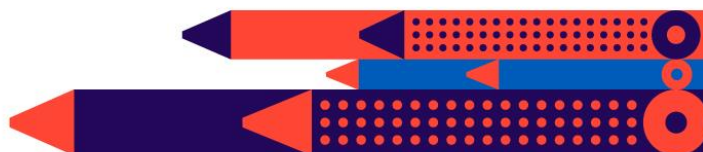




VLAS 2025 Part of the New Direction series.

8 November 2025, Hanoi, Vietnam



Conference Programme – Speakers and Abstracts

Plenary Speakers

Prof. Barry O'Sullivan, British Council



BIO: Professor Barry O'Sullivan OBE is the British Council's Head of Assessment Research & Development. He has worked on numerous test development and validation projects globally and advises ministries and institutions on assessment policy and practice. He has undertaken research across many areas on language testing and assessment and its history and has worked on the development and refinement of the socio-cognitive model of test development and validation since 2000. He has presented his work at many conferences around the world, while almost 100 of his publications have appeared in a range of international journals, books and technical reports. He is the founding president of the UK Association of

Language Testing and Assessment, holds a visiting professorship at the University of Reading, UK, and is Advisory Professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China. He was awarded Fellowship of the Academy of Social Sciences in the UK in 2016 and was elected to Fellowship of the Asian Association for Language Assessment in 2017. In 2019 he was awarded an OBE by the government of the UK for his contribution to language testing. In addition he has received two lifetime achievement awards, from the E-Assessment Association in 2023, and from the English Language Testing society in 2025.

TALK: Enabling the teacher and the learner: bringing speaking into the classroom (and beyond)

For many years, languages provision in our schools has failed. I studied French at secondary school but when I finished, I was unable to order a coffee and incapable of understanding a simple question from the waiter, "*Voulez-vous cela avec ou sans lait?*" (Would you like that with or without milk?). Thank you to Google translate for the French! For too long, we have focused on the mechanics of language (grammar and vocabulary), only occasionally using the language for reading and listening. This has meant that learners have never had to come to grips with the language as a living and practical tool for communication. While this has begun to change, there are some significant challenges. The first is the lack of teachers to take on this difficult task. The second is the lack of time within the system to allow for controlled practice with very large class sizes. The third is that when learners do get exposed to the language, they have limited opportunities to practise it.

In this talk, I will look at how we can solve all three of these problems through the appropriate use of technology. I will show how we are dealing with the situation by presenting two projects in which we have developed curriculum-specific speaking tasks for both formative and summative use, and also how we are harnessing the power of AI to build a new system of task development, delivery and assessment that promises to revolutionise the whole language learning process in our schools globally.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Pham Thi Hong Nhung
Hue University of Foreign Language and International Studies



BIO: Pham Thi Hong Nhung holds an MA and PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Queensland, Australia. She is currently a lecturer of Hue University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Vietnam. She has published widely in prestigious journals such as RELC Journal, International Journal of TESOL Studies, E-Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, Issues in Educational Research, and Language Testing in Asia. She has also authored chapters in edited volumes published by leading academic publishers including Cambridge University Press, Multilingual Matters, and Routledge. She has led various national research projects. Her current research interests focus on teacher education, intercultural communication and ESP.

TALK: Beyond scores: The emotional lives of learners in digital language assessment

Emotions lie at the heart of language learning and teaching, playing a crucial role in both language acquisition and language use. For this reason, the emotional experiences of learners as test takers deserve serious attention. The pressures inherent in language testing and assessment often make these experiences even more emotionally challenging. In online assessment contexts, learners may face further difficulties due to reduced control and limited access to the kinds of support available in face-to-face settings. This presentation reports on findings from our ongoing study on the emotional experiences of EFL students taking online language tests. While discussions of online testing frequently focus on technical facilities and resources, our research draws attention to the central role of test takers' feelings and emotions. The implications from this study aim to contribute to efforts to design and implement more learner-sensitive online language assessments in Vietnam and beyond.

