

Coalition for Language in Education

Response to DfE Curriculum Consultation

(submitted 20.11.24)

Section 1: About you

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)

We are a new cross-sectoral Coalition for Language Education. We comprise subject associations, organisations and individuals working both in different fields of language education (MFL, HHCLs, BSL, English, EAL, ESOL, EAP,) and in different educational sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary, further, voluntary). We align closely with the values and ideals expressed on page 4 of the Review's Call for Evidence, and we coalesce around a Founding Statement of shared principles and priorities that has a growing list of signatories (including ALL, NALDIC, NATECLA, NALA, UKALTA, BAAL and the Bell Foundation – see <https://coalitionforlanguageducationuk.com/founding-statement/>). We build on a strong research-based understanding of major changes in the linguistic and communicative environment in which children grow up in the UK, and we come together in a recognition that there is a lot that we can do, at all levels of the education system, to engage more productively with the opportunities and challenges that this environment presents.

4. What is the name of your organisation?

- Coalition for Language Education (<https://coalitionforlanguageducationuk.com/>)

5. What is your role within the organisation?

- Members of the Coalition Coordinating Group

6. What is your name?

- Professor Ben Rampton & Professor Rosamond Mitchell

7. What is your email address?

ben.rampton@kcl.ac.uk r.f.mitchell@soton.ac.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?

Curriculum, assessment systems and qualification pathways are highly interconnected, and are not currently working effectively to support and recognise educational progress in language(s) for the full current generation of children and young people. However we acknowledge some specific positive features:

- The English Language A Level curriculum offers insights into the nature of language and language variation which we believe should be built on much more widely across the curriculum for language(s);
- Policy measures have been implemented in recent years which have supported access to languages other than English as curriculum subjects in KS3 and KS4, and have provided a level of stability for take-up in languages at GCSE level, including GCSE qualifications in 14 community/heritage languages, offered across exam boards;
- The A level curriculum in French/German/Spanish offers opportunities for breadth and depth in skills and content, and some student autonomy over choice of topic; critical engagement with social political and cultural aspects of the target societies is encouraged;
- The broad aims of the current National Curriculum for MFLs at KS3 to promote “liberation from insularity”, and “foster pupils’ curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world” are appropriate and should be at the heart of children’s experience.

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

a) Curriculum:

- We would like to see further embedded into all schools a core range of subjects (beyond just English language and STEM) plus cross-curricular links that assure a common humanist curriculum and develop multiple modes of self expression.
- Within the domain of language(s) study, we would like to see the (re-)introduction of mechanisms that encourage a broader, multidisciplinary conception of literacy development and language study, addressing digital communication, ensuring cross-curricular links and addressing the needs of EAL learners across subjects.
- We would like to see an inclusive approach to all relevant languages (English, heritage languages, MFL) as languages of study, and positive support for the use and visibility of all relevant languages in schools, plus expansion of the range of languages leading to formal qualifications to include a wider range of community languages.
- In all areas of language education balance is needed between aspects of meaning making, broadening of cultural knowledge and understanding, and development of

- learning strategies alongside linguistic system knowledge (phonics, vocabulary, grammar, discourse), including awareness of linguistic variation and diversity.
- The range of texts for study in English and MFL curricula remains predominantly white/euro-centric and urgently requires review to better reflect contemporary society and identities.
- b) Assessment:
- There is strong evidence that the use of measures such as SATs and Progress 8 as tools for school and system accountability is distorting children's educational experience in language(s), and that of disadvantaged groups in particular. We believe that mainstream assessment should focus at the individual level on assessment for learning and certification of children's language capabilities, decoupled from system accountability measures. A broader range of assessment strategies and greater teacher autonomy to assess is integral to refocusing on assessment for learning.
- c) Qualification pathways
- The current English language GCSE exam is not fit for purpose as a universal measure of capability in language and literacy and urgently requires replacement.
 - The reductive syllabus of the new GCSE in French/German/Spanish (2026) is problematic and likely to increase the existing gap between expectations of languages curricula at GCSE and A Level.
 - At 16-19, more diverse language pathways leading to a greater range of qualifications is required, in English, as well as in MFL and in heritage languages, so that language(s) can make a broader contribution to both vocational and academic study routes.

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

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

There are many barriers to educational success and progress for children experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, but it is important to emphasise that these barriers are design features of society more broadly. Schools cannot compensate for structural discrimination. We do, however, recognise that schools can be places where the broader barriers facing disadvantaged children can be either perpetuated or challenged. We feel that, too often, the current curriculum perpetuates those barriers. We focus on language given our expertise as a coalition.

The current curriculum is rooted in a narrow, Eurocentric, and monolingual vision of language which often positions linguistic variation as linguistic deficit (Cushing 2022, 2023; Welby 2023). This fails to recognise and build on the linguistic strengths, repertoires, and dexterity that all children bring to school with them, but especially those from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds (Snell 2013). 'Academic vocabulary' and 'standard English' are particularly prominent in the current curriculum, from Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 4, and because they are proxies for language varieties associated with middle-class communities (e.g. Williams, 2007), it is marginalised children who are most likely to be framed as displaying linguistic deficiencies which require correcting, and to not see and hear their authentic language practices being recognised in the curriculum (Cushing, 2020). This

puts them at further risk of educational disadvantage – because children who use non-standardised varieties often get judged to have weaker academic abilities and lower intelligence (Snell & Cushing 2022; Grainger, 2013; Lampropoulou & Cooper, 2021).

The outcome of this is that children who are categorised as users of non-dominant language patterns (often those from marginalised backgrounds) are at risk of feeling conscious of their own language, are less likely to engage in classroom discussion, and thus face heightened educational barriers.

To add to this, in the last 20 years in particular, media and political narratives have fuelled a moral panic about language, education, and migration. These narratives get reproduced in policy channels and used to stigmatise marginalised children and their families (Tyler, 2020). Migrant children are often positioned as “draining the resources” of schools and destroying “British character” (Welply, 2023) - despite the evidence that those EAL-tagged pupils who have managed to develop high levels of English proficiency may achieve higher examination grades than their monolingual peers (DfE, 2020).

There is a serious lack of attention to multilingual children in educational policy, assessments, and teacher guidance, with this “perpetuat[ing] the dominance of the English-speaking (mainly white) majority, through the under-assessment of the marginalised linguistic (and often racialised) Other” (Bradbury 2020). Research suggests that it takes around 6 years for children learning English for the first time at school to achieve a level of proficiency adequate for age-appropriate attainment. For those entering at Reception level, early support is key (Strand & Lindorff, 2020). However specialist training is lacking, so that teachers are left with limited guidance on how to best support and foster language-minoritised children. EAL students are expected to follow the mainstream curriculum irrespective of their English language competence, yet DfES guidance (2004) gives no pedagogical advice on how to provide for this, nor is any reference made to children’s multilingual competence and how to build on this (Costley & Leung, 2009; Leung, 2022). This issue is particularly acute for older EAL arrivals into the school system (Strand & Lindorff, 2021).

A new national curriculum would celebrate multilingualism and diversity, actively reject deficit thinking about the language practices of marginalised children, and provide sustained opportunities for children to share what they already know, and learn about the relationships between language, power, and social in/justice. We build on this recommendation in subsequent sections of this submission.

Baker-Bell, A. (2020). *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. Routledge.

Bradbury, A. (2020). A critical race theory framework for education policy analysis: The case of bilingual learners and assessment policy in England. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(2), 241–260.

