



Embassy  
of the Republic of Poland  
in London

# GCSE POLISH GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Embassy of Poland in London



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# GSCE Polish

## Guide for Students and Parents

### State Examination of Polish as a Foreign Language at the GCSE Level in the UK General Certificate of Secondary Education<sup>1</sup>

In the UK, GCSE exams in Polish as a foreign language are usually taken by students aged 14 to 16.

The Polish language GCSE exam is part of the *General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)* series of exams. These are the main qualifications secondary school students take in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Polish language GCSE covers various aspects of the Polish language, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Students preparing for Polish language exams analyse themes related to, among other things, everyday life, education, free-time activities, travel, culture, and customs. The Polish language GCSE exam preparation program also involves deepening understanding of Polish grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

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<sup>1</sup> The literal translation of the phrase *General Certificate of Secondary Education* into Polish is *Powszechnie Świadectwo Edukacji Średniej*.

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## 1. A simplified overview of the educational stages in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom does not have a unified education system. Each country – England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – has its own education systems and unique qualification frameworks. Although the education systems of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are relatively similar, the Scottish system differs in several essential aspects, which is why this *Guide* has a separate section for the Scottish education system and the country's examination situation (see [1.3. Scotland](#)).

For a summary cross-section of the UK's education systems, see the chart compiled by *Eccctis* under [Educational Pathways](#).

British GCSE level exams in the UK (i.e., in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) are usually taken around age 16 at the end of compulsory schooling.

### 1.1. England and Wales

The education system is divided into five main stages<sup>2</sup>; each stage is called *the key stage*:

- KEY STAGE 1 – (Y1-Y2) – for children between the ages of 5 and 7 (year one and year two of primary school);
- KEY STAGE 2 – (Y3-Y6) – for children between the ages of 7 and 11 (from year three to year six of primary school);
- KEY STAGE 3 – (Y7-Y9) – for young people between the ages of 11 and 14 (year seven to year nine of secondary school);
- KEY STAGE 4 – (Y10-Y11) – for young people between the ages of 14 and 16 (year tenth and year eleventh of secondary school) – this is the time when most young people take their GCSE level exams;

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<sup>2</sup> Before primary school, there is a preschool stage, Early Years Foundation Stage, for short *EYFS*, for children ages 3 to 5. In descriptions the pre-school stages have been omitted for simplicity.

- KEY STAGE 5 – for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 – during this time, some of those remaining in the British education system are preparing for their A-level exams.

[Ofqual](#) is responsible for assigning qualifications to the appropriate levels in England.

[Qualifications Wales](#) is responsible for assigning qualifications to the appropriate levels in Wales.

## 1.2. Northern Ireland

- FOUNDATION STAGE – (Y1-Y2) – for children between the ages of 4 and 6 (year one and year two of primary school);
- KEY STAGE 1 – (Y3-Y4) – for children between the ages of 6 and 8 (year three and year four of primary school);
- KEY STAGE 2 – (Y5-Y7) – for children between the ages of 8 and 11 (year five to year seven of primary school);
- KEY STAGE 3 – (Y8-Y10) – for young people between the ages of 11 and 14 (year eight to year ten of secondary school);
- KEY STAGE 4 – (Y11-Y12) – for young people between the ages of 14 and 16 (year eleven and year twelve of secondary school) - this is the time when most young people take their GCSE level exams;
- KEY STAGE 5 – POST-16 – for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 – during this time some of those remaining in the education system are preparing for their A-level exams.

[The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations, and Assessment](#) is the institution responsible for assigning qualifications to the appropriate levels in Northern Ireland.

### 1.3. Scotland

Scotland's education system differs from the systems in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and it is distinct and independent. The 1998 Act granted the Scottish Parliament full control over education (devolution).

Below is a simplified overview of the Scottish education system leading to the GCSE level<sup>3</sup>.

- EARLY LEVEL CHILDCARE – (ELC-P1) – for children between the ages of 3 and 5 (covering nursery education and the first year of primary school);
- FIRST LEVEL – (P2-P4) – for children between the ages of 5 and 8 (covering the second to the fourth year of primary school);
- SECOND LEVEL – (P5-P7) – for children between the ages of 9 and 12 (covering the fifth to the seventh year of primary school);
- THIRD LEVEL – (S1-S3) – for young people between the ages of 12 and 15 (covering the first to third year of secondary school);
- SENIOR PHASE – (S4-S6) – for young people between the ages of 15 and 18 (covering the fourth to sixth year of secondary school). Young people prepare for National 4/5, Higher, and Advanced Higher-level exams<sup>3</sup> during this period<sup>4</sup>.

[The Scottish Qualification Authority](#) is responsible for assigning qualifications to the appropriate levels in Scotland.

