



Kevin Foster MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
(Minister for Safe and Legal Migration)
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
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28 June 2022

Dear Minister,

1. The Justice and Home Affairs Committee has now concluded its inquiry into the Life in the UK Test. We would like to thank you for appearing before the Committee on 17 May. Over the course of this inquiry, we took evidence from international experts, academics and policy experts, and we spoke to a small number of people who took the Test. Our work builds upon the recent inquiry work undertaken by other Select Committees.¹ This letter sets out the Committee's conclusions (noted below in bold text) and recommendations (bold and italicised). We would be grateful for a response by 19 August 2022.
2. The stakes are very high for anyone taking the Life in the UK Test, which prospective citizens and (most) prospective permanent citizens must pass. Those taking the Test as part of an application for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) face severe delays to their settlement if they fail the Test.² They may even face deportation, the loss of their livelihoods, and separation from their families.³ Others are taking the Test as part of an application for British citizenship. You told us—and we agree—that “taking the step of becoming a British citizen should be seen as significant, a commitment to the country.”⁴ The logic of this acknowledgement is that the Test must be appropriate.
3. Nevertheless, you told us that a reform of the Life in the UK Test and of its associated handbook was not your priority.⁵ A review was first proposed in 2018, when the Lords

¹ See Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, [The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century](#) (Report of Session 2017–2019, HL Paper 118); Liaison Committee, [The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century Follow-up report](#) (5th Report, Session 2021–22, HL Paper 179); and House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, [Citizenship and passport processes relating to Northern Ireland: Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2021–22](#) (Second Special Report of Session 2021–22, HC 787)

² Written evidence from Zoe Bantleman ([LTN0008](#))

³ Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#)) and Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

⁴ [Q 31](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁵ [Q 29](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement was conducting its work.⁶ In 2020, the Government was still “considering a review”.⁷ Earlier this year, you told the Liaison Committee that a review would only “potentially” be launched as part of an undetermined “wider package of change on citizenship”.⁸ When we met you a few weeks later, you told us that the Government only intends to set out the terms of reference of the review “over the next 12 months”, making the review itself a remote prospect.⁹

4. **The Government should treat seriously a reform of the Life in the UK Test and of its associated handbook as a matter of priority. We are astonished that the Government has not yet conducted its long-overdue review, ignoring recommendations from select committees. The proposed timing, with no end date, is inadequate. We see no reason to delay it any further.**
5. **The Government should immediately set an end date by which a review is to be completed and published.**

Requirement to demonstrate “sufficient knowledge about life in the UK”

6. The requirement for prospective citizens to demonstrate “sufficient knowledge about life in the United Kingdom” was introduced in 2002¹⁰ and later extended to prospective permanent residents (applying for ILR).¹¹ The British Nationality (General) Regulations 2003 provides that such “sufficient knowledge” must be demonstrated by passing the Life in the UK Test—the content and syllabus of which is decided upon by the Home Secretary.¹²
7. This requirement was designed as an invitation for prospective citizens and permanent residents to embark on a “learning journey”.¹³ You told the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that the Test “ensures that people who are committing to become British citizens have knowledge of our values, history and culture.”¹⁴ As part of this journey, applicants are supported to acquire linguistic skills and practical knowledge about life in the UK. They are encouraged to play an active role in a cohesive society that embraces diversity. If they need it, a handbook guides them throughout this journey, and then forms the basis of a Test, a rite of passage with symbolic value.¹⁵

⁶ Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, [The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century](#) (Report of Session 2017–2019, HL Paper 118); Letter from Lord Greenhalgh, Minister of State for Building Safety and Communities to The Rt Hon The Lord McFall of Alcluith, Chair of the Liaison Committee. dated 28 April 2020 <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4133/documents/40824/default/>

⁸ Liaison Committee, [The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century Follow-up report](#) (5th Report, Session 2021–22, HL Paper 179)

⁹ [Q 20](#) (Kevin Foster MP), see also [Government response](#) to the report Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, [The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century](#)

¹⁰ See the British Nationality Act 1981, [Section 6\(1\)](#), as amended by the [Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#) (NIAA)

¹¹ [Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules](#) (Laid on 19 March 2007) HC 398

¹² See the [British Nationality \(General\) Regulations 2003](#).