Costley, T. & Leung, C. (2009). English as an additional language across the curriculum: Policies in practice. In J. Miller, A. Kostogriz & M. Gearon (Eds.), *Culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms: New dilemmas for teachers* (pp. 151-171). Multilingual Matters.

Cushing, I. (2020). ‘Say it like the Queen’: the standard language ideology and language policy making in English primary schools. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(3), 321–336.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1840578>

Cushing, I. (2022). *Standards, stigma, surveillance: Raciolinguistic ideologies and England’s schools*. Palgrave.

Cushing, I. (2023). Challenging anti-Black linguistic racism in schools amidst the ‘what works’ agenda. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 26(3), 257–276.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2023.2170435>

Department for Education (DfE). (2020). *English proficiency of pupils with English as an additional language - Ad-hoc notice*.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e55205d86650c10e8754e54/English_proficiency_of_EAL_pupils.pdf

Grainger, K. (2013). ‘The daily grunt’: Middle-class bias and vested interests in the ‘Getting in Early’ and ‘Why Can’t They Read?’ reports. *Language and Education*, 27(2), 99–109.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2012.760583>

Lampropoulou, S. & Cooper, P. (2021). The “grammar school pressure”: From tolerance to distance, to rejection of ‘Scouse’ in middle-class Merseyside schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 66, 100996.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2021.100996>

Leung, C. (2022). English as an additional language: A close-to-practice view of teacher professional knowledge and professionalism. *Language and Education*, 36(2), 170-187.

Parrish, A. (2024). Policy tug of war: EBacc, progress 8 and modern foreign languages in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, 39(5), 718–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2024.2328625>

Snell, J. (2013). Dialect, interaction and class positioning at school: from deficit to difference to repertoire. *Language and Education*, 27(2), 110–128.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2012.760584>

Snell, J & Cushing, I. (2022). “A lot of them write how they speak”: policy, pedagogy, and the policing of non-standard English. *Literacy*, 56(3), 199-211.

Strand, S. & Lindorff, A. (2020). *English as an Additional Language: Proficiency in English, educational achievement and rate of progression in English language learning*. University of Oxford/Bell Foundation.

Strand, S. & Lindorff, A. (2021). *Proficiency in English and rate of progression: Pupil, school and LA variation*. University of Oxford/ Bell Foundation.

Tyler, I. (2020). *Stigma: The machinery of inequality*. Zed Books.

Welply, O. (2023). English as an additional language (EAL): Decolonising provision and practice. *The Curriculum Journal*, 34(1), 62-82.

Williams, A. 2007. Non-standard English and education. In D. Britain (Ed.) *Language in the British Isles: 2nd Edition* (pp. 401-416). Cambridge University Press.

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 protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity)?

We have commented under Q12 on the barriers affecting curriculum access and attainment for children with English as an additional language. An attainment gap also affects deaf children; at the end of KS1 they are on average 8 months behind their (non-SEND) peers, and this gap increases to 17.5 months by the end of KS4 (Hutchinson, 2023). As with EAL children, deaf attainment is also highly diverse, affected by socio-economic (dis)advantage and regional disparities. The introduction of a GCSE in sign language indicates improved attention to deaf communication, but more consistent support is clearly needed for this group.

Regarding study of MFLs in particular, there is clear and nuanced evidence for a gender gap and its intersectionality with other factors such as socio-economic background (Mills & Tinsley, 2020):

- Girls are more than twice as likely as boys to achieve a pass in GCSE languages;
- Just 38% of boys sat GCSE languages in 2018, compared to 50% of all girls;
- Gender is a stronger predictor of success in languages than a pupil's level of disadvantage;
- The best predictors of success in a GCSE language are a student's prior achievement in different subjects at Key Stage 2 and the affluence of their home area. Students with higher prior attainment and from wealthier neighbourhoods are more likely to achieve a grade 4 or higher. This is a stronger predictor than whether the student qualifies for free school meals.

Based on interviews with schools that have higher-than-average participation of boys (Mills & Tinsley, 2020), three key factors are identified as making a significant difference in boys' uptake and achievement in language education.

- Inclusive Language Policies: school policies which encourage or require language learning for all, including support for lower-attaining or disadvantaged students, generally tend to benefit boys.
- Teaching Approaches: A strong emphasis on speaking, interaction, humour, rewards, and competition, and systematic grammar instruction, are reported to be effective in engaging boys. An emphasis on writing and on decontextualised vocabulary learning are less effective. Motivation is key, and what is good for boys is good for all.
- Language-Rich Curriculum: opportunities to learn or try multiple languages at Key Stage 3, supported by extracurricular language activities, enrich exposure to languages beyond regular lessons, and are engaging for learners generally including boys. Once community and heritage languages are included systematically in the mix, there are many local options for motivating extracurricular activities, including field trips to the learners' own community, community engagement projects, explorations of multilingual digital communities, and collaborations with museums, cultural centres and community hubs..

A new piece of research (Hunter, Arfon & Zhu, 2024) shows that while policy decisions made at the school level can significantly boost the uptake of languages at GCSE, it can come at the expense of inclusion. This tension is driven by accountability measures and other constraints that shape schools' approaches, leading them to select pupils to study a language who have high achievement in other subjects like maths and English.

In many schools, traditionally taught European languages (French, German, Spanish) are the only options available for study and there is little or no opportunity to study languages spoken in the community or build on skills which students already possess. This neglect of children's multilingualism can undermine identity and lead to a sense of marginalisation. The range and

availability of heritage and community languages as languages options need to be strengthened throughout KS2-KS4.

Hunter, A-M., Arfon, E., & Zhu, H. (2024). '[Opportunities for all? Which pupils are studying languages in England and why?](https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/2024/11/07/opportunity-for-all-which-pupils-are-studying-languages-in-england-and-why/)'. <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/2024/11/07/opportunity-for-all-which-pupils-are-studying-languages-in-england-and-why/>

Hutchinson, J. (2023). *The educational outcomes of deaf children in England: Attainment at key stages 1, 2 and 4*. Educational Policy Institute. <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Educational-outcomes-of-deaf-children-in-England.pdf>

Mills, B., & Tinsley, T. (2020). *Boys studying modern foreign languages at GCSE in schools in England*. Education Policy Institute & British Council. [https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/boys-studying-foreign-languages/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20significant%20gender,per%20cent\)%20of%20all%20girls](https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/boys-studying-foreign-languages/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20significant%20gender,per%20cent)%20of%20all%20girls) .

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?

Around 10% school-age children have language difficulties, either alone (Developmental Language Disorder) or in association with other conditions such as autism or learning disabilities. The narrow focus of current curricula and assessment methods in English and in MFL plus the emphasis on test outcomes as measures of school accountability tend to marginalise learners with SEND. The Leiden Manifesto *Think Language First!* (ATLAS, 2024) promotes a systematic approach to the identification and education of children with all types of language-related SEND and could contribute usefully to an audit and review of curricula and development of more flexible techniques for assessment of learning.

ATLAS (2024). *Manifesto: Think Language First!* <https://www.bacdis.org.uk/articles/atlas-leiden-declaration#:~:text=manifesto%2C%20which%20was%20launched%20at,lifelong%20wellbeing%2C%20including%20educational%20attainment>

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?

Local and school-level policies can have powerful influence in recognising and sustaining linguistic diversity within the school curriculum at all levels (Forbes & Morea, 2024; Kohl et al., 2024; Manchester City of Languages, 2024). At GCSE level in particular, the provision of qualifications in heritage languages is significant for our increasingly multilingual population, and the number of students being supported by their schools to take these qualifications is increasing after a drop off during Covid (Collen & Duff, 2024). The introduction of a GCSE examination in British Sign Language is intended from 2025, and will provide important recognition for BSL learners and users, though information is yet to be available as to its roll-out (and a similar proposal for Wales has been scrapped).

