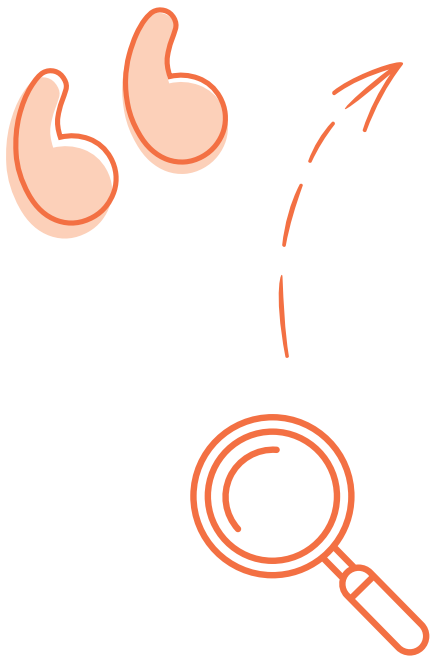


How we provide great assessment for all students

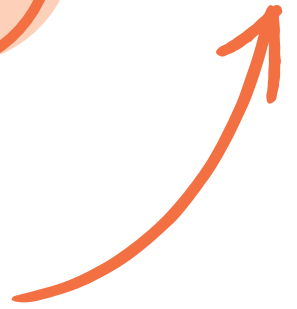
Insights that inform our
assessment design

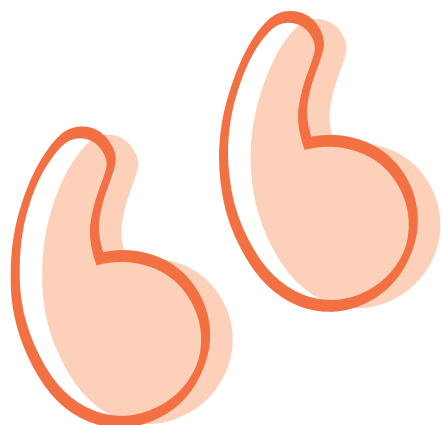


Great assessment
for all students

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Assessments that give students the best chance to show what they can do

The differences between ‘good enough’ and ‘great’ assessment might seem subtle and hard to spot, but the effect is significant.

It’s easy to assume that assessment papers from different exam boards generally offer the same student experience. This is because the content covered in the GCSE languages specifications is standardised.

However, while the content and standards are set by the Department for Education (DfE), there is a role for assessment expertise to create papers which can help students perform at their best.

This guide will illustrate how we provide great assessment for all students, as well as the insights that inform our assessment design.



In a nutshell, we:

- design our exam papers with clear, consistent language and style
- make sure both our practice and live exam papers have similar layouts and question style to help build familiarity and confidence
- structure our Listening and Reading papers to encourage students to attempt all questions.

We believe with these key principles in place, our assessment experts are able to design exam papers that give students the best chance to show what they can do.



How exam paper design can bring out the best in your students

Students deserve a paper designed to give them a good exam experience as this can make a big difference on the day.

We know that the wording and style of a question can make a paper more accessible, but the design and layout can help too. We review our papers to make sure they're clear, unambiguous and show students what is expected and what is important in terms of their responses.

Giving students the confidence to attempt all questions

In terms of levels of demand, our Listening and Reading papers at both tiers are structured using a series of peaks and troughs within a steady incline of difficulty. This has been our practice for many years over different MFL specifications and our long experience tells us that this method of structuring papers encourages and motivates students to attempt all the questions in a paper. It's important you share this information with students in advance of their exams. This way they won't be put off if they come across a question which they find challenging as an easier question will be coming up later in the paper.

Our track record of producing assessments which are accessible and which differentiate between students of different abilities can be seen by looking at our papers, mark schemes and *Examiner reports* from every exam series for GCSE languages.