¹³ [Q 1](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan)

¹⁴ House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, [Citizenship and passport processes relating to Northern Ireland: Government response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2021–22](#) (Second Special Report of Session 2021–22, HC 787), Appendix 3

¹⁵ [Q 2](#) (Madeleine Sumption), written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)), and written evidence from Professor Peter J Spiro ([LTN0006](#)).

8. We were told that the Test, in its current form, may be perceived differently. All five people we talked to who had recently taken the Test were unsure what the Test intended to achieve.¹⁶ Two contributors wondered whether the Test was designed to filter applications for citizenship or ILR, describing it as “an additional barrier” or “a resilience test”.¹⁷ This sentiment was echoed in much of the expert evidence we received.¹⁸ Witnesses told us that there was no evidence the Test is having a positive effect on social cohesion, which was regarded by our witnesses as of very great importance, and which is also the strong view of the Committee.¹⁹ We were even told that the Test may alienate some candidates, reducing their appetite for active participation in society.²⁰
9. **Social cohesion, education, active participation, and the celebration of prospective citizens and permanent residents are at the heart of the requirement to demonstrate sufficient knowledge about life in the United Kingdom. We fully endorse that approach, centred on social cohesion, a matter of primary importance. We note with concern that those taking the current version of the Test may experience it differently.**

The current handbook

10. The Test is closely related to the *Life in the United Kingdom* handbook. As you told us, someone taking the Test “only need to read the handbook, and that is the only material that [they] will be tested on”.²¹ In other words, the Test is a test on the handbook.
11. The current handbook was described as a “mockery”²² trying to create “a particular image of British traditions and values” in evidence we received.²³ Its content was described to us as “impractical”, “inconsistent”, “trivial”, “outdated”, and “false” to such an extent that the handbook is “undermining British values”.²⁴ Professor Frank Trentmann, Professor of History at Birkbeck, University of London, was of a similar view. His research led him to the conclusion that the handbook is “fomenting distrust” and “treating new citizens as unthinking, mindless masses”.²⁵ Professor Peter J Spiro, Charles Weiner Professor of Law, Temple University, notes that, seen from the United States of America, “the question most identified with the UK test related to the appropriate action to take after spilling a beer on someone at the pub”, adding that “that question is still cited even after its removal from

¹⁶ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022). See also written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#)), Dr Amy Clarke ([LTN0012](#)) and Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

¹⁷ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

¹⁸ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)), Professor Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#)), Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#)), Zoe Bantleman ([LTN0008](#)), Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#)), Prof. Dr. Patricia Jerónimo ([LTN0010](#)), Dr Amy Clarke ([LTN0012](#)) and Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#)).

¹⁹ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)), Professor Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#)), Professor Peter J Spiro ([LTN0006](#)), Zoe Bantleman ([LTN0008](#)) and Prof. Dr. Patricia Jerónimo ([LTN0010](#))

²⁰ Written evidence from Dr David Bartram ([LTN0001](#)) and from Professor Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#))

²¹ [Q 25](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

²² Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#))

²³ Written evidence from Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

²⁴ Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#))

²⁵ Written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#))

later editions of the test”.²⁶ The handbook, in other words, is not respected at home or overseas.

