Stage exams as the sole summative assessment tool in most curriculum areas seriously limits the range of assessment tasks undertaken and the aspects of young people's development which can meaningfully be documented (Lucas 2021). Researchers are working actively on new approaches to capture a broader range of domains than currently assessed, including domains such as interactional and intercultural competence, and pragmatics, including online approaches (ILTA 2024). As illustrated in Section 2, there is much to learn from international experience which can increase the range of aspects of language which can be validly assessed and of assessment tools used, while decreasing the stress associated with end-of-KS exams.

More specifically, GCSEs would do well to recognise practical skills as well as academic knowledge. Coursework was successful for many pupils (QCA 2006; Richardson 2014). This aspect could be developed a good deal further.

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?*

GCSE English Language is a well known point of failure for 30% of our young people and requires urgent reform (Burgess 2023; OCR 2024) and serious revision (EA 2024a and 2024b) as, whatever the curriculum and the GCSE guidelines specify, the exams currently have no content relating to language, and 'model' answers from the exam boards expect nothing but literary/rhetorical constructs such as metaphor. We refer to the in-depth analysis of one GCSE English Language paper question under '2024' at https://clie.org.uk/responses/. We also notice that the two papers of the GCSE exam test virtually the same skills and knowledge so they could easily be collapsed into one without any loss.

Modern Languages GCSEs offer limited appeal to many students. Any revision would do well to consider the understanding and relevance of the language being learnt (see Lehecka and Östman 2022).

More generally, summative assessment in English language and in other languages should involve a wider range of assessment techniques spread over time. For all languages, the inadequacy of a

narrow focus on standard varieties needs to be replaced in summative assessments by broader conceptualisations of linguistic repertoires and registers (see Eppler, Fahim and Kim forthcoming).

A provision that better relates with the characteristics of the population is advisable. Specifically, the HHC languages offer should expand further and the actual provision of HHCL GCSEs should be secured across relevant geographical areas so that schools no longer discourage students from taking up HHCL GCSEs (see 'Language Empowers' 26/09/23 and forthcoming LSP special issue on Languages in Education).

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

There are a number of flaws with the current system:

- the teaching of languages is so out of kilter with KS2 that pupils always have to start a language ab initio, whether they have studied it or not.
- the languages on offer do not align well with the cultural backgrounds of the pupils, and this irrelevance can be demotivating for pupils.
- no value is given to the languages pupils speak.
- the curriculum seems to be formed by assessment, not vice versa.
- languages are seen as a thing apart, a necessity to the age of 14, but then discarded. No effort is made to link languages to other subjects.
- the curriculum could be developed to create greater alignment between English and other languages.

There is clear evidence in a decline of motivation at KS3 (Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc 2007), especially in Year 7. So, one vital thing for progress at KS3 is a proper alignment, coherence and consistency between KS2 and KS3.

For Modern Languages and English, the way of supporting pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3 would consist of a) ensuring a revised curriculum and b) the teachers in charge of those subjects having a background that is fit for purpose by providing them with Knowledge about Language (KAL) and language analysis skills during their training and/or CPD.

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

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

Accountability

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

The current system wreaks havoc on MFL. School leaders perceive the subject as difficult and do not have the teachers with the expertise to teach it, so they often limit the teaching of the subject and reduce the likely impact on school data (Parrish 2023).

In colleges, accountability systems include financial penalties when students do not achieve their qualification, which creates perverse incentives to enter students for lower levels that they will definitely pass rather than those that will challenge them, and to choose ESOL Awarding Organisations whose qualifications are perceived to be easier, including those where all assessment is carried out by teachers. This also favours GCSE over other qualifications, as every grade at GCSE (from 1 upwards) counts as an achievement, whereas many other post-16 qualifications are pass/fail.

An example of a better approach might be IELTS. This is a much better programme and qualification than GCSE English for ESOL learners taking A Levels or working towards admission to HE, as it focuses on academic language development, but it is currently not funded.

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?*

The progress 8 score can lead to erroneous views of secondary school achievement. The inclusion of the EBACC as an indicator of school success/quality is a nonsense, which some schools just ignore. It is not a tangible award, just a measure of school adherence to a policy expectation that contributes to the ranking of schools on the DfE website. Initially, it caused a rise in the numbers of students studying French, German or Spanish at KS4 in 2013, but that has 'stalled' (Parrish 2024, p. 727) and fallen, except in the case of Spanish. Just 38% of schools meet the expectation for entry and success in the EBACC. This needs urgent review. The current system does not support or recognise progress for ESOL learners, especially those with limited educational background, as it sets them up to fail and ignores the difficulties of making up for lost years of education in a short time. Accountability via achievement rates and funding penalties has led to teaching to the test, so that ESOL students will 'achieve' rather than teaching them broader language skills that will prepare them fully for the next level of English and for work and further FE or HE studies.