#### 1.3.1. Examinations of the Polish language in the Scottish education system

There is no direct equivalent to the Polish as a Foreign Language exam at the GCSE level in Scotland. However, Scottish students can, between grades S3 and S6, take the exam called [The Modern Languages for Life and Work Award](#) at SCQF level 4 to obtain

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<sup>3</sup> You can read more about the Scottish education system [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> You can read more about the Scottish exams [here](#).



a qualification confirming their knowledge of Polish. This qualification ranks lower than GCSEs in terms of the exam requirements and level of demand.

For this reason, some young people attending Polish Saturday Schools in Scotland choose to take the Polish language GCSE examinations offered by the English exam board AQA (see 2.1). Preparation for these exams often begins as early as the last year of primary school, and students usually take the exams themselves between years S1 and S6.

Currently, the issues of exam centres for GCSE Polish language exams are intensively being revised. The Polish diaspora of educational communities in Scotland is actively working to make these exams more accessible to Polish language students. The aim is to enable more people to take the exams and obtain qualifications in Polish.

## 2. GCSE Examination

GCSE qualifications consist of a set of exams typically taken by those attending secondary schools in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland around the age of 16 (for Scotland, see 1.3.1). The exams cover a wide range of mandatory (see 2.1) and optional subjects. In England, the candidates receive grades expressed in numbers from 9 to 1 in each subject they take (where the number 9 refers to the highest grade and the number 1 to the lowest). In Wales and Northern Ireland, candidates receive grades expressed in letters from A\* to G in each subject they take (where the letter A\* refers to the highest grade and the letter G to the lowest). Scores for Polish as a foreign language at the GCSE level are given as numerical grades, regardless of the country where candidates take the exam (for more on grades, see 5.3.1).

### 2.1. Compulsory subjects at the GCSE level

English and Mathematics<sup>5</sup> are the compulsory subjects for the GCSE exams in England. Nonetheless, as part of a recommendation from the Department for Education, many

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<sup>5</sup> In Wales, one needs to take exams in science and the Welsh language.

secondary schools in England require the approach of five GCSE-level subjects under the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) program.

To obtain *EBacc*, you must pass GCSE exams in the following required subjects:

- English Language and Literature,
- Mathematics,
- Science<sup>6</sup>,
- Geography or History,
- A foreign language (any, including Polish).

Several exam boards, such as Pearson Edexcel, OCR, WJEC, AQA, and CCEA in Northern Ireland, offer GCSE exams. [AQA exclusively offers the Polish language at the GCSE and A-levels.](#)

## 2.2. Where can you take GCSE level exams?

GCSE exams can be taken at exam centres. Exam centres are authorised to organise and conduct state examinations at the GCSE and A-levels, among other levels. Examination centres may be managed by schools, educational institutions, training centres or other organisations<sup>7</sup> that have obtained the appropriate authorisation from the relevant educational/examination authorities.<sup>8</sup>

The main tasks of the UK examination centres include:

- Organisation of exams,
- Registration of candidates for examinations,
- Ensuring compliance with examination procedures and rules,
- Providing exam results to candidates,
- Ensuring the credibility and integrity of the examination process.

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<sup>6</sup> Under the heading of *science* there are two or three GCSE subjects, such as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and so on.

<sup>7</sup> An example of an examination centre that is not a school is [The Polish Educational Society Examination Centre in London.](#)

<sup>8,9</sup> Work is currently underway to open an examination centre in Scotland.

### 2.3. Where can you take Polish GCSE level exams?

Polish can be taken at an accredited exam centre offering exams provided by the AQA exam board, which, in most cases, is the child's state school. The list of accredited exam centres for AQA can be found [here](#).<sup>9</sup>

### 2.4. Where and to whom should I go to enrol my child for the GCSE Polish exam?

To enter your child for the Polish language examination, you should contact the head of MFL or an exam officer/exam coordinator at your child's secondary school.

### 2.5. When do I express my interest in taking the exam?

Expressing your willingness to enrol your child for the exam as early as possible is important. You can do this by speaking with representatives from secondary education institutions during open days before selecting a secondary school. Notifying the school about your child's intention to take Polish language lessons during the transition period between primary and secondary school is also recommended.

The AQA Examination Board offers examination centres to enter their students for the examination on a primary date (usually mid-February for exams in the summer session; (see 2.11). The exam centres may still accept applications after this date (late entry); nevertheless, it is combined with an increased entry fee for the exams (usually as part of a very late entry in April). See [here](#) for more information on AQA's dates for accepting enrolment from exam centres.