12. These criticisms were particularly strong in relation to the history chapter. Professor Frank Trentmann, analysing this chapter, identified “a consistent pattern in which key events are bowdlerised and manipulated”. Citing examples of insensitive content on slavery, Nazi Germany, and decolonisation, he argues that the handbook “feeds new citizens myth, which it requires them to remember”.²⁷ Individuals who took the Test told us they had felt uncomfortable about some inappropriate content, such as the British Empire being described as “a force for good in the world,” and about an insensitive statement suggesting that the UK had fought alone against Nazi Germany.²⁸ Professor Trentmann drew our attention to the fact that, “at a time of fake news and authoritarian challenges, when democracies need to muster all the strengths they have, a falsified account of history will do more damage than good”.²⁹ You acknowledged that “there was a previous version of the handbook that gave quite a glowing picture of empire and the end of empire” and that you would “not necessarily share quite such a glowing assessment” of that period in history.³⁰
13. Many witnesses were bemused by the obscure content of the handbook. Examples include early Scottish poetry, 18th-century furniture design³¹, the country where the founder of the UK’s first curry house eloped with his wife³², Roundheads and Cavaliers³³, as well as stereotypical characterisations such as “Monty Python, roast beef, pantomimes, Edward Elgar, and allotments”.³⁴ One person who recently took the test, confused by the content of the handbook, told us that they “didn’t know what the test wanted from them”.³⁵ Professor Bridget Byrne, Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester, explained that confusion by the fact that the handbook includes “knowledge which is not obtained through participation in the British education system”, meaning that most of the population does not possess that knowledge.³⁶
- 14. The content of the current edition of the *Life in the UK* handbook comes across as a random selection of obscure facts and subjective assertions that most people would not know, trivialising the process. The content of the history chapter is so insensitive as to be offensive. It urgently needs replacing.**

²⁶ Written evidence from Professor Peter J Spiro ([LTN0006](#))

²⁷ Written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#))

²⁸ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022). See also written evidence from Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

²⁹ Written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#))

³⁰ [Q 25](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

³¹ Written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#))

³² Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#))

³³ [Q 1](#) (Madeleine Sumption)

³⁴ Written evidence from Dr Amy Clarke ([LTN0012](#)). See also Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

³⁵ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

³⁶ Written evidence from Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

A new handbook

15. Taking stock of the criticisms against the current (third) edition of the handbook, the proposed review of the Test and handbook should extend to the content of a new edition of the handbook. The intrinsic value of a handbook and its strong links with the Test makes it essential. The evidence we received offers a starting point.
16. Those who criticised the current edition for its subjective and controversial content often praised international equivalents for being factual.³⁷ This is the case with the “Life in Germany” curriculum, as well as for the US equivalent, as part of which naturalisation applicants are asked questions about “the US constitutional systems, US history [and] geography” during interviews.³⁸ Prospective citizens are not tested on their knowledge of history in Australia and Belgium, and observers from these countries are sceptical of the inclusion of a history chapter in the handbook. With respect to the Life in the UK Test, Dr Thwaites, Senior Lecturer in Public and Administrative Law at the University of Sydney, explained: “for an overseas audience, the commentary raises questions as to the wisdom of testing on an ‘official history’ being a condition of citizenship (as opposed to applicants being encouraged or supported to engage with the material).”³⁹
17. Besides the recommendation against subjective content, our witnesses also made suggestions about what could feature in the new handbook. In the first place, they advocated in favour of a message of welcome to open the handbook, as was the case in the first two editions of the handbook. The message of welcome could be signed by the Queen (noting she is already the Head of State for citizens of Commonwealth Realms), the Prime Minister, or the Home Secretary. This could be an opportunity, our witnesses thought, to indicate pleasure that a person is choosing to become a citizen or to settle permanently in our country.⁴⁰
18. There also emerged a near consensus that priority should be given to matters related to citizenship rather than historical and cultural matters related to being part of the nation, reverting to the spirit of earlier versions of the handbook.⁴¹ As Dr Djordje Sredanovic, Researcher at Université libre de Bruxelles, put it, the advantage of this approach is that “the prospective citizen is asked to familiarise with more neutral notions about the workings of institutions, rather than with an image of the country which is necessarily based on a specific interpretation”.⁴² This would involve prioritising matters related to democratic processes, active participation, the rights and responsibilities of the citizens, national and local government, and knowing the law.⁴³ There was an agreement that the content should not vary in whichever nation of the United Kingdom the Test is taken. Professor Thom Brooks,

³⁷ Written evidence from Dr Rayner Thwaites ([LTN0004](#)), among others.

