AALL
Association for Academic
Language and Learning

An investigation into post-entry English language assessment in Australian universities

Katie Dunworth

School of Education, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, Western Australia 6845, Australia

Email: k.dunworth@curtin.edu.au

This paper describes a research study that identified the use of and attitudes towards post-entry language assessments (PELAs) in Australian universities. The study, which was conducted using desk research, online surveys and semi-structured interviews with key informants, found that PELAs are used in over one third of Australian universities, with a further twelve institutions planning to introduce them. While most PELAs are currently limited to specific discipline areas, there is a growing interest in offering them at an organisation-wide level. The study found that there was ambivalence towards the introduction of PELAs, with participants applauding the desire to address issues of English language competence or academic literacy while simultaneously expressing concern that some fundamental questions about their usefulness had not yet been addressed.

Key Words: English language competence, language assessment

1. Introduction

This report relates to a research project that was carried out in late 2008 into the use of and attitudes towards post-entry English language assessments (PELAs) in Australian universities. The background to the research was the public debate that has taken place over the English language proficiency levels of international students. Driven particularly by a high-profile report on the English language levels of overseas students graduating from Australian universities (Birrell, 2006), the topic received considerable media attention and in August 2007 a national symposium, attended by representatives from all Australian universities, was convened by Aust-ralian Education International (AEI) and the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) to debate the topic of the English language competence of international students. This culminated in a report which included the prioritization of certain actions including "a more generalized use of English language diagnostic tests (for all students) including post-entry" (AEI, 2008, p. 17). While the publicity is recent, the research literature has over many years debated the relationship between students' language proficiency and the quality and outcomes of the tertiary experience for both students and their teachers. The well documented concerns of both students and academic staff over the last ten years (e.g. Chalmers and Volet, 1997; McDowell and Merrylees, 1998; Coley, 1999; Jamieson et al. 2000; Bretag, 2007) demonstrate that language and cultural issues can be the source of much frustration and dissatisfaction on both sides if there is a belief that language levels are not suited to the domain of language use.

It is in such an environment that the use of instruments to assess language strengths and weaknesses once students have enrolled in their tertiary programs has increased. In spite of their growing popularity, however, their introduction has not been met with unqualified support. Some concerns, for example, have been expressed about the appropriateness of the way in which they are used, particularly when they are identified as "remedial" instruments. The term "remedial" carries with it the strong connotation of failure, and "casts its shadow on students'

abilities in other areas of the course" (Pantelides, 1999, p. 73) by stigmatizing them. Concern has also been expressed about the use of such instruments as "tests" since the language of testing, failure and remediation is not appropriate within an institution that has set its own English language entry level; a further "test" should not be necessary if students have already met the entry requirement (Briguglio, 2005). At the same time, for diagnostic purposes, "profiles of performance are surely needed, and very detailed information on the performance across the various components specified in the content specifications is highly desirable" (Alderson, 2005, p. 9).

This project was initiated with the intention of providing AALL members with access to a comprehensive analysis of the availability and use of PELAs in higher education in Australia and information on current approaches to and attitudes towards PELAs. Its specific aims were to:

- Investigate the extent to which PELAs are in use or being considered for use at an institutional level across all the public universities in Australia;
- Explore the nature of those instruments already in place;
- Analyse approaches to and understandings of the value of such diagnostic instruments.

2. Research methods

The primary research data collection instrument was a questionnaire submitted electronically to key staff, including Directors of Offices of Teaching and Learning, Deans of Teaching and Learning and Managers of Learning Centres, at all the public universities in Australia. It was envisaged that responses from this survey would provide sufficient data to address all of the aims to some extent, which indeed proved to be the case. However, it was believed that the use of a "mixed methods" approach, that is one that incorporated data obtained through both qualitative and quantitative means, would be more likely to generate results which were both generally applicable and supported by in-depth analysis, and furthermore that triangulation of the data obtained from the questionnaire would ensure that the analysis was as robust as possible. For these reasons, the main part of the study was supplemented by follow-up semi-structured interviews with a small group of experts in a range of those institutions that currently offer a PELA, and with "desk research": the collation of information about existing PELAs in use at Australian institutions obtained from publicly available sources such as websites, promotional material, media releases and research reports.

