The GCHQ National Language Competition – Frequently Asked Questions

The frequently asked questions about the GCHQ National Language Competition

FAQs

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How do I register?

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The NLC is running from Monday, 16 November till Friday, 20 November. Teachers, students and home educators can register their participation on the **NLC platform.**

How many teams can our school enter?

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In terms of quantity of teams, there is no limit. We would, however, encourage you to advertise the opportunity and only make teams for the students that are planning to actively compete. Individual teams can have up to four participants.

What are the timeframes for the NLC?

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The competition opens on Monday 16 November 2026 at 07:00. Students can compete between 07:00 and 22:00 from Monday to Thursday. On the last day, Friday 20, students can compete between 07:00 and 18:00.

Please note that teams are not required to compete for the full duration of the competition. Each team has a standard 25-hour allocation which they can use flexibly, with additional time provided for students who are eligible for extra time

What does the competition involve?

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Teams from around the UK will compete against each other to solve language-based challenges and score points. The NLC challenges vary in difficulty and are worth different numbers of points accordingly.

A key part of the NLC is that it requires no previous language skills – our aim is to inspire language learning by encouraging students to discover their aptitude for learning languages. For example, many of the challenges involve rarer languages or made-up languages so students can get involved even if they have never studied a foreign language before.

This year, we have introduced a new format and more easy challenges to improve accessibility.

What resources will students need in order to participate?

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All that is required is a device (computer, laptop, tablet etc.) and connection to the internet to take part. Access to the wider internet is permitted as part of the competition. We would recommend you ensure your device is updated to the latest version of internet browser and operating software, and that your school system does not block JavaScript, to ensure the competition experience is as smooth as possible for your students.

Do teams have to be made up of students studying the same language? / Can students who are not studying languages take part?

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There is no requirement for students to be studying the same language or have any previous language experience.

Is the NLC free?

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Yes! There is no charge to students or schools.

Can home educated students take part?

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We welcome home educated participation (of eligible age). We simply ask for an adult to act as a representative for each team participating.

What do I need to do?

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Our aim is to make the NLC as simple as possible. As a teacher/adult representative, you will need to:

- look out for any email updates from the NLC mailbox.
- create an account on our platform when registration becomes live.
- advertise the NLC to your students.
- create teams for them on the NLC platform.
- facilitate contact between your students and the NLC team if the students have any questions.

The NLC team are on hand to help via the NLC mailbox (nlc@gchq.gov.uk) during the hours of 8am-5pm Monday to Friday. These hours are extended to align with platform opening times during competition week. If there's anything we can do to support you or your school, then please do get in touch.

Which year group can participate in the NLC?

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The NLC is a national competition aimed at Yr9 (England/Wales), Yr10 (NI), S2 (Scotland) students. We hope this competition will enthuse students about language learning in time to inform their GCSE (or equivalent) option choices.

PUBLISHED

4 June 2025

REVIEWED

4 June 2025