Forbes, K. & Morea, N. (2024). Mapping school-level language policies across multilingual secondary schools in England: An ecology of English, modern languages and community languages policies. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50, 1189–1207. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3959>

Kohl, K., Dudrah, R., Gosler, A., Graham, S., Maiden, M. Wen-chin Ouyang & Reynolds, M. (Eds.) (2020) *Creative Multilingualism: A Manifesto*. Open Book
Publishers. <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0206>

Manchester City of Languages (2024). *Towards a languages strategy for cities*.
<https://mrcityoflanguages.org/@cityoflanguages>

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

[We don't comment on maths; for English, see our responses to questions 28-30 on curriculum, and Section 7 for our responses on assessment]

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.

17. To what extent do the English and maths *primary* assessments²⁰ support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim?

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?

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?

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)?

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?

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)?**

English

[See responses to questions 28-30]

Languages other than English (Heritage languages + MFL)

We acknowledge the role of English as a key shared resource locally and internationally, and understand the central role of schooling in developing children's command of English in varieties and genres relevant to their current identity and future life opportunities, as discussed in our responses to Questions 28-30. However we also view the learning and development of languages other than English to be a key element of compulsory schooling.

Firstly, increasing numbers of children are plurilingual and bring knowledge of more than one language into school; these heritage languages are positive assets for individual learners and also for the community as a whole, and should be acknowledged and developed as tools both for self expression and for learning. At present, however, such children are identified one-sidedly as practising English as an additional language (EAL); their multilingualism is not addressed explicitly anywhere in the language curriculum in English primary schools, and is generally ignored in classroom practice (Costley & Leung, 2020; Quehl, 2025). Official data regarding languages current among schoolchildren significantly underestimates both the range of languages and proportions of students using them (Liggins, 2024). For example, the 2021 census reported 95 languages as being spoken in England, yet the survey of London schoolchildren by Baker & Eversley (2000) identified over 300 languages being spoken. This is due to poor reporting systems for students' language repertoires combined with social attitudes and perceived status of languages other than English which often result in parents concealing their children's bilingualism for fear of being seen as linguistically deficient (Liggins, 2024). At secondary school level this marginalisation of multilingualism continues, with the exception of GCSE courses in selected international and community languages. This is a major curriculum gap which needs to be addressed. There are numerous positive examples of local projects and initiatives which acknowledge and celebrate multilingualism and make it the focus of language awareness investigations and activities (e.g. Claughton, 2022; Edwards et al., 2020; Forbes et al., 2021; García & Flores, 2012; Gilmour, 2020; Liggins, 2022, 2024; ROMtels, 2017). Collen & Duff (2024) also report that primary school teachers of MFLs are generally favourable to acknowledging children's heritage languages and say they make explicit references/ comparisons with these during languages lessons. However unlike in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021), there is no explicit recognition in the National Curriculum of multilingualism as a benefit for learning additional languages. There is positive international evidence that plurilingual teaching involving translanguaging can contribute to higher learner engagement and achievement (Cummins, 2021; Heltai & Tarsoly, 2023; Laviosa & González-Davies, 2020). For example, Hopp & Thoma (2023) showed that primary school children in Germany being taught English using a plurilingual approach, including regular comparisons between English,

German and other heritage languages known to the children, facilitated varied aspects of English grammar learning. However, all such initiatives challenge the current strong boundaries between subject “English” and other languages, and require greatly increased flexibility and an underlying strategic commitment to the more unified and integrated treatment of language across such boundaries. This is an area where more innovation and research is needed (Chalmers & Murphy, 2021).

Secondly, every child’s experience of schooling should include the opportunity for sustained study and progression in at least one additional language. Current policy makes provision for such study in KS2 and KS3, and tools such as the EBacc are intended to support access to language learning once it becomes optional in KS4 (though see our comments on the EBacc in Section 7). These commitments mean that a greater proportion of young people have experience of studying an L2 than in several other Anglophone countries. However, other international comparisons show that provision is relatively weak. For example, every other country in Europe allocates at least twice as much curriculum time to languages, and most follow the Council of Europe 1+2 guidance (national language + two taught languages).

At KS2 level, the introduction of a compulsory languages offer is a positive development but has been hampered by lack of structural support. The current curriculum offers a very limited outline in sharp contrast e.g. to the 2005 Framework for primary MFL. Teachers know that more funding is required to make MFL a serious offer at KS2. For example, they call for the development of effective online resources usable by teachers who are not necessarily themselves specialists (Collen & Duff, 2024).

Teaching additional languages takes place most consistently in KS3 and KS4, yet serious progression and achievement are challenging, in the context of global English. The experience of learning languages needs to be divorced from their elitist historical weight (NALA, 2020). However a good deal is known about children’s motivation for languages other than English (LOTEs). They are motivated in particular by the prospect of developing interactional competence which will allow them to interact meaningfully with users of the LOTE. They are also motivated by the experience of systematic progression which contributes to a sense of self-efficacy (Graham et al., 2017; Printer, 2024). Studying an L2 should also contribute to children’s intercultural and citizenship learning, and the development of language awareness. For example, when asked what they believe to be of greatest importance in MFL learning, teachers emphasise the intercultural element and the development of “language skills and the ability to use these in simple conversations and for practical, real-world purposes”. Teachers place “less emphasis on accurate language use and the development of grammatical knowledge” (Woore et al., 2020). For an international perspective on integrating intercultural and citizenship learning with languages, see Lütge, Merse and Rauschert (2022).

Following recent reviews by DfE and OFSTED, however, a new curriculum and GCSE are in force from September 2024, for French, German and Spanish (only), with the first exams in 2026. This new GCSE and curriculum foreground knowledge of the linguistic system in a one-sided way, and lack focus on cultural learning and cross-curricular, citizenship and language awareness skills. GCSE in other languages, however, retain the previous curriculum framework.

Reinforcing this narrow focus on the linguistic system, a key feature expressed in the OFSTED Curriculum Research Review (OCRR) is the metaphor of three pillars: vocabulary, grammar and phonics. We agree with Woore, Molway and Macaro (2022, p. 146) that “there is a danger that the OCRR could lead teachers to focus too heavily on individual building blocks in the early stages of language learning, and thus lose sight of the ‘bigger picture’. … We suggest that other ‘pillars’ may also be important in supporting the edifice of language proficiency, including strategic competence

and intercultural understanding". Many associations also expressed concern with the proposals (see for instance NALA's joint statement in 2021 co-signed by AQA, ASCL, Association for Language Learning, Eduqas, HMC, ISMLA, NAHT, Pearson Edexcel, or the Pearson response at <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Modern-Languages/mfl-statement-may-2021.pdf>

Apart from the summative target of GCSE, there is currently no progression framework for languages in schools beyond the Progress 8 tracking mechanism used to measure performance (assessment levels were abolished from the National Curriculum at its latest iteration in force since 2014).

The National Curriculum for Languages now consists of a few general statements but is only statutory in local authority-maintained schools (not independent or state-funded academy schools). It has therefore lost its influence. We take the view that in languages as in other subjects, a National Curriculum should apply to all types of school and all students.

The integration of languages into the EBacc has been helpful in stabilising numbers studying at least one language other than English (LOTE) to GCSE level. Schools which accommodate the EBacc by making language learning compulsory for some or all pupils have higher rates of languages uptake than those which offer a free choice (Hunter, Arfon & Zhu, 2024). However having languages in the Humanities portfolio is not necessarily helpful, given that we see languages as also having a broader disciplinary identity than this categorisation implies. In practice the EBacc has also had some distorting effects on access to LOTEs, and has had limited effects on raising attainment (see evidence presented in Section 7). Its contribution to sustaining LOTEs overall requires review.

