

# Uneven language profiles & differentiated language requirements

- *recommendations for test developers, policy makers and employers*

	Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening							
Speaking							
Reading							
Writing							

ALTE LAMI report, 2023

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## Foreword from the ALTE Secretary General

For more than 30 years, ALTE has pursued its mission in the world of multilingual language assessment to set standards while sustaining diversity. In doing so, *striving for fairness* has been at the heart of our *Code of Practice* and a guiding principle for all members.

Increasingly in recent years, we have sought to broaden participation in ALTE's activities and to engage with other stakeholders in society, including policy makers and employers. This has extended our focus to encompass issues of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Taken together these issues are nowadays represented by the acronym JEDI.

ALTE's Special Interest Group, LAMI, that deals with language assessment in the context of migration and integration, has grappled with issues of fairness and social justice from theoretical and practical perspectives for many years. This report on uneven language profiles and differentiated language requirements is the most recent example of their output and represents another important contribution from ALTE to the field of language assessment. The examples of good practice not only serve to raise awareness of the importance of acknowledging that language learners have uneven language profiles, but also illustrate how it has been put into practice in diverse assessment contexts and for several different languages.

The ongoing collaboration with the Council of Europe is an important aspect of the work of LAMI and ALTE's interest in language profiles has its origins in such collaboration dating back to the 1990s. After its publication in 2001, the CEFR became a core reference document in ALTE's *Principles of Good Practice*. Whilst the action-oriented approach and Reference Levels are central, the CEFR notions of *plurilingualism*, *partial competence* and *life-long learning* are particularly relevant to the work that is reported here.

I would like to thank the authors for this timely report and believe that it will support better understandings of uneven profiles in language learning. In turn, I hope this will lead to fairer assessment practices and more socially just uses of language assessment, especially in the context of migration and integration.

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Cambridge  
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## Executive summary

The aim of this report is to raise awareness about the advantages of an uneven profile approach in language testing, i.e., measuring learners' language skills separately in different parts of the test. Language tests reporting scores of listening, speaking, reading, and writing separately allow employers and policymakers to set differentiated language requirements for access to labour, higher education, residence, or citizenship. The report presents the results of a survey investigating whether ALTE members do indeed measure and report language skills separately in the tests they develop, as well as the degree to which test users in different Council of Europe member states set differentiated language requirements for different contexts. Finally, the report presents examples of good practice from five countries in which there are language tests measuring uneven language profiles as well as examples of test users setting differentiated language requirements. The target readers for this report are professionals working in language teaching and assessment, primarily in the migration context.

## Social justice and equal opportunities

A just and inclusive language policy should consider that language learners typically have uneven language profiles and should therefore set legitimate and differentiated requirements for instance for access to education and employment. Measuring skills separately as well as setting differentiated language requirements would facilitate migrants' integration process into all areas of society. Uneven profile testing is therefore a more socially just assessment practice and more in line with Council of Europe values of social inclusion, respect for diversity and the dignity of all.

## Language testers' responsibility for justice

Language test developers have a responsibility to do what they can to ensure that their test scores are interpreted and used in line with the underlying construct and intentions and in the best interest of test takers. The first step to achieving a well-informed and appropriate interpretation and use of test scores, is for the test developers to give clear and detailed descriptions of what their tests measure, as well as the meaning of test scores. Providing information about the value of setting differentiated language requirements in the pursuit of equal opportunities for all, is part of that responsibility.

## Uneven language profiles are the normal case

Language users and language learners alike typically have uneven language profiles with higher levels of proficiency in some skills than in other. This is true for most language users, first and second language users alike, but even more so for adult language learners who are learning to read and write for the first time in a second language. For an accurate representation of language users' skills, this fact must be taken into account when measuring language proficiency and reporting test scores. Uneven language profiles are acknowledged as natural in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) and the Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) upon which most ALTE members base their tests.

## Most ALTE members measure language skills separately

The survey conducted among ALTE members demonstrates that most test developers within ALTE do indeed measure and report language skills separately in their tests: this is the case in 19 out of 24 cases.

### Policy makers and employers typically require a flat proficiency level

Even when language test certificates differentiate between different language skills, this is often not used when policy makers and employers set language requirements for different contexts. In 11 out of 24 countries test users do not set differentiated language requirements, to the best of respondents' knowledge. When a lower level *is* required in some skills, it is normally the case for writing, followed by reading.