Dr Cao Thi Hong Phuong, Hanoi National University of Education



BIO: Phuong Cao obtained her PhD in Applied Linguistics from the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, where she also earned her second M.A. in TESOL. Her doctoral research investigated teachers' assessment practices in an academic English programme, reflecting her long-standing interest in language assessment and its impact on teaching and learning. Phuong has been actively involved in both international and national projects on language assessment, contributing to the development of assessment literacy among teachers and to the evaluation of programmes and curricula. In Vietnam, she works as a teacher trainer at Hanoi National University of Education. Her current research centres on language curriculum development, programme evaluation, textbook analysis, and particularly language assessment, with a focus on how language assessment literacy can be embedded in teacher education and classroom practices in Vietnam and similar contexts.

TALK: Developing Formative Assessment Literacy for English Teachers: Insights from Research and Practice

Formative assessment has been widely recognised as a powerful driver of learning, yet in Vietnam its implementation remains limited due to the influence of high-stakes examinations, rigid curricula, and traditional teaching practices. These systemic pressures often position assessment of learning as the norm, while assessment for learning is marginalised. As a result, formative assessment is sometimes misunderstood by teachers as periodic tests, by students and parents as extra work disconnected from exam outcomes, and by policy discourse as a broad innovation lacking practical guidance for classroom application.

This talk conceptualises formative assessment literacy (FAL) as both a knowledge base and a repertoire of practices that enable teachers to embed assessment for learning into everyday instruction. Crucially, formative assessment is not a single event but a spiralling cycle of clarifying learning goals, eliciting and interpreting evidence, providing feedback, and taking actions. When implemented effectively, this cycle continuously informs and reshapes teaching and learning.

Drawing on research in applied linguistics and classroom-based studies in Vietnam and comparable Asian contexts, the talk will illustrate how teachers can develop FAL through strategies such as peer and self-assessment, reflective portfolios, and digital tools for capturing evidence of learning. Three key contributions of formative assessment will be highlighted: enhancing learner engagement in exam-oriented classrooms, fostering self-regulated learning and autonomy, and strengthening teachers' responsive decision-making.

The talk concludes with recommendations for embedding spiralling cycles of formative assessment in classrooms, teacher education, and professional development, with the aim of better aligning policy aspirations with the realities of English language teaching in Vietnam.

Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Quynh, University of Languages and International Studies



BIO: Nguyen Thi Ngoc Quynh (also known as Quynh Nguyen) completed her PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Melbourne, Australia in 2012. She is the Director of the Office of Assessment and Quality Control at the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. She plays a key role in multiple national and international projects on language education and assessment. She reviews for some journals on second language acquisition and teacher education, and has presented and published on second language education and assessment. She is currently the President of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA).

TALK: EMI in Vietnam: From a Review to a New View

EMI at higher education in Vietnam is considered a strategy to prepare the labour force for globalization. The presentation starts with a review of major findings of literature to date on the benefits and challenges of EMI in Vietnam's context. The presentation then proposes a re-identification of constructs in EMI assessment: shifting from the separationist approach to an integrated approach with the target constructs of context-specific Interactional Competence. It ends with a detailed discussion of a case study that piloted this new formative assessment approach at a public university in Vietnam.

Symposium Panellists



- **Dr Nguyen Thi Mai Huu** is Director of Vietnam's National Foreign Languages Project. Formerly Deputy Director of the Language Testing and Assessment Center at VNU, she has led national initiatives in language education and assessment, including the development of VSTEP, with research interests in EMI, CLIL, and formative assessment.



- **Prof. Barry O'Sullivan** is Head Assessment Research & Development at the British Council. He has led global language assessment projects, developed the socio-cognitive model, and published extensively. He is a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and AALA, and received an OBE for services to language testing.



- **Dr Pham Thi Hong Nhung** is a lecturer at Hue University of Foreign Languages. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Queensland. She has published widely in international journals and edited volumes. Her research focuses on teacher education, intercultural communication, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).