The survey was sent to a total of 89 individuals in the 38 Universities Australia member institutions. The questions are provided in Appendix A of this report. The semi-structured interviews (the question protocol for which is included in Appendix B) were held with six key informants from different states (New South Wales (2), Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia). The interviewees were selected because of (a) their acknowledged expertise in the area of language assessment, tertiary teaching and learning, and/or the use of PELAs, (b) their willingness to participate in the project, (c) their availability during the period in which the research was conducted, and (d) their differing geographical locations. All interviews were held on the telephone and were recorded. The data from the interviews, as well as from the open-ended questions in the surveys, were collated into categories that emerged through a "constant comparative" procedure (Cresswell, 2002). They are described in this report according to the categories which emerged.

3. Survey results

Of the surveys sent out, 54 useable responses were received (duplicate and blank submissions were deleted) from 34 of the 38 Universities Australia member institutions contacted, an overall response rate per individual of 61% and for institutions of 89%. Of the four universities from which no responses were received, one was in Victoria, two in Queensland and one in Tasmania. All states and territories but one were therefore represented in the data obtained. The number of responses for each state is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Responses by state.

State/territory	Number of responses
ACT	2
New South Wales	21
Northern Territory	1
Queensland	9
South Australia	6
Victoria	9
Western Australia	6

The number of responses per university is indicated in Table 2 below; a minimum of one and a maximum of four responses being received from any individual institution. The high number of institutions returning only one response was not unexpected; anecdotal evidence obtained by the researcher prior to analysis indicated that in some cases DVCs had forwarded the invitation to respond to a suitably informed member of staff who had already been independently contacted.

Table 2: The number of responses per institution.

Number of institutions	Number of responses
21	1
8	2
3	3
2	4

Where factual information was provided about an institution's use of a PELA, and there was more than one respondent from a given institution, the intra-institutional data obtained were analysed for consistency. In most cases, the information was substantially consistent across respondents from the same institution, with variations occurring only in answer to general open-ended questions or in relation to minor details. Differences in statements of key facts (e.g. on whether a PELA of any kind was offered) occurred within three institutions; for these three institutions, the facts-based data selected for reporting came from the respondent(s) whose answers provided the most detail and were supported by the data obtained from the desk research. It was therefore possible to present the descriptive information at an institutional rather than respondent level, which it was believed would be more useful for readers of this report. Attitudes and opinions, on the other hand, have been reported as the aggregated views of all individuals, because respondents were not required to represent the official views of their institutions.

According to the survey results, four universities currently make use of an institution-wide PELA. The desk research confirmed three of these, but no evidence could be found for the fourth. A further ten universities offer a PELA within individual discipline areas. No particular discipline area was consistently represented in this latter group, which included IT, Education, Visual Arts, Built Environment, Pharmacy, Engineering, and Health Sciences. Twelve more institutions were, at the time of the study (November 2008), considering the introduction of a PELA and four did not offer one and had no plans to do so in the future. Respondents from four universities were not sure whether their institutions offered any form of PELA. The desk research relating to those four organisations did not uncover any evidence of a PELA.

More detailed information about those 14 PELAs identified as being in use were provided by respondents as described in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Reported information on PELAs in use at the time the study was conducted.

Question	Responses		Not Stated
Source of PELA:	In-house design: 8	External design: 3	3
Delivery mode:	Paper-based: 7	Online: 3	4
Manner of delivery:	Supervised: 6	Unsupervised: 4	4
	Compulsory: 10	Optional: 2	2
Availability:	At specific times: 6 (usually at the start of semester)	Throughout the semester/year: 4	4
Content of PELA:	Reading: 7	Writing: 10	4
	Listening: 2	Speaking: 0	
	Other content listed: vocabulary 2; grammar 3; Australian culture 1; inference 1; spelling 1		
Target cohort:	All students: 7 (usually when new to the university)	EAL students: 4	4

