

Reformed GCSE and A level subject content consultation

Pearson response

20 November 2014

A brief introduction to Pearson

Pearson is the world's leading learning company. Our education business combines 150 years of experience in publishing with the latest learning technology and online support. We are also part of the wider Pearson family which includes Penguin, Dorling Kindersley and the Financial Times. We provide education and assessment services in more than 70 countries. Our qualifications, courses and resources are available in print, online and through multi-lingual packages, helping people learn whatever, wherever and however they choose.

A summary of the Pearson response

Pearson welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on proposed content for reformed GCSEs and A levels. We also welcome the opportunities that we as an awarding organisation have been afforded to feed in to the process of shaping these content criteria.

Pearson teams worked collaboratively alongside colleagues at AQA, OCR and Eduqas, as well as DfE colleagues, to listen to the views of stakeholder groups and HEI representatives to establish new content expectations. As well as working with stakeholder groups convened by the Department, we also have a detailed base of evidence of our own to draw on, including analysis of international high-performing jurisdictions, additional stakeholder engagement, and data and qualitative analysis of our existing qualifications.

The drafting process for these subjects has inevitably required a degree of compromise. It has involved exploring an appropriate balance between ensuring that the content provides the best possible progression, ensuring that the skills, knowledge and understanding represented are the right ones for the subject in the eyes of stakeholders, ensuring that we can assess these validly and reliably over the life of the qualification, and ensuring that the qualification is deliverable in schools and accessible and appealing to students.

Following consultation with our wider stakeholder groups, we believe that further, critical revisions are required to ensure these aims are met.

- In **Design and Technology**, significant consideration needs to be given to the issue of ensuring adequate depth in relation to the Areas of Interest.
- In **Citizenship Studies**, we believe both the volume and nature of some of the proposed subject content to be inappropriate. We have significant doubts about awarding organisations' ability to set valid assessments on active citizenship without a proportion of non-examined assessment.
- We believe the purpose of the new **Cooking and Nutrition** GCSE is unclear, as is the link to KS3 and A level study. We strongly recommend revising the subject content to ensure an appropriate balance between the content areas of nutrition, food (food provenance and food choice) and cooking and food preparation

In this response, we propose recommendations that we believe will ensure the content is appropriate for study at the specified level, will facilitate progression, and will go some way to protect take-up of the subject in question as part of a broad and balanced curriculum offer: a concept to which Pearson remains extremely committed.

Detailed response: section 5

1. Is the revised GCSE content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please consider:

- whether there is a suitable level of challenge
- whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to further academic and vocational education
- whether the amount of content in the qualification is appropriate and, if not,
- whether you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

Please provide evidence to support your response.

(a) Citizenship Studies

Overall, we believe that the revised subject content for Citizenship Studies is largely appropriate, and builds on content in current Citizenship Studies specifications. However, we have a number of concerns pertaining to how the subject content has been prescribed:

Breadth and specificity of content

- The volume of content is too great. The content currently comprises 71 separate bullet points, many of which contain several substantial sub-points. For example, one single bullet point reads 'the UK's role and relations with the rest of Europe and the wider world, including the UN and its agencies, NATE, the EU, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and the WTO'.
- There is a very high degree of specificity in the citizenship studies subject content, compared with other GCSE subjects, e.g. "the process of voting by division" (page 5), "the role and history of trade unions" (page 7), "the roles of legal representatives" (page 7). This is the level of detail that would normally be found in awarding organisations' specifications.
- As a result, we are concerned that within the 120 guided learning hours typically allocated to a GCSE it would not be possible for learners to cover this volume of content to a sufficient level of depth or focus, making discriminating levels of understanding in an assessment problematic, especially with regard to AO3 and AO4. **We recommend that there needs to be some thinning out of content in order to allow awarding organisations to specify some areas to be covered in breadth and others in depth** (see below).