Our papers are designed to avoid adding to exam day stress

We do this by:

- including plenty of white space on the page; this cleaner look helps with readability
- avoiding unnecessary information; keeping questions and instructions clear
- only using examples where needed, avoiding unnecessary reading
- making sure students have the right amount of space to write their answers; we know that giving too much space can be off-putting for students if a short answer is what's required
- ensuring pauses in the listening tests are carefully tailored to meet the needs of the individual task; a task that requires a written response will require a longer pause than a question which asks students to write a letter in a box and we also allow time for page turns
- using bold text to emphasise key elements of a question, for example, how much detail is needed to avoid students inadvertently missing out on marks because of a lack of clarity
- avoiding sub-clauses where possible to simplify the language and also avoid repeating information
- keeping contexts short, simple and clear
- glossing words in our reading comprehension passages if needed, to help with overall comprehension
- providing lists of standard target language rubrics in the specification for you to share with your students to remove potential barriers on the day of the exam.

How do we design great assessments?

When designing our assessments, the key principles we take into consideration are:

- the tasks reflect the content set out in the specification
- students can complete the paper in the time allowed
- the questions clearly tell the students what they need to do
- the mark scheme rewards students for what they know and what they can do.

Spreading the marks in each paper will differentiate well between students of different abilities and give widely spaced grade boundaries. If grade boundaries are closely bunched together, this is not good in terms of reliably distinguishing between different students' exam performance.

“The writing exams enable students to show off their ability, and having the choice of the questions means that they don't feel too nervous going in that it will be something they're not able to access”

**Helen Robinson, Head of Languages,
Canons High School, Middlesex**



“The balance between success and challenge for the students is well-managed. The topics are accessible and engaging and there are no surprise questions from the sample assessment materials and the final exam”

Jake Hunton, Curriculum Leader for Modern Foreign Languages, Solihull

We consider language style, layout and even the pauses in listening questions, to create exam papers that give students the best chance to show what they can do.



Demand and the design of tasks

Differentiating between students of different abilities

Our Listening and Reading papers have to cater for a range of students of different abilities. At Foundation tier, we are targeting grades 1–5 and at Higher tier, grades 4–9.

We write questions that are targeted at low, medium and high demand at each tier, reflecting the likely demand for students operating within broad ability ranges. Because they're common to both tiers, the high demand questions at Foundation are the low demand questions at Higher.

Different students will find different questions more or less challenging, depending upon their particular skill set and their understanding of the language and concepts involved. Around one third of the marks at Higher tier in GCSE Listening and Reading are targeted at grades 6 and 7 and a further third at grades 8 and 9 (the final third being the overlap questions aimed at grades 4 and 5). At Foundation tier, 60% of the marks are targeted at grades 1–3 and 40% at grades 4 and 5.

Our papers ensure that higher demand questions testing more challenging aspects (for example, making an inference, drawing a conclusion, demonstrating close listening and reading skills) can be accessible to a wide range of students, **even though only those students at the very top of the ability range are likely to get full marks.**

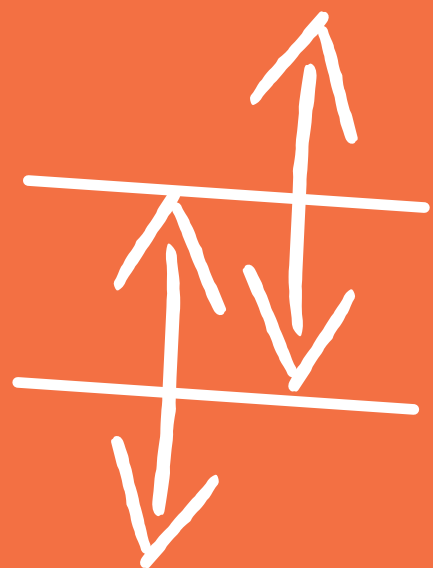
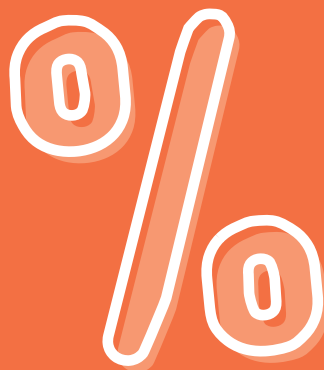
Multiple choice questions and distractors

While there is only one correct answer to a multiple choice question, **all the optional answers provided need to be plausible.** These plausible but incorrect answers are known as distractors. They need to be considered by students, and either selected or eliminated in favour of the correct answer.