As can be seen from Table 3, the majority of institutions had decided to develop their own instrument, and had largely opted for a paper-based delivery mode. Given that most of the PELAs consisted of a writing or reading/writing component, this may have been seen as the simplest and most cost-effective way of managing the process, particularly as for most institutions the PELA was a compulsory tool administered within particular courses, and which seemed in most instances to require supervision of its administration (i.e. the PELA was administered under exam-like conditions). The PELAs were in the majority of cases targeted at students new to their university. A substantial number of PELAs were targeted at all students rather than English as an Additional Language (EAL) students; where they were administered as a standard part of a discipline-based program this is only to be expected. Of the institution-wide PELAs, one was described as compulsory for all students who scored less than an IELTS score of 7 overall or its equivalent, or less than 30 in the VCE English/ESL; two others were described as optional and the question was left blank by the fourth respondent.

Those institutions which were considering the introduction of a PELA appeared to have a similar focus to those already using one, except that there appeared to be a greater intention to use an online delivery system (respondents from eight of the twelve institutions in this category indicated that a future PELA would be delivered online, and four stated that it would be paper-based). Respondents from six universities indicated that the PELA would be available institution-wide, and those from seven indicated that it would be compulsory. A small majority (7) stated that it would be targeted at all students rather than those from any particular sub-category.

Once the PELA has been completed, it appears that the majority of institutions currently providing a PELA offer assistance to students identified as in need of support on a voluntary basis. Only one institution reported that students are required to register for English language support; however, two others noted that students were streamed in their tutorial groups according to the PELA results. One other respondent stated that "forms of support are negotiated".

Those respondents who indicated that their institutions had introduced or were intending to introduce a PELA were asked for the reason why it was considered necessary. They were given a choice of four responses and the option of providing additional or alternative reasons. The results for this question are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Reasons given for introducing a PELA.

Reason for introducing PELA	Number of responses
We want to identify those who need English language support	33
We want to maintain/improve English language levels	29
We want students to understand the importance of English competence	23
We want to obtain data on student English levels	16
Other reason	6

Reasons provided under "other" included comments that students had been failing their units in disproportionate numbers, that academics had requested the introduction of a diagnostic tool, that there was a desire to improve academic literacy (as opposed to English competence in general), that a PELA would assist students undertaking clinical placement, and that there was a desire to embed literacy support in the disciplinary programs offered by an institution.

Respondents from the four institutions which had no plans to introduce a PELA were invited to describe the reasons why they had decided not to proceed. In three cases it seems that the option had not yet been rejected out of hand as the reasons given were as follows: "the issue has not yet been sufficiently canvassed among the senior management"; "there has not yet been a strong enough case made to the university decision makers"; and "English language services across the university will be undergoing a review in 2009". One respondent stated that a PELA would be no more relevant than the measures the institution used to assess entry-level English language proficiency.

4. Questionnaire and interview results: attitudes and opinions of respondents

The open-ended questions in the survey and the interviews elicited both positive and negative comments about PELAs. The responses describing the benefits of offering a PELA could broadly be categorized into two groups: those which identified the advantages to students, and those which outlined the advantages to the institution or its staff. The concerns ranged from those based on principles or values to the very practical.

4.1. The benefits to students

Almost all respondents who commented on the benefits of a PELA referred to its capacity to identify students' language "needs". They were described as "needs" because they could impact on academic results: inaction left students "disadvantaged" (participant 34), "at risk of failing" (participant 46) or "doomed to fail" (participant 35), while intervention strategies could help them to "do well academically" (participant 33). A clear causal link seemed therefore to exist for the respondents between students' ability to use language and their academic success or failure. While such a link might seem obvious, it is not necessarily the case that high levels of language competence are required to attain pass grades, at least both according to some of the recent literature (see, for example, Bretag, 2007; Birrell, 2006) and as reported by a few of the respondents themselves, who commented that colleagues, particularly in some science or maths-based disciplines, were satisfied that their students were performing at an appropriate level academically without high levels of language competence. At the same time, two participants in this study stated that they had found in their own statistical analyses, failure rates and low levels

of language competence to be positively correlated, although it was not clear whether the relationship was deemed to have been causal.