To deliver a LOTE curriculum more in tune with learner motivations and societal needs, there is firstly a need for dialogue between policy makers and the languages education community "to promote a clear, cohesive and aligned message about the value of languages in wider society" (Collen & Duff, 2024 p.5; Ayres-Bennett, 2024). It is also important to fund and support transnational connections for teacher education and for schools to forge links: "there is a sustained decline in international engagement in the state sector", which remains much higher in the independent sector. Most schools are not aware of the Turing scheme intended to support such links, and among those who have applied for funding the success rate is low (Collen & Duff, 2024).

The challenges of teacher recruitment and retention are major issues for the quality delivery of the LOTE curriculum (Scott et al., 2024). The development of language proficiency, interactional competence and intercultural competence in combination requires strong professional judgement and flexibility of pedagogical approaches (Graham et al., 2020; Kohl et al, 2021; Woore et al., 2022). At present, there are many case studies of good practice where a whole-school approach to language provision has improved take-up (see, for instance, those featured in Collen, 2023, and in Mills & Tinsley, 2020); however, these rely on local initiatives and are not supported by national or regional structures which focus on delivery of a single approved pedagogy, that of the 2016 Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review. A more open system of teacher education and support for continuing professional development is required, reflecting "the crucial importance of teachers' professional judgment in determining the most appropriate instructional approaches for a given classroom on a given occasion" (Woore et al., 2022, p. 146).

Ayres-Bennett, W. (2024). *Languages and policy: Building collaborations between academics and policymakers*. Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies.
https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/institute_modern_languages_research/Language%20policy%20report.pdf

Baker, P. & Eversley, J. (ed.) 2000. *Multilingual capital: The languages of London's schoolchildren and their relevance to economic, social and educational policies*. Battlebridge.

Chalmers, H. & Murphy, V. (2021). Multilingual learners, linguistic pluralism and implications for education and research. In E. Macaro & R. Woore (Eds.) *Debates in second language education* (pp. 66-88). Routledge.

Claughton, J. (2022). A taste for languages: The WoLLoW project. *The Linguist*, 61, 14-15.
<https://theworldoflanguages.co.uk/>

Collen, I. (2023). *Language Trends 2023*. British Council.
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_england_2023.pdf

Collen, I., & Duff, J. (2024). *Language Trends England 2024*. British Council. doi.org/10.57884/PAFA-TF94

Costley, T. & Leung, C. (2020). Putting translanguaging into practice: A view from England. *System*, 92. ISSN 0346-251X.

Cummins, J. (2021). *Rethinking the education of multilingual learners: A critical analysis of theoretical concepts*. Multilingual Matters.

Edwards, J., Mohammed, N., Nunn, C., & Gray, P. (2020). Mother tongue other tongue: nine years of creative multilingualism in practice. *English in Education*, 56(1), 18–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2020.1850176>

Forbes, K., Evans, M., Fisher, L., Gayton, A., Liu, Y., & Rutgers, D. (2021). Developing a multilingual identity in the languages classroom: the influence of an identity-based pedagogical intervention. *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(4), 433–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2021.1906733>

García, O. & Flores, N. (2012). Multilingual pedagogies. In M. Martin-Jones, A. Blackledge, & A. Creese (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of multilingualism* (pp. 232-246). Routledge.

Gilmour, R. (2020). Special issue: multilingualism and English teaching. *English in Education*, 54(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2019.1706878>

Graham, S., Courtney, L., Tonkyn, A. & Marinis, T. (2016). Motivational trajectories for early language learning across the primary–secondary school transition. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42, 682-702. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3230>

Graham, S., Fisher, L., Hofweber, J. & Kruesemann, Heike (2020). Getting creative in the languages classroom. In Kohl, K. et al (Eds.) *Creative multilingualism: A manifesto*. Open Book Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0206>

Heltai, J. & Tarsoly, E. (Eds.) (2023). *Translanguaging for equal opportunities: Speaking Romani at school*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Hunter, A-M., Arfon, E., & Zhu, H. (2024). *Opportunities for all? Which pupils are studying languages in England and why?* <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/2024/11/07/opportunity-for-all-which-pupils-are-studying-languages-in-england-and-why/>

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- Liggins, S. (2022). How we worked with children to produce heritage language resources. *Creative Multilingualism*. <https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/blog/exploring-multilingualism/how-we-worked-children-produce-heritage-language-resources/index.html>
- Liggins, S. (2024). *Heritage languages in plurilingual secondary school cohorts: Exploring students' diverse linguistic repertoires*. PhD Thesis, University of Essex.
- Lütge, C., Merse, T. & Rauschert, P. (Eds.). (2022). *Global citizenship in foreign language education: Concepts, practices, connections*. Routledge.
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- National Association of Language Advisers (NALA) (2020). *The languages curriculum and disadvantaged students*. <https://nala.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NALA-Report-on-socio-economic-deprivation-and-MFL-2020-Full-report.pdf>
- Printer, L. (2024). Towards a motivating language acquisition curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal*, 35, 727–731. <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.287>
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- Welsh Government (2021). *Languages, literacy and communication*. <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/languages-literacy-and-communication>

Woore, R., Graham, S., Kohl, K., Courtney, L., & Savory, C. (2020). *Consolidating the evidence base for MFL curriculum, pedagogy and assessment reform at GCSE: an investigation of teachers' views*. <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:1f797d25-98b4-4b89-863a-779b2348ae20>

Woore, R., Molway, L., & Macaro, E. (2022). Keeping sight of the big picture: a critical response to Ofsted's 2021 Curriculum Research Review for languages. *Language Learning Journal*, 50(2), 146–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2045677>

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

We have referred in previous answers to the under-representation in the curriculum of contemporary social and linguistic diversity, the privileging of Standard English norms, and the marginalisation of socially, linguistically and ethnically disadvantaged and minority groups. Across all language domains (English, MFL, heritage languages) literary and cultural content should be expanded to include themes, identities and practices relevant to the learners and their immediate social context, e.g. linguistic and social diversity, intercultural understanding, social justice, environmental sustainability, digital literacy. The range of languages offered for formal qualifications (starting with GCSE) needs to be expanded to include a wider range of community languages; new and more flexible approaches to assessment should facilitate provision for languages with smaller candidate numbers. Teaching and assessment of community languages would be strengthened by the funding and development of systematic links with volunteer-led supplementary schools (Global Future Foundation, 2021). Digital media such as films and online games offer rich opportunities for linguistic and cultural explorations in these languages; multilingual story-making promotes creative and critical engagement with literacy, as shown by the Goldsmiths “Critical Connections” project (Anderson, Chung & Macleroy, 2018).

Anderson, J., Chung, Y-C. & Macleroy, V. (2018) Creative and critical approaches to language learning and digital technology: findings from a multilingual digital storytelling project. *Language and Education*, 32(3): 195-211.

Critical Connections <https://goldsmithsmdst.com/>

Global Future Foundation (2021). *Silenced Voices*. https://globalfuturefoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/GFF_SilencedVoices.pdf

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?

