

MFL GCSEs (9-1) Summer 2021 exams

Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Gujarati,
Italian, Japanese, Persian, Portuguese, Russian,
Spanish, Turkish, Urdu

Frequently Asked Questions





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Introduction

Given the very significant concerns about the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on students' education and the considerable disruption to learning that has ensued, Ofqual set out a series of proposals for assessments in summer 2021. This was accompanied by a consultation, and contributions from teachers and other stakeholders were welcomed. The decisions made following of the consultation have now been published and can be found on the Ofqual website:

[Consultations Decisions: Proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021](#)

In October 2020, a further consultation was launched seeking views on short-term amendments to the GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements (SLCs) for Modern Foreign Languages for 2021. The decisions made following this consultation have now been published and can also be found on the Ofqual website:

[Consultation decisions: Conditions and requirements for the assessment of MFL GCSEs in 2021.](#)



Frequently Asked Questions

The following FAQs have been compiled to help provide an understanding of the key changes that will result as a consequence of the Ofqual decisions across the four language skills. These will affect *all languages* in our GCSE languages portfolio (please see FAQs for our International qualifications [here](#)).

Papers 1 (Listening) and 3 (Reading)

Can we expect any changes to the listening and reading papers?

As Ofqual is lifting the requirement to include non-core vocabulary in the listening and reading papers for summer 2021, we shall review our papers accordingly. Any words that do not appear in the specification's vocabulary list will be removed, if possible, or glossed on the question paper.

What is meant by 'glossed'?

In relation to the GCSE MFL qualifications, *glossed* means that the meaning of the word will be given in the question paper, below the relevant question, for example:

*la rougeole = measles

We will still include some basic, familiar vocabulary items in the papers which students are likely to have encountered at KS3/prior to GCSE study. We will also include obvious cognates not listed in the non-core vocabulary and these will not be glossed. Students may need to understand these in order to answer the questions. This is because excluding such items from the assessments may increase the demand of the tasks.



Paper 4, Writing

Are any modifications to the writing papers planned?

Following a review of the papers, we will be adding an option to Foundation paper Question 2, where there is currently only one question. The 2(a) and 2(b) questions will each relate to a different theme. This will give more choice to students who may not have been able to study the whole specification.

We will be adding **an additional 5 minutes** to Foundation Paper 4 to ensure students have sufficient time to read the options and make decisions.

We will also be **presenting the topic titles of the questions in English** to aid swift identification of themes by students. (Questions and rubrics are already set in English for GCSE Chinese and Japanese).

We will not be adding extra options to the Higher tier as optionality is already available for all questions except for the translation.

Because Question 1 in Paper 4 Foundation and the translations at both tiers will be the only questions where there is no option, we will not include coverage of Pearson's Theme 5 (International and global dimension) in these questions.

Will you be providing exemplification of what the new paper structure and rubrics will look like?

Yes, we will produce generic exemplification of the changes to papers 1, 3 and 4 by December. However, we will not be updating existing SAMS to reflect these minor changes. The amendments to assessments resulting from the Ofqual consultation are only intended as a temporary modification for summer 2021 assessments; they are not intended to feature in subsequent examination series. They are additional to Pearson's earlier changes that were made to improve paper accessibility and the overall assessment experience for candidates.

For French, German and Spanish, the recently amended SAMs and the upcoming amended June 2019 exam papers, which will be published in December 2020, are the papers that should be used for practice and mock exams. These amendments will take effect from Summer 2021 exams and will be ongoing.



The Speaking Endorsement

Will the GCSE speaking tests (Paper 2) take place in summer 2021?

No. Paper 2 (Speaking) will not be assessed in summer 2021 in any of the GCSEs in languages. The assessment of the qualification will be completely based on the skills of listening, reading and writing.

What is the speaking endorsement?

Although separate to the main qualification, which for summer 2021 *only* will be made up of papers 1, 3 and 4, the teacher-assessed endorsement will enable you to indicate the appropriate level that each of your students has achieved in target-language speaking. Teachers will draw on each student's overall speaking performance during normal speaking activities.

The proposed common assessment criteria have been published on pp 20-21 of Ofqual's [GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Modern Foreign Languages \(2021\)](#) document made available November 2020.

How will the speaking endorsement be 'graded'?

The speaking assessment will not be graded 9-1 like the GCSE papers that are formally examined. Instead, teachers will provide an indication of their students' level of target-language speaking according to Ofqual common criteria that links to a three-point scale: *pass*, *merit* and *distinction*. Any students that do not meet the requirements for 'pass' or do not have an endorsement level submitted will receive '*not classified*'.

When must the speaking endorsement take place?

There will be no prescribed assessment window. Teachers will submit each student's level in target-language speaking based on their achievement during the course of study.