Please note that registration deadlines for Polish language GCSE exams may vary from one exam centre to another due to their internal regulations. It is advisable to declare your desire to take the GCSE Polish language exams no later than at the beginning of

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the school year in which you want your child to take the exams, and then at the beginning of January, ensure that your child is enrolled. It is best to contact the relevant exam centre for accurate information on the subject.

## 2.6. Who can take the Polish language GCSE exam?

From the perspective of the UK state exam regulators, the Polish language GCSE exam can be taken by anyone resident in the UK with no age restriction, usually in Y10 or Y11. In the case of languages, it happens that young people choose to take the exams in the earlier years. However, many centres authorised to conduct examinations reserve the right to accept children only from year ten (Y10). However, this is not a requirement of the exam regulators but an internal arrangement of some [exam centres](#). It is advisable to contact the relevant examination centre for accurate information on the subject.

## 2.7. What steps to take if the organisation of an exam is refused?

Exam centres typically enrol candidates in Polish language exams. However, if an examination centre refuses to enrol your child for the exam, you should inquire about the reason.

The most common reasons for refusals are:

- a. Lack of funds to organise the exam,
- b. Unfamiliarity with the requirements of the specification, difficulty in finding a suitably qualified person authorised to conduct the oral examination,
- c. Staff shortages, i.e., Polish-speaking teaching staff to enable support for the student taking the exam,
- d. The lack of a Polish language GCSE exam preparation courses at the school in question,
- e. Late information about the desire to take the exam, making it impossible to prepare the exams adequately,
- f. Child's age, some centres stipulate that they do not enrol children before year ten (Y10),

- g. Fear of lack of preparation and low exam results for the candidates.

After obtaining the reason for the refusal, seek a solution to the difficulty or, if no agreement is reached, search for another examination centre from the list of [accredited examination centres](#).

Possible solutions to the difficulties reported by the exam centre:

- a. Some people who enrol their child for the exam offer to find another funding source, including private funds, to organise the exam. Cost may include (i) an administrative fee (an entry fee), (ii) hiring an oral examiner, (iii) hiring an invigilator, and (iv) rental of the premises where the exam is held. In London schools, which are also exam centres, the cost of arranging exams ranges on average from £58.60 to £150. If the exam centre is not also a school, the cost of organising the exam increases. The administrative fee<sup>10</sup> is a fee required by AQA. In 2024, the administrative fee for enrolment in the Polish language on time for the foundation and higher tiers was £58.60<sup>11</sup>. Once the enrolment deadline is missed (*late entry*), an additional fee applies; 100% of the base application fee is added to the child's enrolment fee. When the enrolment deadline is significantly missed (*very late entry*), an additional fee is 150% of the base enrolment fee and is added to the child's enrolment fee.
- b. Some parents send their children to Polish language classes at one of the local Polish Saturday Schools in the UK or to private Polish language classes, which offer the assistance of qualified teachers who can answer all the exam officer's questions.
- c. It is advisable to hire an outside Polish language GCSE professional for a few sessions to support your child's preparation or ask a local Polish school for help.
- d. It is advisable to enrol your child in a preparatory course (at a Polish school or with a private tutor) for the exam and keep the English school updated on your

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<sup>10</sup> The exam administration fee can be checked annually on the AQA website: <https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/entries/entry-fees> [accessed: 10th May 2024].

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/admin/library/AQA-ENTRY-FEES-SUMMER2024.PDF> [accessed: 10th May 2024].

child's progress and predicted grade. You can also request a certificate from the educational institution organising the course to confirm the student's regular attendance.

- e. It is advisable to express willingness to take the Polish language exam as soon as possible (see 2.5).
- f. It is advisable to wait until your child reaches the appropriate age or search for another exam centre that accepts younger children.
- g. In this case, a mock exam of the Polish language is advised. Many schools choose to hold mock exams and have them checked by a GCSE Polish language teacher from outside the school. Another option may be to conduct tests with the child at home and hire a qualified professional to mark the work and determine the child's level of language proficiency.

## 2.8. Where can I enrol in the Polish GCSE level course?

You can enrol in a Polish language course at the GCSE level at a local Polish Saturday School (for a list of Polish Saturday Schools, see [here](#)) or hire a private Polish language teacher. Some English schools choose to hire a person to teach Polish at the GCSE Polish language level if more than a few candidates are willing to take the exam.

## 2.9. How many years should a GCSE preparation course last?

AQA recommends – but does not require – a two-year preparation course for the GCSE Polish. Polish Saturday Schools offer both year-long intensive courses and two-year courses, as the exam board recommends.

## 2.10. How many hours should a GCSE preparation course last?

AQA recommends – but does not require – between 120 and 140 hours of study under the guidance of a teacher<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Source: <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/languages/AQA-MFL-GCSE-FAQ.PDF> [accessed: 10th May 2024].

