

OFQUAL A-level subject grading

UCML statement

The falling numbers in A-Level language takers since 2008 have been linked to the common belief that A-Level languages are graded more severely than other subjects and there is substantive evidence to support this. Since 2013, OFQUAL has been studying and reviewing this perception and released a statement on 21st November 2018 on 'inter-subject comparability for science and language A levels'.

OFQUAL 'concluded that there is not a uniformly compelling case to adjust grading standards in these subjects' and no action will be taken or adjustments made. Despite this conclusion, OFQUAL is aware that the widespread perception of grading severity may have a negative impact on the uptake of our subjects: in this respect, they are committed to ensuring that, in the future, languages 'do not become statistically more severely graded'.

We agree that assessment should not be 'dumbed down' with the objective of attracting more students to languages. However, UCML believes that OFQUAL's decision does not help to reverse the perception of grading severity or mitigate the impact of this on progression to GCSE, A level and Higher Education.

UCML welcomes the fact that OFQUAL will be continuing to address the issue of inter-subject comparability in relation to GCSE in MFL. This work on grading must form part of a wider push to increase uptake in languages at this critical time. This should come as a joint action taken by the government, wider society, and the relevant education bodies working in unison: what must be changed is the general perception that the UK is a monolingual nation. This issue is of paramount importance as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

The incontrovertible fact is that the UK is a richly multilingual nation: the sooner this is acknowledged as a national asset, the sooner a positive change can take place at large, which will boost language learning at all levels of education. UCML will continue to invest, support, and lobby for the value of learning languages with leaders, their grass root organisations and the wider public. Languages benefit individuals and broader society and we need to recognise and celebrate our linguistic diversity.

(All quotes from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reviewing-inter-subject-comparability>; accessed 25/11/18)

Please get in touch with UCML at ucml@bbk.ac.uk if you would like to comment or get involved with languages at all levels of education.

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