In the high demand questions on the Higher tier, the distractors are deliberately strong as only the most able students should be getting these marks, otherwise the paper has failed to differentiate at the very top of the scale. **So, while easier questions sound attractive, they can lead to higher than anticipated levels of performance and, in turn, result in higher grade boundaries.**

Setting and reviewing questions

Practising teachers are involved at every stage of our question setting and review process, working alongside our assessment writers and assessment experts to produce the highest quality papers for your students in each exam series.





We focus on accessibility

Accessible doesn't mean easy. It means that students are able to understand what they are being asked to do. If students don't understand what they're being asked to do then they will not be able to demonstrate whether they can do it.

Giving students the best chance

Fair exam papers need to be accessible to every student, no matter their educational history, region of the country or economic background. We're committed to making sure our papers test the vocabulary, grammar and subject content in the specification. The purpose of exams is to produce evidence to show what knowledge and skills students have gained.

Clarity and integrity

Clear papers are also essential for all students. **When every mark matters, there's no room for unclear or vague questions.** Our papers ensure that high demand questions testing challenging language structures and skills, such as inference and deduction of meaning, can be accessible to a wide range of students, even though we anticipate only the highest attaining students will get full marks.

Clearer papers are not created just by cutting the word count – it's about making it easy for students to understand what they are being asked to do.





Example questions

Here we cover some examples using questions from different tiers to illustrate how we establish demand and differentiate ability.

Each commentary will talk through the performance we expect to see in an appropriately-targeted question, along with the associated mark scheme.

Example 1

2018 GCSE German, Paper 3, Foundation tier, Q10.1–10.5

Commentary

Question 10.1 is a low-demand question on the Foundation tier which simply tests students' understanding of the names of two European countries. This simple test of vocabulary was set as part 1 of this question in order to give students confidence and over 75% of students gained the mark.

The other parts of the question test students' ability to draw simple conclusions at a basic level and to recognise whether information is provided or not in the text.

Parts 10.2 and 10.4 test students' ability to recognise that there is no evidence in the text for the printed statements.

Parts 10.3 and 10.5 test the ability to draw a simple conclusion by relating sunbathing and reading to relaxing in 10.3 and relating local dishes and international cuisine to a wide choice in 10.5

Questions 10.2–10.5 were targeted as medium-demand questions at Foundation tier and for each part question, around 50% of the students who sat the paper got the mark. This demonstrates that the questions differentiated successfully between students at this level.

1 0

Urlaub

Lies diese Online-Werbung.

Beantworte die Fragen.

Schreib **R**, wenn die Aussage richtig ist,
F, wenn die Aussage falsch ist,
NT, wenn die Aussage nicht im Text steht.

Mit wenigen Klicks zum Traumurlaub in Frankreich

- Verbringen Sie eine Woche im Hotel Bella Vista am wunderschönen Mittelmeer!
- Man kann schwimmen, schnorcheln oder Jetski fahren.
- Wenn man nicht aktiv sein will, kann man sich natürlich sonnen und dabei ein gutes Buch lesen.
- 7 Nächte für €350 pro Person, alles inklusive.
- In den vier Restaurants kann man sowohl die Spezialitäten der Region als auch eine internationale Küche probieren.

10.1 Das Hotel Bella Vista liegt in Griechenland.

[1 mark]

10.2 Das Meer ist immer ruhig.

[1 mark]

10.3 Man kann sich im Hotel gut entspannen.

[1 mark]

10.4 Das Hotel ist billiger als viele andere Hotels.

[1 mark]

10.5 Man hat eine große Auswahl an Essen im Hotel.

[1 mark]

Mark scheme

Question	Accept	Mark
10.1	F	1
10.2	NT	1
10.3	R	1
10.4	NT	1
10.5	R	1

Example 2

2018 GCSE Spanish, Paper 3, Foundation/Higher tier, Q13/15

Commentary

This is a high-demand question at Foundation and low-demand at Higher. It shows how, even on the Higher tier, some questions involve a relatively short text and if students can understand the question and correctly identify the part of the text giving the answer, then a simple ‘lift’ will be credited.

At Foundation, around 50% of the students got the mark for each of parts 1, 3 and 4; at Higher over 80% did so. Part 2 proved to be more demanding, in that 22% of students scored the mark at Foundation and 53% at Higher, so this part question is an example of a ‘peak’ within a question.

