

Natural History FAQs

Q: Where did the idea for a Natural History GCSE come from?

Mary Colwell approached us in 2019 to discuss her campaign to address a gap in education content in relation to Natural History. Mary had gathered over 10,000 signatures on a UK Parliament Petition from schools, environmental organisations and individuals, in support of a development in the secondary school curriculum. Since then we have been working closely with Mary, the Natural History Museum, The Linnean Society, Field Studies Council and others to explore the purpose, design and delivery of such a Natural History GCSE. Visit [our website](#) to hear the podcast discussion between OCR Chief Executive - Jill Duffy and Tim Oates, Director of Assessment Research and Development for [Cambridge Assessment](#).

Q: How do you develop a new GCSE?

We have had conversations with a wide range of stakeholders and have set up a Strategic Advisory Board to start the process of developing a proposal around this new qualification. Our Board has acted as a forum to seek insight and advice in the development of our consultation, which focuses on a draft definition and themes. It is an important step in helping to shape early thinking about what a Natural History GCSE might look like – it will help us refine and shape the content of the qualification, anticipate and overcome difficulties in implementation, and be a litmus test of wide support. This is the first step in a process that will also need to reflect the views of Ofqual, the qualifications regulator in England, and the Department for Education, because the content and design of GCSEs is carefully controlled through legislation. We want to hear views from as many people as possible.

Q: What content will be studied?

We want to be sure that a Natural History GCSE offers something distinctive to existing GCSEs and would be deliverable in schools/colleges. We feel it should offer focussed, intensive field study of whole organisms in context, as well as exploration of our relationship with nature, including the way that art, literature and music have been shaped by, and shape, that relationship. This will mean it provides a unique contribution to the national qualifications offer. We'd love to hear your thoughts on content so please do engage with our consultation.

Q: Who will have the opportunity to study this GCSE?

We want it to be available as a choice for all Key Stage 4 students; it will be as relevant to urban schools as it will be to rural schools. It will be an additional choice for students, and interest to date has come from all segments of the education system, and all parts of the country. It will engage with the realities of the contemporary rural environment as well as the way that nature plays out in our urban settings.

Q: Who will teach this GCSE?

We know that Biology and Geography teachers will be well placed to deliver this qualification, but we have also had interest from other subject teachers. We are already working with the Natural History Museum, The Linnean Society and the Field Studies Council to plan professional development and support to help with the design of programmes and delivery.

Q: When will this GCSE be available?

Any new GCSE needs approval from Ofqual and the Department for Education. We are aiming for first teaching in September 2022.

Q: Who can participate in the consultation?

Our consultation is open to all - we are keen to hear everyone's views, from organisations to any individual with an interest in Natural History. We would particularly like to hear from as many young people as possible.

Q: What is the timeframe for the consultation?

Our consultation was launched on the 4 June 2020 and will be open until midnight on Sunday 19 July 2020. We look forward to reading and analysing all the responses and we are aiming to share the outcomes of the consultation later in the summer (2020).