The second benefit to students identified by a number of respondents was the power a PELA gave students to understand their own language performance and take control of their own learning. Comments included: "students know their needs and [are] motivated potentially to expend extra effort improving" (participant 21); and "[a PELA can] raise student awareness re their EL skills and motivate them to focus on improving these skills" (participant 46). Conversely, without the encouragement provided by a PELA "students do not self-identify" (participant 26). Thus, an explicit link was made in many responses between students' learning about their levels of competence and their intrinsic motivation to do something about it if the results required action. Whether such a direct connection can be made will, however, require further study as PELAs with optional follow-up programs become more commonly used.

A more implicit link was sometimes made in these types of positive responses between the PELA and the availability of subsequent language development assistance. A PELA, it was argued, could "point to appropriate support" (participant 45), enable students to "get help tailored to their needs" (participant 19), to obtain "targeted EL support" (participant 52) or experience "realistic interventions" (participant 39). These comments served to emphasise the desirability of a holistic approach to language development; without such tailored programs within institutions the value of a PELA would be diminished. Information about the degree to which currently available programs are individually tailored, and their efficacy in leading to improved outcomes for students, did not form part of this study. However, the literature does tend to support a link between interventions and improved outcomes (e.g. Bretag, Horrocks & Smith, 2002), though not always unequivocally.

Some respondents also commented on the value of a PELA in enabling students, so long as it was available throughout their academic programs, to assess their language development in an ongoing way and therefore measure their own progress towards graduation. Several participants suggested that some kind of exit assessment should also be introduced, as this would give students a target level of competence at which to aim, particularly as some professional associations are beginning to "demand that students attain a certain exit level" (participant 28).

4.2. Institutional benefits

Many participants also identified benefits which accrued to the university. Comments appeared to fall into three main categories: the value of a PELA in providing data that could be used to enhance aspects of the institution's educational services; the contribution of a PELA towards attaining educational and quality assurance goals; and the importance of having an instrument that could provide language assessment information not always available through external sources.

In the first category, respondents commented that the information obtained from a PELA could be used to "develop new services for students to improve levels of success and retention" (participant 24), that it would lead to a "more comprehensive understanding of English language needs of students" (participant 38), that it could "assist in curriculum and resourcing" decisions (participant 49), and, from a longitudinal perspective, assist in identifying "changes in skills levels over time" (participant 24) – which in turn could lead to fruitful discussions between disciplinary and language and learning staff about "best practice in embedding academic literacy into disciplines" (participant 31). The capacity to track data on developing competence levels and the opportunities for productive research were also identified by a small number of respondents as beneficial.

In the second category, several participants referred either explicitly or implicitly to their university's graduate attributes and educational goals. Most universities list high level communication skills as one of their graduate attributes, and respondents believed that a PELA could assist in assessing "literacy based components of graduate attributes" (participant 17), could enable academics to set tasks that would "reflect expected standards of competence and

interaction" (participant 21), could assist in establishing quality assurance processes with employers and could have "reputational benefits to accrediting agencies" (participant 21).

In the third category, a number of respondents suggested that a PELA could explore the adequacy or counteract the perceived inadequacy of current gatekeeping processes. One participant, for example, stated "IELTS academic does not provide discipline specific enough testing to give a 'clear' indication of students' capacity in using English in the context of our specific requirements" (participant 27). Another felt that a PELA would "assist in assessing comparability of pathway programs" (participant 47), and another commented that the range of backgrounds from which students originated and the types of language qualification they presented meant that "you can't rely on the transcript" (participant 4) and a PELA could be used for placement purposes.

A small number of respondents indicated their belief that if universities had in place high enough English language entry standards using existing measures, then a PELA would be unnecessary. In fact, one participant suggested that the existence of PELAs "undermines IELTS and equivalents", and asked, "Why aren't these working?" (participant 20). Two participants suggested that if universities had in place a standardised entrance test then it could serve the purpose of identifying areas of need prior to a student's enrolment in a program. Standardisation across the sector, however, was not necessarily being advocated, as one participant pointed out that a standardised instrument would be unlikely to meet the needs of all institutions, which vary.