This is the sort of performance we would expect to see in a question which is appropriately targeted at the overlap grades (grades 4–5).

1 3

La vida escolar

Ves esta página en una revista chilena sobre las preocupaciones de unos jóvenes.

<p>Mi profesor de francés explica bien y saco buenas notas en clase, pero es imposible aprobar los exámenes. Me hacen falta clases de apoyo. Mis amigos dicen que estas clases son útiles.</p> <p>Soledad</p>	<p>Mi instituto organiza un viaje a Nueva York, pero me apetece más ir de visita a Alemania. No sería difícil para mí porque se me da bien el alemán, pero lo malo es que cuesta demasiado.</p> <p>Óscar</p>
--	---

Contesta a las preguntas en **español**.

1 3 . 1

¿Qué dificultad tiene Soledad con el francés?

_____ [1 mark]

1 3 . 2

¿Qué necesita Soledad?

_____ [1 mark]

13.3 ¿Cuál de los viajes escolares prefiere Óscar?

[1 mark]

13.4 ¿Cuál es la desventaja del viaje de Óscar?

[1 mark]

Mark scheme

Question	Key ideas	Accept	Reject	Mark
13.1	Aprobar (los) exámenes	Key idea included in part or all of the first sentence.	Whole paragraph copied out. 'Aprobar' on its own. 'Los exámenes' on its own.	1
13.2	Clases (de) apoyo	(me) hacen falta clases (de) apoyo.	Whole paragraph copied out. 'Clases' on its own. 'Apoyo' on its own. Falta clases de apoyo.	1
13.3	Alemania	Key idea included in part or all of the first sentence. 'alemán' on its own.	Whole paragraph copied out. 'bien el alemán' 'un viaje a Nueva York pero me apetece más ir de visita a Alemania' on its own.	1
13.4	Cuesta demasiado	Key idea included in part or all of the second sentence. El precio/el coste Es (muy) caro	Whole paragraph copied out. 'cuesta' on its own. 'demasiado' on its own	1

Example 3

2018 GCSE French, Paper 3, Higher tier, Q6

Commentary

Targeted at the highest grades on the Higher tier, the responses to this question require precision and very close reading skills. In part 1, it is necessary to include the notion of 'trying to/ attempting to' in order to be credited with the mark and in the final part, it is not enough simply to recognise the word *sourire* – students must understand the way the final sentence hangs together and realise it's the **passer-by** who should smile and **not** the homeless person.

Part 3 proved to be the most demanding of the three questions with 19% of students scoring the mark, which is in line with expectations for a question targeting the highest grades at this level.

At the same time, however, the text was not over-long. The length of a stimulus text is considered carefully during the question setting process and a more extended text does not necessarily mean a higher demand of task. The question stems were easy to read and understand and 35% of students gained the mark for part 2. 22% of students gained the mark in part 1.

This level of challenge is appropriate in a set of questions targeting the top grades and discriminated in the way necessary for a high-demand question at Higher tier.

0 6

Homelessness

While researching homelessness, you see this leaflet on a French website.

Comme tout le monde, les sans-abris ont parfois envie d'être tranquilles alors il ne faut pas les déranger s'ils essaient de s'endormir par exemple !

Tout d'abord, le plus dur quand on est à la rue, c'est la façon dont les gens réagissent. Il est si facile de passer à côté d'eux en fixant son écran de téléphone.

C'est une bonne idée de parler avec ceux et celles qu'on voit régulièrement dans la rue, le sourire aux lèvres.

Complete the sentences in **English**.

0 6 . 1 You should not disturb homeless people if they ...

[1 mark]

0 6 . 2 The hardest thing for the homeless is the way ...

[1 mark]

0 6 . 3 While talking to homeless people, you are advised to ...

[1 mark]

Mark scheme

Question	Key ideas	Accept	Reject	Mark
06.1	are trying to sleep	are trying to/hoping to/ attempting to get to sleep/fall asleep. are nodding off.	are asleep.	1
06.2	people react	people avoid eye contact/look away/ ignore them/don't acknowledge them.	look at phone to walk by/walk past the way people treat them.	1
06.3	<u>smile</u>		make them smile.	1

Example 4

2018 GCSE French, Paper 1, Higher tier, Q9

Commentary

Question 9 is a two-part question targeted at the mid-range of Higher tier across the two question parts (9.1 and 9.2).

