

Reforms to encourage more students to take up language GCSEs



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Students will study reformed language GCSEs from 2024, following government changes to make the subjects more accessible and attractive for students, and boost take up by making it clearer what they need to know.

Following a public consultation, the Department for Education has today (14 January) confirmed changes to French, German and Spanish GCSEs, supported by a research review by Ofsted, to help students build confidence and excel in learning languages.

In the updated GCSEs, students will be assessed on the most common vocabulary used in conversations and writing, as well as grammar and pronunciation, increasing clarity for teachers and improving the practical benefits for students.

Research shows that a focus on these ‘building blocks’ enables students to more clearly see progress in their ability to understand and use the language, and in turn grow in confidence and motivation.

The changes aim to fulfil the government’s ambition for 90% of Year 10 pupils to study EBacc subjects for GCSE by September 2025. So far, over 95% of students have been entered for GCSE English, maths and science and over 80% in humanities subjects, and the government wants to increase the number of students studying language GCSEs too.

The consultation was based on recommendations from an expert panel chaired by Ian Bauckham and received 1,644 responses, with the majority from language teachers agreeing with the proposals. The plans for the new French, German and Spanish GCSEs reflect sector feedback, giving exam boards an

additional year to develop them.

Schools Minister Robin Walker said:

Studying languages opens up a world of new, exciting opportunities for people and is hugely important for a modern global economy.

That's why we want more young people to take up modern language GCSEs, and these evidence-based changes aim to do just that – making these qualifications more well-rounded and accessible, and helping more young people to enjoy learning languages.

The revised GCSEs will start to be taught in September 2024, with first exams being held in 2026. The changes to the language GCSEs include:

Students will be assessed on the basis of 1,200 'word families' at foundation tier GCSE and 1,700 'word families' in higher tier GCSE. An example of a word family could be 'manage', 'managed' and 'manages'

Exam boards will select topics and themes to inform the selection of key vocabulary, as opposed being prescribed in the subject content

At least 85 per cent of the 'word families' will be selected from the 2,000 most frequently occurring words in a language to make sure students have a good knowledge of the most common words

Ofqual has also confirmed the assessment approach today, following a public consultation, which sets out the revised assessment objectives and confirms that the current use of tiered assessments and non-exam assessment (NEA) will continue. Ofqual will now conduct a public technical consultation on the details of assessment requirements and then exam boards will develop GCSE specifications, ready to be taught from September 2024.

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