The dates for the submission of levels will be confirmed in due course.

Will the speaking endorsement be tiered?

The GCSE speaking endorsement will not be tiered so the same assessment criteria will apply to *all candidates* regardless of their tier of entry for the language qualification.

Is the speaking endorsement compulsory?

Ofqual has stated that awarding organisations must require each centre to provide them with a, 'spoken language statement', confirming that it has taken reasonable steps to ensure there is an opportunity for an assessment of spoken language for every learner. (The Centre declaration form which contains this spoken language statement will shortly be made available on the Pearson website). If a Centre fails to provide a spoken language statement to the awarding organisation, this will be considered as malpractice. A Learner who is not granted the opportunity for an assessment of spoken language will receive a result of 'not classified.'



What moderation arrangements are planned for the speaking endorsement?

There will be no Pearson-Edexcel moderation of the speaking endorsement.

Will you require evidence of schools' judgements such as recordings?

We will not be requiring evidence of schools' judgements and centres will not be required to submit recordings to Pearson-Edexcel. However, teachers may find it useful to record students for their own purposes in terms of record-keeping or internal moderation.

How will we assess large classes, particularly with social distancing?

If teachers are having difficulty assessing large classes, particularly because of Covid 19 restrictions, teachers can also arrange to assess their students on a one-to-one basis either in the centre or remotely.

How should we keep records of students' performance?

This will be an internal decision for each centre to make as it will depend on how the centre wishes to monitor the application of the criteria and moderate this across cohorts or even centres, such as in an Academy trust.

Can students use their notes or read prepared answers for their endorsement?

Whilst it may be appropriate in some speaking tasks for students to use notes as an aide memoir, (as they do in the role-play and picture-based task which form part of the usual formal speaking assessment) it is important to remember that the assessment criteria for 2021 assesses students' ability to communicate and interact accurately using a range of language and that it would only be possible to assess pronunciation and intonation of someone reading aloud.

Is it acceptable to use the foreign language assistant to assess some of the speaking endorsement tasks?

It is important to remember that the criteria are not a mark scheme, but provide an overall description of the students' ability by the end of the course. A foreign language assistant conversant with the assessment criteria could contribute to the decision about a student's level. It is the responsibility of the centre to confirm that the criteria has been applied correctly.



Do we still have to cover the current GCSE themes?

Yes the assessment must be based on the Themes that are set out in the specification. Speaking activities should be used to support the study of the Themes for the other examined skills of Listening, Reading and Writing, in an integrated way. This will ensure that there is no extra burden placed on teaching speaking separately and with different content.

Can we keep students informed of the level of their endorsement?

Yes, teachers may share their students' 'working at level', if they wish, to enable students to discuss, monitor and assess their own progress and to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Can students be assessed via a one-off performance?

Yes, the endorsement does allow for assessment via a one-off performance where this is deemed to be the most appropriate, including via remote assessment by centres. In this circumstance, teachers must ensure that any one-off assessment covers all of the requirements of the assessment criteria (see the next FAQ for suggestions on how this can be achieved). In addition, teachers should make themselves familiar with the requirements in relation to spoken language assessments, included on pages 17 to 21 of [Ofqual's GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Modern Foreign Languages and Certificate Requirements \(2021\)](#).

How much speaking would need to be assessed in a one-off performance?

It is important to say that there are no formal requirements or arrangements set down by Ofqual or awarding organisations. The assessor can choose how they assess students' speaking, as long as students are given the opportunity to meet all the assessment criteria for speaking. However, we recognise that teachers have been seeking guidance on the amount of evidence needed if the endorsement is to be awarded based on a one-off performance. We therefore set out below some guidance which will help centres in this respect. **Please note that this is guidance only and that the suggestions given are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.**

Ofqual's requirements state that to be awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction, learners must take part in ***different tasks*** across a ***variety of themes*** and that the assessment criteria are designed to be used across a ***range of ... purposes ...***. Whilst this will be easier to achieve within a classroom situation where teachers can assess their learners on an ongoing basis (the speaking endorsement was introduced to allow for students to be assessed during normal classroom activities, in order to maximise time for teaching and learning which has been disrupted because of Covid 19), we have set out below some guidance for teachers on some of the terms used and what would constitute the minimum to satisfy the criteria:



- **different tasks:** our guidance is that *different* constitutes at least **two** different tasks (see below for further guidance on tasks)
- **variety of themes:** our guidance is that a *variety* constitutes aspects of at least **two** different topics each based on a different theme.
Note: themes and topics must be taken from those within the specification.
- a **range of ... purposes** : our guidance is that a *range* constitutes at least **two** of the *purposes* suggested by Ofqual ie conversations, presentations, transactions, formal and informal settings, descriptions and narrations (again, the suggestions given are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive).