### Examples of good practice

The report includes examples of good practice provided by five ALTE members from Council of Europe member states where uneven profile assessment as well as differentiated language requirements exist. In reporting test results in different language skills, these examples provide empirical evidence of the existence of language learners' uneven profiles. The examples also show that writing is normally the most difficult skills for language learners.

## Introduction

Learning a new language as an adult is a demanding cognitive task which requires considerable dedication, effort, and investment on the part of the learner as well as a favourable learning context to be successful (Carlsen et al., 2023; Ortega, 2014; Darvin & Norton, 2023). Language learning in adulthood is challenging enough when it is the result of the learner's own choice and interest, when learning happens in a safe context, when the teacher shares the learners' first language and can use it for explanations and support, and when no high stakes are involved if learning fails. For those who are forced migrants, however, the language learning situation is even more demanding due to both learner-internal and learner-external factors (Gujord, 2023; Kurvers et al., 2015): Since the major causes of forced migration – war, conflict, poverty and discrimination – are at the same time important causes for lack of schooling and literacy training in childhood, many migrants and refugees have been deprived of the fundamental right of schooling and therefore lack in literacy training as well as in the experiences with formal learning in a class-room setting, testing and exams (Carlsen, 2017; Carlsen & Rocca, 2021). In addition, language instruction in the migration context is typically given by teachers who do not share their learners' first language and who can therefore only use it to a limited degree for support and explanations. Moreover, learning the language of the new country of settlement is often an obligation and a necessity rather than a choice of one's free will, and the stakes of failing are high: Over the past 20 years, migrants' prospects of a safe future as well as their access to equal rights and opportunities have come to depend largely on their ability to learn the new language and ultimately on their scores on formal language tests (Gysen et al., 2009; Khan & McNamara, 2017; Rocca et al., 2020; Van Avermaet & Pulinx, 2013).

Language tests function as door-openers to education, jobs, and democratic participation<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, they function as gatekeepers to the same rights and opportunities (Khan & McNamara, 2017; Shohamy, 2009). In line with validity theory and professionally recognized codes of ethics and codes of practice developed by international language test organizations, like the [ILTA Code of Ethics](#), the [ALTE Code of Practice](#), and the [EALTA guidelines for good practice](#), language test developers have an ethical and professional responsibility to ensure that the tests they develop be beneficial for test takers and society in the short and long term (McNamara, 2006; McNamara & Roever, 2006).

In this report, we argue that for a language test to give all test takers an even-handed chance to show their language abilities, it is important that a lack of proficiency in one language

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe on competences for democratic culture here: [The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(RFCDC\) - Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(coe.int\)](#)

skill, like writing, does not impact the score of the test on a whole or the outcome on other parts of the test, like speaking, more than necessary. *One aim of this report is therefore to argue in favour of constructing language tests that measure the different language skills and report the scores separately.* This is, in our view, the best way of providing all test takers, including those who lack in prior schooling and literacy skills, with the best chance to show their language abilities. *A second aim of the report is to underline the importance of setting differentiated language requirements for admission to higher education, for access to the labour market or for residence and citizenship*<sup>2</sup>. This, we argue, gives all migrants the fairest chance to take part in society on equal terms and hence foster social justice and equal opportunities for all. This approach has several advantages for migrants (ALTE LAMI, 2016: 27; Carlsen et al., 2023): Not only does it yield a more accurate picture of learners' abilities; it also allows all learners to show their actual levels of proficiency in each skill rather than being restrained by their poorest skill. It also allows test candidates to sit for each part of the test separately and to only take the part of the test required for a certain purpose, or to take only a part of the test again if they fail to reach the desired or required level at the first attempt. This is both more motivating, more practical, and more economic for the candidates.

We acknowledge that setting formal language requirements is, in most cases, up to the policy makers who develop language policy in different areas and employers setting language requirement when hiring new staff, and therefore most often outside the direct control of language tests developers. This does not free language test developers from their responsibilities to try and prevent their tests from being used inappropriately, however (Carlsen & Rocca, 2021; Messick, 1998): Since language testers are the ones who know better than anyone what their tests measure, what they do not measure, and what would be the best and most adequate use of their tests, language testers have a professional and ethical responsibility to communicate this information clearly to policy makers and employers. Hence, in addition to measuring the different language skills separately, test developers and test developing organizations, can make a difference by clearly informing potential test users of the possibilities of setting differentiated language requirements and the benefits of doing so.

