



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE  
ESOL Examinations

Experts in Language Assessment

# Assessing language for migration ... in the UK and beyond

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# **A hot topic ... some recent developments:**

- **Cases of suspected centre malpractice (December 2009)**
- **Review of the PBS – new Tier 1, 2 and 4 lists scheduled for spring 2011**
- **Access to ESOL qualifications for residency and citizenship applications (April 2010)**
- **New English language requirement for spouses (May 2010)**



# VRIP – Getting the balance right

- **V**alidity = fitness for purpose
- **R**eliability = repeatability
- **I**mpact = effect on individuals and society
- **P**racticality = Cost? Resource? Access?



- **Cases of suspected centre malpractice (December 2009)**

“Allegations are being made about a number of centres offering these qualifications stating that certificates are being issued with virtually no training or learning taking place and with insufficient rigour in the assessment process.”

“... there are concerns being expressed about the way in which immigrants ... can obtain ESOL with citizenship qualifications as a means to applying for permanent residency on the UK.”

Isabel Nisbet, CEO, Ofqual




- **Review of Tiers 1, 2 and 4 of the PBS**

- New criteria for English language tests to be published
- Submissions to be made by end of 2010
- New lists of exams to be in use from spring 2011



- **Access to ESOL qualifications for residency and citizenship applications (April 2010)**

- 40,000 “ESOL route” applicants in 2009
- Progress by at least one level between pre-course diagnostic test and their ESOL exam
- Must study at an “accredited centre”
- Judicial review under way

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- **New English language requirement for spouses (May 2010)**
    - From autumn 2010, for non-European migrants applying to come to marry their settled partner
    - English at least at A1, before they come to the UK
    - Evidence from “one of the UKBA approved test providers”



# Choosing the right test

- "To test or not to test?"
- Guidance from the profession
  - Codes of Practice, Principles of Good Practice etc.
  - International forums - e.g. work of ALTE with the Council of Europe

(See ALTE paper “Language tests for social cohesion and citizenship – an outline for policymakers”, at:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ALTE\\_migrants08\\_final\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ALTE_migrants08_final_EN.doc))
- Ensuring that a testing system is valid
  - Setting the appropriate criteria for quality
  - Requiring evidence





# Choosing the right test

## Two main considerations:

- Ensuring that the testing system is appropriate for the high stakes decisions to be made using the results
- Ensuring that the test is suitable for the intended test taker groups
  - content, level, mode of delivery, etc.



## Questions to ask about test administration ...

- 1. Is there a sufficient network of testing centres?**
- 2. Are the test centres authorised and monitored?**
- 3. Are the staff suitably vetted and trained?**
- 4. Is there a high level of security and confidentiality throughout the whole process?**
- 5. Are the physical conditions suitable (including arrangements for candidates with special requirements)?**




## More questions to be answered ...

- Who is going to be tested (the candidate profiles)?
- What features of the language will be covered and what is the justification for this?
- What proficiency level is realistic for different groups?
- When and where will the testing take place – the venues and physical conditions?
- How will the administration be conducted and how will the integrity be assured?



## Yet more questions to be answered ...

- How will the results be issued and verified?
- How will the results be used and what decisions will rest on the outcomes?
- How will data be collected in order to validate the test (e.g. estimate its reliability)?
- How will its impact on individuals and on society more generally be evaluated?



## **What are the implications of ignoring quality assurance in a testing system?**

- **predictable test content**
- **cheating, malpractice and impostors**
- **inaccurate and non-verifiable results**
- **biased, discriminatory tests**
- **unfair for everyone**



# Conclusions

- **When language tests are used**
  - they need to be “fit for purpose” and to have the technical qualities which enable the decisions to be taken fairly using test scores
- **Validity - provision of validation arguments**
  - test providers have a duty to account for the quality of their testing systems *and* to investigate the impacts



**Thank you ...**

**Any questions?**



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