Question 9.1 requires students to understand the whole utterance and not focus solely on the cost of the clothing in order to get the mark.

Question 9.2 has distractors as is appropriate in order to achieve the discrimination needed – the question would not be functioning as required if the majority of Higher tier students got the answer correct. Accordingly, the three types of body decoration mentioned in the passage (piercings, tattoos and hair-dying) are listed as options; students need to understand what is being said about each one and distinguish what happened *hier soir* from what happened *la semaine dernière* in order to be awarded the mark. The students who scored the mark for this task were demonstrating highly developed, close listening skills.

Question 9 performed as expected overall, with the first question being slightly less demanding to give students confidence. Over 60% of students gained the mark for 9.1 and a little under 40% gained the mark for 9.2, with the overall demand of the question considered appropriate for a question targeted at the mid-range of Higher tier.

Family relationships

Whilst in a cafe in Switzerland, you overhear these teenagers talking about their relationships with their family.

Write the correct letter in the box.

Answer both parts of question 9.

09.1 Why is this girl unhappy with her mum?

A	Her mum buys the same outfits as her.	<input type="text"/>	[1 mark]
B	Her mum criticises what she is wearing.		
C	Her mum says her clothes are too expensive.		

09.2 Why did she argue with her mum last night?

A	She has a new piercing.	<input type="text"/>	[1 mark]
B	She has dyed her hair.		
C	She has had a tattoo.		

Transcript

- 09 F3** Ma mère est pénible ! Si je porte quelque chose de nouveau, elle veut savoir où je l'ai acheté, combien ça a coûté. Et puis, elle le commande pour elle. J'aimerais qu'elle arrête de me copier !
- Je voudrais un tatouage à l'avenir mais ma mère ne sera jamais d'accord ! Hier soir, quand elle a vu mon petit trou dans le nez, sa réaction a été horrible. C'était pire que quand j'ai changé de couleur de cheveux la semaine dernière.

Mark scheme

Question	Accept	Mark
09.1	A	1
09.2	A	1

Example 5

2018 GCSE German Paper 1, Foundation tier, Q13, 14 and 15

Commentary

In these mid-demand Foundation tier questions, students had to listen to the whole utterance in order to arrive at the correct answer and to understand the key word in context.

The fact that 67% of students scored the mark in question 13, 76% in question 14 and 81% in question 15 shows that this question sequence performed as expected for the range of grades it targeted. It also illustrates the importance of keeping going since, even students unable to score the mark for question 13 did gain the mark in the subsequent, less demanding questions.

School

Sven is talking about his day at school.

Write the correct letter in the box.

1 3

Why was today not a good day at school for Sven?

A	He forgot his maths textbook.
B	He did badly in a maths test.
C	The maths teacher gave him a detention.

[1 mark]

1 4

Why was the PE teacher angry with Sven?

A	He was injured and could not play in the football team.
B	He had left his football boots at home.
C	He played badly in the football match.

[1 mark]

1 5

What is the final problem that Sven mentions?

A	He could not buy any food for lunch.
B	He ate lunch but then felt ill in the afternoon.
C	He did not enjoy the food for lunch.

[1 mark]

Transcript

- M1** Heute war kein guter Tag in der Schule. Wir hatten eine Klassenarbeit in Mathe und sie war sehr schwierig. Ich habe bestimmt eine schlechte Note bekommen.
- M1** Der Sportlehrer war böse auf mich, weil ich im Fußballspiel sehr schlecht gespielt habe. Die andere Mannschaft hat zwei Tore geschossen.
- M1** Und dann habe ich mein Geld verloren. Ich habe also nichts zu Mittag gegessen und war den ganzen Nachmittag sehr hungrig.

