



Language Testing and Assessment in the UK

This document is written by **UKALTA, the UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment**, and aims to provide a brief overview of:

- what UKALTA is and who our members are
- why we exist and what we do
- why language learning is important in the UK
- why language testing and assessment are important

What is UKALTA?

UKALTA is a professional organisation that aims to provide a forum for the exchange of information and research on language testing and assessment in the UK. Founded as a professional association and learned society in 2016, UKALTA grew out of the [Language Testing Forum](#), an annual gathering of UK-based language testing and assessment specialists which has met since 1980.

Who are UKALTA's members?

[Membership](#) is free of charge to individuals with a professional and/or academic interest in the field of language testing and assessment and who are working, studying or living in the UK (or have strong UK connections). Current membership stands at over 300, with a healthy balance of members from academia, education and industry, including a growing number of early career scholars and postgraduate research students.

Why do we exist?

UKALTA exists to support the language testing and assessment research and practitioner community in the UK and to mentor new and emerging researchers and professionals in the field. We also aim to facilitate greater awareness of professional issues in language assessment and to improve (language) assessment literacy for both specialist and non-specialist audiences. We aspire to be a highly visible source of professional expertise to which educational and corporate bodies, government and the media can look for input related to improving language assessment in the UK.

What we do?

UKALTA's activities are guided by five organisational [aims and objectives](#):

- exchange of information and research
- training and professional development
- collaboration across UK language education
- awareness-raising and advocacy
- outreach and public engagement.

To fulfil these aims and objectives, UKALTA engages in a range of regular and occasional activities, including: a [2-day annual academic conference](#); offering [funding for training and professional development](#) events; [support for postgraduate research students](#) and early career researchers; [collaborative projects](#), e.g. relating to the use of English language tests for access to UK Higher Education, and to the development of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in language education; [contributions to public discourse and debate](#) on language testing and assessment matters.

UKALTA belongs to the British Academy's Network of Learned Societies and Subject Associations, the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) and the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA), participating regularly in national meetings of these bodies. It is also a member of the Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLIE) and is affiliated to the [International Language Testing Association](#) (ILTA). UKALTA promotes the ILTA [Code of Ethics](#) and ILTA [Guidelines for Practice](#) as important principles for professionals working in the field of language testing and assessment.

Are we interested in the assessment of languages other than English?

Historically, UKALTA's roots lie in the field of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and much of our focus has been on L2 English assessment, including English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English as an Additional Language (EAL). Nevertheless, our interests and concerns extend beyond English to include modern foreign languages (e.g. French, Spanish, Arabic) and other national languages taught or spoken in the UK (e.g. Welsh), as well as less widely taught or spoken languages, including heritage and community languages.

UKALTA is eager to contribute to research and discussion on the assessment of a broad range of languages in the UK, and to learn from scholars already working in those areas. We seek to share knowledge and collaborate with other UK-based organisations and stakeholders focusing on language education issues, including academics, policymakers, teachers and test providers (e.g. [BAAL](#), [UCML](#), [WJEC](#)).

UKALTA collaborates actively with peer testing and assessment organisations in Europe, including the [European Association of Language Testing and Assessment \(EALTA\)](#) and the [Association of Language Testers in Europe \(ALTE\)](#), both of whom represent the range of languages spoken across the European continent and are committed to the principles of multilingualism and plurilingualism. For example, UKALTA is currently working closely with British Council, EALTA and ALTE to develop accessible procedures for aligning language education with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.

Why are language skills important in the UK?

The [strategic importance of language skills](#) in the UK has recently been acknowledged at the highest level, particularly in the wake of Britain's exit from the EU and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Good communication, including additional/foreign language skills and intercultural competencies, is considered essential to the solving of global as well as national challenges. Language skills enhance employability, enabling people to navigate multicultural environments, be sensitive to cultural difference, and thus be better at conceiving events and issues from multiple viewpoints. Languages are also sociocultural resources to be cherished and nurtured; recognition

and support for the languages of minority and indigenous populations is critical to creating multilingual societies as well as for effective cross-cultural communication.

In 2020 the development of a [national languages strategy](#) was proposed as a way of halting the drastic decline in UK language teaching and learning in schools and universities over recent years and reviving language education from early years through to adulthood.

Why are language testing and assessment important?

A holistic, system-wide approach that will reverse the current decline and revive language education in the UK for the future must include attention to the ways in which language teaching and learning are assessed, i.e. classroom-based assessment practices and [learning-oriented assessment \(LOA\)](#), as well as standardised language testing and the integration of language within professional and vocational qualifications (e.g. for the health professions or the aviation industry). Fair, valid and meaningful assessment of linguistic ability is crucial as a means to demonstrate ability and encourage further learning, as well as open the door to educational and employment opportunities. A recent recommendation for [increased partnerships across the language education and skills community](#) matches well to UKALTA's aims and aspirations as a professional association, particularly with regard to matters of language assessment in school-based and vocational settings. One aspect of this is the creation of an accessible UK-wide cross-sector framework for language competence and qualifications.

As a discipline and a field of professional practice, testing and assessment should contribute to a society where quality data is gathered to inform sound decision-making for the common good and where opportunities are awarded on the basis of talent, effort and achievement rather than wealth, class or other social categorisation (i.e. race, gender, disability). But tests can also be used as a convenient political tool to show that something is being done, or to achieve policy objectives beyond what a test was originally designed to assess. So [the role of assessment within a socio-political landscape](#), including language tests used for high-stakes purposes such as professional registration or migration/citizenship, needs to be well understood and effectively monitored.

UKALTA is keen to contribute positively to a better understanding of the principles and practice of language assessment in education, employment and public policymaking. We are also committed to assisting with the development of language assessment tools that are fit for purpose and adhere to the values of fairness and justice, as well as to ensuring that their use is appropriate and enhances the common good.

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