Language investigations, language awareness activities and school language policies can make a strong contribution to students' knowledge about and respect for others, and materials are available internationally to support such initiatives, e.g. a Council of Europe initiatives regarding intercultural inquiry (Barrett, 2022) and plurilingual education (Beacco et al., 2016). An internationalist focus on intercultural understanding should be a key element of MFL study and support overall anti-prejudice, anti-xenophobia, and anti-racist aims of general education (Hawkins, 1987; Tarsoly & Ćalić, 2022). Matras (2024) makes a case for “locality studies” to support aspects of social engagement and intercultural awareness across languages. Such studies would involve cross-sectoral collaboration between schools and other local stakeholders (such as police, healthcare institutions, universities etc), and engage students in “citizen science” investigations of local linguistic diversity and language needs (Molek-Kozakowska & Laihonen (2024).

Barrett, M. (2022). *Autobiography of intercultural encounters*. 2nd edition. Council of Europe.

Beacco, J.C., Byram, M., Cavalli, M. et al. (2016). *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*. Council of Europe.
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/guide-for-the-development-and-implementation-of-curricula-for-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education>

Hawkins, E. (1987). *Awareness of language: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Matras, Y. (2024). *Speech and the city: Multilingualism, decoloniality and the civic university*. Cambridge University Press.

Molek-Kozakowska, K., & Laihonen, P. (2024). Fostering language awareness through Citizen Science: results and implications of a project with Polish teenagers doing language-related research. *Language Awareness*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2024.2428184>

Tarsoly, E. & Ćalić, J. (2022). Language learning and community engagement for global citizenship. In C. Lütge, T. Merse & P. Rauschert (eds.), *Global citizenship in foreign language education: Concepts, practices, connections* (pp. 267-287). Routledge.

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?

[see response to Question 28]

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?

[see response to Question 29]

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?

[see responses to Question 30 and to Section 8]

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?

The current primary curriculum places a disproportionate emphasis on technical linguistic skills concerned with English spelling, punctuation, and grammar. This view of language overlooks the social dimension of communication and presents language as a decontextualised and disembodied entity. It emphasises technical aspects of language over creativity, meaning that children have limited opportunities to be creative with language. Where creative opportunities do arise, research has shown that this can be superficial and restrictive. For example, many schools rely heavily on prescriptive writing frames which lead to children focusing on technical aspects of their writing and ‘what works’, rather than genuine writing for pleasure (see Barrs, 2019; Dyson, 2020). As others (e.g. Myhill, 2021; Wyse et al., 2022) have argued, the grammar requirements in England’s national curriculum require radical redesign, due to their inappropriateness in contributing to the improvement of pupils’ writing. Cushing (2021) also shows how the current emphasis on ‘correct grammar’ in the primary school curriculum leads to pedagogies which position teachers as language police, *despite* teachers’ own beliefs against this. We also have concern about the almost exclusive

emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics in the primary curriculum and the lack of robust research evidence to warrant this (see Wyse & Bradbury 2022).

There are many things that a new curriculum could do to support children and promote their agency in developing a love, enjoyment, and critical awareness of language. A new curriculum would expand beyond technical aspects of language and towards language as a system of meaning-making, drawing in issues of language, power, and society. Ultimately, a new curriculum would strike a better balance between the technical aspects of language with the social aspects of language.

Barrs, M. (2019). Teaching bad writing. *English in Education*, 53(1), 18–31.

Cushing, I. (2021). Grammar tests, de facto policy and pedagogical coercion in England's primary schools. *Language Policy*, 20, 599-622.

Dyson, A. H. (2020). "This isn't my real writing": The fate of children's agency in too-tight curricula. *Theory Into Practice*, 59(2), 119–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1702390>

Myhill, D. (2021). Grammar re-imagined: foregrounding understanding of language choice in writing. *English in Education*, 55(3), 265–278.

Wyse, D., Aarts, B., Anders, J., de Gennaro, A., Dockrell, J., Manyukhina, Y., Sing, S & Torgerson, C. (2022). *Grammar and writing in England's national curriculum*. UCL.

Wyse, D & Bradbury, A. (2022). Reading wars or reading reconciliation? A critical examination of robust research evidence, curriculum policy and teachers' practices for teaching phonics and reading. *Review of Education*, 10, e3314. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3314>

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?

The current secondary curriculum for English Language is not appropriate in its breadth or its balance. The current curriculum, at both Key Stage 3 and 4, has received ample amounts of criticism, which we agree with (e.g. NATE 2021; OCR 2024; Oracy Education Commission 2024). It places an undue focus on linguistic structure and reading comprehension (often of inappropriate source material), and of the creation of artificial texts. OCR's (2024) review of the curriculum highlighted responses from English subject associations which described English Language GCSE as 'damaging', 'boring', 'narrow', 'uninspiring', 'unpopular', and 'desperately in need of a revamp'. The OCR review concludes that redesigning the English Language curriculum is a 'matter of urgency, and [must] include a broader definition of English skills including media and spoken language'. We agree with this, but we would also like to see this pushed further. We believe critical language awareness should form an integral part of the curriculum, placing greater focus on the relationship between language, power, and in/justice. It would provide students with opportunities to learn about the social, colonial, and political dynamics of English as a global language. It would provide students with opportunities to engage with language as a system of choices for making meaning. It would provide students with opportunities to explore linguistic diversity and understand the relationship between

language and intersectional identities. A radically different curriculum for English Language is an urgent requirement.

NATE. (2021). GCSE English Language: Time for change. *Teaching English*, 27.

OCR. (2024). *Striking the balance: A review of 11–16 curriculum and assessment in England*. OCR.

Oracy Education Commission. (2024). *We need to talk: The report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England*. OEC.

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?

We are in support of the current curriculum for A-level English Language, which is praised by linguists as the only qualification in English where language analysis is systematically taught (Hudson, 2010; Hudson, Sheldon & Trousdale, 2021). We suggest that a revised secondary curriculum for English Language would look to A-level content for inspiration.

Hudson, R. (2010) *A-level English Language: A collection of facts and figures*.
<https://dickhudson.com/al-englang/>

Hudson, R., Sheldon, N. & Trousdale, G. (2021). Language for lively minds. *Teaching English*, 26.

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?

The focus of the post-2014 curriculum on maths and literacy at primary level and on “academic” subjects valued by the EBacc have been detrimental to learners’ ability to access creative subjects. As far as language is concerned, we see this as the loss of opportunity to develop creative skills in an integrated way. There are many positive examples internationally of how a translingual and transcultural orientation to language and to language pedagogy can integrate other semiotic resources and enhance learners’ linguistic and non-linguistic creativity in integrated ways (Lytra et al., 2022). Film, cultural artefacts, podcasts, fine art, poetry, music can all act as vehicles for inspiring and motivating MFL lessons.

Lytra, V., Ros I Solé, C., Anderson, J., Macleroy, V. (Eds) (2022). *Liberating language education*. Multilingual Matters.

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

[see our comments on the impact of accountability measures such as the EBacc and Progress 8 in Section 7]

Key stage 4 Technical Awards

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?

[no 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?

[no response]

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

Primary assessment

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

As set out above, the priority for language assessments throughout schooling is to serve children's comprehensive language and literacy development. This can be underpinned by meaningful certification of their language abilities at key educational milestones.

The current statutory assessment of language at KS1 and KS2 is not serving this purpose as well as it should. It has three major shortcomings:

1. Overemphasis on summative assessment: The focus on using language assessments for school and teacher accountability undermines their primary purpose of supporting student learning. The current approach distorts the value of assessment for all children, particularly disadvantaging lower-attaining students Hargreaves, Quick & Buchanan, 2023).
2. Limited assessment methods: The narrow range of assessment methods employed fails to capture the full spectrum of language skills and development.
3. Narrow focus on Standard English: The current assessment system prioritizes Standard English grammar and literacy, neglecting the importance of children's growing awareness and control of diverse language varieties, genres, and media literacy.