Mark scheme

Question	Accept	Mark
13	B	1
14	C	1
15	A	1

Example 6

2018 GCSE German Paper 3, Foundation tier, Q4

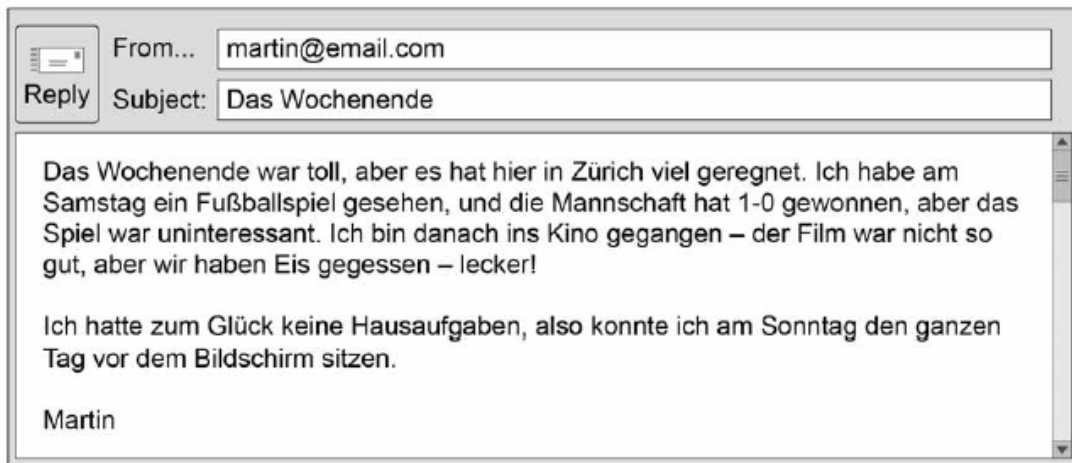
Commentary

This mid-demand question at Foundation tier performed as expected apart from part 4.4. In part 4.1 just under 70% of students scored the mark and in parts 4.2 and 4.3 around 90% did so. However, many students failed to take account of the negative in *keine Hausaufgaben*, resulting in just 32% scoring the mark in 4.4. This shows the importance of careful reading of the stimulus text rather than focusing on isolated words.

0 4

Free time

Your Swiss friend has sent you an email about his weekend.



Write the correct letter in the box.

0 4 . 1

The weather was...

A	sunny.
B	rainy.
C	windy.

[1 mark]

0 4 . 2 The football match was...

A	boring.
B	tiring.
C	exciting.

[1 mark]

0 4 . 3 The food in the cinema was...

A	expensive.
B	delicious.
C	awful.

[1 mark]

0 4 . 4 On Sunday Martin...

A	did homework.
B	visited friends.
C	watched TV.

[1 mark]

Mark scheme

Question	Accept	Mark
04.1	B	1
04.2	A	1
04.3	B	1
04.4	C	1

We're committed to fair and accurate outcomes

Once exam scripts have been marked, a group of senior examiners meet to set the grade boundaries. They look at scripts on the grade boundary from the previous year and a range of scripts from the current year.

These awarding committees are guided by the principle of comparable outcomes – that's the principle that a student should get the same grade this year that they would have if they'd sat the previous year's paper.

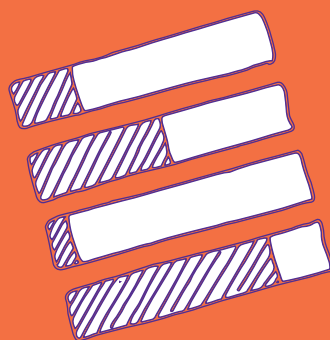
The committee then compare the scripts to decide the mark for the current year's boundary, which represents the same standard as the previous year. Statistics are also used to guide their judgement.

These statistics look at how students performed in previous tests – we use Key Stage 2 data for GCSE awarding. This means that while we're looking to carry over the same standard from the previous year, if we have a slightly more able cohort than the previous year then there will be slightly more top grades available.

After careful consideration, the senior examiners decide what the minimum mark for each grade should be.

The continuing use of comparable outcomes in the awarding process, as specified by Ofqual, ensures that standards and student results are not impacted by any change in demand to exam questions.

Ofqual's close monitoring of this process ensures a 'level playing field' and that it is no easier to achieve any given grade with one exam board than another.