### 2.11. When are the GCSE Polish exams held?

GCSE Polish examination is held during the so-called summer exam series – every year, usually between April and June<sup>13</sup>. The first is a speaking exam, followed by reading and listening exams (both on the same day). The last exam is writing (see 5). Examination dates are published annually at the beginning of each new school year. You can find the dates of GCSE exams organised by AQA annually [here](#).

### 2.12. Do I need to enrol my child in a GCSE preparation course?

No, there is no such requirement from AQA. The child can prepare for the exam independently. Nevertheless, some exam centres require taking such a course. Preparing for an exam on your own can be challenging for candidates, so it is worth considering enrolling in a GCSE Polish exam preparation course.

### 2.13. Are the GCSE-level Polish language exams fee-based?

Yes, in many cases, GCSE Polish language exams are fee-based. The exam fee is usually charged to candidates by the school or exam centre where they take the exam. The cost of the exam may vary depending on the exam centre. However, many schools cover the cost of organising the exams. It is advisable to contact the relevant examination centre for accurate information on fees.

### 2.14. Whose responsibility is it to find a person to conduct the oral exam?

The exam centre should handle finding and assessing the qualifications or training of the person conducting the exam. However, they may ask for help finding the right person if they find it difficult.

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<sup>13</sup> Written exams are held between May and June. And the oral exam during the five-week exam window in late April and early May.

### 2.15. Can the examiner be a relative of the person taking the oral exam?

Generally, the person conducting the oral exam should not be related to the person taking the exam. However, in exceptional cases where there is a lack of a suitably qualified person to conduct the exam, the examination centre may request permission for a candidate's family member to participate as an examiner, provided that the examination centre employs them. If so, the conflict of interest should be reported immediately to [irregularities@aqa.org.uk](mailto:irregularities@aqa.org.uk).<sup>14</sup>

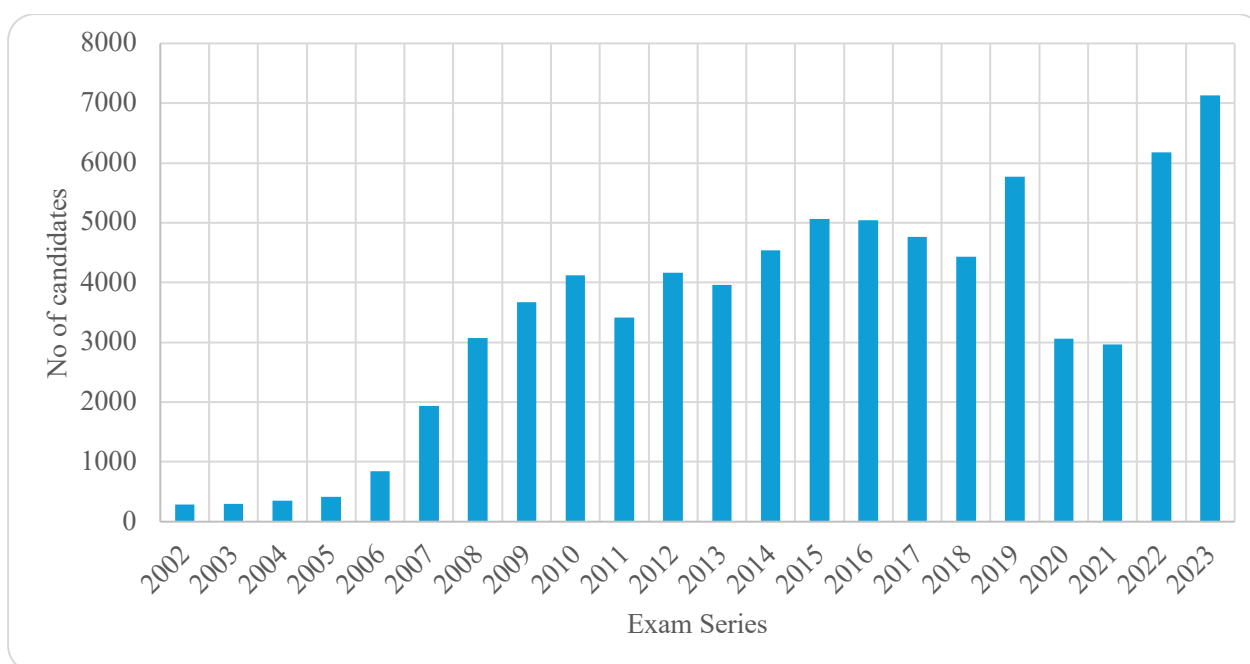
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<sup>14</sup> Source: <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/languages/AQA-GCSE-MFL-ICE-24.PDF> [accessed: 10th May 2024].



