



Department  
for Education

**Launch date: 16 July 2014**

**Respond by 19 September 2014**

**Ref: Department for Education**

# **Reformed GCSE and A level subject content consultation**

**July 2014**

**To** schools; colleges; organisations representing school teachers and lecturers; subject associations; parents; young people; higher education; further education; academies; employers/business sector; local authorities; teachers; and awarding organisations.

**Issued** 16 July 2014

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## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The government is reforming GCSEs and A levels to ensure that they prepare students better for further and higher education, and employment. GCSEs are being reformed so that they set expectations which match those of the highest performing countries, with rigorous assessment that provides a reliable measure of students' achievement. The new A levels will be linear qualifications that make sure that students develop the skills and knowledge needed for progression to undergraduate study.
- 1.2. Reforms to these qualifications are already underway. [GCSE subject content](#) in English literature, language and mathematics was published in November 2013, and the new qualifications will be taught from September 2015. [GCSE subject content](#) in ancient languages, geography, history, modern foreign languages and science, which will be taught from September 2016, was published in April 2014.
- 1.3. At AS and A level, [subject content](#) in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology was published in April 2014. These new qualifications will be taught from September 2015.
- 1.4. We are now consulting on a further set of GCSEs, AS and A levels which will be taught from 2016. This consultation seeks views on the proposed subject content for GCSEs in art and design, computer science, dance, music, and physical education, and AS and A levels in dance, music, and physical education. We are continuing to develop content in the remaining 2016 subjects and will consult on citizenship studies, drama, design and technology, and religious studies in September.
- 1.5. At AS and A level this consultation is also seeking views on the subjects which have been developed following advice from the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB). These are AS and A levels in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, and geography.
- 1.6. Ofqual is currently [consulting](#) on proposals for the reform of the remaining subjects. Reformed GCSEs and A levels in remaining subjects will then be introduced for first teaching from 2017.

## 2. Coverage of this consultation

- 2.1. This consultation seeks views on proposed subject content for qualifications which will be introduced from September 2016.
- 2.2. The proposed subject content requirements are designed to become regulatory documents which set out the minimum knowledge, understanding and skills

needed for GCSE and A level qualifications. They provide the framework for awarding organisations to create the detail of qualification specifications.

**2.3.** This consultation covers:

- proposed content for **GCSEs in art and design, dance, computer science, music, and physical education**
- proposed content for **AS and A levels in dance, music, and physical education**
- proposed content based on ALCAB's recommendations for **AS and A levels in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, and geography**

The Department for Education (DfE) will consult on the content for the remaining 2016 GCSEs and A levels in September 2014.

**2.4.** Whilst responsibility for specifying the subject content of GCSEs and A levels lies with DfE, responsibility for assessment lies with Ofqual, the independent regulator. Ofqual is therefore consulting in parallel on GCSE and A level assessment arrangements for these subjects. The Ofqual consultation can be found [here](#).

### **3. Background and context of the consultation**

#### **GCSE reform**

**3.1.** The primary purpose of GCSEs is to evidence the progress and achievement of students of all abilities against demanding and fulfilling subject content. GCSEs must also enable progression to further vocational and academic study. The new qualifications will remain universal qualifications which are accessible, with good teaching, to the same proportion of students as currently sit GCSEs at the end of key stage 4. At the level of a pass (currently indicated by a grade C) there must be an increase in demand, to reflect that of high-performing jurisdictions. At the top end, the new qualifications should prepare students properly to progress to A level or other study.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The GCSE reform process to date**

**3.2.** DfE consulted widely with subject experts, education experts, schools and teachers to develop the GCSE content for reformed GCSEs in EBacc subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information please refer to Ofqual's consultation on how standards should be set for new GCSEs <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/setting-the-grade-standards-of-new-gcses-april-2014/>.

We published GCSE subject content in English language, English literature, and mathematics in November 2013, for first teaching from September 2015. We then published GCSE subject content in ancient languages, history, geography, science, and modern foreign languages in April 2014, for first teaching from September 2016.

