

FCSE takes up languages challenge

Exam board AQA is now rolling out its FCSE (Foundation Certificate of Secondary Education) initiative which is designed to act as a linguistic bridge for pupils aged 11–14

From this term pupils can take French, German, Italian and Spanish and Mandarin Chinese at FCSE, covering the four skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. All assessment is carried out by the teacher in the classroom.

John Mitchell Director of Qualifications, Development and Support for AQA said: "We recognise that there is much to do to reverse trends

away from language learning at GCSE and AQA is determined to help schools by providing FCSE language options as a way of engaging and motivating students. FCSE fills a gap.

"Teachers told us that students who learn a Modern Foreign Language up to the end of Key Stage 3, but choose not to continue, have nothing to show for 3 (or more) years of language

learning. Languages are an important job qualification in a growing range of professions.

"By offering the FCSE in French, Italian, German and Spanish, we hope that schools find that they can highlight the increasing relevance of modern foreign languages to their students and relate this to the world beyond school, leisure, education and work.

"There are three levels of award: Pass Merit and Distinction covering National Curriculum Levels 4, 5 and 6. Pupils attempt assignments when a topic has been covered, at different stages in the course, and can re-take if required.

"Practice assignments are available. Teachers choose which units to cover and send AQA evidence from three of them for moderation."

SATS ~ the debate rolls on

A new report from the think tank Civitas reveals that 90% of secondary school teachers believe Key Stage 2 Sats results are inconsistent with pupils' actual capabilities

The knock-on effect for teachers of this artificial inflation is that it appears that they have made little or no progress with their pupils - or worse, that pupils have gone backwards. With 'value added' a key measure of school quality, secondary teachers frequently find inflated KS2 results put them under huge pressure to catch-up. One increasingly popular solution is for secondary schools to do their own testing.

Civitas found that nearly two-thirds of the schools they surveyed tested pupils on entry to secondary school in order to have a reliable benchmark for their pupils' subsequent progress. This means that the vast sums of money spent on KS2 testing are being wasted as their consumer, secondary schools, can't use the results.

Testing in education has become more about 'proving' that standards are rising than genuinely assessing standards. Civitas does not propose scrapping primary testing, rather, they propose setting tests where the schools are not forewarned on either the details of the test or the timing. This would provide a snapshot of learning rather than an attempt to gauge the sum of learning over a course

• *Meanwhile, Voice - the union for education professionals - has welcomed a report, Perspectives on Education: Primary Science published by the Wellcome Trust and researchers from Bristol and Durham Universities and its finding that science SATs are stifling children's curiosity in science and should be replaced by "moderated teacher assessment".*

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