

Consultation response form

Consultation closing date: 20 December 2013

Your comments must reach us by that date

New A levels: subject content consultation

If you would prefer to respond online to this consultation please use the following link: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the department.

The department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Richy Thompson	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name of organisation (if applicable): British Humanist Association	
Address: 39 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB	

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the department's [contact us](#) page.

Please mark a box that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> University	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher education institution	<input type="checkbox"/> Learned society
<input type="checkbox"/> School	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Pupil
<input type="checkbox"/> Academy	<input type="checkbox"/> College	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other

Please specify: Religion or belief group

Will you be responding to Ofqual's consultation on proposed changes to the assessment objectives and assessment arrangements?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
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Please specify: Not sure

Q1 Is the revised A level content in each of these subjects appropriate in view of the issues identified in Professor Smith's report? Please provide evidence to support your response.

1 a) Art and design

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments:

1 b) Business studies

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments:

1 c) Computing

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 d) Economics

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 e) English literature

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 f) English language

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 g) English language and literature

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 h) Geography

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 i) History

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 j) Science

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

1 k) Sociology

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

Q2 Will the revised A level content in each of these subjects enable students to progress to undergraduate study (particularly study in the same subject)? Please provide evidence to support your response.

2 a) Art and design

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 b) Business studies

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 c) Computing

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 d) Economics

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 e) English literature

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 f) English language

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 g) English language and literature

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

2 h) Geography

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments:

2 i) History

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments: The proposed subject content says that 'AS and A level specifications in History must encourage learners to: ... acquire an understanding of different identities within society and an appreciation of aspects such as social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, as appropriate'. Also 'Both AS and A level specifications must require learners to study: ... a range of appropriate historical perspectives, for example aesthetic, cultural, economic, ethnic, political, religious, scientific, social or technological.'

We are concerned that non-religious diversity and non-religious perspectives are excluded from these lists. Non-religious people have made an important contribution to the history of this country and elsewhere and their exclusion is inexplicable.

The latest Census recorded 25% of the population of England and Wales as having no religion,¹ while the most recent *British Social Attitudes Survey* found that 46% of the public does not belong to a religion.² Focussing on young people

¹ Office for National Statistics, 'Religion in England and Wales 2011', 11 December 2011: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html>

² NatCen Social Research, 29th British Social Attitudes Survey: <http://bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/>

specifically, the 2010 *British Social Attitudes Survey* (the most recent to segregate by age) records 65% of 18-24 year olds as not belonging to any religion.³ Meanwhile, the 2003 Citizenship Survey found 46% of 11-15 year olds not having a religion,⁴ while a 2004 Department for Education report found 65% of 12-19 year olds are not religious.⁵

In other words, a very large portion of the population, and a majority of young people, has no religion. To exclude the identities of those people arguably makes the subject less relevant to its audience.

It is also important from an equalities perspective to include non-religious beliefs on an equal footing to religious beliefs. There is no good explanation for taking one half of this equality strand while ignoring the other.

2 j) Science

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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³ 28th British Social Attitudes Survey – see page 195: http://ir2.flife.de/data/natcen-social-research/igb_html/index.php?bericht_id=1000001&index=&lang=ENG

⁴ Christine Farmer, '2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey' (Home Office and Department for Education and Skills, 2005), p. 37:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/452490.pdf>

⁵ Alison Park, Miranda Phillips and Mark Johnson, 'Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds' (Department for Education and Skills, 2004), pp. 10-11:
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR564.pdf.pdf>

Comments: We welcome the new section in the biology content on genetics and evolution. Scientists and educationalists tell us that the topic is central to biology, and genetics is a large and growing field in biology and biomedical science. Therefore its inclusion seems appropriate.

We welcome the addition of 'Working scientifically' sections. However we are concerned that nowhere in key stages 1-4 or here is there any requirement to cover the nature of evidence, of whether evidence is reliable and why it might not be, or of blinding or randomising trials. Such topics are particularly important at A Level and are surely not too advanced to merit inclusion.

2 k) Sociology

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

Q3 Are the new names for the A level subject content in Business studies (changed to 'Business') and Computing (changed to 'Computer science') appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

Q4 Is the revised AS qualification content in each of these subjects appropriate? Please provide evidence to support your response.

4 a) Art and design

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 b) Business studies

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 c) Computing

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 d) Economics

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 e) English literature

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 f) English language

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 g) English language and literature

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 h) Geography

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

4 i) History

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments: See 2 i)

4 j) Science

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments: See 2 j)

4 k) Sociology

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

Q5 Do you think that any of the proposals have the potential to have a disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on specific student groups, in particular the 'protected characteristic' groups? (The relevant protected

characteristics are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.) Please provide evidence to support your response.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
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Comments: See 2 i) and our concerns at the unequal treatment of religious and non-religious perspectives in history.

Q6 How could any adverse impact be reduced and how could the subject content of A levels be altered to better advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not? Please provide evidence to support your response.

Comments: By including 'and non-religious' alongside 'religious'.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply.

Email address for acknowledgement:

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, please confirm below if you would be willing to be contacted again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes

No

All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#). The key consultation principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected

Completed responses should be sent by post or email by 20 December 2013.

Send by post to:

A level reform team
Department for Education
Level 2 Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Send by email to: ALevelSubjectContent.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact:

Carole Edge
DfE consultation co-ordinator
Tel: 0370 000 2288
Email: carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.