- 3.3.** The Secretary of State announced the second stage of GCSE reform in April 2014. GCSEs in art and design, citizenship studies, computer science, dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education, and religious studies will be reformed for first teaching from September 2016.
- 3.4.** Awarding organisations were asked to work with subject associations and other stakeholders to develop the subject content. The organisations consulted are listed in Annex 1. As part of the development process awarding organisations were required to:
- actively involve subject experts in the development of content to ensure that the qualification is fit for purpose;
  - ensure that the proposed content increases the level of demand by being sufficiently robust and challenging;
  - consider the equality impacts of the proposed changes as they are being formulated; and
  - work with Ofqual to ensure that the content can be regulated.
- 3.5.** This consultation seeks views on proposed subject content for GCSEs in **art and design, computer science, dance, music, and physical education.**

## **A level reform**

- 3.6.** The primary purpose of A levels is to prepare students for degree-level study. The purpose of AS qualifications is to enable students to broaden the range of subjects they study, and support progression to further study or employment. Reforms to AS and A levels are intended to make sure that they continue to meet this purpose, in particular, responding to concerns from higher education institutions that students lack some of the skills necessary for undergraduate success.<sup>2</sup> The new A levels will be linear with more synoptic assessment, allowing more time for

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<sup>2</sup> 2012 Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, Fit for Purpose? The view of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels, <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-04-03-fit-for-purpose-a-levels.pdf>, Cambridge Assessment, What are the impacts of qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds on higher education? A survey of 633 university lecturers, <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/images/116010-cambridge-assessment-he-research-survey-of-lecturers-executive-summary.pdf>.

teaching and learning, and for students to develop a deep understanding of their subject. The process for reform gives universities a greater role in the design and development of the new qualifications.

### **The A level reform process to date**

- 3.7. A review of A level subject content was conducted between April and July 2013 by the four awarding organisations for A levels in England. The review was independently chaired by Professor Mark E. Smith, Vice Chancellor of Lancaster University.
- 3.8. In April 2014 [subject content](#) in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology was published. These new A levels will be taught from September 2015.
- 3.9. Responsibility for reviewing subject content for the remaining facilitating subjects, which are to be taught from September 2016, was remitted to a new independent body, the A level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB).<sup>3</sup> ALCAB formed panels of subject experts, mainly from higher education and subject associations, to review these A levels and make recommendations for change. The ALCAB panels' reports can be found [here](#).
- 3.10. This consultation seeks views on the draft subject content, developed based on ALCAB's recommendations, for **modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, and geography**.
- 3.11. In April 2014, the Secretary of State announced that a further set of A levels would be reformed for first teaching from September 2016. These are: dance, design and technology, drama, music, physical education, and religious studies.
- 3.12. Awarding organisations were asked to work with subject associations and draw on advice from higher education institutions to develop the subject content. The organisations consulted are listed in Annex 1. As part of the development process awarding organisations were required to:
  - actively involve subject experts in the development of content to ensure that the proposed content facilitates progression to higher education and builds upon the revised GCSE content;

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<sup>3</sup> It was decided that A levels in modern foreign languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography required more significant change and development time and that these subjects would be reformed for first teaching in 2016. Following a request from the Department, the Russell Group of universities set up ALCAB to review subject content in these subjects, together with ancient and classical languages.

- consider the equality impacts of the proposed changes as they are being formulated; and
- work with Ofqual to ensure that the content can be regulated.

**3.13.** This consultation also seeks views on proposed content for AS and A levels in **dance, music, and physical education.**

## **4. Proposed changes to GCSE and A level subject content**

This section outlines the proposed changes to current GCSE and A level subject content. The full content requirements can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.

### **Art and design GCSE**

- 4.1.** The revised GCSE subject content aims to be clearer about what is expected of students so that specifications from different awarding organisations are comparable. It focuses on the importance of the creative process in art and design, reflecting subject experts' desire to see students realise personal outcomes through a creative journey in which they develop and refine ideas. The revised content is designed to enable progression to the reformed A level and to other study.
- 4.2.** The level of demand has been increased by requiring students to show knowledge and understanding of communicating through visual language using formal elements. This will ensure that colour, line, tone and texture feature in all GCSE specifications. Students will also need to understand the properties and effects of using different media, materials, techniques and processes and the different purposes and functions of art, craft and design.
- 4.3.** The revised content provides more detail on the skills which students will need to demonstrate. In particular, students must demonstrate an ability to use drawing skills for different needs and purposes suited to the context they are working in.
- 4.4.** The concept of 'endorsed' and 'unendorsed' courses has been removed. Instead, the emphasis is on the separate qualification titles such as art and design (fine art), art and design (graphic communication) and art and design (photography) as well as a general title: art and design (art, craft and design). There is no title to replace the current "applied" endorsement because of the overlap with technical award qualifications.
- 4.5.** As the general art, craft and design title requires students to produce work from at least two different specialisms, and there is some overlap between titles, DfE will need to review the way in which the different titles will discount against each other in performance tables when the new qualifications are introduced.

