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DfES - Languages Review (Interim Report) consultation: a response from Edexcel

Details

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Response

Edexcel very much welcomes the Languages Review and, as the largest awarding body in the UK and with a comprehensive language qualifications offer, is aware of many of the issues raised in the report and supports most of the provisional proposals.

The continuing fall in numbers of language learners at Key Stage 4 is particularly alarming and Edexcel recognises the special efforts that many centres have made to recruit and retain their students since losing its compulsory status. The report's references to examples of innovative practice, effective use of ICT and potential changes in GCSE assessment and content are of especially interesting.

Edexcel is committed to offering language qualifications that are fit for purpose and which facilitate learning that students find engaging and value. To this end, we have been proactive in developing a new and innovative **GCSE in Applied French**. Although currently in pilot phase, Edexcel intends to make this qualification available to more centres subject to QCA approval.

The qualification places its emphasis on productive language skills and is linked to the specialist contexts of *Business, Leisure and tourism* or *Media and communications*. It encourages embedding of ICT activities and features onscreen testing of reading and listening skills which put the candidate in control of the assessment. Students' reactions have been positive and they are considered as user-friendly' rather than stressful'. Similarly, speaking assessment is not 'high stakes' since it involves a series of ongoing teacher-assessed activities.

Students like the fact that the content is 'adult' and is more likely to feature the production of a webpage, pod-cast or business email than a traditional letter to a pen-friend. Content is flexible as it offers candidates, through the option of '2 skills'

short courses, the opportunity to focusing on listening and speaking or reading and writing skills. A recent QCA review of the qualification highlights the positive attitude of pilot students, confirms that it is fully comparable to standard GCSE and its suitability as a progression route to GCE. Edexcel therefore envisages that the qualification will appeal to a wide range of learners in different 14-19 settings including KS4, KS5 and the Specialised Diploma.

Edexcel looks forward to **new and more flexible GCSE criteria** that will continue to allow for teacher assessment, greater choice of content and that offers scope for unitised and '2 skills' short course GCSEs.

In fact, most of the current Edexcel MFL GCSE models are non-prescriptive and already afford students choice of conversation and coursework topics but further changes and greater choice are welcomed.

Edexcel offers GCSEs and GCEs in **ten languages** and so promotes languages diversity in the school curriculum. For example, work has taken place to support taught-learners of Chinese with special adjustments to the specification and, in conjunction with the British Council, Edexcel advised the China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (Han Ban) when they produced a new series of textbooks and CD ROMs 'Chinese for GCSE'. Edexcel has also been consulted recently by the Needham Research Institute to advise on improving access to Chinese teaching materials.

In accordance with new subject criteria, **changes to GCE** are planned (first teaching 2008) so that, in most languages, students can expect a reduction in assessment units. Again, to accommodate the special needs of taught learners of Chinese and following discussions with SSAT, a new GCE AS level is proposed that will feature new speaking and listening assessments.

It is acknowledged that traditional MFL GCSEs are not the only form of MFL accreditation available and Edexcel now offers both **NVQ language units and qualifications** in seven languages for adult and KS4 learners. Units permit flexible assessment and enable learners to build up spiky profiles across different skills and languages and the content can be customised to meet the needs of different types of learner. The NVQ language qualification reward learners for achievement in all four skills in one language at a specific level and could be used in a Modern Apprenticeship for specialist linguists.

Many teachers consider the need for assessor award training an obstacle since they are already experienced in assessment. Edexcel would welcome consideration given to the approval of simplified or fast-track assessor awards for those considering delivery of NVQ language units.

It seems logical that NVQ language units and the Applied GCSE should feature in the **Specialist Diploma** but flexibility on language unit size would be needed to allow this.

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