

Written evidence submitted by the British Council (ECA0025)

1. The British Council

- 1.1 The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.
- 1.2 As an organisation, we support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We uniquely combine the UK's expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language, our global presence and relationships in over 100 countries, and our unparalleled access to young people and influencers.
- 1.3 We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally to make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

2. British Council Presence in Central Asia

Where:

- 2.1 The British Council has a physical presence in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and delivers exams in Kyrgyzstan. In Uzbekistan, we have 25 members of staff and first established there in 1996. In Kazakhstan, we have 31 staff based mostly in Almaty, with six staff based in Astana which first opened 1994. Our aim in Central Asia over the next few years is to build our digital presence across the entire region to engage with over 20 million young people by 2025, including in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

What:

- 2.2 Our work in this region centres around English and education reform, and assessment for access to international education opportunities.
- 2.3 In **Uzbekistan**, we support national reforms with a focus on international collaboration and best practice. We have done this through partnerships in the creative economy, partnerships between HE institutions in the UK and Uzbekistan and partnerships with quality assurance agencies.
- 2.4 In **Kazakhstan**, our focus is on increasing partnerships in the creative economy space, becoming a more nationally trusted partner to improve English teaching with government support and growing the number of TNE partnerships between the UK and Kazakhstan.
- 2.5 Across Central Asia, we deliver a range of programmes both in-country and digitally. The table below gives a summary of our operations in Central Asia. Cultural Engagement includes all of our work in the arts and education spaces. Exams include the delivery of a range of paid-for exam products including IELTS and APTIS. We do not have Teaching Centres in Central Asia but direct teaching contracts are delivered through our Teaching Centre in Georgia.

British Council operations in Central Asia

Country	Physical presence	Cultural Engagement (Arts and Education)	Teaching	Exams
Kazakhstan	Yes	In-country	No	In-country
Uzbekistan	Yes	In-country	No	In-country
Kyrgyzstan	No	Digital	No	In-country
Tajikistan	No	Digital	No	No
Turkmenistan	No	Digital	No	No

3. Our work in education

- 3.1 In **Education**, we strengthen and facilitate HE institutional partnerships, supporting national reforms, particularly in the growth of the creative economy, and helping improve teacher development across the board. This has become even more important over the last 7 years which has seen a massive expansion of the HE sector – in **Uzbekistan**, enrolment rates of 9% in 2017 to over 30% by 2022 with a goal of 50% by 2030 and the number of universities doubling.
- 3.2 In **Uzbekistan**, as an established partner for TNE, we are supporting inclusion and quality as well as growth in partnerships between UK and Uzbekistan:
- We held the first **Inclusive University Conference**, in partnership with the Ministry of HE, Science and Innovations and the Uzbek Parliament. We identified key focus areas including inclusive education strategies, inclusive curriculum, and student support services. We also co-chair a National Inclusive University working group and are developing a Good Practice Guide in this field.
 - In 2023, to celebrate the Year of Quality Education announced by the President of Uzbekistan, we launched a University Governance and Quality Assurance in HE Policy Discussion series – engaging Vice-Chancellors and academic leaders nationwide.
 - The **Uzbekistan-UK Education Forum** was held in March 2023 bringing together UK-Uzbek TNE stakeholders to share experiences and reflections on challenges and opportunities for TNE partnerships development, ensuring understanding of Quality Assurance in the UK and the positive impact of internationalising education.
- 3.3 In **Kazakhstan**, we're seeking more growth in TNE following 20 partnerships between UK and KZ HE institutions over the past 5 years, building relations with the Ministry of Science & HE, and using our research to identify blockers to the government's aim of internationalisation in the HE sector – linking to our work supporting English teaching in-country as this is a core obstacle in TNE growth.
- 3.4 We're also prioritising the development of TNE through:
- The **Going Global Partnership programme**, which funds research partnerships and aims to build relationships between international partners, supporting transnational education.
 - The continuation of the **InterLinks Grants Scheme** which helps universities from all 4 UK regions of the UK and Kazakhstan to begin building a TNE strategy and showcasing and building on from the results of the 2021-2023 Grants Scheme. Based on analysis from the previous results, we aim to bring together 20 partnerships and showcase them to a wider audience and the Kazakhstani Government.
 - In 2023/24, both **Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan** will participate for the first time in the **Women in STEM scholarship programme** where 5 scholarships are available for women to study master's degrees at the University of Portsmouth and additionally 10 more opportunities extended to women in the Wider Europe region (including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.)

4. Our work in arts and Culture

- 4.1 In **arts and culture**, we support the creative industries and develop markets through international partnerships. We aim to engage creatives around important dimensions of creative entrepreneurial education as well as girls' and women's empowerment and environmental sustainability. We also connect partners in Central Asia where the British Council is not represented and help amplify the work of the British Embassies in the region in creative economy.
- 4.2 In **Uzbekistan**, our Creative Industries Mapping work was the first of its kind in the country drawing on data to give a clearer picture of the sector.