- **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Ba Tien** - Vice President of Vinh University and Editor-in-Chief of the Vinh University Journal of Science. He holds a PhD in Linguistics and has served in various academic leadership roles. His work focuses on language education, curriculum development, and quality assurance. He has contributed to national education reforms and international academic collaborations.

Theme: English Language Assessment in the New Age

- How is the role of English evolving in Viet Nam? What is its future?
- How can AI and technology contribute? What are the key considerations?
- What is the importance of Language Assessment Literacy in these developments?

Discussant (Moderator): Mr Davide Guarini Gilmartin



BIO: Davide Guarini Gilmartin is the British Council Senior Academic Manager, English and School Education in Indonesia and Viet Nam. He is a teacher educator with over 25 years' experience and has worked with British Council since 2003. He has extensive experience of teacher development projects across East Asia, having designed or delivered projects and programmes for British Council in China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Peru, Thailand, and Vietnam. He holds a BA (Honours) in Town & Country Planning, a Trinity TESOL Certificate and a Cambridge DELTA Diploma. Prior to entering the education sector, he spent eight years working in the UK local government sector as an urban and policy

planner.

Other Speakers

Breakout Session 1 – 2.00pm to 3.00pm

Ms Megan Agnew – British Council



BIO: Megan is a senior IELTS Manager for the British Council and manages relationships with higher education institutions globally, supporting policy changes as well as IELTS product development. With 15 years' experience in Marketing, Business Development and Client Relations, she has lived and worked in the UK, India, and the Middle East and recently completed an MBA with Distinction at the University of Liverpool. Currently based in Hanoi, Vietnam, Megan combines her industry expertise with fresh academic insights to support educational growth and innovation in English language assessment and partnerships.

TALK: Co-constructing a Language Assessment Literacy Framework

Recent research (Bruce et al., 2025) shows increased confusion in the arena of English proficiency, as well as wide gaps in the understanding of language assessment literacy (LAL), across and between higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world. Language assessment is adapting to a context of rapid change and, with the increasing expansion of English Medium Education around the world (British Council & Studyportals, 2025), a major challenge for HEIs is how to ensure that high-stakes decisions around admissions tests are informed by empirical data.

This session will explore differences in perspectives of LAL around the world, focusing on new approaches and ways of working. Participants will have the opportunity to co-create a basic language assessment literacy toolkit for universities to integrate into professional development, as well as:

1. Gain an insight into research and key findings to support admissions and recruitment decisions.
2. A deeper understanding of latest research on the relationship between English language proficiency and student wellbeing.
3. Practical suggestions on evaluating English language assessment.

Ms Elena Ostashchenko – Independent



BIO: Elena Ostashchenko is an experienced EFL educator with 17 years of teaching across EFL, ESP and IELTS contexts, working with both with young learners and adults. Based in Vietnam since 2017, she holds an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL from the University of Leicester (2023), as well as full Cambridge qualifications - CELTA (2017) and Delta (2019). Her professional interests include materials design, learner autonomy and project-based learning (PBL). She is passionate about creating a learner-centred environment for her students where

everyone feels welcome and included. She's also active in teacher mentoring and continuous professional development, and has supported colleagues in India and Vietnam through workshops, observations and feedback. Elena has presented at several ELT conferences, including New Directions 2023, APAC Online Teaching Conference 2023, ACEID 2024, BBELT 2024, MEA 2024, British Council Teaching English ASEAN 2024, Macmillan New Voices 2024 and Macmillan Advancing Assessment Day 2025, and VietTESOL 2025 sharing practical classroom insights and contributing to the wider ELT community.

TALK: Reflective students, lifelong learners: exploring exit tickets as practical tools for meaningful self-reflection and learning.

