Global Assessments

New Directions Series, Uzbekistan

Post-Conference Report

10March 2023

Tashkent

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# **Context**

Uzbekistan’s national development strategy prioritises economic development and education reform to build capacity to make ambitious plans happen. Recent national education strategy documents prioritise the relevance and quality of education, the internationalisation of education standards, new approaches to foreign language teaching, learning and assessment, transnational education and international partnerships in education.

English reform has been one of the most important areas of the British Council’s work in Uzbekistan for over 26 years, with major highlights that include the development of national standards for English teaching, the reform of pre-service teacher training in 18 universities in Uzbekistan, the development of the national English for Specific Purposes curriculum benefitting 40+ universities, the development of 24 hubs across Uzbekistan to deliver the English for Teachers and English for Academics programme, and the shaping of English medium instruction approaches in 16 universities in Uzbekistan. Among recent initiatives in collaboration with the Ministry of Pre-school and School Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, we are mapping the professional development journey of an English teacher in public education and are developing major principles of Continuing Professional Development ( CPD); in addition, we have undertaken modern English Curriculum and assessment consultancies and embarked on our flagship programme, called *Future English,* that aims to understand and address the perceived issue of the low level of English skills of school leavers and to develop solutions to bring about sustainable change.

To complement our work in language learning, teaching and assessment, the British Council New Directions in English Language Assessment conferences held in November 2021 and March 2023 provided a forum to consider perspectives and insights on trends and approaches in English language assessment, focusing very much on local national contexts.

The 2023 New Directions conference in Uzbekistan took place within the ‘Year of Quality Education’ announced by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and follows on from a highly successful online New Directions event in 2021 which brought together over 700 policy makers, teacher educators and teachers.

# **Themes and Objectives**

## **Themes**

Below are the themes of the 2023 British Council New Directions in English Language Assessment Conference:

### **Comprehensive Learning System**

The key elements of learning systems (curriculum, delivery of curriculum and the assessment of the outcomes of the curriculum) need to be aligned around common standards, such as the CEFR, for effective learning and teaching to take place. Misalignment leads to poor student outcomes.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Language assessment policy cannot occur in a vacuum. It is vital that all key stakeholders are involved in the development of polices to ensure their success.

### **Four-skills Testing, Teaching and Learning**

Traditional tests of just two skills (reading and listening) or traditional grammar and vocabulary multiple-choice tests have negative washback on teaching and learning and do not lead to gains in language proficiency. Communicative language tests of all four skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) are necessary to promote communication skills and encourage improved communicative competence.

### **Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment is as essential as summative assessment, and teachers need to be trained at PRESET and INSET to be assessment literate.

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Tests need to be accessible to all by adhering to clear Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies.

# **Objectives**

Below are the objectives of the 2023 British Council New Directions in English Language Assessment Conference:

## **Shared understanding**

* To engage with major stakeholders and support a clear strategic vision and shared understanding of assessment as an integral part of reforms in language education policy
* To achieve a shared understanding of the need to align national standards/curriculum, delivery and assessment for better learning outcomes
* To unpack the fundamental principles behind modern communicative quality tests and clarify how these can inform pedagogical practices to ensure better student outcomes
* To respond to the national reform agenda and strengthen partnership work with education institutions and professional and youth networks in the area of assessment

## **Informed policy-making and planning**

* To facilitate multi-stakeholder discussions on the goals of national education reform and the role of assessment in these goals
* To identify the priorities for English language assessment in Uzbekistan for the next 3 – 5 years
* To facilitate the building of a Community of Experts, who work together to help formulate, disseminate, and promote best practices and Thought Leadership in assessment.
* To encourage the use of quality assessments as a basis for evidence-based policy- and decision-making
* To identify feasible and measurable language proficiency targets

## **Quality and Inclusivity**

* To promote understanding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies in assessments
* To understand the journey and roadmaps to achieve national, regional and local objectives around language

Key conference data



# **Making the Learning System Comprehensive**

One of the main themes of the conference was the Comprehensive Learning System. This section will present four main challenges to ensuring comprehensiveness in the English language education system in Uzbekistan and offer solutions to addressing them. It should be emphasised that significant effort and cooperation will be required amongst all key stakeholders to overcome these challenges. The British Council’s language teaching and assessment specialists are ready to support the Ministry of Pre-School and School Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and to work with them and other institutions to find ways to make this happen.

## **Challenge 1: Uzbekistan Partnership Contract for Education Reform**

The National Partnership Compact (Compact) (GPE) aims to ensure the prioritisation and operationalisation of education reform interventions in the Republic of Uzbekistan during the mid-term period of 2023-2026, in order to ensure equitable access to transformative quality education.

## **Solution 1.1: Theory of Change (Uzbekistan Partnership Contract for Education Reform)**

Curriculum and Teaching and Learning Resources, Teachers Professional Development, and Learning Assessment Systems are key pillars in the Theory of Change outlined in The National Partnership Compact (Compact).