³⁸ On the German test, see written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#)), among others. On the US equivalent, see written evidence from Professor Peter J Spiro ([LTN0006](#)). See also written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#))

³⁹ On the Belgian test, see written evidence from Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#)). On the Australian perspective, see written evidence from Dr Rayner Thwaites ([LTN0004](#))

⁴⁰ [Q 4](#) and [Q 9](#) (Sunder Katwala)

⁴¹ Written evidence from Dr Amy Clarke ([LTN0012](#)), see also written evidence from Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#)) and Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

⁴² Written evidence from Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#))

⁴³ See, for instance, written evidence from Dr David Bartram ([LTN0001](#)), Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#)), [Q 9](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan, Madeleine Sumption, Sunder Katwala), and Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022).

Professor of Law and Government, Durham University, reminded us of the approach taken in the USA: “someone is becoming a citizen of the whole, not only the part.” He therefore suggests including “knowledge about regional difference in the Life in the UK test but without regionally different tests.”⁴⁴ The only objection we noted is that a focus on cultural and civic matters makes the handbook irrelevant to those applying for ILR: “it is fundamentally unfair to require civic knowledge of a person who does not enjoy civic duties, and who is not applying to be a British citizen”, Zoe Bantleman, Legal Director of the Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association (ILPA), argued.⁴⁵

19. The question whether the handbook should contain practical information on everyday matters was subject to debate. In its 2003 report, the Life in the UK Advisory Group recommended that the handbook include content on practical matters, such as how to access employment, where to find help and information, and how to meet everyday needs. The idea was to educate newcomers, shortly after their arrival.⁴⁶ This was reflected in the first two editions of the handbook, but not in the current (third) edition.
20. Some of our witnesses regret that move. They argue that the handbook misses information about taxation, access to emergency services, how to obtain a National Insurance Number, and how to get a driving licence.⁴⁷ Like you, we consider that practical information of that type, as distinct from material related to rights and active citizenship, would be inappropriate in a handbook for people who have been in the UK for several years, and is not appropriate for the Test.⁴⁸
- 21. The review should consider the content of a revised edition of the Life in the UK handbook. We believe it should focus on factual content related to the rights and responsibilities of a citizen in the contemporary British democracy. The content should recognise that the United Kingdom comprises four nations. Where the handbook contains information on practical matters, the information included should be relevant to someone who has been living in the UK for several years.**

Test format

22. The review should also include the format of the Test itself. On the one hand, you told us that “it is very unlikely that [the Government] will move away from the test—previous conclusions have been reached about why a multiple-choice test is the most appropriate option.”⁴⁹ You pointed out, in particular, that this format made the Test accessible to a wider audience compared, for instance, to essay writing.⁵⁰ This tallies with the evidence we received and we recognise the practical issues and potential for discrimination that would

⁴⁴ Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#)) and Professor Peter J Spiro ([LTN0006](#))

⁴⁵ Written evidence from Zoe Bantleman ([LTN0008](#))

⁴⁶ [Q 1](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan)

⁴⁷ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

⁴⁸ [Q 34](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁴⁹ [Q 23](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁵⁰ [Q 22](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

result from requiring discursive answers. We heard from some witnesses that the multiple-choice format was fair, efficient, and best suited to ask questions about facts.⁵¹

23. On the other hand, some witnesses warned us that the multiple-choice format has limitations. First, this format is appropriate only to assess “people’s willingness and ability to absorb quite a lot of information”⁵² but “you cannot test what people actually believe in their own heart.”⁵³ As Madeleine Sumption, Director of the Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, put it, “it is just an unfortunate thing that any multiple-choice test is not going to do a very good job of assessing people’s values.”⁵⁴ Secondly, the current approach to the multiple-choice format has resulted in a light-hearted selection of questions which, at best, falls flat.⁵⁵ The Test is a “quiz”, as many of our witnesses called it.⁵⁶