### 3. How popular are Polish language GCSE exams?

Polish language exams at the GCSE level are gaining in popularity. Apart from the periods of changes in the specification (e.g., 2018) and the global pandemic (2020 - 2021), the number of candidates for the GCSE exam has steadily increased. In 2023, it reached a record number of just over 7,000 candidates over the past 20 years, that is, Poland's entry into the European Union.



Img 1. Number of people taking the Polish language GCSE exam:<sup>15</sup>.

The two years during the pandemic showed the incredible determination of young people who, despite adversity – due to social and systemic reasons – have worked tirelessly to obtain qualifications in Polish as their heritage language.

<sup>15</sup> Kozińska, Maksi, *Gender Agreement and Null Subject Usage in Oral Production: A Study of Polish Heritage Speakers in England and the Impact of Supplementary Education* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Anglia Ruskin University, 2024)

#### 4. Specification – GCSE Polish 8688

Each specification carries its unique number. The number of specifications for GCSE Polish in effect as of 2017 is 8688. The Polish language specification is divided into five main sections: (i) introduction, (ii) specification at a glance, (iii) subject content, (iv) scheme of assessment, and (v) general administration. The GCSE Polish course should be based on specification number 8688 – the link to the *GCSE Polish 8688* specification can be found [here](#).

##### 4.1. Subject Content

The GCSE 8688 specification for Polish as a foreign language clearly defines learning content focused on three themes (see 4.1.1), scope of study and grammar (see 4.1.3), vocabulary (see 4.1.2), and communication strategies.

#### 4.1.1. Themes

The GCSE 8688 core curriculum is based on the three themes presented in Table 1. Each of the four exam sheets tests all three themes.

GCSE THEMES OF POLISH LANGUAGE (GCSE POLISH 8688)		
THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3
Identity and culture	Local, national, international and global areas of interest	Current and future study and employment
1.1. Me, my family and friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships with family and friends</li> <li>Marriage/partnership</li> </ul>	2.1. Home, town, neighbourhood and region	3.1. My studies
1.2. Technology in everyday life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media</li> <li>Mobile technology</li> </ul>	2.2. Social issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charity/voluntary work</li> <li>Healthy/unhealthy living</li> </ul>	3.2. Life at school/college
1.3. Free-time activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Music</li> <li>Cinema and TV</li> <li>Food and eating out</li> <li>Sport</li> </ul>	2.3. Global issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The environment</li> <li>Poverty/homelessness</li> </ul>	3.3. Education post-16
1.4. Customs and festivals in Poland	2.4. Travel and tourism	3.4. Jobs, career choices and ambitions

Table 1. Applicable topics for the GCSE Polish language exam: Polish-language study based on the GCSE Polish 8688 Specification.

#### 4.1.2. Vocabulary

When preparing for the GCSE Polish language exam, consider the list of mandatory vocabulary tested in the exam. It is essential to carefully read the list prepared by AQA, as it contains vocabulary that may be less commonly used in Polish-speaking homes. Both active and passive vocabulary knowledge is tested on each exam sheet. There may

also be vocabulary that is not on the mandatory vocabulary list. The list contains masculine expressions, but candidates must also learn feminine and neuter forms, e.g. if the list includes the adjective *zdrowy*, you must also know the forms *zdrowa* (feminine) and *zdrowe* (neuter gender). The list of required vocabulary for each exam level (see 4.2) can be found [here](#).

#### 4.1.3. Grammar

As with vocabulary, the exam board has also prepared exam requirements for grammar. The list of required grammatical content for each exam level (see 4.2) can be found [here](#).

## 4.2. Examination Tiers

Polish language GCSE exams can be taken at one of two levels – the foundation tier and the higher tier. They differ in the degree of difficulty and the way they are graded (see 5.1). A candidate must take all four components of the Polish language exams at the same level, i.e. all at the foundation or all at the higher tier.

When enrolling a child for an exam, in addition to basic personal information for verification processes, the exam centre may also ask about:

- Exam type – GCSE,
- The name of the exam board – AQA,
- Specification number – 8688,
- Specification number for the foundation tier – 8688/F,
- Specification number for the higher tier – 8688/H,
- UCI number.

The exam centre assigns a UCI (Unique Candidate Identifier) number, an individual identification number, to all those taking GCSE level exams. The UCI number helps exam boards and educational institutions accurately identify candidates along their exam path. It ensures that scores, coursework, and a history of marks earned are correctly assigned to the correct individuals and helps maintain the integrity and

security of the examination process. Each candidate receives a UCI number when registering for the exams through their school or educational institution.