Focus of content

- There is a significant imbalance in the focus given to the different areas of content, with a very heavy emphasis on the Democracy and Politics section, which accounts for almost half of all the subject content. This does not seem to us to reflect the weighting given to the different aspects of the subject in the KS4 Programme of Study for Citizenship. This will have the effect of diminishing some key issues within citizenship, in particular the UK's relationships with the wider world and identities and diversity. **We recommend that the content in the Democracy and Politics section should be decreased; for example by removing statements such as 'who can stand for election and how candidates are selected', 'key parliamentary roles ... Black Rod' and 'the process of voting by division'.**
- We are also concerned that, as a result of the emphasis on politics within the subject content, there is now a significant overlap between the subject content of GCSE

Citizenship Studies and AS and A level Government and Politics, without a clear difference in aim or application of the knowledge. For example, AS level specifications should 'develop a broad knowledge and understanding of the political system of the UK, including the local and European Union (EU) dimensions'. This would seem to indicate that a portion of the proposed GCSE content is actually pitched above GCSE level. Whilst there is a benefit in Citizenship providing a good foundation for students who may want to go on to take this A level, it is important that we ensure that the level of demand of the GCSE is lower than that of the AS and A level (and certainly that there isn't a higher content demand in the GCSE).

Taking citizenship action

- We are also very concerned about the way that taking citizenship action has been specified. The content requires students to take citizenship action 'in a real, out-of-classroom context' and to carry out 'at least one in-depth, critical investigation', but there is a real risk that some centres will not do this as it is not being assessed directly. It is possible that some will instead focus on preparing their learners to answer exam questions about actions. We will not be able to ask questions in an exam that validly or reliably assess the candidate's ability to apply these skills in a real, out of class context, or that validate that they have done this.
- We are also concerned that it will not be possible to vary questions sufficiently each year, meaning that students will be able to pre-prepare responses. The in-depth critical investigation will not itself be seen or assessed, making it nearly invalid as a requirement as the exam questions will not be able to require the written investigation to be carried out to answer them successfully. **We would propose that the 15% taking citizenship action element of the subject content should be assessed via non-examined assessment. It would be possible to produce board-set tasks that are manageable for centres and that could reliably be externally assessed, but which allowed students to demonstrate practically the skills of formulating enquiries, identifying research questions, using primary sources, advocating a viewpoint and representing other viewpoints. Evidence could be captured in the form of an artefact or report or through observation of, for example, a presentation or debate. We believe that in this way we could validly and reliably assess the skills set out in the draft subject content.**
- We are also concerned that there is a range of areas of uncertainty in this section that are not clearly enough defined to ensure comparability between awarding organisations, e.g. is the focus of the investigation board or centre-set, is there any requirement on the extent of the investigation, etc. **We suggest that there needs to be a process of agreeing some of these points between awarding organisations and with Ofqual ahead of submission of specifications.**

Aims and learning outcomes

Some of the aims and learning outcomes seem to reflect the broad areas of study listed in the content and others (e.g. 'know and understand how taxes are raised and spent...', bullet 4) are referring to a specific sub-bullet within an area of content. **As this section pertains to overarching aims and learning outcomes, we recommend that specific content should not be included in this list.**

Skills, processes and methods

Not all of the bullet points are clearly defined as skills, processes or methods. Bullet point 2 and bullet point 9 represent understanding not skills. In bullet point 7, we suggest that 'analyse and evaluate' is a better skill than 'describe and analyse'. Also in bullet 7, we are concerned that 'taking practical actions with others' cannot be assessed in an exam in a measurable, manageable or reliable way. We suggest that this reference needs to be removed as there is no element of non-examined assessment.

(b) Cooking and Nutrition

We support the proposal to remove the subject content from the design and technology qualification and to create new subject content for a standalone GCSE.