24. The German model seems to circumvent these limitations effectively. According to Dr Elisabeth Badenhoop, Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, questions in the *Life in Germany* test are “more educative” and less likely to be humorous because “there are always four possible answers”—and they are carefully worded, avoiding grotesque suggestions. She gave the following example:

“A woman in Germany loses her job. Which reason for this redundancy is unlawful?”

- “The woman has been ill for a long time and is not fit for work”;
- “The woman often arrives late at work”;
- “The woman does private business at work”;
- “The woman is pregnant and her boss knows that”.⁵⁷

25. Questions in the *Life in the UK* Test, on the contrary, fall well short of inviting candidates to reflect about their rights and responsibilities. They may also be confusingly phrased.⁵⁸ The following example in the *Life in the United Kingdom: Official Practice Questions and Answers* book illustrates our concern:

“Which TWO rights are offered by the UK to citizens and permanent residents?”

- “Free groceries for everyone and a right to a fair trial”
- “Long lunch breaks on Friday and a right to a fair trial”
- “Freedom of speech and a right to a fair trial”
- “Freedom of speech and free groceries for everyone”⁵⁹

26. While we are supportive of the multiple-choice format, we acknowledge it cannot possibly test candidates on values. Questions should focus instead on

⁵¹ Written evidence from Dr Amy Clarke ([LTN0012](#)) and [Q 2](#) (Madeleine Sumption, Sunder Katwala)

⁵² [Q 1](#) (Sunder Katwala), see also written evidence from Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

⁵³ [Q 8](#) (Madeleine Sumption)

⁵⁴ [Q 7](#) (Madeleine Sumption)

⁵⁵ [Q 5](#) (Madeleine Sumption)

⁵⁶ See, for instance, [Q 1](#) (Sunder Katwala), [Q 5](#) (Madeleine Sumption), or written evidence from Prof. Dr. Patrícia Jerónimo ([LTN0010](#))

⁵⁷ [Q 18](#) (Dr Elisabeth Badenhoop)

⁵⁸ These rights are not offered by the UK only to citizens and permanent residents. The capitalisation of “TWO” in the question may also confuse the candidate, who could be tempted to select two of the four proposed responses

⁵⁹ TSO, *Life in the United Kingdom: Official Practice Questions and Answers*, 2021 edition (Norwich: TSO)

factual, objective, and non-trivial matters. They should be carefully worded to avoid humour (whether deliberate or inadvertent) and insensitive content. The review should consider what safeguards will guarantee the quality of the handbook and of the questions contained in the Test, including who should draft them.

Test centres

27. We asked a small, non-representative group of people who took the Test about their experience at test centres.⁶⁰ Most of them described their experience as “uneventful”, one adding that it was “very straightforward”. Many praised the staff welcoming them for their friendliness.
28. However, among the few people we talked to, some had unpleasant experiences. One female contributor explained that she had found it “quite intimidating” to be searched and have her papers checked by all-male staff, in a small room, in front of all other test-takers. She “felt quite self-conscious”. Another contributor explained that the centre could not be accessed via public transport and involved cycling 45 minutes uphill to reach it. That centre was in an almost abandoned industrial estate, hidden behind a supermarket. There were no refreshments available, and no heating in the building itself. Upon arrival, they “just wanted to do the test as quickly as possible to escape this environment”.⁶¹
29. To find out more about the location of test centres, we called the Life in the UK Test helpline on 6 April 2022. We found out that there were only 19 test centres operating at the time—well short of the 38 locations you told us about.⁶² In other words, applicants must either wait until a seat can be booked to take the Test relatively close to their homes or travel very long journeys to take the Test elsewhere at shorter notice. This may prove particularly challenging for some candidates, especially those in Northern Ireland, where there is only one test centre, in Belfast.
30. We are grateful that you agreed to monitor the situation.⁶³ You told us that you would engage with the contractor if you found out that a test centre was not accessible via public transport or if the temperature was not “reasonable”.⁶⁴ We have provided you with an example of that, derived from our sample of five people who recently took the Test. The fact that this feedback did not reach you via other means is alarming. The survey you mentioned, and on which we await details, asks candidates immediately after they have taken the Test about how satisfied they are. It is an unsatisfactory mechanism for channelling important feedback. **Better feedback should be collected from applicants on their experience with the Test, in a manner which cannot be thought to affect the Test result.**