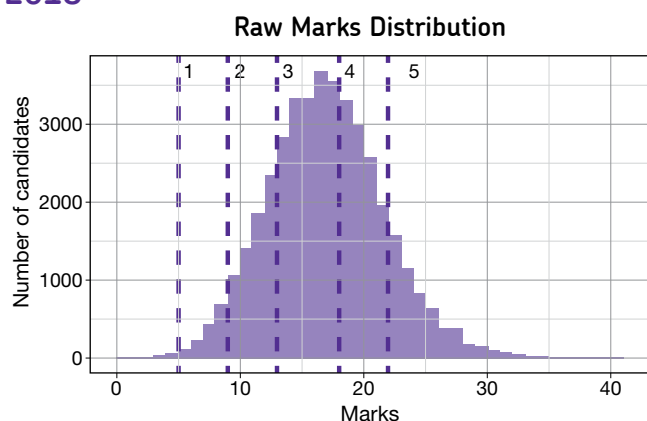
We're never finished. We review and improve our papers every year

After every exam series, we carry out an in-depth review and qualitative analysis of all of our papers. In our Listening and Reading papers, we look carefully at how each individual question or part question has performed in terms of the level of demand it was targeted at. The question setters and our assessment design experts look carefully at a range of data which also includes any feedback from teachers and our examiners.

There are a range of factors which can impact on how a question has performed, for example the task type, the vocabulary items which are being tested as well as the strength of any distractors which have been part of the task. Questions don't always perform in line with expectation and part of this review is to understand why a question proved to be more or less demanding than intended.

In 2018, the Foundation tier French Listening paper proved to be more demanding than expected, resulting in a mean score of 41% of the marks. As you can see from the graph below, very few students scored marks towards the top of the mark range.

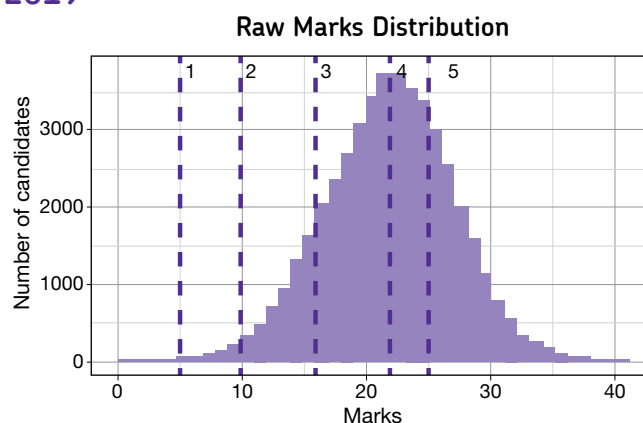
2018



This lower than expected performance was reflected in the placing of the grade boundaries in the 2018 series.

In the light of the information gathered as part of our question paper review after the 2018 exam series, changes were made to the French Foundation tier Listening paper for 2019. This resulted in a mean score of 54% as well as an improved spread of marks, as can be seen in the following graph.

2019



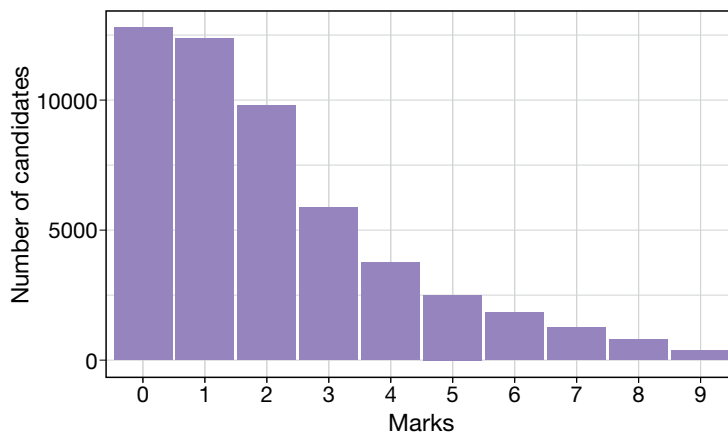
Standardisation and future papers

This information and insight informs the setting of future papers to improve the design and performance of the tasks in future series.

An example of this was the GCSE French Higher tier translation in 2018, the first year of the new specification. The task proved to be more demanding than anticipated and this is demonstrated by the following graph.