However, the aims and learning outcomes of the subject content do not make clear the purpose of the new qualification with regards to progression from Key Stage 3. In KS3, Food remains part of the design and technology group of subjects, embracing core themes such as the iterative design process and application to a range of contexts. The proposed subject content for GCSE Cooking and Nutrition focuses heavily on cooking, and the aims and objectives in KS3 and GCE Food are not explicitly referenced. We believe that, as a result, the proposed content does not reflect learners' prior attainment or what they need to know in order to progress to further academic and vocational education. **We recommend revising the aims and learning outcomes to make explicit the connection between KS3, KS4 and KS5 courses for food and revising the subject content to ensure the appropriate balance between the content areas of nutrition, food (food provenance and food choice) and cooking and food preparation.** Details regarding how this recommendation can be addressed are provided below.

Our work with stakeholders indicates that the proposed title of Cooking and Nutrition is not appropriate and has the potential to impact negatively on learner take-up. We recommend changing the title to reflect the broader nature of the qualification and the three main content areas of nutrition, food and cooking. This will also support our recommendation to ensure a more explicit connection between KS3, KS4 and KS5 courses as well as addressing the balance between the three main content areas. **We recommend a title of 'Food and Nutrition' or 'Food Science and Nutrition', with the term 'food' used to encompass food provenance, food choice, and cooking and food preparation.**

We support the proposal to provide students with a greater breadth of study through the requirement to study the three broad areas of nutrition, food, and cooking / food preparation. However, in order to appropriately support the *depth* of study required for a suitable level of challenge, and for progression to further academic and vocational education, we cannot support the level of detail specified in Sections 7 and 8 within 'Skills requirements: preparation and cooking techniques' without clarification of the requirement for how these skills will be assessed.

Without this clarification, the proposed content focuses unduly on the cooking elements, with a greater emphasis on preparation and cooking techniques than nutrition and food. The level of detail and amount of content presents a challenge in terms of covering all of the requirements within the 120 guided learning hours of a GCSE qualification. Furthermore, the specificity of these skills in the subject content has an adverse impact on the level of demand and comparability of this qualification in relation to other creative and practical subjects at GCSE level. The proposed subject content for GCSE Music, GCSE PE, GCSE Drama, GCSE Art and Design, and GCSE Design and Technology requires students to develop and apply the

appropriate skills for these subjects, but these skills are integrated within the subject content to ensure they are developed in context. This enables the underpinning skills to be assessed through the final, measurable outcome (such as the final performance of a piece of music or a final product/prototype). The proposed presentation of the skills in Cooking and Nutrition could lead to isolated assessment of, for example, knife skills and the use of equipment, rather than the application of these skills to appropriate contexts.

The individual skills requirements are not always appropriate; for example:

- Students may not be able to access some of the skills, such as 'fillet a chicken breast', due to dietary or religious reasons or 'roasting' in the time available within classes
- The skills groups and techniques within the skills groups, are not always comparable, with some comprising low order skills, such as 'mash' and others comprising high order skills such as 'use protein to set a mixture on heating such as choux pastry' or multiple steps and high level of demand, such as 'make a béchamel sauce'
- Some of the techniques within skills groups, such as 'tenderise and marinate' are centred on knowledge and understanding rather than a demonstrable skill.

We recommend clarifying in the subject content how the skills and techniques in the tables on pages 8 to 11 will be assessed. We recommend a requirement to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the techniques (outlined in the third column) and a requirement to demonstrate the application of the different skills groups. This emphasis will ensure skills and techniques are assessed in the appropriate contexts and will support comparability with reformed GCSEs in creative and practical subjects.

Section 7 requires students to 'modify or create new recipes'. It is not clear what the definition of 'recipes' is in this given context. **We recommend defining the terms 'dish', 'meal' and 'recipe' in the subject content to ensure there is a shared understanding of these terms. We would recommend the following definitions:**

- **Recipe:** instructions of how to make a dish
- **Dish:** one item (can be any course)
- **Menu:** a balanced selection of dishes, for example starters, mains, desserts and accompaniments

If these definitions are accepted, the requirement for students to create a new recipe is beyond the scope of GCSE and requires a more advanced level of knowledge, understanding and skills. **We recommend changing this requirement to 'modify or create new dishes'.**

(c) Design and Technology

Pearson supports the proposal to provide design and technology students with a greater breadth of study, through the requirement to work in the most appropriate material area(s) for the content in 'Section 10: Designing and making principles' and the requirement to draw on all of the material groups through the content specified in 'Section 11: Technical principles'. We also support the proposal to ensure that the iterative design process is a focus of the GCSE.

