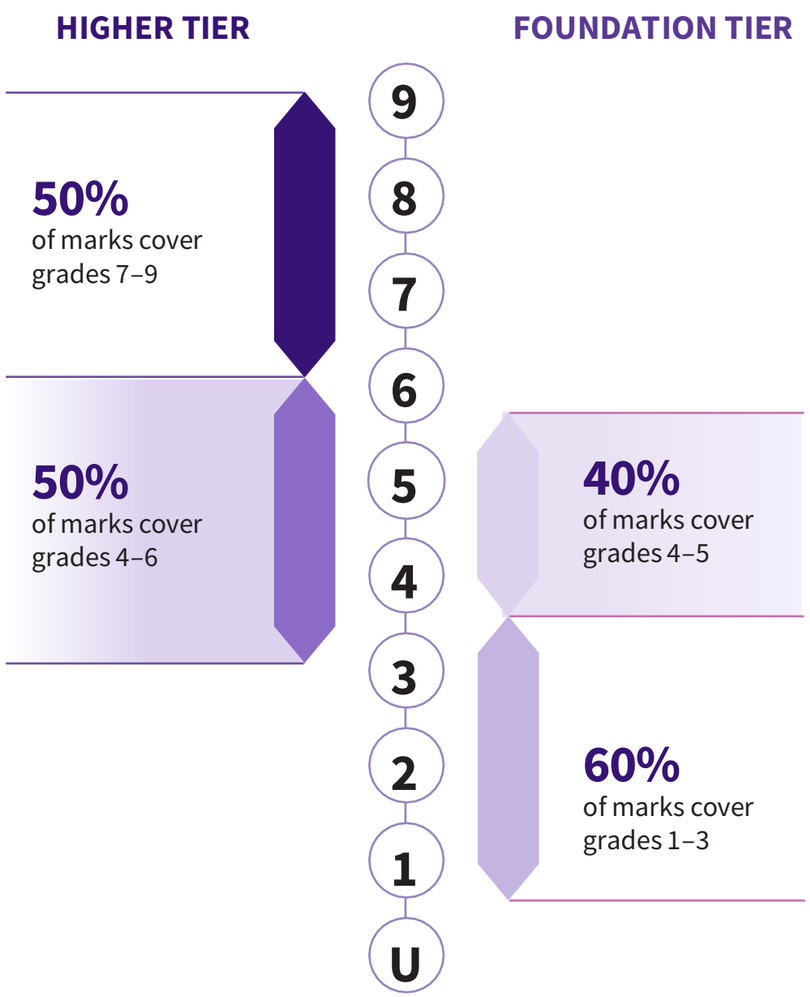
GCSE MFL Grade 4 and 5 students: Foundation or Higher – what's best?

For most students taking the new GCSEs (first exams Summer 2026) in French, German and Spanish, appropriate tier choices are relatively straightforward. However, for potential grade 4 and 5 students it can be more uncertain. There are a number of factors to consider.

How are the marks targeted in Listening and Reading papers in each tier?



Foundation tier reaches Grade 5.

The most straightforward questions on Higher tier papers target **Grade 4**.

Foundation and Higher papers contain a number of questions common to both tiers. **Students who are unable to answer many common questions in sample assessments are unlikely to have a good experience at Higher tier,** as **two-thirds of the paper** is aimed at students expecting a **Grade 6 and**

Students aiming to achieve a grade 4 in a language at GCSE will be able to access more marks in the Foundation tier than the Higher tier.

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Key considerations

Did the student perform consistently well on the common questions (questions that feature in both tiers) in Papers 1 and 3 aimed at Grades 4 and 5 in mock exams?

Is the student confident in dealing with the more complex language and grammatical structures which will be used in Higher tier papers?

Does the student consistently meet the requirements of the higher mark bands in speaking and writing?

How does the student deal with Listening and Reading questions identified in the sample paper commentary booklets as medium demand at Higher tier?

Is the student able to comfortably respond to unseen tasks which are more open ended in the Higher tier writing paper? What about the translations (Reading and Writing)?

Taking the answers to the questions above into consideration will help decide the most suitable tier for your student.