In **Kazakhstan**, we delivered Creative Economy face-to-face workshops in 3 cities gathering 40 policy-makers from national and city governments, and 120 creative and cultural practitioners through online training.

- 4.3 **Creative Spark**: This programme was designed to boost bilateral partnerships involving universities and creative institutions to drive creative enterprise education, establish innovation hubs and provide students with business development skills.
- It was a five-year initiative to support international university and institutional partnerships across 7 countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan), South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and Ukraine through partnership with the UK.
 - Funding from the British Council for the programme amounted to **£90,000 for each partnership over** four years with no funding in the fifth year (funding secured from national grants funds, UNESCO, Erasmus Plus).
 - At a **national** level, the programme engaged with the Ministry of higher and secondary specialised education, El Yurt Umidi Foundation, Art and Culture Development Foundation and major higher education institutions to inspire and develop approaches to creative entrepreneurial education and make it relevant to the needs of the growing market.
 - At a **policy** level, Creative Spark engaged stakeholders around the subject of creative entrepreneurial education – also looking at women and girls' empowerment and environmental sustainability. A Quality Practice Framework was developed with the aim to share this with all universities in Uzbekistan and encourage the development of a creative entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- Outcomes** of this project include annually engaging with 11,000 Uzbekistani students, a 92% increase in understanding and knowledge of UK creative industries and business environment, an MoU signed between 2 UK and 2 Uzbek universities outlining long-term collaboration, the first private entrepreneurial university in Uzbekistan – TEAM - was established in collaboration with London South Bank University, and agreeing the next steps for the World Conference on Creative Economy (WCCE) taking place in Uzbekistan in September 2024.

5. Our work in English and Exams

In **English**, we support national education reforms – particularly in English teaching. We improve the understanding of international assessment standards and deliver many thousands of UK qualifications throughout the region.

- 5.1 In **Uzbekistan**, the quality and relevance of our assessment products and our expertise in assessment have been acknowledged by senior government stakeholders. In 2022 a Presidential Decree advocated four-skills testing and the acceptance of international tests lead to a huge demand for Aptis – and Aptis for teachers now the rest of choice cementing our reputation as trusted partners in education delivery and reform.

- 5.2 We also run the following programmes to support quality assurance and professional development in English teaching:
- **English language Pre-Service Teacher Training (PRESETT)**- between 2009-2018, the British Council partnered with the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education and ran a project aiming to achieve lasting improvement in the standard of English Language Teaching. This programme developed guidelines for teaching practice, a network of Professional Development Centres in 18 PRESETT institutions, matching up exit standards to international standards, development of critical thinking, judgement and understanding of how teaching supports learning.
 - **English Curriculum Strategy Project** in 2021/22 saw the British Council working with the Ministry of Public Education to commission a consultancy around national English curriculum reform which helped develop a national English language delivery strategy. In addition, we worked on a consultancy around Continuing Teacher Professional Development. Both of these strategies focused on public school education in Uzbekistan.
- 5.3 In **Kazakhstan**, we are working to gain accreditation for our English teaching and establish a clear partnership between the British Council and the Ministry of Enlightenment (MoE). We aim to support the MoE develop a blended online teacher community and training offer accredited by the government to raise English teaching standards. IELTS has been recognised by the MoE for graduate and postgraduate studies (120 universities and 600,000 students).
- 5.4 In the Wider Europe region, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine, **Future English** began in 2020 and is a regional teacher professional development project. This programme:
- Provides ministries and stakeholders with high-quality research and consultancy in English language learning and teaching.
 - Reaches more than 4,000 English teachers from public schools in **Uzbekistan** who benefit from these professional development opportunities every year.
 - Through our Future English research, the British Council now has a picture of English language teaching in secondary schools in **Kazakhstan** and how it can work with the Ministry of Enlightenment (MoE) on professional development training, planning, curriculum, testing and quality assurance. In **Uzbekistan**, the project commissioned the *English Impact report* providing robust policy-relevant data evidencing English Language capability – 150 schools and 1,446 students were sampled for this report.
 - Through our **Future English Online Teacher Community platform**, we've engaged with 4,000 teachers in **Kazakhstan** (10% of all secondary) and 6,000 English teachers from schools across **Uzbekistan** since 2021. This programme helps with teacher professional development with online courses and the opportunity to be part of a professional development community.
 - Going forward, a major expansion of the Online Teacher Community would enable the UK to respond to requests from governments for support in English through benchmarking levels of English teachers as a first step in a programme to support teacher development and teaching quality improvement.

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