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?*

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

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 2 c) Level 1 and entry level*

We focus our response on b) and c).

b) Not all Level 2 English qualifications meet the language learning needs of ESOL learners, but some are used as they attract more funding (eg GCSE English) or have more recognition within FE and with employers (GCSE and Functional Skills English), or have been set by the government as the only acceptable English qualifications for apprenticeships (GCSE and FSE). However, ESOL qualifications are designed for ESOL learners and usually promote broader and better language development. Recognition of L2 ESOL qualifications as equivalent to GCSE and L2 FSE would meet learners' language learning and recognition needs better. Public funding of IELTS would allow those ESOL learners progressing to university to demonstrate their English skills in the same way as international students, without having to gain a GCSE in English.

c) Entry level and Level 1 ESOL programmes are essential for ESOL learners to progress to the higher levels that they need for work and further study, as many arrive in the UK as beginners or at low levels of English. Used effectively alongside other programmes such as maths, science and vocational tasters, these programmes can promote very speedy progression for young learners. Functional Skills English programmes do not provide a suitable language learning experience for these learners, as they are designed for fluent English speakers who have achieved the lowest grades at GCSE. GCSE English classes are also very unsuitable for the same reasons and also because the content is focused on literature and culture. However, both of these qualifications are used by colleges, sometimes alongside ESOL programmes and sometimes instead. In the case of GCSE, there is a perverse incentive for colleges to do so, as achievements are counted at every grade in GCSE and are

therefore higher than for Pass/Fail qualifications such as ESOL and FSE (see Roden and Osmaston 2021).

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 qualifications b) T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes c) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3 d) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below*

We focus our response on d)

d) ESOL qualifications are in this category. There are quality issues with some of the assessment approaches and assessment instruments, which are not always reflective of best practice in language assessment, leading to issues of validity (Ofqual 2022). There is also some variability in standards across the 10 Awarding Organisations (AOs) offering these qualifications. Requiring the qualifications to be mapped more closely to the CEFR would be very helpful, and would probably also help with recognition. AOs vary as to whether assessment is marked externally by examiners or internally by teachers. Internal assessment leads to a greater loss of teaching time and may be less reliable, but can be more flexible for student populations that are subject to sudden moves in location, e.g. refugees.

The most important changes that are needed are firstly to decouple the ESOL Skills for Life qualifications from the Adult Literacy Standards, which were designed for fluent speakers of English and not for learners of English, and secondly for more stringent quality control and moderation of ESOL qualifications by Ofqual, including closer mapping to the CEFR, which would increase confidence in the equivalence of levels between AOs and should help to improve recognition (*Ofqual 2022*).

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?*

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

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

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

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?*

[Not covered in the CLiE response]

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

Transitions

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

We present two perspectives on transitions, specifically, those of EAL and ESOL learners on the one hand, and MFL learners on the other, making suggestions with regards to how the curriculum and related teaching may better support them.

The curriculum needs to be planned with transition in mind, with every teacher needing to be fully aware of what has been taught in the previous Key Stage.

While transitions require careful consideration for all pupils, for EAL and ESOL learners, transitions are even more complex, particularly when they arrive during KS4 without enough time to learn enough English to pass - or even take - GCSEs, and again aged 16 when they have 'failed' at GCSE and move on to college.

To address this, we suggest that assessments must facilitate recognition of these pupils' prior learning and qualifications, and intensive English language learning must be available so that they don't miss out on their education.

For MFL teaching, transition from KS2 to KS3 needs urgent consideration. This has been made even more difficult than in the past due to academisation and the resulting proliferation of bodies responsible for education in addition to local authorities. Despite the inherent challenges, this has to be done if we are serious about improving learning.

We suggest the following changes, in alignment with the recommendations of the Primary MFL White Paper: Learners need to experience a sense of progress from one KS to the next, and develop language learning strategies and an awareness of subject relevance, from the very beginning of language learning in KS2. Transition from KS2 to KS3 could then either focus on matching target languages from feeder to secondary schools, or enhancing student learning strategies. There is an opportunity to be seized here to work on progressive vocabulary lists such as this from KS1 to KS2 also for KS2 to KS4, addressing the problem of repetitiveness and boredom in the transition from KS3 to KS4 (cf. ALL 2016). Such lists also allow teachers at secondary level to identify what has or has not been covered by their learners, thus enabling appropriate actions by teachers.

Technology

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

There is a noticeable gap between traditional teaching methods and the digital habits of today's students. This can lead to a lack of interest and even an increase in absences (Williams, 2008). The lack of clear guidance about digital literacy skills may leave students unprepared for the modern world, where critical thinking and media engagement are essential (Marshall, 2016).

This question about the integration of modern technology into education is vast and could be a review in and of itself. We look forward to contributing to such a review, should it be launched in future. For now, we present three potential ways for the use of technology to improve the current status quo.

First, technology can be used to deliver the existing curriculum more efficiently and effectively. Especially within the MFL and EAL context, scant regard is currently paid to what is available across different platforms across the world. We also need a better understanding of home technology use to understand how families support language development (of any language) in the home (Little 2019; Said 2021). For MFL, research shows a clear impact of video-conferencing on pupil motivation as they are able to connect with learners of similar ages in other countries (Macrory et al 2012).

Second, technology can enable more effective assessment, e.g. through adaptation to candidate responses. While awarding bodies are already working on developing digital assessment, more can be done to explore adaptive assessment.

Finally, and at a more ambitious level, the entire curriculum could be reconstructed around digital skills. With ever-evolving technology, this would necessitate flexible structures with opportunities for fluidity, adaptation, and growth.

We recommend that the government take into account the communicative and connective affordances of technology to redevelop the curriculum in a manner that foregrounds authentic language learning and development.

Further 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?*

N/A