How can we help Young Learners develop awareness of their learning and take greater responsibility for their progress? This presentation explores the power of self-reflection through *exit tickets* - short written or spoken responses completed at the end of a lesson (Main, 2022). While often overlooked, these simple tools can encourage language development, promote learner autonomy and support more informed teaching decisions (Basco, 2021; Fowler et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2024). The presentation draws on real classroom examples from the speaker's own teaching experience in Vietnam, working with a variety of age groups and levels in young learner contexts. These examples show how exit tickets can be successfully adapted even for low-level or mixed-ability classes and also highlights how exit tickets align with *Assessment for Learning* principles (Black et al., 2003; Wiliam, 2013), particularly in creating opportunities for student voice and timely feedback. When used thoughtfully, exit tickets become a powerful tool for

differentiation, helping teachers adjust instruction and support based on individual learners' reflections (Fowler et al., 2019; Main, 2022). Participants will:

- understand the role of reflection in promoting deeper learning
- be equipped with a bank of exit ticket prompts and formats
- recognise the potential of exit tickets for formative assessment
- gain practical strategies to include self-reflection in everyday classroom routines.

Dr. Nguyen Nhat Tuan, Hanoi University



BIO: Dr. Nguyen Nhat Tuan is the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Director of the International Education Center at Hanoi University. He teaches courses in Translation Theory, TESOL Methodology, Curriculum Design, and Research Methods. His professional expertise spans English-medium instruction (EMI), international education, and higher education innovation. His research focuses on translation studies, pedagogical practices in EMI contexts, and the internationalisation of higher education.

TALK: Turning Assessment Culture Shock into Learning Opportunities

Drawing on experiences from English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes at Hanoi University, this presentation explores how assessment culture shock can be transformed into valuable learning opportunities for both students and educators. It highlights common sources of mismatch between students' prior assessment expectations and EMI assessment practices, including differing notions of fairness, feedback, and learner autonomy. Through selected case examples, the talk demonstrates how reflective teaching, scaffolding, and culturally responsive assessment design help EMI students adapt and thrive in new academic cultures. The discussion aims to share practical insights for institutions seeking to build assessment literacy, enhance student confidence, and foster inclusive learning environments in transnational education settings.

Dr Vu Thi Thanh Nha, University of Languages and International Studies



BIO: Vu Thi Thanh Nha is the dean of the Faculty of English Language and Culture, University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University (ULIS). She has been involved in curriculum and material development projects and teacher training with the Ministry of Education and Training, US Regional English Language Office, Australian Alumni in Vietnam, and British Council since 2015. Her research interests include project-based learning, community of practice, pedagogy and technology. Currently, Nha focuses on digitalisation, EMI, and teacher development and curriculum implementation in Vietnam.

TALK: Developing Ai-Assisted Assessment Tools for English University Writing Tasks at a Vietnam Public University.

The study explores the process of developing and implementing an AI-assisted assessment tool for paragraph writing in a Vietnamese public university, where this writing assessment tool was integrated into its Learning Management System (LMS). The study involved nine teachers, an IT team, and 151 students who submitted paragraph writing tasks for B1 English courses. Data were collected from students' works, technical guidelines, writing scores, and team meeting discussions. The findings showed that the AI-assisted assessment tool exhibits clear advantages in terms of time reduction, detailed feedback, and score consistency. The paper gives some implications for LMS developers and users in AI applications.

Mr Andy Milner, British Council



BIO: Andy has been involved in teaching English for over 34 years and has worked in seven different countries in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Most of his career has been with the British Council as an academic manager, and he has also taught a wide range of courses, developed syllabuses and materials, trained teachers, and worked as an examiner for Cambridge exams, including IELTS. Andy has two postgraduate diplomas: one in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, and one in Educational Management in TESOL. His areas of expertise are English for Adults, ESP, and Exam Preparation. Since 2018, Andy has been one of the British Council's global team of specially trained IELTS Teacher Trainers and more recently has been training teachers on the CEFR and CEFR-related tests such as Aptis. Andy currently works as the Academic Support Manager for the British Council's East Asia Exams teams, advising on the connections between teaching, learning and assessment.

TALK: Testing Teenagers with the CEFR

With the growing importance globally of the CEFR in assessment and educational policy benchmarking, how can we conveniently and accurately evaluate the progress of teenagers through their basic education journey? Following the socio-cognitive model for test design, what adaptations are necessary to English tests to allow young people to demonstrate their full communicative competence? How can stakeholders at all levels be assured of reliability and validity against globally recognised standards?