If a child takes an exam at a centre that is also his or her school, the school provides the UCI number. If a child enrolls in an exam outside of his or her lead school, the assigned UCI number should be given to the new centre or a new number should be requested. It is important to inform educational institutions about the status of the UCI number to avoid assigning two numbers, which could make it difficult to collect the child's results in the right place.

## 5. Examination structure

A qualification such as the Polish language GCSE consists of four components/papers: three written and one oral, which take place over three days (see 2.11):

- Paper 1 – Listening,
- Paper 2 – Speaking,
- Paper 3 – Reading,
- Paper 4 – Writing.

Each paper is worth 25% of the total exam, so the results of the four papers add up.

### 5.1. Exam structure – foundation tier – GCSE Polish 8688/F

#### 5.1.1. Listening – 8688/LF

Paper 1: Listening at the foundation tier tests understanding and responding to different types of spoken language. The exam lasts 35 minutes (during this time, candidates have five minutes to read the exam sheet before the recording is played). There are 40 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam. The foundation tier listening exam sheet consists of two sections: A and B:

- Section A contains questions in English and requires an answer in English or non-verbal<sup>16</sup>.
- Section B contains questions in Polish and requires answers in Polish or non-verbal.

A sample listening exam sheet can be found [here](#).

The recording for the sample exam sheet can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample exam sheet can be found [here](#).

### 5.1.2. Speaking – 8688/SF

Paper 2: Speaking at the foundation tier tests communicating and interacting effectively in speech for a variety of purposes. The exam consists of two main parts: a twelve-minute preparation time and a recorded oral exam consisting of three components: a role-play (up to two minutes), a picture [photo card] description (up to two minutes), and a general conversation on two of three themes (see 4.1.1) that is three to five minutes long. The candidate chooses one theme for the general interview.

The recorded part of the exam usually lasts between 7 and 9 minutes.

There are 60 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam.

Foundation Tier		
Time to prepare	12 minutes	
Role-play	2 minutes	15 marks
Image description	2 minutes	15 marks
General conversation	3-5 minutes	30 marks
Duration of the exam:	7-9 minutes + preparation time	TOTAL
		60 marks

Table 2. Format of the oral examination in Polish at GCSE level - Foundation Tier

<sup>16</sup> AQA classifies a response as non-verbal when it is expressed by a letter or number.

A sample speaking paper can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample speaking exam paper can be found [here](#).

### 5.1.3. Reading – 8688/RF

Paper 3: Reading at the foundation tier tests understanding and responding to different types of written language. The exam lasts 45 minutes. There are 60 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam. The paper consists of three sections: A, B, and C:

- Section A contains questions in English and requires an answer in English or non-verbal<sup>17</sup>.
- Section B contains questions in Polish and requires answers in Polish or non-verbal.
- Section C contains a translation from Polish to English (for a minimum of 35 words)

A sample reading exam paper can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample exam paper can be found [here](#).

### 5.1.4. Writing – 8688/WF

Paper 4: Writing at the foundation tier tests communicating effectively in writing for a variety of purposes. The exam lasts one hour. There are 50 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam.

The paper, at the foundation tier, consists of four tasks:

- The first task is to describe the picture/photo in four sentences. The visual material is presented in black and white. This task allows you to earn eight marks

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<sup>17</sup> AQA classifies a response as non-verbal when it is expressed by a letter or number.

for communication, two marks per sentence if the relevant message is clearly expressed in Polish (e.g., *The family is eating a meal.*)

- The second task requires writing a short speech (blog, letter, etc.) of about 40 words on a topic. In their statement, the candidates should refer to the four sub-points in the instruction.
- The third task is translating five sentences (at least 35 words) from English into Polish. The ability to convey information in Polish with appropriate grammatical and lexical structures is tested. You can get 5 marks for providing the main information. Another 5 marks can be obtained for grammatical and lexical correctness.
- The last task is guided writing, which is supposed to result in an essay of about 90 words. Candidates choose one topic from two options.

A sample writing paper can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample exam sheet can be found [here](#).

## 5.2. Exam Structure – higher tier – GCSE Polish 8688/H

Sample exams at the higher tier, examiners' reports, and mark schemes can be found [here](#).

### 5.2.1. Listening – 8688/LH

Paper 1: Listening tests understanding and responding to different types of spoken language. The exam lasts 45 minutes (during this time, candidates have five minutes to read the exam sheet before the recording is played). There are 50 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam. The paper consists of two sections: A and B:



- Section A contains questions in English and requires an answer in English or non-verbal<sup>18</sup>.
- Section B contains questions in Polish and requires answers in Polish or non-verbal.

A sample listening exam sheet can be found [here](#).

The recording for the sample exam sheet can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample exam sheet can be found [here](#).

### 5.2.2. Speaking – 8688/SH

Paper 2: Speaking tests communication and effective oral interactions in various communication situations.

