

Pearson response to the DfE consultation on GCSE and A level reform: politics, and PE short course

December 2015

Organisation details

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential

Name

Mark Anderson

Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation

Name of organisation

Pearson UK

Address

One90 High Holborn

London

WC1V 7BH

Awarding organisation

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.

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, drawing on our extensive research with Higher Education Institutions, stakeholder groups, teachers and learners.

Our involvement in drafting the **GCSE PE short course** criteria was extensive, and as such we are supportive of the proposed requirements as they currently stand and are not proposing further changes.

With regard to **GCE politics**, we are generally supportive of the content requirements and agree that they are broadly appropriate in light of the issues raised by stakeholders. However, we do have significant concerns about the representation of women in the subject content with the removal of feminism as an optional ideology. Our concerns and subsequent recommendations are detailed in our response to questions 2-4 below.

As we do not offer **GCE qualifications in geology** we are not best placed to comment on the proposed subject content in that area.

Detailed response: GCSE PE Short Course

1. Is the revised GCSE short course content in physical education (PE) 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:

Pearson teams were heavily involved in the drafting of the proposed content requirements for GCSE PE and in turn its short course. We worked collaboratively alongside colleagues at other awarding bodies, as well as DfE and Ofqual colleagues, to listen to the views of stakeholder groups and a range of HEI representatives to establish new content expectations. As well as working with stakeholders convened by the Department, we also have a detailed base of evidence of our own to draw on, including additional stakeholder engagement, plus data and qualitative analysis relating to our existing qualifications. As such, **we believe that the proposed subject content for this short course is appropriate.**

We would add one further note to this: the content drafting process has inevitably required a degree of compromise. It has involved finding 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, and ensuring that we can assess these validly and reliably over the life of the qualification. In particular, content and assessment decisions are often inextricably interlinked, and where the proportion of non-examined assessment has been reduced, this has often had an impact on the choices made about content. We believe these criteria balance these different drivers as best they can. We do however look forward to receiving feedback and refinement from the broadest range of stakeholders through this consultation process.

Detailed response: A level

2. Is the revised AS and A level content in each of these subjects 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.

(a) geology

We do not offer GCE Geology. As such, we are not best placed to comment on the suitability of the content.

(b) politics

We worked alongside colleagues from other awarding bodies, DfE, Ofqual and a range of stakeholders to shape the current content. As such, we are broadly in support of the direction it has taken. However, we do have significant concerns about the representation of women in the subject content, specifically the removal of feminism as an optional ideology and the corresponding paucity of female theorists and political actors represented. The blueprint set by the subject content provides an opportunity to ensure that female voices and contributions are included in all GCE Politics specifications, thus in turn ensuring the qualification is truly representative of all the learners it serves, regardless of which awarding body a centre chooses.

As such, we recommend that the 'Political ideas' element (section 12 of the content) is expanded to include other ideologies. As it currently stands, this content is unduly narrow and deep in only expecting students to study the three ideologies of Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism, but insisting on the study of at least 16 key thinkers. We propose that the content is amended to state that specifications must require learners to study those three ideologies, as well as one chosen from the following list: feminism, nationalism, anarchism, multi-culturalism and ecologism.

Each of these must be comparable in depth and demand to the three core ideologies. Given that this represents an increase in content to an already very full syllabus, we recommend that the existing requirements to study key thinkers are slimmed down so as not to make the course unmanageable. Particular thought should be given to these lists of key thinkers across all the core and optional ideologies, to ensure they are suitably diverse and that no

'voices are missing'. These thinkers should be specified in the subject content to ensure that any GCE Politics specification then carries that inclusivity forward.

We also recommend combining certain sections in the 'Political participation' content where there is duplication. We propose combining 'pressure groups' with the 'democracy and participation' section, and making specific reference to women's suffrage in relation to democracy and participation, including the role of the suffragettes and suffragists.

3. Is the amount of content for politics AS and A level appropriate and, if not, do you have any suggestions for removing or adding content?

The document is extremely detailed, and there is a concern that the amount of content will not translate to a manageable course of study at this level, though we believe it to be broadly appropriate. Some suggestions for deletion from our Expert Subject Advisory Group include the names and dates of laws passed for the UK Government (section 9, first bullet) and EU sections (section 11, first bullet). It is also critical to cut down the number of thinkers required per ideology in the 'Political ideas' element, as stated above.

4. (a) Is the size and demand of the two options in politics A level (comparative: USA, and global politics) comparable and, if not, do you have any suggestions for removing or adding content

We believe the two options as currently proposed are comparable. =

4. (b) Is the size and demand of the optional areas within global politics (conflict; poverty; environment and human rights) comparable and, if not, do you have any suggestions for removing or adding content?

We believe these optional areas within the 'Global politics' section are comparable.