2018 Higher tier translation from French into English

8658/RH Item: 12

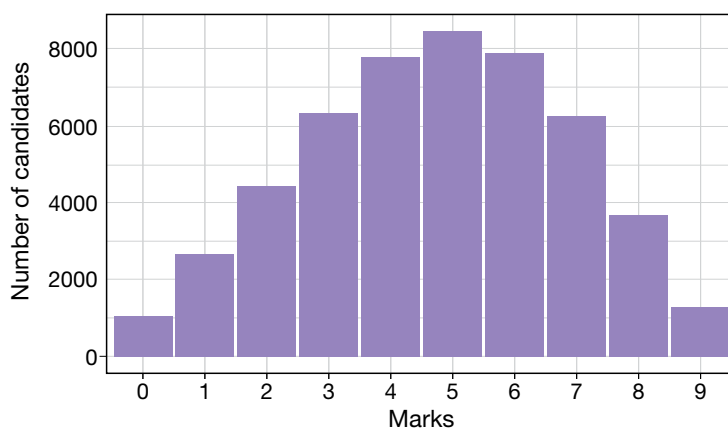


Many students failed to score at all in this task and few students scored four marks and above. This was taken into account in the positioning of the grade boundaries for the 2018 Higher Reading paper. Additionally, there were some reading comprehension questions in the same paper which proved to be less demanding than anticipated, so the paper overall performed in line with expectation.

However, this insight enabled the question setters to design a translation in 2019 which performed in a much different way. The following graph shows a good spread of marks across the whole mark range, with far fewer students scoring no marks and the proportion of students scoring full marks at a level consistent with expectation:

2019 translation from French into English

8658/RH Item: C13



The evidence

We're committed to fair and accurate outcomes

Comparable outcomes mean that students' grades are not impacted by changes in demand in the exam. Grade boundaries move according to demand, so grades are consistent year on year.

We review our exam papers and make changes every year

We're never finished. We review papers and make changes to improve them regularly using student performance data and feedback from teachers.

We work with practising teachers

All our draft questions are reviewed by practising teachers before they make it into a paper.

We focus on accessibility

We consider language style, layout and even the pauses in listening questions, to create exam papers that give students the best chance to show what they can do.

We know the right length of a listening pause is important

In listening, we know how important it is to get the pauses just the right length – to allow time for reading the question, writing an answer, and even turning the page.

We don't have overly long texts in our reading papers

We make sure the text is long enough for differentiation but we won't include more than is needed.

We allow teacher prompts in speaking tests

Students can be prompted to ask a question in the general conversation without losing marks.

We have clear instructions and tasks

We make sure our wording is as succinct and clear as possible. If there is any confusion, we take this into account during standardisation and for future papers.

We target vocabulary carefully

In reading and listening papers, we meet the requirement to test outside the prescribed vocabulary list by using cognates, near cognates and words that should be familiar from KS3.



Our support

Head to the Plan, Teach, Assess tabs for your language for a wealth of resources, including:

Plan

- *Tiering guide quick reference poster*
- *Tiering guide: foundation or higher booklet*

Teach

- Lesson plans
- Schemes of work

Assess

- *Insight report: results at a glance*
- Past papers
- *Notes and guidance: Instructions for the conduct of exams*

eAQA

Secure Key Materials (SKM) holds example student responses and Examiner reports.

extranet.aqa.org.uk

Professional development

From effective exam preparation to local networking hubs, we offer a range of training courses and events for education professionals. Get support when you need it and however it suits you.

aqa.org.uk/professional-development

Additional resources

Search hundreds of AQA GCSE and A-level languages questions, mark schemes and examiner comments, as well as interactive marked and annotated student responses for GCSE writing.

exampro.co.uk/languages

Other AQA languages specifications

- FCSE French
- FCSE German
- FCSE Spanish
- FCSE Chinese (Mandarin)

aqa.org.uk/subjects/languages/fcse

Hear what other teachers think about our GCSE languages papers

Helen Robinson

bit.ly/MFLHelen

Jake Hunton

bit.ly/MFLJake

Contact us

Our team of subject experts are here to help and support you as you deliver our specifications.

We're here to provide advice when you need it and respond to queries you might have to make sure you feel confident about guiding your students to fulfil their potential.

We understand the trust you put in us to provide great assessments for your students and we are committed to delivering on this.

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