⁶⁰ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

⁶¹ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

⁶² [Q 27](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁶³ [Q 27](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁶⁴ [Q 28](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

31. **While usually uneventful, the experience of candidates at test centres is crucial. Every test centre should be staffed with male and female staff. Test centres should be accessible via public transport. The review should consider solutions to make sure that candidates are not required to travel excessive distances to take the Test, including perhaps by opening more test centres and test slots or by making it possible for candidates to take the Test online from elsewhere.**

Alternatives to a test

32. Some prospective citizens and permanent residents may find a test particularly challenging, for instance if their first language involves a script different from the Latin alphabet (for example, nationals of Afghanistan, Yemen, or Somalia).⁶⁵ Candidates with such a linguistic background have some of the lowest pass rates at the Test and were among those most likely to opt for the course before it was discontinued.⁶⁶ Other groups are equally likely to regard the Test as too big an obstacle for settlement and citizenship, including “those who have little prior schooling, illiterates, [and] traumatised refugees.”⁶⁷ Unless they are eligible for an exemption, they may be deterred from applying for citizenship or ILR entirely.⁶⁸
33. To accommodate those who may find a test particularly challenging, some exemptions apply. Those aged under 18 or 65 and over are exempt from taking the Test, as well as those who have a long-term physical or mental condition. We note, however, that the threshold to be exempt from the Test on medical grounds is very high. You also told us about a range of adaptations available to accommodate individual needs of those required to take the Test.⁶⁹ We were unable to find information about those adaptations on the Gov.uk website, and the Life in the UK helpline was unable to assist. **Information about possible adaptations should be publicised more widely and the review should consider whether the current list of adaptations and exemptions is sufficient.**
34. To accommodate those who may find a test particularly challenging, we came across a wide range of alternative mechanisms used by other countries. These include interviews⁷⁰, courses⁷¹, integration contracts⁷², documents⁷³, or recommendation statements from community leaders.⁷⁴ There was a suggestion of a scheme similar to the Duke of Edinburgh award focusing on civic and community engagement.⁷⁵
35. Until 2013, those required to take the Life in the UK Test had the option to take an “English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with citizenship course” instead. Our witnesses

⁶⁵ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)). See also written evidence from Professor Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#)) for other reasons why some groups may find a test more difficult than others

⁶⁶ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#))

⁶⁷ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)), Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#)), and Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

⁶⁸ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#))

⁶⁹ [Q 26](#) (Kevin Foster MP and Kristian Armstrong)

⁷⁰ Written evidence from Professor Peter J Spiro ([LTN0006](#))

⁷¹ Written evidence from Professor Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#))

⁷² For the Italian example, see [Q 10](#) (Dr Djordje Sredanovic). For the French example, see the [French Republican Integration Contract](#).