However, while the proposal for one broad-based GCSE in design and technology appropriately supports *breadth* of study, we feel that *depth* of study (and thus appropriate challenge / adequate progression to further academic and vocational education) is not facilitated by the areas of interest specified in Section 13.

Section 12 of the draft subject content specifies that students must study the required content through one chosen area of interest with the intention of developing depth. However, the very

broad nature of the areas of interest, and the wide range of material groups that can be used within these areas, mean that specifications will be required to cover Section 12 in a very broad way. This is a significantly different approach to the material specialisms in the current specifications, which support depth of study. In covering Sections 10, 11 and 12 for a range of material areas, there is a significant risk that the GCSE will become a very broad course that does not appropriately support the depth required for progression. This has been a key finding of our research with teaching specialists and examining teams.

This focus on breadth over depth carries the risk that students will not have the opportunity to develop the appropriate technical and practical expertise to design and make high quality functional prototypes and/or products by engaging in an iterative design process. Greater content requirements reduce the time available for students to work creatively and take risks through an iterative design process.

Furthermore, Sections 12 and 13 do not sufficiently take deliverability into account. Training and recruitment of design and technology teachers is focused on material specialisms rather than broad-based product design. Specialist facilitators are needed to achieve the required depth. Resources in schools also focus on these specialisms, with the broad range of equipment requiring separate rooms. Therefore, a very broad course presents a very difficult and practical challenge for deliverability in the classroom, with a risk of skills and resources gaps that cannot be easily filled. This finding is evidenced in our research with current practitioners. Such a large change in the approach to a qualification requires a significant investment to ensure that subject experts are in place to deliver the new demands and schools have access to the appropriate equipment and materials.

We therefore recommend reviewing and refining the proposed Areas of Interest to enable students to study material areas to the appropriate depth. The Areas of Interest should remain as broad headings but should be defined more explicitly. This would enable awarding bodies to develop comparable specifications that have an appropriate balance between breadth across all material areas and depth within one specialism.

This would also enable individual specifications to support delivery of the new qualification through ensuring centres and awarding organisations have the appropriate skills and resources to deliver the GCSE successfully.

In addition to our recommendations in relation to depth, our work with teaching specialists and examiners has provided evidence for the following recommendations:

The definitions for 'product' and 'prototype' require further clarity to ensure these are clear. For example, the definition for 'prototype' states that it should give 'a true indication of a final product's functions' but does not explicitly state whether this needs to be functional. The seventh bullet point in Section 4 references 'high quality functional prototypes and/or products' which suggests that prototypes are functional. The definitions between 'product' and 'prototype' overlap and this could result in final, measurable outcomes that are not comparable. **We recommend that these are made more distinctive, for example by stating that a 'product' should have a functioning outcome and that a 'prototype' is not functional, OR by changing references to the final product/prototype as 'final outcome' and ensuring 'prototype' is used only to represent the modelling of design ideas throughout the iterative design process.**

Section 4 includes words that are subjective and therefore open to interpretation. Subjectivity reduces the reliability and comparability of assessments and presents a challenge in terms of assessing all students fairly. The descriptions of 'creative', 'ambitious' and 'innovative' (in Section 10) are not quantifiable in mark schemes and require further definition. **We support**

the intention behind these words and agree they have value in the iterative design process but recommend that awarding bodies agree definitions that are transferable to the assessment process.

In Section 10, bullet point 11 references 'marketable products' but **we recommend that this be amended to 'marketable outcomes'** to make it clear that this is referencing the final product and not any modelling created during the iterative design process.