The exam consists of two main parts – a twelve-minute preparation time and a recorded oral exam consisting of three components – a role-play (up to two minutes), a picture description (up to three minutes), and a general conversation on two of three themes (see 4.1.1) of five to seven minutes. The candidate chooses one theme for the general interview. The recorded part of the exam usually lasts between 10 and 12 minutes. There are 60 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam.

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<sup>18</sup> AQA classifies a response as non-verbal when it is expressed by a letter or number.

Higher Tier		
Time to prepare	12 minutes	
Role-play	2 minutes	15 marks
Image description	3 minutes	15 marks
General conversation	5 -7 minutes	30 marks
Duration of the exam:	10 -12 minutes + preparation time	TOTAL
		60 marks

Table 3. Format of the oral examination at GCSE level in Polish - Higher Tier

Sample speaking exam papers can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample speaking exam paper can be found [here](#).

### 5.2.3. Reading – 8688/RH

Paper 3: Reading at the higher tier tests understanding and responding to different types of written language. The exam lasts one hour. There are 60 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam. The reading paper consists of three sections: A, B, and C:

- Section A contains questions in English and requires an answer in English or non-verbal<sup>19</sup>.
- Section B contains questions in Polish and requires answers in Polish or non-verbal.
- Section C contains a translation task from Polish to English (for a minimum of 50 words)

<sup>19</sup> AQA classifies a response as non-verbal when it is expressed by a letter or number.

A sample reading exam paper can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample exam paper can be found [here](#).

#### 5.2.4. Writing – 8688/WH

Paper 4: Writing at the higher tier tests communication and effective interaction in writing in various communication situations. The exam lasts one hour and 15 minutes. There are 60 marks to be earned from this part of the exam, which is 25% of the entire GCSE exam. The exam at the higher tier consists of three tasks:

- It begins with guided writing, which is supposed to result in an essay of about 90 words. Candidates choose one topic from two options.
- The second task is to write a longer essay in Polish on one of the two topics on one of the sub-topics of the themes, in Polish, for about 150 words.
- The last task is translating a text of at least 50 words from English into Polish. The translation task earns points in two categories: transferring relevant information and applying relevant grammatical and lexical knowledge.

A sample writing paper can be found [here](#).

The mark scheme for the sample exam sheet can be found [here](#).

### 5.3. Assessment objectives

At this educational level, testing all modern foreign languages in the UK is based on four general assessment objectives (AOs).

CLARIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES / EXPECTED SKILLS		
Assessment objectives	Skills	Weight
A01	Listening – understand and respond to different types of spoken language	25%
A02	Speaking – communicate and interact effectively in speech	25%
A03	Reading – understand and respond to different types of written language	25%
A04	Writing – communicate in writing	25%

Table 4. Assessment objectives are detailed in the Polish language specification at the GCSE 8688 level.

The Examination Board indicated during the introduction of the new specification that this examination does not map onto the language proficiency scale of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.<sup>20</sup>

#### 5.3.1. Assessment

Examination results are presented on a nine-point scale from 1 to 9, where 1 is the lowest grade, and 9 is the highest. The result can also be expressed by the letter U, which means no classification. Candidates at the foundation tier of the nine-point grading scale can receive grades from 1 to 5. If the person taking the exam does not meet the criteria for a grade of 1, he or she is then given a score of U.

Candidates at the higher tier can receive grades from 4 to 9 on a nine-point grading scale. If the candidate taking the exam does not meet the criteria for a grade of 4, he or

<sup>20</sup> Council of Europe (2001) *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. Online edition: "<https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97> [accessed: 15th May 2024]

she is then given a score of U. See Table 5. for a proposed simplified explanation of the grades expressed in numerical terms.

PROPOSED EXPLANATION OF THE GRADING SCALE AT THE GCSE LEVEL
THE GRADING SCALE
9 (OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE)
8 (VERY GOOD PLUS)
7 (VERY GOOD)
6 (GOOD PLUS)
5 (GOOD)
4 (SUFFICIENT)
3.2 (NEEDS IMPROVEMENT)
1 (INSUFFICIENT)
U (UNCLASSIFIED)

*Table 5. A proposed simplified explanation of the grading scale at GCSE level*

The scores for the individual paper break down as follows:

- Foundation tier: listening = 40 (marks) x 3/2, speaking = 60 (marks), reading = 60 (marks), writing = 50 (marks) x 6/5. A total of 240 marks are available.
- Higher tier: listening = 50 (marks) x 6/5, speaking = 60 (marks), reading = 60 (marks), writing = 60 (marks). A total of 240 marks are available.