Among assessments in current use at KS1 and KS2, the Year 6 SATs exert a distorting influence on the whole curriculum (Burgess, 2023). The narrow focus on written Standard English biases language instruction, underemphasising the development of diverse language skills and awareness.

The Reception Baseline Assessment, recently introduced primarily for accountability purposes, has limited validity for an increasingly multilingual primary population, and distracts Reception teachers from building meaningful relationships with their new students. (Roberts-Holmes, Sousa & Lee, 2024).

The Year 1 Phonics Check, despite its potential as a formative assessment tool (Double et al., 2019), has also attracted criticism (Darnell, Solity & Wall, 2017). The test's emphasis on accountability effectively enforces synthetic phonics as the sole approved approach to early literacy. There is evidence that even among teachers generally supportive of phonics instruction, the test's emphasis on accountability has led to Phonics Check preparation becoming a distinct activity, distorting teaching practices (Carter, 2020). It has proved particularly problematic for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners.

Aside from SATs, these statutory assessments may not be very numerous or lengthy, but their combined accountability functions exert a narrowing impact on the language and literacy curriculum and bring other negative washback effects, such as a deficit mindset, particularly affecting lower-achieving children (Hargreaves, Quick & Buchanan, 2023).

Burgess, N. (2023). <https://schoolsappg.org.uk/news/towards-a-fairer-more-useful-and-fit-for-purpose-way-to-assess-children-and-young-people-in-the-21st-century/view>

Carter, J. (2020). The assessment has become the curriculum: Teachers' views on the Phonics Screening Check in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46, 593-609. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3598>

Darnell, C.A., Solity, J.E. and Wall, H. (2017), Decoding the phonics screening check. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43, 505-527. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3269>

Double, K.S., McGrane, J.A., Stiff, J.C. and Hopfenbeck, T.N. (2019), The importance of early phonics improvements for predicting later reading comprehension. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45, 1220-1234. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3559>

Hargreaves, E., Quick, L., & Buchanan, D. (2023). National Curriculum and Assessment in England and the continuing narrowed experiences of lower-attainers in primary schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 55(5), 545-561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2023.2253455>

Roberts-Holmes, G., Sousa, D. & Lee, S. F. (2024). Reception Baseline Assessment and 'small acts' of micro-resistance. *British Educational Research Journal*, 00, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4016>

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?

Language and literacy assessments at primary level should focus on assessment for learning. We support the main recommendations of the Independent Commission on Assessment in Primary Education (ICAPE: Wyse, Bradbury & Trollope, 2022). These include the phasing out of SATs and other high stakes assessments, and the introduction of a system of teacher-led pupil profiling drawing on a variety of assessment methods reflecting the full curriculum and documenting children's progress in all aspects of language and literacy, including in heritage and foreign languages.

Individual assessments should be clearly distinguished from system-wide accountability measures, although both must draw on a shared understanding of language and literacy. Summative assessments are appropriate only at key transition points within the primary years, where they should immediately inform the next stage of provision. To ensure coherence across transition points,

the information they provide must be relevant, timely and accessible to teachers and other stakeholders.

Universal high stakes assessments for accountability purposes like SATs distort learning. Another way of monitoring educational attainment across the curriculum is required. We support a nationally representative sampling system of the kind proposed by Moss et al. (2021).

Moss, G, Goldstein, H, Hayes, S, Chereau, B M, Sammons, P, Sinnott, G & Stobart, G (2021). *High standards, not high stakes: An alternative to SATs that will transform England's testing & school accountability system in primary education & beyond*. British Educational Research Association. bera.ac.uk/publication/high-standards-not-highstakes-an-alternative-to-sats

Wyse D, Bradbury A and Trollope R (2022). *Assessment for children's learning: A new future for primary education*. The Independent Commission on Assessment in Primary Education (ICAPE). Final report. Retrieved From: icapec.org.uk/reports/NEU2762_ICAPE_final_report_A4_web_version.pdf

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?

High stakes assessment is a source of academic stress for learners in general (Högberg, 2024). It has been widely asserted that SATs engender stress, although we acknowledge that this has also been questioned (for example by Jerrim, 2021). The changes to statutory assessments proposed in our responses to Questions 35 and 36 and refocusing of children's experience of language assessment on assessment for learning may be expected to reduce stress for all. We believe that such a reorientation would enhance motivation and engagement, with particularly beneficial effects for lower-attaining and disadvantaged children.

Högberg, B. (2024). Education systems and academic stress—A comparative perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50, 1002–1021. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3964>

Jerrim, J. (2021). National tests and the wellbeing of primary school pupils: new evidence from the UK. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 28(5–6), 507–544. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2021.1929829>

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)?

High stakes assessment and associated pedagogic practices may have particularly significant negative impacts on the sense of self-worth and educational engagement of disadvantaged learners and those from ethnic minority groups (Reay, 2024; Hargreaves et al., 2023). The changes to statutory assessment supported here, together with the adoption of a curriculum and associated assessments positively reflecting the full range of language practices and identities of contemporary society, may be expected to improve the functioning of assessment. A focus on formative assessment/ assessment for learning will be more compatible with the flexibility in content, timing and delivery required for equitable and valid assessment of learners in need of additional support.

Research sponsored by the Bell Foundation (e.g. Strand & Lindorff, 2020, 2021) has shown that levels of English proficiency are (unsurprisingly) key to the educational achievement of children for whom it is an additional language, and that it takes around 6 years of education to reach full proficiency in order to meet/ exceed age-related academic expectations. Yet in England there is no system of measuring the proficiency of EAL children; the support needed by EAL children entering Reception is very different from that needed by later arrivals into the school system; and many teachers feel inadequately prepared to assess proficiency and respond to varying EAL needs. We support the Bell policy proposals for EAL assessment (Bell Foundation, n.d.).

Bell Foundation (n.d.). *Supporting the education of children who use English as an additional language*. <https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/09/EAL-policy-recs-summary-v3.pdf>

Hargreaves, E., Quick, L., & Buchanan, D. (2023). National Curriculum and Assessment in England and the continuing narrowed experiences of lower-attainers in primary schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 55(5), 545–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2023.2253455>

Reay, D. (2024). Measuring and understanding contemporary English educational inequalities. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3, Supplement_1, i861-i878. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odad027>

Strand, S. & Lindorff, A. (2020). *English as an Additional Language: Proficiency in English, educational achievement and rate of progression in English language learning*. University of Oxford/Bell Foundation.

Strand, S. & Lindorff, A. (2021). *Proficiency in English and rate of progression: Pupil, school and LA variation*. University of Oxford/ Bell Foundation.

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?

We agree with the many critics who argue that the current volume of GCSE assessment is too high (e.g. Burgess, 2023; OCR, 2024). Exam preparation, mocks and the final GCSEs consume disproportionate amounts of school time and dominate the curriculum (OCR, 2024). The reliance on end-of course exams as the sole assessment tool in most curriculum areas seriously limits the range of assessment tasks, inevitably underrepresenting the diversity inherent in language use. Thus, key aspects of young people's language development such as spoken communication, creativity, digital literacy, and critical awareness of language variation and its social functions are at best only partially assessed.

We recommend that the volume of final exams in both English and other languages be significantly reduced and be complemented by other forms of assessment undertaken at appropriate time points; many constructive suggestions are available (see e.g. Lucas, 2021, and New Era Assessment, 2022, for general proposals, and Jones & Saville, 2016, for a systemic approach connecting summative and formative assessment in second/foreign languages).