In general, though, there was a sense that PELAs could serve a quite different role to those language tests used as gatekeeping measures. One respondent encapsulated a number of views:

> "[PELAs] may very well be a useful tool to remind students that language development – and commitment to self-development – is critical to tertiary success and employment outcomes. Getting into uni is the beginning, not the end of language development and all too often the setup of IELTS and other tests stop students from considering what they will do after they get the required entry score" (participant 33).

4.3. Concerns

While most respondents were broadly supportive of the use of PELAs, which might have been expected given the population from which they were derived, they were also keenly aware of the drawbacks of such instruments and the wider issues that their use raises. Participants primarily expressed concerns about the tools themselves, about whether PELAs should be integrated into a disciplinary context, about the impact of PELAs on students, particularly if they are to be compulsory, and about the resource implications for their institutions.

With regard to the instruments themselves, a number of respondents commented on the need for construct validity. For example, comments included: "the scope of the tests needs to be appropriate to a tertiary environment; if not they will give us misleading information" (participant 24); "there has to be clarity about what aspects of English are actually being assessed and the instrument used has to provide reliable and specific information that is sufficiently functional to suggest the kinds of support the students need" (participant 19); "the test needs to be designed so that test items are in context as opposed to being discrete multiple choice items" (participant 19); and "online testing of grammar... may not be sufficient to test the academic literacy skills that are required of students" (participant 43). In addition, it was believed that the constraints and limitations of such instruments should be made clear to decision-makers and that PELAs should not be accorded a greater significance in terms of their results than other indicators of student performance. In short, many reservations were expressed as to whether an instrument either existed or could be designed that would truly meet the needs of the stakeholders it was intended to serve.

What also emerged from these responses was that PELAs were being viewed in essentially two different ways. For one group of participants, what needed to be assessed was academic literacy: the ability to communicate using the tools of academic discourse. For those with this point of

view, communication skills in the context of an academic program should not be separated from any other aspect of language; a PELA should therefore target all students. For the other group, a distinction was made between English language competence and academic literacy; the value of a PELA being primarily to identify issues with the former. For this group of respondents, a PELA would be more likely to target EAL students, if not explicitly, then, by virtue of its content, by implication.

The second concern related to whether a PELA and subsequent language development should be integrated into discipline areas. For the great majority of respondents, there were few doubts that assessment and the provision of subsequent development activities within disciplines was the preferred option. A number of reasons were put forward for this. First, if PELAs "are integrated into disciplines they become 'invisible' and therefore more acceptable to students" (participant 2), as they will simply be seen as part of the academic program. Second, if high level language competence is a graduate attribute, then discipline areas should take responsibility for ensuring that it is attained. Conversely, if assessment and subsequent assistance is provided from outside the discipline area, it lends support to the idea that disciplinary staff need not take responsibility for inducting their students into the literacy practices of their discipline, exacerbating the current problems still further. Third, discipline-based "capstone" units which assess literacy or language standards are likely to motivate students to take the issue of language competence or tertiary literacy seriously. Fourth, unlike a generic or institution-wide tool, a PELA located within a discipline area can be finely tuned to the linguistic needs and the specific discourses of the discipline area.

At the same time, it was widely acknowledged that there was a place in the process for language and learning experts, since disciplinary specialists may not have the awareness to identify what is required or the skills to teach it without ongoing professional development. Indeed, one participant, suspicious of the "language across the curriculum" approach, argued that PELAs "should be administered by language professionals, not well-meaning and diligent enthusiasts" (participant 37) in the disciplines, not only for quality reasons, but also so that intellectual rigour around language teaching and scholarship could be maintained.

A further concern among respondents was whether a PELA should be mandatory or optional. Those who believed it should be mandatory argued that this would make a statement about the degree of seriousness with which the issue was taken by the university, that it would prevent accusations of discrimination against individuals or students from particular backgrounds (so long as it was compulsory for all), that an optional PELA fails to include those who are most in need of it, and that for those who do take it there is no incentive to take up the subsequent language development opportunities even if they are found to be in need of them. Some of those arguing for an optional instrument or hesitant about introducing a PELA appeared to come from a perspective of a concern for the emotional well-being of the student. For example, comments included "students may feel uncomfortable, even threatened" (participant 34), and "students may resent being assigned to support classes" (participant 43). Others were not supportive of a mandatory instrument because they believed that students in higher education should be self-motivated: "at tertiary level you shouldn't have to mandate anything" (participant 4).

