Dear …..

It is with both shock and grave concern that I/we received the information from the AQA Examination Board that it is planning to axe the AL exam in Polish. The final cohort of students would take the exam in June 2018. A similar fate is facing three other minority languages provided by AQA: Hebrew, Bengali and Panjabi. This information is the more surprising since the government and the Ministry of Education are making every effort to promote the study of languages in UK schools. Since the 90’s, when taking a foreign language was no longer compulsory at GCSE level, there has been a marked drop in the numbers of candidates studying foreign languages to examination level. This has caused grave concern, as knowing another language is seen as a gateway to another history and culture. Dropping Polish – and other modern foreign languages - at AL is definitely giving the wrong message to young people, prospective candidates of the abandoned exams. By discontinuing the examination in Polish and keeping other languages available to candidates, the examination board is not providing equal opportunities for UK’s largest minority.

While all four languages are considered to be community languages, taken exclusively by native speakers, this is not the case with Polish, which is also a modern foreign language spoken by the members of a large European Community country with strong economic and historic ties with this country. The Polish AL exam is also taken by businessmen, translators, social service workers, policemen and others, interested in solidifying links with Poland.

Polish people in the UK have traditionally formed cohesive communities, which are well integrated into their local neighbourhoods. These communities establish and support local Polish Saturday Schools, which teach Polish culture and Polish language within the British environment, leading to British public examinations and culminating in the nationally recognised A-level qualification. It should be noted that most Polish A-level candidates sit the examination at their local British school, so their results have a positive effect on the schools’ overall results. There are currently over 130 Polish Saturday Schools in the UK, grouped under the Polish Educational Society umbrella, with the number increasing year on year. The number of students attending a Polish Saturday School exceeds 15000 and is forecast to rise significantly in the coming years. Additionally many candidates prepare for these exams through various forms of distance learning.

Helping young immigrants to understand their roots and heritage integrates them better with their peers. A multicultural society allows for this, enriching the fabric of the nation. It is also a known fact that the simultaneous study of two or three languages at an early age develops the brain and facilitates the study of other languages in later years.

Scrapping the Polish A Level exam is a very short sighted decision. The Polish community in the UK is planning and aggressive campaign in the hope of reversing this AQA decision. With the forthcoming elections just weeks away I/we would like to feel that we have your support on this issue.

Yours sincerely,