Burgess, N. (2023) <https://schoolsappg.org.uk/news/towards-a-fairer-more-useful-and-fit-for-purpose-way-to-assess-children-and-young-people-in-the-21st-century/view>

Jones, N. & Saville, N. (2016) Learning oriented assessment : A systemic approach. *Studies in Language Testing*, 45. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/english-research-group/published-research/silt/>

Lucas B (2021). *Rethinking assessment in education: The case for change*. CSE Leading Education Series. Melbourne: Centre for Strategic Education. Retrieved from: [New Era Assessment \(2922\). Final report from independent assessment commission.](https://www.neweraassessment.org.uk/findings) <https://www.neweraassessment.org.uk/findings>

OCR (2024). *Striking the balance: A review of 11-16 curriculum and assessment in England*. <https://teach.ocr.org.uk/striking-the-balance>

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?

The reliance on end-of course 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). Alternative approaches are needed to capture valued outcomes such as creativity, critical thinking, intercultural competence, and problem-solving. Internationally, researchers are working actively on new approaches to language assessment in domains such as interactional and intercultural competence, pragmatics, academic literacy and mediation, including online approaches (ILTA, 2024; Wei Dai, 2024). There is much to learn from international experience which can increase the range of assessment tools used and aspects of language which can be validly assessed, while decreasing the stress associated with end-of-course exams.

International Language Testing Association (ILTA) (2024). *Bibliography of language testing Volume 3, 2021-2023*. <https://www.iltaweb.org/page/ILTALangTestBiblio>

Lucas B (2021). *Rethinking Assessment in Education: The case for change*. CSE Leading Education Series. Melbourne: Centre for Strategic Education. Retrieved from: rethinkingassessment.com/rethinking-blogs/its-time-to-rethink-assessment/

Wei Dai, D. (2024). *Assessing interactional competence: Principles, test development and validation through an L2 Chinese IC test*. Peter Lang.

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?

Yes: See our earlier comments on curriculum content in responses to questions 22 and 29.

Because of their primary reliance on end-of-course- exams to deliver summative assessments at age 16, the current GCSEs in English and in languages provide only a limited and distorted view of young people's language and literacy capabilities. Thus, key aspects of young people's language development are only partially assessed if at all (e.g. oracy, intercultural communication, creativity

mediation and translanguaging, digital literacy, language awareness). Most obviously, GCSE English Language is a well known point of failure for 30% of our young people and requires urgent reform (Burgess, 2023; OCR, 2024). 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 proficiency (Leung, 2022). Priority should be given to documenting young peoples' communicative abilities in speech, writing and digital media, and their ability to exploit their full range of language resources in ways appropriate to different contexts and interlocutors. Themes and topics in literature and cultural studies should reflect and extend children's contemporary life experience and engage them with broad themes of social justice, diversity and environmental sustainability. Curriculum content and assessment should promote a smooth tradition to post-16 study, which has not been the case e.g. in MFL (Pachler, 1999).

Burgess, N. (2023). *Towards a fairer, more useful and fit-for-purpose way to assess children and young people in the 21st century*. APPG.

<https://schoolsappg.org.uk/news/towards-a-fairer-more-useful-and-fit-for-purpose-way-to-assess-children-and-young-people-in-the-21st-century/view>

Leung, C. (2022). Language proficiency: from description to prescription and back? *Educational Linguistics*, 1(1), 56-81. <https://doi.org/10.1515/eduling-2021-0006>

OCR (2024). Striking the balance: A review of 11-16 curriculum and assessment in England. <https://teach.ocr.org.uk/striking-the-balance>

Pachler, N. (1999). *Teaching foreign languages at Advanced Level*. Routledge.

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

A renewed and joined up KS3 curriculum for English, for languages, and involving a consistent approach to language and literacy across the curriculum was discussed above in our answers to questions 22 and 29. The KS3 language(s) curriculum should be complemented by systematic formative assessment, in varied formats, focused on informing and supporting children's learning, and managed and led by KS3 teachers with appropriate professional training and support. KS3 language(s) should be inclusive and accessible to all, and should not embark prematurely on GCSE preparation.

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

Lower attaining children in KS3 should be supported through differentiated pedagogy and tailored formative assessment to access the full KS3 curriculum (including e.g. studying a further language and creative subjects).

Accountability

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

We have commented already on the narrowing influence of the accountability system on curriculum and assessment decisions at primary level, in our responses to Questions 35-38.

At secondary school level, in addition to providing 16 year olds with personal summative certification, highly significant for future learning and employment, the GCSE examinations bear the weight of accountability in KS3 and KS4, through the EBacc and Progress8 measures. This double responsibility is well known to be heavily skewing the curriculum in terms of subject choice, as learners are steered toward pathways likely to maximise schools' competitive standing (Parrish, 2024; Rogers & Spours, 2020). The EBacc promotes an "academic" pathway including study of a language other than English, but disadvantaged students following it may pay a penalty in terms of their actual achievement of GCSE grades (Armitage & Lau, 2019). Promotion of this pathway has been at the expense of other subjects central to language development such as drama and the creative arts, as well as vocational subjects.

There is also more specific evidence that the EBacc appears to be narrowing the experience of languages other than English. In case study schools investigated by Hagger-Vaughan (2020), the EBacc policy has led to a reduced variety of languages being taught and the decline of students learning two languages ("dual linguists"). It has become difficult for students with diverse linguistic backgrounds to receive formal recognition for their skills outside of a standard GCSE exam. The pressure on schools to achieve strong GCSE results in one language, along with reduced funding and limited curriculum time, has led overall to a focus on a single language.

Armitage, E., & Lau, C. (2019). Can the English Baccalaureate act as an educational equaliser? *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 27(1), 109–135.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2019.1661222>

Hagger-Vaughan, L. (2020). Is the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) helping participation in language learning in secondary schools in England? *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(5), 519–533.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2020.1752292>

Parrish, A. (2024). Policy tug of war: EBacc, progress 8 and modern foreign languages in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, 39(5), 718–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2024.2328625>

Rogers, L. and Spours, K. (2020). The great stagnation of upper secondary education in England: A historical and system perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46, 1232–1255. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3630>

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?

Our comments here relate to KS3 and KS4, where the current accountability system grounded in GCSE entries and outcomes "punishes" schools with socially disadvantaged intakes and "rewards" those with advantaged intakes. These effects lead to widespread exam washback and discouragement of innovative pedagogy (Perryman, 2022), and some gaming of the system, such as rises in exclusions and disapplications (Rogers & Spours, 2020). The measures are also unstable; changes to technical aspects of the administration of Progress 8, and in particular decisions on whether to take account of contextual variables, can lead to major changes in outcomes (which can also vary significantly from year to year)

(Leckie & Goldstein, 2017, 2019; Prior et al., 2021). As for primary level education, we believe that accountability measures should be separated as far as possible from the assessment and certification of individuals.

Leckie, G. and Goldstein, H. (2017), The evolution of school league tables in England 1992–2016: ‘Contextual value-added’, ‘expected progress’ and ‘progress 8’. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43, 193-212. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3264>

Leckie, G. and Goldstein, H. (2019), The importance of adjusting for pupil background in school value-added models: A study of Progress 8 and school accountability in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45, 518-537. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3511>

Perryman, J. (2022). *Teacher retention in an age of performative accountability*. Routledge.

Prior, L., Jerrim, J., Thomson, D., & Leckie, G. (2021). A review and evaluation of secondary school accountability in England: Statistical strengths, weaknesses and challenges for ‘Progress 8’ raised by COVID-19. *Review of Education*, 9, e3299. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3299>

Rogers, L. & Spours, K. (2020). The great stagnation of upper secondary education in England: A historical and system perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46, 1232-1255. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3630>

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?