⁷³ For the Belgian example, see [Q 10](#) (Dr Djordje Sredanovic). For the Portuguese example, see written evidence from Prof. Dr. Patricia Jerónimo ([LTN0010](#))

⁷⁴ Written evidence from Dr Bronwen Manby ([LTN0011](#))

⁷⁵ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

were very supportive of these citizenship courses. They told us that they promote gender equality, encourage participants to take on further education, create a more cohesive society through “emotional learning” and “participation”, and that they help with language acquisition.⁷⁶ We also heard that courses are an opportunity for participants to meet people from outside their own community, thereby promoting social cohesion.⁷⁷

36. These courses were discontinued in 2013. We heard that organising citizenship courses is expensive for candidates⁷⁸ as well as for the taxpayer⁷⁹ and that ensuring consistency across the country may be difficult.⁸⁰ By contrast, Madeleine Sumption described citizenship tests as “very efficient” and Professor Dina Kiwan, Professor in Comparative Education at the University of Birmingham, suggested that they may be perceived by many people as “less expensive and less of a time burden” than courses.⁸¹ This is probably why, as you told us, the test route used to be much more popular than the course route.⁸²

37. Citizenship courses actively promote social cohesion and gender equality. We regret that the Home Office appears to exclude the reintroduction of the course. Their discontinuation disproportionately affected specific groups of prospective citizens and permanent residents who may find a test particularly challenging. The Government should reintroduce citizenship courses as a way of fulfilling the civic knowledge requirement. Citizenship courses should only be offered as an alternative to a test. They should be offered at a reasonable cost. Courses should be either delivered in-house or outsourced to a not-for-profit organisation.

Costs

38. We asked witnesses about the cost of the Test and much of the evidence we received related, unprompted, to overall costs. You referred to the cost of taking the Life in the UK Test as the £50 fee to book the Test (every time one books a Test), the cost of learning materials (usually up to £23), and the cost of the return journey to the test centre.⁸³ This last can be substantial: one person we spoke to privately explained that these three expenses had amounted to £354 in total for them.⁸⁴

39. We also heard about other significant costs associated with the Test. Those individuals we spoke to mentioned the day off work they had to take to attend the test centre, and the time spent preparing for the Test, described as “time away from family and friends” or “a Saturday not spent with children”.⁸⁵ Most importantly, many located the Life in the UK Test

⁷⁶ [Q 2](#) and [Q 3](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan), [Q 5](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan), and written evidence from Professor Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

⁷⁷ [Q 2](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan) and written evidence from Professor Brooks ([LTN0009](#))

⁷⁸ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#))

⁷⁹ Written evidence from Dr Djordje Sredanovic ([LTN0007](#))

⁸⁰ Written evidence from Professor Cecilie Hammes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#))—in this instance in the Norwegian context

⁸¹ [Q 2](#) (Professor Dina Kiwan, Madeleine Sumption, and Sunder Katwala)

⁸² [Q 23](#), [Q 24](#), and [Q 27](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁸³ [Q 27](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁸⁴ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022)

⁸⁵ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022). See also written evidence from Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#))

in the wider context of an application for citizenship or ILR. We were told in particular about the fees—in thousands of pounds per person—which make applicants anxious about making genuine mistakes and can mean selecting who, within one family, should apply for citizenship or ILR when the family cannot afford for all members to do so.⁸⁶

40. These points were backed up by the evidence we received during the inquiry. There was a consensus among our witnesses that applying for citizenship or permanent residency was “financially prohibitive” for some.⁸⁷ Taking the Life in the UK Test is only part of that process, especially because of the “personal and professional arrangements” one must make to prepare for and take the Test.⁸⁸ Even those who could afford to proceed with an application felt uncomfortable about the financial commitment it represents. One person who recently took the Test told us they felt that they had been expected to “buy [their] way in”: if they were deemed worthy of becoming a British citizen, they thought that they should not be required to pay.⁸⁹

41. The costs associated with preparing for and taking the Test can be prohibitive for some people, taken in the context of the wider process of applying for citizenship or permanent residency. The review should consider ways of lightening that burden to solve any accessibility issues.