## **Computer science GCSE**

- 4.6.** There is currently no subject content for GCSE computer science. The proposed content builds upon key stage three programmes of study and supports progression to A level.
- 4.7.** The proposed content requires students to develop a deep knowledge and understanding of the key principles and concepts of computer science, including data representation, Boolean logic and different data types. Students will need to demonstrate their ability to analyse and solve problems in a computational way through decomposition and abstraction as well as writing, testing and refining programs. Students will also need to understand key mathematical principles and the key components that make up computer systems. The proposed content specifies that students will need to consider the ethical, legal and environmental impacts of digital technology on wider society.

## **Dance GCSE**

- 4.8.** The revised content supports students' artistic and creative development through holistic engagement with the primary aspects of dance: performance, choreography, and appreciation. The revisions aim to provide a much clearer definition of what students are required to know, understand and be able to do in order to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the subject. This also aims to ensure comparable demand across specifications.
- 4.9.** The level of demand has been increased to better support progression to AS and A level through enhanced theoretical content, including more emphasis on critical appreciation and knowledge and understanding of professional works and the context of choreography and performance.

## **Dance AS and A level**

- 4.10.** There is currently no subject content for AS and A level dance. The new subject content builds upon the existing qualification and draws on advice from higher education and subject experts. The content was developed alongside the revised GCSE content to ensure continuity in students' development in the primary aspects of dance: performance, choreography and appreciation. As at GCSE, the content aims to clearly define what is expected of students to ensure aims and objectives are met and that there is comparability across specifications.
- 4.11.** The subject content also aims to support progression to a range of university courses by specifying the need for critical evaluation, reflective analysis, embodied knowledge and an understanding of styles and contexts.

## **Music GCSE**

- 4.12.** The revised subject content has been developed alongside the A level content to ensure clear progression from GCSE to A level. The content aims to ensure that

students are able to engage critically with a wide range of music, including music from the Western Classical Tradition. The previous 'listening' element has been changed so that there is greater focus on active engagement, requiring students to apply knowledge and understanding in order to make critical judgements about music.

- 4.13.** The level of demand has been increased through much greater focus on the knowledge and understanding that students need to be able to demonstrate. This includes explicit references to students being able to write (as well as read) staff notation and to knowing and understanding chord symbols. There are new, more demanding, expectations of students in terms of their performing and composing, with a requirement for all students to perform as part of an ensemble and new minimum lengths of time for which candidates must perform and compose, which will ensure greater consistency between specifications.

### **Music AS and A level**

- 4.14.** The new A level content builds upon the revised GCSE content and aims to develop students as effective and independent learners, to support progression to undergraduate study. There is a greater focus on the knowledge and understanding that students need to be able to demonstrate, in line with the changes at GCSE, including the new expectations for performing and composing. However, to recognise that, at this level, students may wish to begin to specialise in one particular area, the A level content has greater flexibility allowing students to concentrate more on either performing or composing if desired.
- 4.15.** Music technology has been separated out from music because, although there is some overlap between the two qualifications, the knowledge, understanding and skills that are needed for each subject are different. It is anticipated that music technology subject content will be developed separately for first teaching in 2017.

### **Physical education GCSE**

- 4.16.** The new subject content reflects increased rigour by sharpening the definition of what is expected of students and emphasising the theoretical knowledge needed to underpin physical activity and practical performance. Students will need to understand how anatomy and physiology, psychology, movement analysis and socio-cultural influences impact performance, and will need to use data analysis to evaluate aspects of physical activity and sport.
- 4.17.** To ensure comparability between practical activities, awarding organisations have proposed changes to the number of options available. Students will need to be assessed in the role of player/performer in two different activities rather than four.
- 4.18.** The proposed list of activities for GCSE, AS and A level and awarding organisations' rationale for selection can be downloaded from the consultation

page on gov.uk. When responding to this consultation, please consider the appropriateness of the list of activities in view of this rationale.