The current accountability system has specific negative impact on participants of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in terms of their interest in languages other than English and their perceptions of their own value within the education system (Parrish, 2024).

Parrish, A. (2024). Policy tug of war: EBacc, progress 8 and modern foreign languages in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, 39(5), 718–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2024.2328625>

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**

In effect, general education ends in England at age 16, and England is an outlier internationally in terms of the narrow nature of the Level 3 curriculum, with no shared common language(s) core, and many students studying 3 specialist A levels only. Linked to this narrowing, there has been a steady

and rapid decline since 2015-16 in the proportion of students taking subjects at post-16 which have traditionally been the most popular Humanities subjects (such as English, History, Religious Studies and MFL) [Scott et al., 2024]. The range of subjects available post-16 has diminished over the last twenty years and there is also a marked decrease in pupils choosing across subject types (STEM, social sciences and humanities), with male students in particular “under-represented across Humanities and Arts” (Scott et al., 2024). Both academic and vocational education are increasingly focused on end of course assessments.

There is evidence that current 16+ curricula and assessment methods with their emphasis on in-depth academic knowledge and end-of-course assessment make inadequate provision for the full range of students, especially disadvantaged and lower attaining students (Rogers & Spours, 2020). We believe that broader programmes of study up to the end of compulsory schooling, including aspects of language, and more varied forms of assessment, common internationally, could provide a more inclusive educational experience and a better platform for transitions to future advanced study and/or the world of work.

We have presented our critique on the current GCSE English Language above, and believe it is not appropriate or effective to require 16+ students to re-take this subject where they have failed it earlier. An alternative language curriculum focusing on interactional competence in speech, writing and digital media and relevant to future life needs urgently requires development.

Rogers, L. & Spours, K. (2020). The great stagnation of upper secondary education in England: A historical and system perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46, 1232-1255. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3630>

Scott, M., Julius, J., Tang, S. & Lucas, M. (2024). (2024) *Subject choice trends in post-16 education in England. Investigating subject choice over the past 20 years*. British Academy & NFER.

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**

[see response to question 47]

Languages other than English have been long very neglected in further education (Collen et al., 2023). We support the call of Collen & Duff (2024) for a review of languages qualifications in languages post-16 (post level 2), which should include T Levels, where language skills are currently absent. “Given the focus on GCSE and A-level, progression pathways in languages for lower prior attaining learners are unclear; the distinct absence of vocational qualifications is stark” (Collen & Duff, 2024). There is a clear need for development of such qualifications, beyond the existing Business Language NVQs, which would introduce students to language practices in the workplace, including critical expertise in use of multilingual online resources and translation software.

As acknowledged by Scott et al. (2024), it is “important to note that language study at post-16 is likely to be heavily influenced by GCSE and KS3 provision across schools”. Post-level 3 pathways for

languages have narrowed in step with this trend (notably through the closure of post-92 university language degrees which were more applied in content), reinforcing a narrow disciplinary image of languages study as a purely literary domain.

Scott, M., Julius, J., Tang, S. & Lucas, M. (2024). (2024) *Subject choice trends in post-16 education in England. Investigating subject choice over the past 20 years*. British Academy & NFER.

Collen, I., Henderson, L., Liu, M., O'Boyle, A., & Roberts, J. (2023) *Languages provision in UK further education*. The British Academy. [Online] Available at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/languages-provision-in-uk-further-education/>

Collen, I. & Duff, J. (2024). *Language trends England 2024*. British Council.

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?

There is positive evidence that timely careers counselling can contribute to learners' understanding of how languages qualifications will contribute to further study and employment (Mills & Tinsley, 2020). One current example is the Raising Aspirations Project (RAP), which is working with speakers of four heritage languages (Albanian, Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Romanian) in a London secondary school. The project is aiming to promote awareness of careers with international and community languages, and raise the self-esteem of multilingual students more broadly (Gönczöl, n.d.). However following the demise of specialist career guidance services, many schools lack the resources and expertise to provide informed counselling at points of subject choice.

Gönczöl, R. (n.d.). *The RAP project*. Personal communication.

Mills, B., & Tinsley, T. (2020). *Boys studying modern foreign languages at GCSE in schools in England*. Education Policy Institute & British Council. [https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/boys-studying-foreign-languages/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20significant%20gender,per%20cent\)%20of%20all%20girls.](https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/boys-studying-foreign-languages/#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20significant%20gender,per%20cent)%20of%20all%20girls.)

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

[no comment]

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?

During the 16-19 phase all students will be actively developing their language practices and capabilities, in discipline-specific ways, as well as for self-expression and social engagement as young adults in an increasing range of settings. They should have opportunities within all strands of education to reflect on these processes and develop a sense of agency and effectiveness in their language choices.

Transitions

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

Since the introduction of MFL to the primary curriculum, there has been dissatisfaction around the issue of transition between primary and secondary schools (Hunt et al, 2008); the issue recurs regularly in annual Language Trends reports, e.g. Collen & Duff (2024). Challenges include:

- Differing levels of MFL proficiency achieved across feeder primary schools;
- Variety of language(s) taught in both feeder primary and secondary schools, often leading to a fresh start in a new language at secondary school;
- Lack of cross-phase familiarity with primary and secondary pedagogy in languages;
- Poor liaison and communication during transfer;
- Demotivation of learners where material is repeated and/or where pedagogy shifts abruptly (Courtney, 2017).

Case studies and historic practice e.g. of specialist languages colleges have shown that solutions to these issues can be found but require resourcing. Collen and Duff (2024) point out that addressing these challenges is a priority for the new DfE-supported National Centre for Languages in Education (NCLE).

Collen, I. & Duff, J. (2024). *Language trends England 2024*. British Council.

Courtney, L. (2017). Transition in modern foreign languages: a longitudinal study of motivation for language learning and second language proficiency. *Oxford Review of Education*, 43, 462-481. DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2017.1329721

Hunt, M., Barnes, A., Powell, B., & Martin, C. (2008). Moving on: The challenges for foreign language learning on transition from primary to secondary school. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(4), 915-926.

Technology

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

Current digital technologies already offer teachers and students a rich variety of engaging learning resources. They enable varied intercultural exchanges and experiences, and can support individualised learning and development in language and literacy, within and beyond the classroom. They offer considerable potential to support multilingualism in education through e.g. facilitating translation, translanguaging and the production of multilingual texts. Research makes it clear that current digital technologies cannot substitute for the social learning experience of the classroom, and are most useful where directed by teachers' professional judgement, with implications for teacher education (Lee & Lee, 2024). However a step change in the educational uses of digital technologies may be coming, with the advent of generative artificial intelligence and its implications for changed language practices throughout society (Warschauer & Xu, 2024). Teachers and students alike will need to develop a new set of critical skills and study practices both integrating AI constructively into curriculum delivery and assessment, and learning how to exploit it critically in their future life and work. For example, AI may eventually take care of lower level technical aspects of literacy (spelling, punctuation), freeing up students and teachers to focus on creativity and critical

reflection. This is clearly an area where a long term commitment to experimentation and exploration of possibilities is needed.

Lee, H., & Lee, J. H. (2024). The effects of AI-guided individualized language learning: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning & Technology*, 28, 134-162. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/73575>

Warschauer, M., & Zu, Y. (2024). Artificial intelligence for language learning: Entering a new era. *Language Learning and Technology*, 28, 1-4.

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?

No