

Taking a GCSE in a Home,  
Heritage, or Community  
Language – A guide for  
students and parents

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# Introduction

This guide is provided to support students, and their parents, who are preparing to take a GCSE in a Home, Heritage, or Community language. It is designed to work alongside the specification and other materials available on the Pearson Qualifications page, and not to replace them.

## Why take a GCSE in a Home, Heritage, or Community language?

Taking a GCSE in a HHCL is beneficial in several ways. Firstly, it can support with strengthening literacy skills in both English and the language of study. It can also help to improve communication between children, parents and teachers as well as developing cultural identity and a sense of belonging. A GCSE in a HHCL is an asset to a student as they consider their next steps in education or employment and can improve their confidence and self-esteem.

## Why Pearson Edexcel?

- **Engaging and popular topics**
  - Topics which students like and find motivating.
- **Manageable content**
  - Structured over five themes to be both clear and flexible.
- **Content and assessments that provide an engaging real-world focus**
  - Authentic situations and stimuli so language can be seen and used in context.
  - Learning about the culture of the target language country.
  - Allowing for spontaneity as well as grammar testing.
- **Straightforward assessments which are accessible to all candidates**
  - Clear and concise papers.
  - Carefully scaffolded questions where appropriate.
  - Papers are structured so that they build to the most demanding questions at the end.
  - Translations are progressive and appropriate to the tier.
- **Carefully selected texts**
  - Interesting and relevant texts.
  - Appropriate to the tier.
- **Clear and precise assessment criteria**
  - Candidates are rewarded appropriately for their work.
  - Clear expectations of candidates at each mark band.
- **Continuous progression**
  - Building a foundation for progression to A Level.

# Qualification aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this qualification are to enable students to:

- develop their ability to communicate confidently and coherently with native speakers in speech and writing, conveying what they want to say with increasing accuracy.
- express and develop thoughts and ideas spontaneously and fluently.
- listen to and understand clearly articulated, standard speech at near normal speed.
- deepen their knowledge about how language works and enrich their vocabulary in order for them to increase their independent use and understanding of extended language in a wide range of contexts.
- acquire new knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking through the ability to understand and respond to a rich range of authentic spoken and written material, adapted and abridged, as appropriate, including literary texts.
- develop awareness and understanding of the culture and identity of the countries and communities where the language is spoken.
- be encouraged to make appropriate links to other areas of the curriculum to enable bilingual and deeper learning, where the language may become a medium for constructing and applying knowledge.
- develop language-learning skills both for immediate use and to prepare them for further language study and use in school, higher education or employment.
- develop language strategies, including repair strategies.

# The themes of the course

Questions across all four language skills are set in common contexts, addressing a range of relevant contemporary and cultural themes. They are organised into five themes, each broken down into topics and sub-topics.

The five themes are:

## **1. Identity and culture**

Who am I?; Daily life; Cultural life

## **2. Local area, holiday, travel**

Holidays; Travel and tourist transactions; Town, region and country

## **3. School**

What school is like; school activities

## **4. Future aspirations, study and work**

Using languages beyond the classroom; Ambitions; Work

## **5. International and global dimension.**

Bringing the world together; Environmental issues

All themes and topics must be studied in the context of both the students' home country and that of countries and communities where the target language is spoken.

# Assessment overview

Assessment for this qualification is split over 4 exam papers covering reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. More detailed information on the assessment can be found in the specification for the relevant qualification.

## Tiers

Each paper is available at Foundation tier or Higher Tier and candidates must be entered for a single tier across all papers.

- Candidates taking the Foundation tier can be awarded grades 1 to 5.
- Candidates taking the Higher tier can be awarded grades 4 to 9.

For further advice on tiers please see the [guide to tier entry decisions](#).

## Paper 1 – Listening and understanding

Foundation tier – 35 minutes

Higher tier – 45 minutes

At both tiers the total time includes 5 minutes reading time for the candidate to read over the questions before listening to the recordings.

Candidates will need to understand vocabulary and structures from across all themes and topics. Questions are in a mixture of English and the target language and will include short response and multiple-choice questions.

## Paper 2 – Speaking

Conducted on a date set by the exam centre within an assessment window set by Pearson Edexcel.

Pearson Edexcel does not provide teacher-examiners to conduct this assessment. It is the responsibility of the centre to appoint a suitable person to conduct this exam. It is in the candidate's best interests that this person has a good understanding of the exam specification and is adequately trained.

Foundation tier – 7-9 minutes

Higher tier – 10-12 minutes

At both tiers there is 12 minutes silent preparation time directly before the exam.

Task 1 – a role play based on one topic allocated by Pearson Edexcel

Task 2 – questions based on a picture stimulus based on one topic which is allocated by Pearson Edexcel

Task 3 – conversation based on two themes. The first theme is based on the topic chosen by the candidate in advance of the assessment. The second theme is allocated by Pearson Edexcel.

Please see the separate Guide to Home, Heritage and Community Languages speaking exams for more detailed information on the requirements of this exam and how candidates should prepare.

## Paper 3 – Reading and understanding

Foundation tier – 50 minutes

Higher tier – 1 hours 5 minutes

Candidates will need to understand vocabulary and structures from across all themes and topics. Questions are in a mixture of English and the target language and will include short response and multiple-choice questions.

Candidates are assessed on their understanding of written language across a range of text types including advertisements, letters, articles, and literary texts.

Candidates are also required to translate a passage from the target language into English.

## Paper 4 – Writing

Foundation tier – 1 hour 20 minutes

Higher tier – 1 hours 25 minutes

Candidates respond to two (Higher) or three (Foundation) open response questions and a translation into the target language.

The foundation tier includes a photo-based task, a 40-50 word task and an 80-90 word task. They are also required to translate 5 sentences into the target language.

The higher tier includes an 80-90 word task, a 130-150 word task and a paragraph translation.

# Administration and general information

This section covers the administration of the exam and some general information that students and their parents may need to know.

## How to enter for the exams

The first thing to do is check with the Exams Officer, English as an Additional Language (EAL) coordinator or similar to see if it is possible to enter at the candidate's own school. It may be that the school is willing to enter candidates for HHCL exams. If this is the case, they will be able to explain everything that candidates need to do to ensure that the exam entry is made.

In some cases it is not possible to be entered at the candidate's usual school, so it may be necessary to seek another centre to be entered at. JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) provide a useful [search tool](#) for locating centres. There is also plenty of information about [entering as a private candidate](#) on the Pearson Edexcel website.

## Exam timetables

Exams are sat in the summer term in May – June. The [timetables](#) for these can be found on the Pearson Edexcel website. The speaking exam is not listed on the timetable, this is because the exam centre sets the date of this within an assessment window set out by Pearson Edexcel. These are subject to change each year but usually fall around early April to early May.

## Support and guidance

For more information about Pearson Edexcel Languages GCSEs please visit the [Languages page](#) of the Pearson Edexcel website. From this page it is possible to access the specification for each language, sample assessment materials, the past exam papers, and any additional materials which are available.

The Subject Advisor for Languages is also on hand for any queries about these qualifications via [teachinglanguages@pearson.com](mailto:teachinglanguages@pearson.com)