Those who were concerned about the negative impact on students also expressed the belief that students may perceive that they were being seen as "deficient" in some way when they had already met the university's English language entry requirements; or that they were being presented with "yet another hurdle to get through" (participant 25). As a consequence, students might suffer from "test fatigue" (participant 45), be reluctant to take the PELA and unmotivated to seek out developmental assistance if identified as appropriate, or, according to one respondent, become discouraged from attending university. Some participants also suggested that PELAs could lead to "perceived discrimination against certain ethnic or national groups, possibly stigmatising some students" (participant 36), and that if the PELA was too narrowly focused on English that it "can 'other' international students" (participant 41). On the other hand, many respondents did not sympathise with such concerns. One stated, for example, that in her institution "students appreciate [the PELA] as they think the more competent all students are, the better the classes will run" (participant 28). Another commented: "What is worse –

stigmatising students or failing students? What is the elephant in the room? Students don't achieve their potential because they haven't achieved language competence" (participant 48).

Many participants suggested that it was possible to have a PELA without generating student anxiety, so long as it was well-managed and if the language that surrounded its introduction was carefully monitored. Many terms in common use were criticized for their pejorative connotations: for example, "remedial" implies lack of an appropriate level of attainment, "diagnosis" is more usually associated with medical conditions, and "support" implies neediness. Alternative terms, such as "developmental", "assessment" and "services", as well as careful explanation of aims, it was argued, could lessen student fears.

Concerns about resources featured strongly in the survey and interview responses. A large number of respondents were concerned either that once a PELA had identified those in need of assistance that the funds would not be available to provide the requisite developmental activities, or that a PELA would take an excessive share of the overall "student support services" budget. Some participants commented that their discipline-specific PELAs were funded by their Schools or Faculties rather than from the central university budget, which put areas under strain. As well as financial resources, many respondents referred to the additional time resources that PELAs could consume: for those administering them, for those following up on them and for those taking them where they are administered outside class time. In short, there appeared to be some concern that universities were introducing PELAs "without planning or being able to resource the next step".

5. Summary and conclusions

The study indicates that over one third of Australia's universities offer some kind of PELA, with many more considering their introduction. At present, most existing PELAs are paper-based, focus primarily on writing or reading and writing, and are linked to a particular course of study. It appears, however, that PELAs which are currently at the planning stage are more likely to be available online and available at an institutional level. Whatever the content and delivery mode, most universities are designing their own instruments in response to their perceived needs; and while there is some support for a more unified approach to be taken across the sector, there is also a belief among some that the needs of the individual institutions are likely to differ. Nevertheless, the issue of how scarce resources might best be utilized preoccupied many participants, and a greater level of collaboration between institutions might be a way of addressing this.

One barrier to collaboration is likely to be the different views on the cohorts of students who should be targeted by such an instrument, and as a corollary to this, the nature of the construct to be assessed. The range of responses in this study illustrated the different paradigms that exist: some viewed the issue as relating to basic language proficiency and identified EAL students, both international and domestic, as being those who should be targeted; some believed that a PELA should assess the generic capacity to communicate effectively within a tertiary academic environment and that a PELA should therefore be available to all students; and some saw a PELA as a discipline-based opportunity to assess all students' familiarity with the specific linguistic demands of a particular discipline. At present, different skills and forms of knowledge are assessed in the various types of PELA, but none can claim to be representative in its coverage of all the facets which make up either general English language competence or academic literacy.

Views, too, appeared to be divided about the function of a PELA, with some respondents visualising it as an assessment of proficiency which could serve as an alternative to, or a more effective measure than, the current means of meeting English language entry requirements. Others saw it as a way of assessing overall proficiency or academic literacy at a given point in time, while still others viewed it as a way in which students could drill down to identify their unique strengths and weaknesses in different areas of language use. What the responses did have in common was a clear commitment to students and concern that their needs should be met and that they should be offered the greatest opportunity to maximize their potential.