This report includes the outcome of a digital survey mapping the degree to which language tests developers in Council of Europe (CoE) member states provide language tests

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<sup>2</sup> In line with Council of Europe values and reasoning, rather than formal language tests as requirements for residency and citizenship, we would recommend that policy makers provide high quality learning opportunities for migrants, since “[c]ourses are likely to be more effective than obligatory language tests to foster and facilitate the process of integration” (Rocca et al., 2020:67).

measuring the different language skills separately, as well as the degree to which policy makers set differentiated language requirements. It also includes examples of good practice from different countries provided by ALTE members in which both uneven profiles and differentiated requirements are described and contextualized. It is our hope that these concrete examples of good practice could serve as illustrations on how language testers can develop tests allowing test score users to set differentiated requirements where language tests become true door-openers to opportunities rather than unnecessary and sometimes even unlawful barriers.

The target audiences for this report are professionals working in language teaching and assessment, primarily in the migration context. Researchers interested in language assessment and language requirements in different contexts might also find it of relevance. Even though the report contains specialized vocabulary, it has been our aim that the report be readable also for non-specialists.

#### Uneven language profiles – the normal case

Language users typically have uneven language proficiency profiles, i.e., different levels of proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking/oral interaction<sup>3</sup>. This is true for pre-school children, whose oral skills (listening and speaking) clearly exceed their written skills (reading and writing), it is true for adult first language users who may read and appreciate the great pieces of literature without themselves being able to write prose of similar quality, and it is true for second language learners who normally perform better in the receptive skills than in the productive skills. Even though first and second language users alike, have uneven profiles to some extent, low-literate adult migrants who learn to read and write for the first time in a second language (hereafter LESLLA learners<sup>4</sup>) have profiles that are particularly jagged, with lower levels of proficiency in the written skills than in the oral skills (Carlsen & Hamidi, 2023). As we will look into in more detail in Chapter 2 below, this insight is core to the *Common European Framework of Reference* (Council of Europe, 2001) and its *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) which is used throughout CoE member states for teaching, learning and assessment as well as for the development of teaching material and curricula for both foreign and second language learning. As we will show in Chapter 3, many ALTE members do indeed measure the different language skills in separate parts of the tests yielding separate

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<sup>3</sup> The CEFR Companion Volume (CoE, 2020) distinguishes between uneven proficiency profile across a specific language (Figure 9 on p. 40 of the CV) and the multilingual language user's plurilingual proficiency profile across more than one language (Figure 10 on p. 40 of the CV). Even though the two can be said to be interrelated, the main focus in this report is on the profile in the dominant language of the host country.

<sup>4</sup> LESLLA refers to Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults ([LESLLA.org](https://www.leslla.org)).

scores<sup>5</sup>. Yet, as we will also show in this report, when language requirements are set for entrance to the labour market, admission to higher education or for residency and citizenship purposes, policy makers do often set uniform requirements, i.e., the same level requirement across the four skills.

ALTE and the ALTE LAMI project group build on the CoE human right standards and share its vision of Europe ‘as a multinational and multicultural society, where immigrants take part as equal members, on the basis of equality of rights and opportunities in return for equality of obligations’ (Council of Europe, 2003). Integration is conceived as a process which allows migrants to take active participation in all areas of society: economic, social, cultural, and political. Proficiency in the majority language(s) will generally be beneficial in the process of integration in all the mentioned areas. At the same time, it is important to recognize that language policies, language ideologies and formal language requirements may constitute very real and sometimes unsurmountable barriers for some groups of migrants (Jensen et al., 2021; Khan & McNamara, 2017). We see an uneven profile approach as an important measure in achieving social justice and social inclusion for adult migrants, in both testing and the setting of language requirements, as it allows all learners to show their language competences across different language skills. In addition, it allows policy makers to set requirements that are tailored to the real needs in the context in which the requirements are set. Still, in order to set requirements that are justifiable, policy makers and employers should start by analysing the real language needs necessary to perform a given task or carry out a certain job, setting adequate and relevant requirements in the different skills. In many jobs, oral proficiency is the most important skill, and in such scenarios, employers could simply set either only oral language requirements, or set lower requirements in reading and writing compared to listening and speaking.

