



www.ukalta.org

17 June 2020

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Raab,

I am writing to you in my role as President of the *UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment (UKALTA)* on behalf of our Executive Committee and our Membership to request that the UK Government commits to immediate, long-term funding for the British Council in order to secure its future.

Together with fellow learned societies and subject associations belonging to the UK's *Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA)*, UKALTA is extremely disturbed to learn of the threats currently facing the British Council (BC) and its future operation. We are aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the suspension of most of the BC's English language teaching operations around the world as well as the closure of many of its testing centres. We appreciate that this will have a drastic effect on the financial reserves of the Council and its capacity to continue its globally significant work in English language education. The British Council is a major provider of English language teaching and testing worldwide, running more than 200 schools around the world plus over 40 test centres. In the past year, over 4 million people took an English exam with the British Council, generating £125 million for UK exam bodies and the economy, some of which goes directly to support the activities described later in this letter.

Many UKALTA members have been closely involved with the BC during their careers in English language teaching, learning and assessment and are enormously grateful for the support and encouragement they received. We often started out our professional lives as English language teachers, initially training on a BC-delivered course and/or teaching in a BC school in different parts of the world. Some of us went on to undertake work for the Council as fulltime employees in test development and research, or as freelance language testing researchers and consultants working on BC-initiated projects. From the 1980s onwards, many of our now internationally-recognised scholars took the IELTS test (part-owned by the BC) in order to access higher educational opportunities or to progress their professional careers within the UK.

Historically, the British Council has made a significant and enduring contribution to the field of language testing and assessment (LTA) since the BC was founded in 1934. Its impact and legacy to LTA is well documented in a recent academic volume (Weir & O'Sullivan, 2017, *Assessing on the Global Stage: The British Council and English Language Testing 1941-2016*). The BC played a key role in the 'modernisation' of language testing in the 1960s (e.g. the Davies Test), the communicative language testing movement from the 1980s onwards (i.e. ELTS/IELTS) and, most recently, the transition to technologically delivered language assessment (Aptis).

Since the 1970s, the Council has given generous support to both UK and international language testing professionals through: involvement with BC projects; commitment to funding innovative research projects (e.g. IELTS Joint-funded Scheme and the Assessment and Research Group grants); invitations and funding to speak at major international conferences (e.g. annual Language Testing Research Colloquium, *New Directions* events in Latin America and in East Asia; speaker sponsorship at regional conferences in Asia).

Council support has facilitated the establishment of several professional organisations. A BC grant helped us to set up UKALTA in 2016 and to establish the BAAL Testing and Evaluation SIG, and the organisation continues to sponsor many UK-based and international events run by professional associations. This enables both early career and more experienced scholars to share their research, knowledge and experience for the benefit of the wider educational and social community. In addition, the BC contribution to The International Research Foundation's (TIRF) Doctoral Dissertation Awards allows individuals from less prosperous regions of the world to complete PhD studies in the field of international English language education.

The current funding crisis faced by the British Council following the closure of much of its teaching and testing activity worldwide puts at risk the continuation of this vital British organisation and threatens its impact in education and society. We are naturally concerned at the devastating impact the funding gap is likely to have on the Council and its workforce, but we anticipate it will also impact negatively on many in the wider language testing and assessment community, both in the UK and beyond. This will in turn affect future capacity to undertake LTA research and development and may damage the UK's international reputation in this important area of social science.

For these reasons, we are joining with the *University Council of Modern Languages (UCML)*, the *Association of University Professors and Heads of French (AUPHF)* and the *Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA)* to appeal to the UK government to both protect and strengthen funding for the British Council.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Lynda Taylor
President of the *UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment (UKALTA)*