

Sally Collier
Chief Regulator
Ofqual
Spring Place
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

5 December 2017

Dear Sally Collier,

We write as representatives of the leading Modern Languages subject associations in UK Higher Education and as members of Ofqual's Modern Foreign Languages Subject Group. We are encouraged that Ofqual has widened consultation amongst those working in Higher Education to inform its work on severe grading in MFL. The Modern Languages community in the UK greatly appreciates the opportunity to be involved in this way, and we are reassured that Ofqual continues to be actively engaged in understanding and addressing this vitally important issue. Those of us involved in a meeting on 13 November 2017 with Richard Garrett and Jonathan Clewes were impressed with the constructiveness of the approach, the openness of the dialogue, and the thorough approach to the necessary research on the many complex factors that affect grading in this subject.

The evidence of severe grading and its detrimental effects for the health of the subject was already considered persuasive by school teachers, university teachers and journalists investigating the issue in 2013, when *The Guardian* published an article entitled *Modern Languages in Freefall* and an open letter signed by some 80 signatories from HE Modern Languages departments and relevant subject associations. Ofqual responded constructively to this appeal for action, and set up a consultation which resulted in some adjustments. We are concerned that Ofqual and the exam boards' approach and methodology need to be modified further if the issue is to be addressed effectively, and greatly appreciate as a result your continued commitment to this area.

A joint letter from ALL, ISMLA, HMC and ASCL was sent to Ofqual on 6 July 2017 setting out key points including urgent recommendations, and disappointment that the issue of severe grading at GCSE was not being addressed. From an HE perspective, we fully endorse that letter, and agree that there is a fundamental unfairness in the historic anomaly which has meant that GCSE Modern Languages are graded more severely than other EBacc subjects.

The purpose of our letter is to urge Ofqual to accept that there is now sufficient evidence to demonstrate the severity of grading in MFL, both at A level and at GCSE, and that the steps necessary to rectify this anomaly need to be implemented with urgency. Intervention is vital not only for the health of the subject but also for the country at a time when the UK is in danger of becoming inward-looking and increasingly hostile to linguistic diversity and more than ever needs 'home-grown' linguists. Change will only materialise if young people are encouraged to feel that languages are valued as much as other subjects, and if they are enabled to pursue the subject with the confidence that their academic efforts will be fairly rewarded. We would urge Ofqual to play its crucial part in equipping young people with the intercultural competence and communicative versatility they will increasingly need if they are to play an effective part in a globally oriented world.

Yours sincerely,

Janice Carruthers
Professor of French Linguistics, Queen's University Belfast
AHRC Leadership Fellow: Modern Languages

Charles Forsdick
James Barrow Professor of French, University of Liverpool
AHRC Theme Leadership Fellow: 'Translating Cultures'

Neil Kenny
Professor of French, University of Oxford
Lead Fellow for Languages, British Academy

Katrin Kohl
Professor of German Literature and PI: Creative Multilingualism (AHRC)
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages
University of Oxford

Silke Mentchen
Senior Language Teaching Officer, Department of German and Dutch
Director of Outreach and Schools Liaison, Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages
University of Cambridge

Michael Gratzke
Professor of German and Comparative Literature, University of Hull
Chair, University Council of Modern Languages (UCML)

Catherine Davies
Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies
Director, Institute of Modern Languages Research
University of London

Bill Burgwinkle
Professor in Medieval French and Occitan Literature, University of Cambridge
President, Society for French Studies

Claire Gorrara
Professor of French, Cardiff University
President of the Association of University Heads and Professor French
Academic Lead for Routes into Languages Cymru, Wales

Margaret Littler
Professor of German, University of Manchester
President, Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland (AGS)

Isabel Torres
Professor of Spanish, Queen's University, Belfast
President, Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland (AHGBI)

Claire Honess
Professor of Italian Studies, University of Leeds
Chair, Society for Italian Studies (SIS)