In Section 11, bullet point 3 has limited applications within centres and has a bias towards electronic materials. This is problematic as it does not enable centres to draw across material areas and is limited by the resources available within centres. **We recommend removing this bullet point.**

In Section 12, bullet point 3 requires 'computer-aided design' and 'computer-aided manufacture'. These might not be the best tools for all areas of interest and access to this equipment may prevent some students from using it. **We recommend amending this requirement to read 'including computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture where appropriate'.**

(d) Drama

Awarding organisations played a leading role in the drafting of the GCSE Drama subject content. As such, we feel the proposed subject content is appropriate in terms of challenge, volume and the progression opportunities it affords.

We recommend one small amendment with regard to the bullet point 'design' in Section 8 (fifth sub-bullet in Section 8). It is not compulsory for all candidates to realise artistic intention when creating a piece of live theatre through design. Design is an option for candidates, whereas all the other bullet points in this section are expected from all candidates. **Therefore we recommend the removal of the sub-bullet 'design' from this section.**

2. Is the content for citizenship studies short course GCSE appropriate? Please consider:

- **whether the content reflects what students need to know, including whether it reflects the national curriculum requirements**
- **whether the amount of content in the qualification is appropriate and, if not, whether you have any suggestions for removing or adding content.**

We do not believe that the subject content should specify the content of the short course by asterisking specific bullet points of content – this will make it incredibly difficult for awarding organisations to design full and short course specifications that can be offered alongside one another. Whilst we understand that it is no longer possible for learners to 'top up' from a short course to a full course, it is still important for centres in terms of planning and resources that the two qualifications are linked. Indeed, if the two are not complementary, it is highly possible that take-up of both the short course and Citizenship Studies more generally will be damaged. **We recommend that rather than asterisking specific content statements, a generic line is inserted stating that short course GCSEs should cover all sections of the full course, but only need to cover 50% of the specified content therein.**

3. Is the revised A level content in drama and theatre appropriate? Please consider:

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

Please provide evidence to support your response.

As with GCSE Drama, awarding organisations played a significant role in the creation of subject content for GCE Drama and Theatre Studies, in consultation with stakeholders including a range of HEIs. As such, we feel that the proposed content is appropriate, and fit for purpose with regard to progression opportunities to further study.

We do believe however that it is necessary to re-order some of the content, in order to promote greater clarity as to whether elements will be assessed as part of knowledge and understanding or skills.

The most significant concern that we have is in paragraph 9, where we believe that the second half of the first bullet and all of the sub-bullets should be moved to the skills section. This would be in line with where it sits in the GCSE subject content, and is necessary because that content would be assessed through the Assessment Objectives focusing on skills. **We recommend that the first bullet in this section should read: 'the production processes and practices involved in making and performing theatre collaboratively', and that the rest of that bullet and sub-bullets should be moved to paragraph 11.**

Within this list of sub-bullets we recommend one other small amendment. It is not compulsory for all candidates to realise artistic intention through design. Design is an option for candidates, whereas all the other bullet points in this section are expected of all candidates. **Therefore we recommend the removal of the sub-bullet 'design' from this section.**

The third bullet of paragraph 9 should also be moved into the skills section. This element focuses on how students translate contemporary theatre practice into their own work, and would need to be evident in their practical work and personal evaluation. **We recommend therefore that the bullet 'through watching live theatre, how contemporary theatre practice informs their own theatre making' is moved to paragraph 11.**

We recommend that the last bullet point in section 9 should be deleted altogether, as it is already covered by the second major bullet point.

4. Is the revised AS qualification content in drama and theatre appropriate?

Please provide evidence to support your response.

For the reasons outlined in our response to question 3, we believe the content is appropriate. However, we believe there is more work to do in differentiating more clearly between the AS and A level content, in terms of the skills we would expect to see in each qualification and in our the content is organised within the document. We propose to carry out further work in this regard alongside the other awarding organisations, before the content is finalised.