### **Physical education AS and A level**

- 4.19.** The proposed A level content reflects the changes at GCSE and provides greater clarity on what is expected of students, who will now be required to cover all topics specified in the subject content. The content emphasises the theoretical understanding and skills needed for study at this level. Students will need to demonstrate their ability to use theories, modelling and data analysis to evaluate physical activity and to implement strategies or compositional ideas.
- 4.20.** The distinction between AS and A level study is more explicit, with the content aiming to retain breadth of study at AS with increased depth at A level. In AS and A level practical activities, the role of coach has been retained as an option as subject experts felt that the skills needed for this role are appropriate for A level study and can facilitate progression to undergraduate study.
- 4.21.** A new section on the role of technology in sport and physical activity has been included. This section replaces the need for students to understand and have knowledge of sporting networks and initiatives, as subject experts felt such information and schemes can quickly become out of date and the new emphasis has more longevity.

## **5. Consultation questions**

1. Is the revised GCSE content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please consider:
- whether there is a suitable level of challenge
  - whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to further academic and vocational education

Please provide evidence to support your response.

- (a) Art and design
- (b) Computer science
- (c) Dance
- (d) Music
- (e) PE

2. Is the revised A level content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please consider:
- whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to undergraduate study

Please provide evidence to support your response.

- (a) Dance
- (b) Music
- (c) PE

3. Is the revised AS qualification content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.

- (a) Dance
- (b) Music
- (c) PE

## **6. Proposed changes for A levels: ALCAB's recommendations**

- 6.1.** As explained at 3.9, content in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics and geography has been developed based on ALCAB's advice. This section outlines the proposed changes to subject content in these subjects. The proposed content can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.
- 6.2.** Please consider the questions below in light of [ALCAB's reports](#), which detail the rationale for change.

### **Modern foreign languages AS and A level**

- 6.3.** The revised modern foreign languages content integrates communication skills and intellectual skills, emphasising the critical and analytical thinking needed for A level study. This emphasis places modern foreign languages alongside other humanities subjects and aims to better equip students for progression to university or employment.
- 6.4.** The ALCAB panel recommended that more stimulating content is required for modern foreign languages A levels to re-engage students and schools. The revised content requires students to engage critically with literary works and consider cultural and social concerns in the countries where the language of study is spoken. Students will be required to carry out independent research and present

their findings. They will need to use language spontaneously to discuss these findings and this requirement aims to better test oral skills and combat current issues with students learning by rote. Greater emphasis has also been placed on the importance of linguistic accuracy.

- 6.5.** ALCAB's panel comprised subject experts in French, German and Spanish. However, the proposed content is designed for awarding organisations to develop specifications in all modern foreign language AS and A level qualifications. In responses to the questions below, please consider whether the content is applicable to all languages that can currently be studied at A level.

### **Ancient languages AS and A level**

- 6.6.** The ALCAB panel concluded that the current A level specifications in ancient and classical languages are essentially fit for purpose and are intellectually rigorous and challenging. The panel made recommendations to fine-tune the subject content and discourage memorisation of set texts in English translation. As there is currently no discrete content for ancient languages, new subject content has been developed, drawing on the existing A level specifications.
- 6.7.** The ancient languages subject content aims to ensure that students develop an appropriate level of competence in the language studied and an interest in the literature, history and culture of the ancient world. Students will be required to read and understand literary texts in the original language. ALCAB's panel comprised subject experts in Latin and Ancient Greek. However, the proposed content is designed for awarding organisations to develop specifications in all ancient languages. In responses to the questions below, please consider whether the content is applicable to all ancient languages that can currently be studied at A level.

### **Mathematics AS and A level**

- 6.8.** The revised subject content aims to ensure that A level students are equipped with the skills and understanding needed for progression to university or employment. The requirements now prescribe 100 per cent of the content of A level mathematics, to ensure consistency across awarding organisations. This change is a direct response to requests from higher education and subject experts. The prescription also aims to support co-teachability of A and AS level mathematics.
- 6.9.** The revised content emphasises problem solving, interpretation and testing to strengthen students' deep understanding of mathematical concepts and of the applications of these concepts. Students will be required to interpret at least one real, large data set. This addition aims to ensure that students develop the skills in interpreting and making inferences from data needed for progression to university and employment.