### 5.3.2. How many marks should you get for the highest grade?

It is worth noting that assessment criteria may vary slightly between different exam series, depending on factors such as the papers' difficulty. Table 6 illustrates these slight differences in grading thresholds. For example, to get a grade 5 at the foundation tier in 2019, you had to score at least 179 marks out of a possible 240, but in 2023, it was enough to score 155.

EXAM SERIES	Foundation tier	Higher tier	maximum number of marks to be scored
2019 <sup>21</sup>	179	212	240
2021 <sup>22</sup>	125	151	180 <sup>23</sup>
2022 <sup>24</sup>	152	200	240
2023 <sup>25</sup>	155	198	240

Table 6. The table shows the number of marks that had to be earned for the highest grade at each tier (grade 5 for the foundation tier and grade 9 for the higher tier) on the three selected 2019, 2022 and 2023 exam series.

### 5.3.3. Current GCSE exam results

Candidates taking the Polish language GCSE exams are generally well prepared and achieve high grades. For example, 83.1% of candidates in 2022 and 2023 received a score of 7 or higher<sup>26</sup>.

### 5.3.4. Where and when can I receive my exam results?

GCSE exam results can be collected on the day they are announced in August at the exam centre where the exam was taken. They are available each year in the second half of August. The date of the announcement of the results is posted annually [here](#).

<sup>21</sup> Source: [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat\\_pdf/AQA-GCSE-GDE-BDY-JUN-2019.PDF](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-GCSE-GDE-BDY-JUN-2019.PDF) [accessed: 10th May 2024]

<sup>22</sup> Source: [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat\\_pdf/AQA-GCSE-2-GDE-BDY-NOV-2021.PDF](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-GCSE-2-GDE-BDY-NOV-2021.PDF) [accessed: 10th May 2024]

<sup>23</sup> The reduced number of marks is dictated by the lack of an oral exam during the pandemic.

<sup>24</sup> Source: [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat\\_pdf/AQA-GCSE-GDE-BDY-JUN-2022.PDF](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-GCSE-GDE-BDY-JUN-2022.PDF) [accessed: 10th May 2024]

<sup>25</sup> Source: [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat\\_pdf/AQA-GCSE-GDE-BDY-JUN-2023.PDF](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-GCSE-GDE-BDY-JUN-2023.PDF) [accessed: 10th May 2024]

<sup>26</sup> Source: [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat\\_pdf/AQA-GCSE-STATS-JUN-2023.PDF](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-GCSE-STATS-JUN-2023.PDF) and [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat\\_pdf/AQA-GCSE-STATS-JUN-2022.PDF](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-GCSE-STATS-JUN-2022.PDF) [accessed: 10th May 2024]

## 6. The benefits of GCSEs in Polish

Passing the Polish language exams carries several benefits, including:

- Developing language skills: taking the course and passing the Polish language GCSE exam enables the development of reading, writing, listening comprehension and speaking skills in Polish at a level beyond the child's home communication.
- Developing literacy in both languages<sup>27</sup>: research shows that learning a second language positively impacts children's educational performance.
- Developing language skills base: this allows you to solidify the basics of the Polish language, enabling you to take the British A-level Polish Baccalaureate.
- Understanding one's roots: the Polish language GCSE programme includes the study of Polish culture and customs, allowing candidates to understand their roots and culture better.
- Additional grade in the high school application: a well-passed Polish language exam raises the grade point average when applying to high school.
- Passing Polish GCSE exams can increase the chances of future studies and a good career. Taking Polish GCSE exams can be useful when applying for higher education, especially in fields related to language, culture, or international relations, but that is not all. The ability to formally speak any additional language, as evidenced by appropriate certifications, is always well-received in personal statements during the recruitment process. It is also an additional asset on a CV during a job search.
- Maintaining contact with Poland and relatives from the country of origin: skilful use of the Polish language will help maintain and cultivate family ties with relatives in Poland.
- Boosting self-confidence: The ability to express oneself freely opens up new professional and educational prospects for people. It also boosts self-confidence and the ability to build and understand interpersonal relationships.

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<sup>27</sup> Source: Cummins, Jim, *Rethinking the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Critical Analysis of Theoretical Concepts*, Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights, 19 (Bristol, UK Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Multilingual Matters, 2021).

## 7. Final Information

The information in this *GCSE Guide* is current at the time of publication. Still, it may be subject to obsolescence with the dynamically changing examination situation and should be reviewed regularly by those who use it. The author and the publishers of *the GCSE Guide* shall not be liable arising from the use of the information contained herein. Any clarification regarding the exams should be sought from your exam centre and directly from AQA at the [website](#), or by calling 01423 534 381 or emailing [mfl@aqa.org.uk](mailto:mfl@aqa.org.uk).





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