



Response to the DfE Consultation on Advanced British Standard in March 2024

Preamble:

Prior to submitting the response, the Association for Language Learning actively engaged in the DfE regional consultation events and conducted an ALL webinar for its membership to gather insights that have framed the response.

Association for Language Learning's response to selected questions:

Question 11: *We propose several overarching aims and principles that should underpin the introduction and design of the Advanced British Standard. To what extent do you support these proposed aims and principles? If you have further views on this, please share below.*

ALL's response: Following a consultation with members of the Association for Language Learning, we are somewhat supportive of the overarching aims and principles, particularly with regards to broadening the curriculum and the amount of time students spend with a teacher in 16-19 education.

We also see the ABS as an opportunity for a re-positioning of languages in the 16-19 curriculum. Therefore, we would encourage the inclusion of languages, linguistic competence and intercultural understanding into the core aims and designs of the ABS. Furthermore, we would encourage the Government to explore the International Baccalaureate as an alternative to the ABS as we believe that this existing qualification meets the aims set out in this proposal.

Question 12: *What do you think is the most important thing that the Advanced British Standard could achieve?*

ALL's response: The ABS could achieve the following: a) to align the importance of vocational routes with academic routes and b) to offer a broader curriculum. Considering the proposal, we think it is important that more emphasis is given to the initial "higher ABS" option outlined in the October 2023 ABS documentation, as this will allow for a greater choice of subjects. The standard ABS won't give most students any flexibility as the majority

will have to choose maths and English as their minors. This flexibility should also be given to those choosing the occupational ABS. The members of the Association for Language Learning would welcome the inclusion of languages in the occupational route as languages, cultural and intercultural awareness are highly regarded by employers.

Question 14: *We propose two main programmes at Level 3: Advanced British Standard and Advanced British Standard (occupational). Each will contain a range of separate components to support students. To what extent do you support the proposed design for the Level 3 Advanced British Standard programmes? If you have further views on this, please share below.*

ALL's response: As previously mentioned, we oppose this as this doesn't align with the aim of broadening the curriculum and giving students greater choice. We would welcome to a greater focus on the feasibility of the higher ABS, which would allow subjects that are currently often marginalised, e.g. languages and arts, the required position within a broad curriculum.

Question 24: *If you have further views on how subjects will be included in these reforms at either Level 2 or Level 3, please share below.*

ALL's response: As the major representative body for language teachers in England, we are concerned that languages and arts could be reduced to "minor" subjects, which would have a detrimental effect on linguistic progression as well as progression to higher education. We therefore recommend that students should continue to be encouraged to engage with languages as a major option while the minor subject option should permit students to acquire a language from the beginning (ab initio) as well as continuing engagement with languages previously studied at GCSE. This would also build on the current EBacc ambition for languages.

We advise that Home, Heritage, and Community languages (HHCL) should be available as an option as part of a broader commitment to supporting the multiple languages spoken in the UK. In practical terms, this may need to be provided in a consortium approach and/or in partnership with HHCL Saturday schools. As previously mentioned, we strongly recommend that students who take the occupational route could have the option to study a language with a relevant vocational focus in the subject curriculum. Assessment and grading should be aligned to the levels and competence descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. A major language subject should align to the current A-level requirements of B2.

Question 25: *To what extent do you support the proposal for increased teaching time relative to self-directed study? We particularly welcome any evidence of how this is balanced currently.*

ALL's response: The Association of Language Learning has over the years argued for a greater time allocation for languages from Keystage 2 upwards. Due to the current time

constraints, additional time is welcome. However, we also need to recognise that recruitment and retention of teachers, including language teachers, has been a major concern and this could jeopardise the implementation of ABS significantly. With a reduced uptake of languages at university, the vicious cycle of language teacher recruitment continues. Therefore, actions will need to be taken now to secure a successful ABS implementation in 2033/34.

Question 35: *If you have further views on what students will study as part of the Advanced British Standard, or anything else covered in Chapter 2, please share below.*

ALL's response: The lack of modern language skills costs the UK economy around £48bn a year. Therefore, languages are of strategic economic importance. In addition, through languages students further develop their oracy and literacy skills. Employers often employ language students due to their transferrable skills set, their linguistic capabilities and their intercultural awareness.

We recommend non-statutory guidance that encourages students to include a language in their subject combinations, at major or minor level, with the option to study a language ab-initio in the minor route (assessed against the CFER). While we see the minor route as an opportunity to creatively expand provision of languages, we strongly caution against a situation where languages are only encouraged or provided at minor level. Further, resources should be prioritised to ensure equal languages provision across all providers and areas, therefore consideration of the supply of language teachers and language assistants is needed.

Question 36: *We have proposed assessment principles to underpin the Advanced British Standard. To what extent do you support these assessment principles? If you have further views on this, please share below.*

ALL's response: We oppose these principles as they are based on existing models. We are mindful that the technological advancements will impact considerably on how languages will be assessed considerably in the future and therefore this should be given considerably more consideration at this stage. The focus on 'rigorous, knowledge-rich, exam-based summative' assessment is not in line with a "minimised burden". We would like to see a commitment to authentic assessment as well as a reduction of the over-reliance on summative end of course assessment formats. There seems to also be an absence of a research project such as the EPQ or the extended essay in the IB.

Question 47: *If you have further views on how the Advanced British Standard could impact 16-19 providers, or anything else covered in Chapter 4, please share below.*

ALL's response: Careful consideration should be given in the next development stages of the ABS to the affordability at local level. We are concerned that school leaders may be forced to focus on the introduction of English and maths, as an underpinning feature of the ABS.

Considering the current 6th form funding, we are concerned that not sufficient funds will be available for schools to commit to a wide range of subjects and therefore languages could be jeopardised. To reduce this risk, a longer-term commitment to the EBacc ambition, ideally at cross-party level, is required to enable a somewhat smoother transition in 2033/34. We want to also reiterate that the proposed increase in contact time will have significant resource implications that schools won't be able to cover within current funding models.

Question 48: *What changes to pre-16 education do you think will be needed to create effective pathways into the Advanced British Standard?*

ALL's response: Many of our members have stressed that this reform is fixing the wrong problem. Without a more holistic reform of education, from primary through to further/higher education, ABS will be an expensive reform initiative that won't meet its ambition. Curriculum progression will need to be given careful consideration as part of this.

Question 52: *If you have views on how to ensure the Advanced British Standard provides effective pathways into post-18 education or study, please share below.*

ALL's response: Our understanding is that in previous A-level iterations, some high-tariff Higher Education Institutions have ignored AS qualifications and focused in on A-level subject only. Therefore, languages must be protected as a major subject, but considerations should be given to those having studied a language as a minor option when applying to university, particularly as many universities are offering ab initio language options.

The consultation response was submitted on 18th March 2024. The consultation is now closed.