Miscellaneous

42. The evidence we received was rich. Witnesses raised many more issues not covered in this letter and made suggestions on how to solve them. Their points ranged from calling for better statistics to be collected and published⁹⁰, flagging a lack of consistency in the languages in which the handbook is published and the Test can be taken⁹¹, and suggesting updates to the GOV.UK website⁹², to calling for more transparency around who writes handbook chapters.⁹³ **We invite the review to consider the full breadth of evidence that was submitted to us as part of this inquiry. It could be the basis of its terms of reference. We particularly urge the Government to consider the lessons from other countries which have adopted a similar test.**

Appointing an Advisory Group

43. At the time the requirement to demonstrate “sufficient knowledge about life in the United Kingdom” was introduced, an Advisory Group chaired by Sir Bernard Crick was appointed.

⁸⁶ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022). See also written evidence from Professor Bridget Byrne ([LTN0013](#)) and from Professor Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen and Professor Edit Bugge ([LTN0005](#)).

⁸⁷ Written evidence from Professor Brooks ([LTN0009](#)). See also written evidence from Dr Amy Clarke ([LTN0012](#)) and Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022).

⁸⁸ Written evidence from Zoe Bantleman ([LTN0008](#)). See also written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)).

⁸⁹ Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022).

⁹⁰ Written evidence from Prof dr Ricky van Oers ([LTN0002](#)).

⁹¹ Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#)).

⁹² Justice and Home Affairs Committee, [Personal experience of individuals taking the Life in the UK Test—Summary of private briefing held on 26 April 2022](#) (12 May 2022).

⁹³ Written evidence from Professor Frank Trentmann ([LTN0003](#)).

It reported in 2003, notably concluding that a handbook should be published.⁹⁴ The first edition of the *Life in the United Kingdom: A Journey to Citizenship* handbook was published in 2004 on its behalf, before the Advisory Group was discontinued. An Advisory Group was involved in drafting the second edition of the handbook.

44. You told us that your Department was facing capacity issues because your teams were working on “one of the biggest programmes of reform of our immigration system in generations”.⁹⁵ For that reason, you told us, the Government is “keen to engage a range of subject-matter experts when reviewing the test’s content,” but were not prepared to commit to involving specific groups.⁹⁶ The Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, in its 2018 report, recommended that representatives from local authorities and the NHS be appointed to a new Advisory Group.⁹⁷ Professor Thom Brooks also suggested that some new citizens and new permanent residents who had taken the Test themselves should be consulted.⁹⁸ Subject-matter experts, people who recently took the Test, and representatives from local authorities and the NHS could all form part of a renewed Advisory Group, practically outsourcing the review.

45. We welcome the Government’s acknowledgement of the importance of engaging experts and stakeholders in reviewing the handbook but regret that the Government’s commitment falls short of constituting an Advisory Group. An Advisory Group should be reappointed immediately. Its membership should be diverse and reflect the experience gained over the past two decades. It should conduct the review of the Life in the UK Test, referring to the points raised in this letter.

Conclusion

46. A review of the Life in the UK Test and associated handbook is urgent. To this end, the Government should launch its review immediately, working to a clear report date supported by an Advisory Group, and keep Parliament informed about its progress.

47. Thank you again for giving evidence to our inquiry.

48. I am copying this letter to Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Chair of the House of Lords Liaison Committee; Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, Chair of the former House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement; Rt. Hon. Dame Diana Johnson MP, Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee; and Simon Hoare MP, Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

⁹⁴ Home Office, *The New and the Old: The report of the "Life in the United Kingdom" Advisory Group*, (2003), available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20110726042035/http://lilac.europole.org/uk/material/life_in_the_uk.pdf

⁹⁵ [Q 21](#) and [Q 29](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁹⁶ [Q 20](#) (Kevin Foster MP)

⁹⁷ Liaison Committee, *The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century Follow-up report* (5th Report, Session 2021–22, HL Paper 179)

⁹⁸ Written evidence from Professor Thom Brooks ([LTN0009](#))

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sally Hamwee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

*Baroness Hamwee,
Chair, House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee*