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School French updated for era of le tweeting et les tatouages

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Teenagers studying languages will learn how to chat about music festivals or boast about their tattoos under a new GCSE syllabus. The OCR exam board has ditched topics such as your family, pets, holidays or school day in an attempt to make the content more relevant and appealing to pupils.

Teenagers studying GCSE French will no longer learn phrases such as *Je mange un pamplemousse tous les matins* (I have a grapefruit every morning). Instead they could be asked to discuss: *A mon avis un tatouage discret est une expression de ta personnalité* (In my opinion a discreet tattoo is an expression of your personality).

Candidates learning GCSE German could be asked to consider a film review of the thriller *Lola Rennt* (*Run Lola Run*), while teenagers studying Spanish could study tweets on the Olympic Games.

One teacher told the exam board: "Students are not really going to meet somebody in a café in Paris and describe their entire family."

Changes have also been made to how

pupils learn grammar as well as introducing new techniques for reading foreign texts. The exam board also said it wanted to scrap vocabulary lists.

Katherine Smith, who is leading GCSE and A-level modern foreign language reforms for OCR, said that the courses were adopting skills similar to those taught on English as a foreign language courses.

"This entails moving away from working too long on a clichéd topic until a student is bored with it to working on more appealing subjects, and with an all-important shift in emphasis on the skills that they can transfer across content," she said.

The draft new courses, which would be taught from September next year, have been submitted to Ofqual, the exam regulator, for approval.

OCR's overhaul comes amid continuing concern about language learning. Figures published this year showed that the number of students taking foreign languages at university had slumped in recent years.

Entrants for modern language degree courses fell by 16 per cent

between 2007-08 and 2013-14, according to statistics published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

In 2013-14, there were 615 entrants for German degree courses, down 34 per cent on 2007-08, while French entrants have dropped by a quarter, to 1,775 starting courses in 2013-14. Italian entries fell 19 per cent in this period.

There are also signs that fewer students are likely to be studying languages at degree level in the future. Last summer's A-level results for England, Wales and Northern Ireland showed another slump in entries for the subject, with the numbers taking French down from 11,272 in 2013 to 10,433, while German has declined from 4,242 to 4,187.

There has been a steady decline in the number of pupils taking languages at GCSE, a fall that began soon after the previous government abolished the requirement for teenagers to study a language to GCSE in 2002.

The coalition government has brought in a requirement for pupils aged 7-11 in England to be taught a language in primary schools.