Building on Messick’s definition of validity as presented in a series of papers in the 1980s and 90s (Messick, 1989, 1998), test score interpretation and the social consequences of test use, are central to the concept of validity. Consequently, language test developers have a responsibility to do what they can to ensure that their test scores are interpreted and used in line with the underlying construct and intentions and in the best interest of test takers. The first step

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<sup>5</sup> In practice, even in tests where the four skills are measured separately, it is natural and even unavoidable, that there is some listening comprehension involved in the speaking/oral interaction part of the test, just as it is natural and unavoidable that the part measuring writing skills requires the candidate to read written instructions and prompts. The most important distinction lies between oral skills (listening and speaking/oral interaction) on the one hand and written skills (reading and writing/written interaction) on the other, and particularly to make sure the scores on the oral parts of the test depend as little as possible on the candidates’ reading and writing skills.

towards preventing uninformed or inadequate use of test scores and achieving a well-informed use of test scores, is for the test developers to give clear and detailed descriptions of what their tests measure, and what would represent a valid interpretation of test scores. To inform users about what would *not* represent a valid interpretation and use, may be less common, but equally important (Taylor, 2023)<sup>6</sup>. This information could include a section about uneven profiles and the possibility of setting differentiated language requirements for different purposes. A good example of this is the web-page tailored to employers developed by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) and available [here](#). In this information, HK-dir explains in detail:

- the content of the *Test of Norwegian for adult migrants*
- what the test results (CEFR-levels) mean
- how to carry out a language needs analysis for specific jobs and professions
- how to provide language learning opportunities at the workplace
- how to avoid discrimination of minoritized employees.

Importantly, in their information to employers, HK-dir explains the importance of setting differentiated language requirements:

Start by considering what language skills are necessary in order to carry out the different work-related tasks. One particular job may require different levels of proficiency in listening, reading, writing and oral skills. If, for instance, the job first and foremost involves speaking with customers, listening and oral skills may be more important than reading and writing. In that case, one may set differentiated level requirements in the job advertisement: For instance, you may require A2 in the written skills and B1 in the oral skills (HK-dir, 2022).

In a report on uneven profiles and the advantages of measuring the different skills separately, we need to also make it clear that it is quite possible, as many linguists and language test expert would do, to make the opposite case. For instance, Purpura argues:

This independent-skills approach, while useful in some assessment contexts, generally failed to acknowledge that in most instances of language use, we read or listen in order to talk or write on the same topic—the skills are integrated, and the topic sustained. In other words, a skill like reading is seen as a social activity of situated language use, in which both independent and integrated skill modalities are used to build and consolidate knowledge in one modality before sharing it in another (e.g., “read-to-write”) [...] (Purpura, 2021).

The advocates for integrated skills testing clearly have a point: In real life, we do indeed often draw on a combination of (language and other) skills when solving complex tasks. Maintaining

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<sup>6</sup> See ALTE’s development of Minimum Standard 18 focusing on language testers’ responsibility for trying to prevent their tests from being misused through explicitness of information, systematic gathering of information about language test score interpretation and use, as well as actions when inappropriate use of the test is detected.

a clear line between language skills and trying to isolate them in a test, is obviously less authentic than measuring language skills in an integrated way. We would argue with Bachman & Palmer (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 2010), that whether this approach is justifiable depends on the intended purpose of the test and the test taker groups for which it is intended. It is less problematic to integrate written and oral skills in a test developed with high-educated, literate candidates in mind, or with the purpose of university admission, whereas it is far more problematic if the test is also going to be taken by LESLLA learners and used for the purpose of setting requirements for residence and citizenship. For these learners, having the possibility to show their oral skills without being held back by a lack of reading and writing skills, may be fundamental for their access to labour as well as their rights to residency and citizenship.

With the aim of achieving equal rights and access to all areas of society for adult migrants, we would maintain that an uneven profile approach is the most beneficial, echoing the claims of Strik (2013) in the CoE PACE [Report \*Integration tests: helping or hindering integration?\*](#), who argue that in order to achieve attainable language proficiency levels for residence and citizenship, it is important that:

[...] the language levels be not set too high and that they be differentiated with regard to what is expected in terms of speaking and listening ability (not going beyond the A2 level of the Council of Europe “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” (CEFR)), and writing and reading ability (remaining at the basic A1 level of the CEFR) (Strik, 2013, p. 3).