The results of this study suggest that post-entry language assessments can serve a variety of purposes and take many forms, all of which have their own merits. It would therefore appear that higher education is unlikely to be well served if there is a move towards a single instrument for the sector. The participants in this study, selected from the population likely to be the most interested and informed about these issues, were broadly supportive of the use of PELAs in higher education, but many were concerned that the debate on the fundamentals had not yet taken place. As the design of any language assessment tool will depend on the purposes for which it is intended, it is clearly essential that prior to the introduction of the tool, universities need to decide what they wish a PELA to measure, whom a PELA should target, how the results will be used to further the educational development of those who take it, and what resources should be set aside to achieve this. If there is to be internal consistency, the nature of the instrument and all associated language development activities will depend on the answers to these questions.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Survey questions

Note: the survey was interactive, so not all respondents received all questions but only those that related to their previous answers.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out about the uses of and attitudes to post-entry English language diagnostic tests/needs analysis tools for undergraduate and/or postgraduate students in Australian universities. For brevity, from this point forward, such an instrument will be referred to as an ELD (English language diagnosis). You will be asked up to 20 questions (the actual number depends on the answers you give). The questionnaire will take between 5 and 15 minutes to complete.

Please tick the statements/answers which are most applicable to your institution. If you cannot answer a question, you can leave it blank.

Question 1
- My university currently uses an institution-wide ELD.
- An ELD is used in one or more areas of my university, but not at an institution-wide level.
- My university does not currently use an ELD but is considering introducing one.
- My university does not currently use an ELD and has no plans to introduce one.

Question 2
The ELD was originally designed:
- In-house
- By an external commercial provider or consultant
- By another university (e.g. available through a licence agreement)

Question 3
The ELD mode of delivery is:
- Fully online
- Partly online
- Pen-and-paper format
- Supervised (i.e. test conditions apply)
- Unsupervised

Question 4

The ELD is administered:
- Throughout the semester or year
- For certain weeks of the year
- On given dates

Question 5

The ELD is compulsory for:
- All new students.
- International students only
- Students who have an English entry level below a certain point only
- Students referred by their lecturer or other academic advisor only
- No-one, it is optional

Question 6

The ELD is intended for:
- Students from any language background
- Students from a non-English speaking background
- Undergraduate students
- Postgraduate students

Question 7

The ELD assesses the following aspects of language:
- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking
- Grammar/vocabulary
- Other _____

Question 8

Which area of your university administers the ELD? _____

Question 9

Approximately how many students per year take the ELD? _____

What percentage of the target group does this represent? _____

Question 10

What is the next step for students who have completed the ELD?

Question 11

If your university uses/is considering an ELD, please explain the reasons why it has been introduced/is being considered.

Question 12

If your university does not use an ELD and has no plans to introduce one, please provide the reasons for this.

Question 13

Please use this space if you would like to make any additional comments about the benefits and/or disadvantages of using ELDs in universities.

Question 14

Please use this space if you would like to make any general comments about the use of ELDs in universities

Question 15 (please circle)

My university is in   NSW VIC TAS ACT NT WA QLD SA

Question 16 (optional)

The name of my university is _____

If you are willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview (maximum 30 minutes), please provide your name, email address and phone number in this box. If you do not wish to be contacted, leave this box blank. Please note that any details you provide here will be stored separately from your questionnaire responses. Many thanks for completing this questionnaire.

Appendix B. Interview questions

- First of all, in your view do diagnostic instruments have a place in a university's overall approach to student language competence?
- What kind of elements do you think a diagnostic instrument should assess?
- Some respondents have suggested that universities will achieve better educational outcomes by having such an instrument. What is your view on this?
- Some feedback suggested that universities are better able to target resources to those who need them in ways that they need them if they use a diagnostic tool. What do you think?
- Some people have argued that a diagnostic can stigmatise students. What is your view on this?
- Some feedback has suggested that there is a danger that diagnostic instruments could be misused. What do you think of these concerns?
- An institution-wide instrument is too blunt and if introduced a diagnostic needs to be discipline specific. What is your view on this?
- Do you have any other comments that you'd like to make?

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