To move ahead with the prioritisation and operationalisation of education reform interventions outlined in the Compact, this current report stresses the importance of ensuing these interventions are:

* built around the Comprehensive Learning System
* give equal importance to all four skills
* rely on recent data and are evidence-based
* involve all key stakeholders
* are inclusive and provide equitable access to quality education
* and enable educational institutions in all sectors to develop their own locally appropriate objectives.

## **Solution 1.2: Theory of Action**

An explicit plan needs to be developed (Theory of Action) to achieve the aims of the Compact. The British Council can support the development of such a plan, which should include:

* SMART targets and objectives
* resources needed
* milestones
* stakeholder engagement plan
* communications plan
* monitoring and evaluation plan
* and a plan for readjustments based on evidence.

It is important to note that any plan needs to be based on evidence acquired from quality four skills assessments to understand the current levels of proficiency amongst students (and teachers). Quality standardised four-skills assessments will provide robust data to make decisions around the targets, allocation of funds, training needs, etc. Such data then has the potential to be used as a baseline to measure later gains in proficiency after targeted inventions and to be used for accountability of funding/spending from the government. Without accurate and robust data from the onset, plans may be over ambitious or focused on areas that are not a priority, leading to non-meeting of goals, lack of stakeholder buy in and confidence and more importantly, non-improvements in language proficiency amongst students due to false assumptions or non-robust data as input for decision making.

## **Challenge 2: Systemic Alignment**

Based on the Comprehensive Learning System (O’Sullivan, 2020), curriculum, delivery and assessment must be aligned to ensure quality language education. The curriculum must clearly define the expected outcomes of the learning journey, from pre-school to university, clearly specifying what is expected at key stages across the education system. It is also critical that teacher training and the classroom materials and assessment resources (both formative and summative) be based on these same outcomes. The outcomes which all of the elements are based on must have been informed by common standards (such as the CEFR).

## **Solution 2.1**

To ensure curriculum, training and assessment have been informed by common standards, the British Council can support the Ministry of Pre-School and School Education and the Ministry of Higher Education to:

1. Review the national English Language curriculum to ensure its alignment to the common standards of the CEFR is explicit and clear to teachers, textbook designers, teacher trainers and test developers. If it is found not to be clear, this can be addressed through an addendum and/or notes. The curriculum should clearly define expected outcomes at key stages in the education system.
2. Develop teacher training (PRESET and INSET) and delivery models (local curriculums, materials) that are aligned to/informed by a set of common standards (CEFR), ensuring it has been made explicit how this alignment has been achieved. There should be an explicit focus in the teacher training element regarding how to assess the curriculum’s outcomes (see 1 above). Furthermore, the materials must have been developed or selected to enable teachers and students to achieve the outcomes of the curriculum.
3. Develop or localise existing standardised, quality four-skills assessments, for both formative and summative use, which have been aligned to/informed by a set of common standards (CEFR). These assessments will serve as a source of measurement for the efficacy of the education system.

## **Challenge 3: Professionalisation of English language teaching**

To improve English language teaching and assessment skills at a national level, instructors need access to high quality training, both in PRESET and INSET - all in turn becoming part of their Continuing Professional Development journey. It is vital that this training gives them the knowledge and the practical skills to be able to select and/or design valid and reliable assessments for formative and summative purposes. Teachers also need to be able to score appropriately and reliably, particularly the productive skills, and to use the information generated from these assessments to communicate results (for both formative and summative purposes) in a meaningful and appropriate way. With these skills, they will be able to better understand the effectiveness of their own teaching and will position Uzbekistan as a centre of teaching and assessment excellence in the region.

## **Solution 3.1**

To ensure that national PRESET and INSET are high-quality and impactful, the British Council can provide help and guidance to the Government of Uzbekistan in the following areas:

1. PRESET – in order to better understand the effect of the revised module on assessment literacy, an impact study should be commissioned to understand the efficacy of the revised teacher training materials.
2. INSET – there needs to be a clear and sustained focus for in-service teachers on assessment literacy, with a particular emphasis on the productive skills. In order to ensure the success of this programme, a needs analysis should be carried out to ensure that the training in INSET programmes is relevant and impactful. It would be useful to follow a similar framework to that used in the PRESET module. National plans for teacher training (curriculums) need to be regularly revised and modified according to local and national needs.
3. Teaching skills - a skilled specialist workforce with a high level of competence across the teaching skills must be developed through long-term investment in capacity building, ongoing flexible opportunities for development and establishment of Communities of Practice with sharing across institutions. This can be achieved through practical experience (e.g., international placements and/or internships) or academic learning (Master’s level, PhD and post-Doctoral placements).

## **Challenge 4: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

Establishing a clear and coherent policy to ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), which comprehensively supports learners with disabilities.