## The CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume on uneven profiles

The CEFR is the first European policy instrument that in a systematic and consistent way incorporates the concept of uneven language profiles, hence challenging the idea of language competence as linear and language learning as a scaled progression. The uneven profile idea is primarily grounded in two of the document’s pivotal concepts, that of plurilingual and pluricultural competence and that of communicative language competence. The first concept considers the linguistic-communicative interactions of an individual as an ‘experience of language in its cultural context, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other people. In tandem with this, the concept of communicative language competence refers to a system that is constructed through the interrelation and the interaction of languages; a system to which all the knowledge and experiences of language of the individual as a member of a society contribute (p. 4).

The assumption that each individual possesses an uneven profile is intricately linked to this and also to the fact that communicative language competence can be considered as comprising several components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic (p. 13), each of which is difficult to define in a unitary and coherent manner due to their open-ended nature. Communicative language competence develops according to a vertical dimension and a horizontal dimension. However, the most accurate representation of its development is a multidimensional one which, as per the CEFR, is extremely challenging, if not impossible, to depict fully. Nevertheless, this representation provides the most comprehensive framework to capture the complexities of the process (p. 16). The multidimensionality perspective allows us not to “forget that the process of language learning is continuous and individual: no two users of a language [...] have exactly the same competences or develop it in the same way. [...] any attempt to establish ‘levels’ of proficiency is to some extent arbitrary, as it is in any area of knowledge or skill” (p. 17). In other words, “learning a language is a matter of horizontal as well as vertical progress and progress is not merely a question of moving up a vertical scale”. For this reason, “learners may make lateral progress by broadening their performance capabilities rather than increasing their proficiency in terms of the same category” (p. 17).

The fact that language users have uneven profiles is even more evident when considering that communicative language competence always develops within a plurilingual and pluricultural dimension and, in practice, corresponds to plurilingual (and pluricultural) competence, within which imbalances are not the exception, but the norm. It should be noted that the CEFR positively emphasises that the idea of an uneven profile does not imply “instability or lack of balance, but rather contributes in the majority of cases, to improved awareness of identity” (p. 133). On a practical level, the fact that language users have uneven profiles makes it plausible to think in terms of plus levels and adopt a branching approach, whereby “a common set of levels and/or descriptors can be ‘cut’ into practical local levels at different points by different users to suit local needs and yet still relate back to a common system” (p. 32). This also makes it possible to assume that “the languages offered should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence” (p. 5).

Published online in 2018 as the *CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors*, the *CEFR Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) represents another step in a process that has been pursued by the CoE since 1964. In addition to the extended illustrative descriptors, this policy instrument “contains a user-friendly explanation of the aims and main principles of the CEFR, which the CoE hopes will help increase awareness of the CEFR’s messages, particularly in teacher education” (p. 14). The CEFR CV takes up and deepens the idea that

language users have uneven profiles. Moreover, it clarifies that what has just been said happens because communicative language competence is by nature uneven, by discussing this idea and offering evidence of it in several passages. More specifically, the CEFR CV ties the concept of uneven profile even more closely to that of plurilingual and pluricultural competence - for which descriptor scales are provided - and insists on the definition of ‘plus levels’. Fundamentally and of far greater significance, the CEFR CV introduces a profound reconsideration of the conventional understanding of “level” and “profile” in the context of developing communicative language competence, by stating that levels are a necessary simplification of complex profiles. This is because the proficiency of any user/learner is “influenced by home background, by the needs of the situation in which the person has found themselves, and by their experience, including transversal competences acquired in general education, in using other languages, in professional life” (p. 39).

In addition, it is emphasised that the reason why “the CEFR includes so many descriptor scales is to encourage users to develop differentiated profiles. Descriptor scales can be used firstly to identify which language activities are relevant for a particular group of learners and, secondly, to establish which level those learners need to achieve in those activities in order to accomplish their goals” (p. 38).

The most groundbreaking proposition coming from the CEFR CV is the concept of “individual uneven language profiles”. This implies also that each scale describes the learning goals independently of each other’. As pointed out in the *European reference guide on literacy and second language learning for the linguistic integration of adult migrants (hereafter LASLLIAM)*: “a person might be at level B1 in a certain scale and at level B1+ in another and this does not imply that there are no interrelations between the scales at all” (Council of Europe, 2022: 22).