- 6.10.** Clarity has been provided on the use of technology in assessment for A level mathematics, specifying when students can use calculators in examinations to enable them to compute summary statistics and access probabilities from standard statistical distributions. This will enable more up to date teaching and assessment.
- 6.11.** The ‘decision mathematics’ option has been removed from the content, as it was not valued by those consulted by ALCAB, including economics and computing specialists. However, the ALCAB panel recognised that decision mathematics may have a place in further mathematics, as an additional strand alongside mechanics and statistics.

### **Further mathematics AS and A level**

- 6.12.** The further mathematics content has been revised in line with the mathematics content. In further mathematics, 50 per cent of pure mathematics content is prescribed for A level specifications. This will ensure more consistency across specifications, but will retain the flexibility needed for students to specialise and allow awarding organisations to develop innovative specialisms in future.
- 6.13.** At AS, a minimum of 30 per cent of the content must be drawn from the prescribed A level content and must include matrices and complex numbers. This requirement is based on higher education demand and will enable progression to undergraduate study in subjects such as engineering, physics and economics.

### **Geography AS and A level**

- 6.14.** The revised content aims to indicate a clear progression from GCSE and provide students with the skills needed for progression to undergraduate study or employment. The revised content prescribes 60 per cent core content, which all A level and AS level specifications will need to cover. This will provide higher education departments with a common base of assumed A level subject knowledge. The 40 per cent non-prescribed content allows awarding organisation to create distinctive specifications and introduce new material providing greater choice for schools.
- 6.15.** The revised content addresses the concerns of subject experts in higher education and beyond, including the imbalance between physical and human geography. Core topics emphasise understanding of human and physical processes through the study of global systems and global governance; changing places; landscape systems; and water and carbon cycling. Fieldwork and specified geographical skills will be required as part of this core learning. The new themes aim to ensure that students engage with relevant, contemporary geographical study and issues.

## **7. Consultation questions**

4. Is the revised A level content in each of these subjects appropriate in view of the issues raised in ALCAB's reports? Please consider:

- whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to undergraduate study

Please provide evidence to support your response.

(a) Modern foreign languages

(b) Ancient languages

(c) Mathematics

(d) Further mathematics

(e) Geography

5. Is the revised AS qualification content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.

(a) Modern foreign languages

(b) Ancient languages

(c) Mathematics

(d) Further mathematics

(e) Geography

6. Is the revised modern foreign languages content, covering assessment of all four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), applicable to all languages currently available for study at AS and A level?

## **8. Equalities Impact**

**8.1.** In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must have "due regard", when making decisions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations, in relation to relevant protected characteristics. It would therefore be very helpful to understand if, in your view, there is any potential for the subject content to have a disproportionate impact upon any student with relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. It would be particularly helpful to understand if any respondents have evidence to support concerns they may have about such impacts.

## **Question:**

7. Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific students, in particular those with 'relevant protected characteristics'? (The relevant protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.) Please provide evidence to support your response.
8. How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content of GCSEs and/or A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it? Please provide evidence to support your response.

## **9. How to respond**

- 9.1. Consultation responses can be completed online at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

or by emailing or posting a completed response form:

by email: [GCSEandAlevel.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:GCSEandAlevel.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk)

or by post: Alex Smith, Floor 2, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith St, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT, UK.

## **10. Additional copies**

- 10.1. Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.

## **11. Plans for making results public**

- 11.1. The consultation will close on 19 September 2014. The response will be published on the consultation page on gov.uk at the end of this year.

## **12. Downloads**

- 12.1. The proposed GCSE and A level subject content can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.
- 12.2. For GCSE physical education, the proposed list of activities can be downloaded from the consultation page on gov.uk.

## **Annex 1: Subject experts consulted by awarding organisations in the development of proposed subject content**

Subject experts were consulted as part of the subject content development process including representatives from the following organisations:

Art and design: Arts Council England, Cultural Learning Alliance, National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD).

Computer science: British Computer Society, E-Skills UK, Naace, the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Dance: Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET), The Place, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Youth Dance England.

Music: Arts Council England, Cultural Learning Alliance, Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM), the Music Education Council (MEC), National Association for Music in Higher Education, West London Free School.

Physical education: Association for Physical Education (afPE), Sport England, The Youth Sport Trust, teachers delivering PE in mainstream and special schools, individuals with expertise in the PE and school sport sector.

Higher education institutions were also consulted during the AS and A level development process for each of these subjects.

Awarding organisations were unable to consult with all subject groups and we welcome the input of organisations, teachers and students in this public consultation.