

BALEAP Testing, Assessment, and Feedback SIG (TAFSIG) Webinar

Notes from the break-out rooms on online testing for entry purposes

The discussion focused on the options for online assessment and the fact that such options are severely limited. The Leeds representative had looked at Password as an option but was undecided. The alternative was whether it was possible to use two of the sections of the Pearson Test, reading and listening, and supplement it with writing and speaking sections created by the Leeds centre and monitored remotely via ZOOM or similar. It was generally thought that this would be very difficult to manage and may well not be acceptable for TIER 4 purposes. The participants from Dundee are interested in using Password. My advice was that, although Password is far from strictly a test of Academic English, it at least has had a reasonably lengthy grounding. I did mention that ISLI/CALS had been involved in the original trialling of the Password test some 10 or 12 years ago and we had quite a number of misgivings about the general construct at that stage and the students involved reacted negatively but that the format and content may well have been refined and be more appropriate these days. I was asked if there were any alternatives and I was in the middle of describing the use of c-tests as a means of assessing at what level students of English had reached when the time ran out. I would have concluded that c-tests are used a lot in Europe as general test of linguistic ability no matter what language but may be valid only as a screening, placement or progress measure.

(John Slaght)

One university yet to decide which if any of the tests to accept, but pretty sure not IELTS Indicator at the moment due to security issues and the fact that it isn't accepted in mainland China. Currently using own in-house online test which tests all 4 skills.

One university's feeder college accepts Duolingo. This is a Foundation college and so there is plenty of opportunity and time to give students additional language support before they transfer to their uni programmes.

Another university self-describes as a 'recruiting university' and so depends on these tests. Currently accepts all the tests mentioned and says they will have to monitor these students very carefully and provide additional in-session support. Has also conducted 450 in-house online speaking assessments in China.

One colleague is involved in an online placement test which was administered after students had been accepted onto their courses at university (in Japan – English was a subsidiary subject and levels were around A1 – A2). For this the team made their own test and administered it online to around 3,000 students.

A colleague at another institution has been asked to give recommendations to Academic Council on the possibility of their imminent acceptance. In the current climate they are being asked to consider carefully the possibilities of significant numbers of students being prevented from coming due to language test certification and the impact of this on the college. With that in mind, they are looking at what follow up they could recommend in order to mitigate concerns around security and suitability of tests.

A summary of views on tests from one group:

DET (Duolingo English Test) – are there any validation reports? Some are uncomfortable with accepting DET because of lack of relevance to TLU domain and lack of writing in the ‘Extended Writing’ part. Some are struggling to justify accepting DET.

Password – some considering. One person was involved in the CEFR linking (on the expert panel for the linking exercise) and accepted it at their university.

LanguageCert – no experience

IELTS Indicator – the test is a real IELTS test. Speaking test has ID check but it is designed as a way to enable test takers and institutions to continue the recruitment process so the university can decide to ask for further evidence, for example, if the L/R/W tests reveal high results but the student doesn’t perform well in the Speaking test.

Other comments:

Comes back to security / online proctoring – test constructs can be as secure as you like but if there’s no security, then there is an issue.

No experience in the group of online proctoring.

One institution is accepting Duolingo along with a PSE course as Duolingo alone does not really give a reliable indication of academic English language proficiency.

LanguageCert International ESOL C1 Expert is accepted for direct entry and online preessionals.

Toefl iBT Special Home Edition is accepted, but not available in mainland China.

Password is not accepted mainly because the University has its own test and needs to find an online proctoring solution, as it would with Password. They are very interested in pursuing avenues for online secure testing.