This brief talk will spotlight a CEFR test that has been especially designed for the 13 to 15-year-old segment, explaining its format and principled adjustments, as well as how and why it has been officially recognised under the UK National Qualifications Framework.

Breakout Session 2 – 3.15pm to 3.45pm

Assoc. Prof. Dr Phuong Hoang Yen, Can Tho University



BIO: Dr. Phuong Hoang Yen is an Associate Professor and Vice Dean at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam, where she has worked since 2001. She holds a PhD in Linguistics from KU Leuven, Belgium (2014), an MA in Educational Research (2006), and a BA in English Teacher Education (2000). With over two decades of experience in English language teaching and assessment, her research interests include formative and summative assessment, teacher professional development, self-regulated learning, and curriculum innovation. She has led national and international projects and published extensively on language education, assessment, and teacher development.

TALK: Reframing Assessment: Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Agency in Formative Practices

This presentation examines how Vietnamese EFL teachers navigate the washback of exam-oriented education by adopting formative assessment practices. Drawing on reflective narratives from teachers who participated in British Council professional development programs, the study highlights shifts from test-driven routines to more student-centred, dialogic approaches. Teachers integrated peer feedback, games, and observation-based strategies to make learning visible, while negotiating institutional expectations. Using a thematic narrative approach, the analysis shows that teacher agency—expressed through improvisation, quiet resistance, and localized adaptation—plays a pivotal role in reshaping assessment. Findings underscore the importance of small, context-sensitive changes in advancing meaningful assessment reform in Vietnam.

Mr Calum John Leatham, Foreign Trade University



BIO: Calum John Leatham is a British lecturer of Business English at Foreign Trade University in Hanoi, Vietnam. His primary interest lies in supporting students beyond language skills alone. He focuses on their mental health and motivation, exploring how these vital factors impact learning. His research is dedicated to finding the most effective methods for teaching English to second-language students. He aims to ensure that classrooms are positive and encouraging spaces where every student can thrive and succeed in their studies.

TALK: Spotlighting Students: Project Presentations as EMI Assessment in Cultural Studies.

This presentation explores the use of student project presentations as an assessment method in a British and American Culture course taught through English (EMI). The study analyses data from classroom observations, detailed analytic rubrics, and student focus group interviews. Findings demonstrate how this performance-based approach effectively shifts the focus onto the learner, enabling the combined evaluation of both cultural knowledge and English communication skills. The session will highlight the practical benefits and challenges, offering actionable insights for educators seeking to implement authentic assessment strategies in their own EMI classrooms.

Mr Tim Hood and Mr Anthony Nicols, British Council



BIO: With over 30 years in international education, Tim Hood has worked across 11 countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. At the British Council, he has led major assessment businesses in China, Egypt, and Vietnam, overseen regional operations in MENA and the EU, and directed Teaching Centres in Vietnam, Turkey, and Spain. He also managed Vietnam's flagship Teacher and Trainer Network, introducing Communicative Language Teaching nationwide. Beyond the Council, Tim has worked as a teacher trainer with International House and as a digital entrepreneur. His interests include education reform, design thinking, and applying AI to pedagogy.



BIO: As Director of Product at the British Council, Anthony Nicols leads the organisation's English teaching and assessment technical product strategy and is one of the founders of AiBC. Following a career in consultancy, Anthony brings over five years of focused EdTech leadership to his current role building and architecting teams that deliver meaningful English language teaching and assessment outcomes.

TALK: Demonstrating an AI Speaking Practice Chatbot

This presentation introduces AiBC, the British Council's new AI engine designed to enhance classroom learning through flexible, meaningful speaking practice. AiBC enables learners to take part in realistic conversations linked to lesson themes, reinforcing key language and building their confidence to communicate in everyday situations. Developed by British Council experts, AiBC complements rather than replaces teachers, providing structured opportunities for guided practice and feedback between lessons. The session explores how this responsible integration of human teaching and smart technology supports effective, learner-centred English communication.