CEFR CV and LASLLIAM offer guidance in how to operationalise language profiles according to three interrelated dimensions:

- 1) the vertical and general dimension, describing competence across different levels (e.g. in part by descriptors at one level and in part by descriptors at another level) (Council of Europe, 2020, Figure 9 and Council of Europe, 2022, Figure 8)
- 2) the horizontal and detailed dimension, describing competence in more detail, addressing learners’ needs across the different categories of the specific scales, even also within the same level (e.g. taking into account to what extent the competence differs between “reading for instruction” and “reading correspondence”) (Council of Europe, 2020,

Figure 7); or a competence described across the four domains of language use (Council of Europe, 2022, Figure 9)

- 3) the plurilingual dimension, describing competence across the different languages that a language user masters to some degree (Council of Europe, 2020, Figure 8).

This report considers mainly the first of these three dimensions, addressing language testers and teachers involved in the assessment of learners' proficiency in one second language. In all figures mentioned above, the modelling of the profiles is based on the replacement of "the traditional model of the four skills" (Council of Europe, 2020: 33) with communicative language activities where, within the interaction (both oral and written), the production as well as the reception of skills are involved. Although representations like these could appear inconsistent with the illustration used on the front page of this report, the main goal is identical: in this report, as in the CEFR and the CEFR CV, the purpose of the figures is to highlight that uneven language profiles are natural in all language users and should be reflected in the assessment of language proficiency. From the perspective of language testing, an additional and related issue worth mentioning is that of partial competence: taking learners' partial competence into account, means operationalising the CEFR communicative language activities (CoE, 2020: 47-123) into test tasks. No test can cover all activities, so a selection has to be made. Nor is it likely that a language user/learner performs equally well in all activities since it depends on each language user/learner's different needs, background, and language learning history. It means that within the speaking component and more specifically within the tasks eliciting spoken interaction, listening is also embedded; similarly, in the writing component and more specifically within the tasks eliciting written interaction, reading is also embedded.

The reason why it is not meaningful to describe language in terms of "full competence" is primarily due to the fact that language and linguistic ability themselves are inexact, vague, without boundaries (Machetti, 2023). Focusing on language, "no complete, exhaustive description of any language as a formal system for the expression of meaning has ever been produced" (CEFR, p. 108). Theories and models are not univocal and do not provide a univocal concept of language and language ability. At the same time, theories and models do not provide a univocal impact of how languages are learned, taught, and assessed. Looking at the learning process, research tells us that language learning appears to be a process of striving towards adequacy to the input norms, in an attempt to build competence in L2 according to the patterns of a 'normal' paradigm of the structural rules of the language. However, it also corresponds to a mechanism of deviation from the norm, which leads the learner to elaborate rules also distant

from those present in the input. Therefore, this process is characterized by constant irregularity and the potential to disrupt not only linguistic, but also generally semiotic mechanisms involved in the formation of meaning, violating the ‘normal’ language rules or changing them in the course of communication (Vedovelli, 2003).

Finally, we would like to underline the importance of communicating in a clear and transparent way the meaning of test results to candidates, teachers, policymakers, and employers alike. These issues address aspects of practicality and relate to the comprehensibility of the information given by the certification, leading to what the CEFR assumes as typical:

“[o]fficial recognition of partial competences may be a step in this direction and it would be helpful if the major international qualifications were to show the way by adopting such an approach, for example by acknowledging separately the four skills” (Council of Europe, 2001:175).

### Uneven profile tests and requirements – results of a survey

For differentiated language requirements to be a viable option for policy makers and employers alike, it is a prerequisite that there actually exist language tests yielding separate scores in different skills. In the opposite case, if the only language tests available yield one holistic score across all skills, there is limited options for those setting requirements, to set lower scores in some skills than in others. Relevant questions to explore in a report on uneven profiles is therefore firstly *to what extent do different ALTE members offer language tests yielding separate scores in different skills*, and secondly; *to what extent are uneven profiles reflected when formal language requirements are set in different areas of society*.