## **Solutions 4.1**

To ensure the development and implementation of a clear and coherent EDI policy in Uzbekistan, the British Council can support the Ministry of Pre-School and School Education and the Ministry of Higher Education to:

* Develop policies and good practice around test development and test administration to meet the needs of learners with disabilities, with the British Council sharing best practice from Aptis.
* Collate relevant data to inform decisions to make education more inclusive.
* Initiate a small pilot project with key stakeholders including the NGO Shariot Plus to understand the needs of exam candidates with visual impairment and pilot exam materials (Aptis) from the UK to start making reasonable adjustments to test development and test administration.
* Develop a module around inclusion in further revisions of the national PRESETT curriculum.

# **Key Performance Indicators**

In order to assess the extent to which the challenges identified in this report have been overcome, the British Council recommends using the following as measures of success.

|  |  |
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| Key Performance Indicator | Detail |
| 1. Improvement in general English proficiency amongst the student population
 | * Use of quality 4-skills language tests as markers of proficiency
* Impact studies
* Providing teachers and students with appropriate support to be able to reach targets
 |
| 1. Implementation of English language teaching and assessment priorities outlined in the national Compact
 | * Systematic Project Management of the objectives laid out in the action plan (regular retrospectives and forward-planning.
 |
| 1. Achievement of ALTE Q-Mark for national tests
 | * Test development and capacity building of local teams
 |
| 1. Teacher understanding of CEFR and national English Language curriculum objectives
 | * Alignment of curriculum to common standards, adding an addendum if required
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# **Conference agenda (appendix)**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Activity** | **Details** |
| 08.30-09.30 | Registration  | Registration  |
| 09.30 -10.00 | Opening & Housekeeping | Alisher Abidjanov, *Vice Rector,* *Uzbek State World Languages University*, Denise Waddingham, *Country Director British Council Uzbekistan*, H.E. Tim Torlot, *British Ambassador to Uzbekistan*, Sherzod Nematov, head of division. *Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations, Laziz Hojakulov, Head of Strategic Development division, Ministry of Preschool and School Education.*. |
| 10.00 -10.40 | Plenary 1 | **Building Better Learning Systems: The CEFR and the Comprehensive Learning System**Professor Barry O’Sullivan, *British Council* |
| 10.40 -11.10 | Interactive Discussion | **Implementation of the Comprehensive Learning System in Uzbekistan**Aidan Holland, *British Council (Discussion Chair)*Professor Barry O’Sullivan, *British Council*Avazbek Abbosov, *Agency for Assessment of Knowledge and Competences*Sardor Radjabov, *Department of Education Quality Assessment, Licensing and Accreditation within the Ministry of Pre-school and School Education*Kamola Muradkasimova, *Uzbek State World Languages University*  |
| 11.10 -11.40 | **Tea Break and Networking** |
| 11.40 -12.20 | Plenary 2 | **Teacher Education and Assessment: PRESETT Assessment Module**Yayra Abduraimova & Nodira Isamukhamedova, *Uzbek State World Languages University*  |
| 12.20 -13.00 | Pitch Panel | **Holistic Education Reform: Overcoming the Challenges**Aidan Holland, *British Council (Panel Chair)*Elena Volkova, *Westminster International University in Tashkent*Nilufar Begibaeva, *British Council Uzbekistan*Erkin Mukhammedov, *Westminster International University in Tashkent*Umida Khakimova, *Agency for Specialised Educational Institutions*Eleanora Menglieva, *Mercy Corps* |
| 13.00 -14.15 | **Lunch** |
| 14.15 -14.55 | Parallel Workshops | **Assessing Writing through Authentic Tasks**Erkin Mukhammedov, Elena Volkova*Westminster International University in Tashkent*Svetlana Khan, *Mercy Corps.* | **Understanding and Applying Formative Assessment in the Classroom**Aidan Holland, *British Council*Yayra Abduraimova, *Uzbek State World Languages University*  | **Looking at Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) (EDI) in Language Testing and in the** **Classroom**Gemma Bellhouse, *British Council*Andrey Maksakov, *British Council Uzbekistan*Jamilya Gulyamova, *British Council Uzbekistan* |
| 14.55 -15.00 | *Break* |
| 15.00 -15.40 | Parallel Workshops | **Assessing Writing through Authentic Tasks**Erkin Mukhammedov, Elena Volkova*Westminster International University in Tashkent*Svetlana Khan, *Mercy Corps.* | **Understanding and Applying Formative Assessment in the Classroom**Aidan Holland, *British Council*Yayra Abduraimova, *Uzbek State World Languages University* | **Looking at EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) in Language Testing and in the** **Classroom**Gemma Bellhouse, *British Council*Andrey Maksakov, *British Council Uzbekistan*Jamilya Gulyamova, *British Council Uzbekistan* |
| 15.40 -16.00 | **Tea Break and Networking** |
| 16.00 -16.40 | Plenary 3 | **Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Testing**Gemma Bellhouse, *British Council* |
| 16.40-17.00 | Closing | Denise Waddingham, *Country Director British Council Uzbekistan*, Alisher Abidjanov, *Vice Rector,* *Uzbek State World Languages University* Keshav Sreedharan, *British Council Regional Exams Director Wider Europe* |

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