Possible one-off assessments could be as follows:

- A description/interview/narration based on a picture, photo* or object, (possibly even brought in by the student themselves), based on one theme plus a conversation covering at least another different theme. The requirement to ask questions could be covered in the picture/photo/object task or in the conversation. Teachers could decide to give their students some preparation time if using stimulus materials for this task.
- Role play task* on one theme plus a conversation covering at least another different theme. The requirement to ask questions could be covered in the role-play or the conversation. Teachers could decide to give their students some preparation time if using stimulus materials for the role-play.
- Presentation and discussion on one theme plus a conversation on at least another different theme. The requirement to ask questions could be covered in the presentation and discussion task or in the conversation. Teachers could allow students to prepare a presentation in advance.
- A description/interview/narration based on a book or a film of the student's choice (based on one of the themes) plus a conversation on at least another different theme. The requirement to ask questions could be covered in the book/film task or the conversation.
- A mixture of any of these tasks **or any other task** the teacher feels is appropriate, as long as the assessment covers as a minimum two different themes, two different tasks, and two different purposes.

*The photo/role-play tasks could be based on materials that have formed part of previous formal assessments produced by the awarding organisation or any other kinds of materials.

Is the speaking endorsement a permanent change?

No, the speaking endorsement is a temporary change for summer 2021 only.

Will there be a set distribution curve as for GCSE grades?

No, each speaking endorsement will be assessed wholly by individual centres and will not form part of the qualification. It will therefore not impact on awarding and there are no set requirements for the number of students gaining pass, merit or distinction.



Will the separate speaking endorsement level appear on the GCSE certificates?

Yes, the spoken endorsement level will feature on each candidate's GCSE certificate alongside their combined grade from Papers 1, 3 and 4. It must also be noted that, if no speaking endorsement level is provided for a student, the endorsement will be reported as 'not classified' on the GCSE certificate.

Other

How will the weighting and scaling of Papers 1, 3 and 4 be affected?

Papers 1, 3 and 4 will now account for 100% of the GCSE qualification and will each be equally weighted at 33.33%. A separate speaking endorsement will, however, be available. The scaling and total marks for the qualification will now be as follows:

Paper	Weighting	Max. raw mark	Scaling factor	Max. subject mark
1	33.33%	50	1.2	60
3	33.33%	50	1.2	60
4	33.33%	60	1.0	60
Total	100%	160		180

As speaking is a core language skill and forms part of the programme of study, a separate speaking endorsement opportunity must be offered wherever possible.

Will we be provided with grade boundaries in advance for the 2021 qualifications?

Grade boundaries cannot be set in advance as it is not possible to predict precisely how much easier or more difficult students will find a paper compared to previous years. Exam boards must wait until the students have taken the exam, compare their performance to that of previous cohorts, and then set the grade boundaries.

How do these changes impact on those announced earlier in the summer for the Pearson Edexcel GCSEs in French, German and Spanish?

It's important to note that the amendments that we have already made to our GCSEs in French, German and Spanish from summer 2021 are quite separate and additional to those determined by Ofqual. The Pearson Edexcel-specific amendments to papers 1, 3 and 4 will still apply. It's also expected that our amendments to the speaking test (paper 2) will be implemented from summer 2022 or as soon as formal speaking tests resume. You can discover more about our amendments to GCSEs in French, German and Spanish [here](#).



Do these changes affect all languages?

Yes. These changes affect all of Pearson's GCSE qualifications in Arabic (1AA0), Chinese (1CN0), French (1FR0), German (1GN0), Greek (1GK0), Gujarati (1GU0), Italian (1IN0), Japanese (1JA0), Persian (1PN0), Portuguese (1PG0), Russian (1RU0), Spanish (1SP0), Turkish (1TU0) and Urdu (1UR0).

Please see FAQs [here](#) for the list of International qualifications.

Can the speaking endorsement be undertaken for (a) language(s) not taught at my centre?

Yes, a speaking endorsement may be submitted for a candidate studying a language that is not taught at your school or college. Centres entering private candidates (as for all candidates) must provide a 'spoken language statement' to awarding bodies, confirming that they have taken reasonable steps to ensure that there is an opportunity for candidates to receive an assessment in the spoken language. They must therefore take reasonable steps to find external tutors or other specialist language trainers to assess the candidate. A candidate who is not granted the opportunity for an assessment of spoken language will receive a result of 'not classified'.

Please see the additional [FAQs for entering private and non-taught candidates](#).

Do native speakers still have to get an endorsement?

Yes, all students are required to be assessed by an appropriate assessor. As for all candidates, the centre is required to submit a spoken language statement confirming that all learners for which it is entering the qualifications, have had the opportunity to receive an assessment in the spoken language.