We explored these questions through an electronic questionnaire in SurveyXact. The invitation to take part was sent to ALTE members on behalf of the ALTE LAMI project group by the ALTE Secretariat on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022 (See Appendix for both documents). The questionnaire first addressed some background factors (country and ALTE affiliation i.e., full member, affiliate member, no member, or other). The two main questions mentioned above were the focus of the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to respond to the best of their knowledge about the existence in their respective countries as to whether there exist:

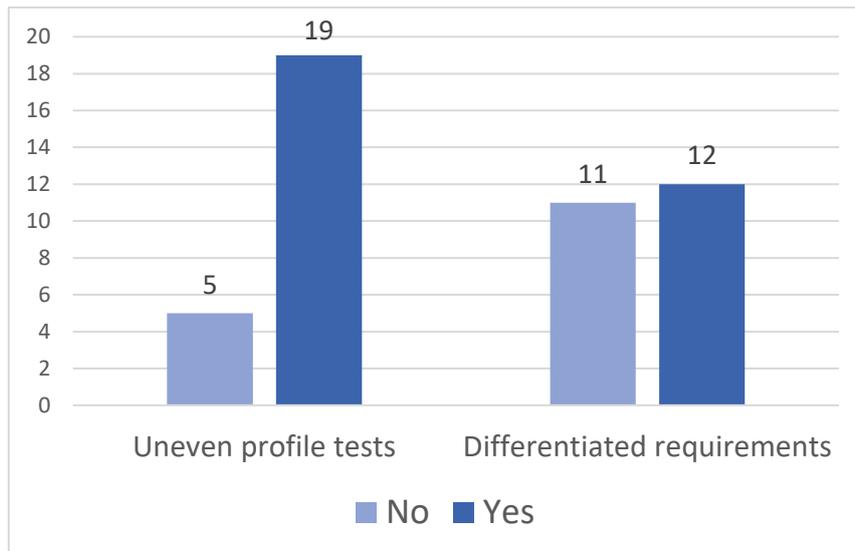
- 1) *tests yielding different scores in different skills, and if so;*
  - *what skills are scored separately*
- 2) *cases of differentiated language requirements in their countries, and if so;*
  - *in what contexts*

*If there are differentiated requirement for employment, they were asked;*

- *what employers set differentiated requirements*
- *for what jobs*
- *in what skills are there lower requirements*

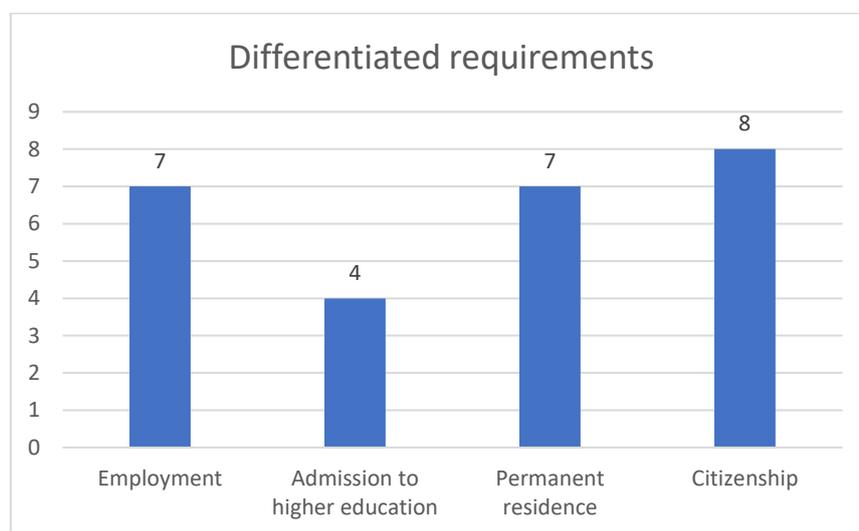
We received 86 responses in total. 28 respondents worked for an ALTE full member institution, 30 for an affiliate member. Some respondents had not filled in what country they worked in, and respondents varied in their degree of knowledge of the existence tests yielding uneven scores as well as contexts in which differentiated requirements were used. For some of the countries, we had multiple respondents. Whenever there were inconsistencies in the information given by respondents from the same country, we selected what in our judgement would be the most reliable source. The criteria for the selection of respondents are presented in the Appendix. Countries covered in the survey are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, & the UK. Below we will briefly present the main results of the survey.

Figure 1 below shows the relation between countries where there are tests providing uneven profile scores and the number of countries where differentiated requirements are set. As the figure shows, in a majority of countries covered, test providers actually do measure the skills in separate parts of the test yielding separate scores which would allow policy makers to set differentiated requirements. Yet, as the columns to the right show, this opportunity is often not exploited by policy makers and employers when requirements are set: while in 19 countries there are tests yielding separate scores in separate skills, only 12 countries set differentiated requirements in one or several contexts.



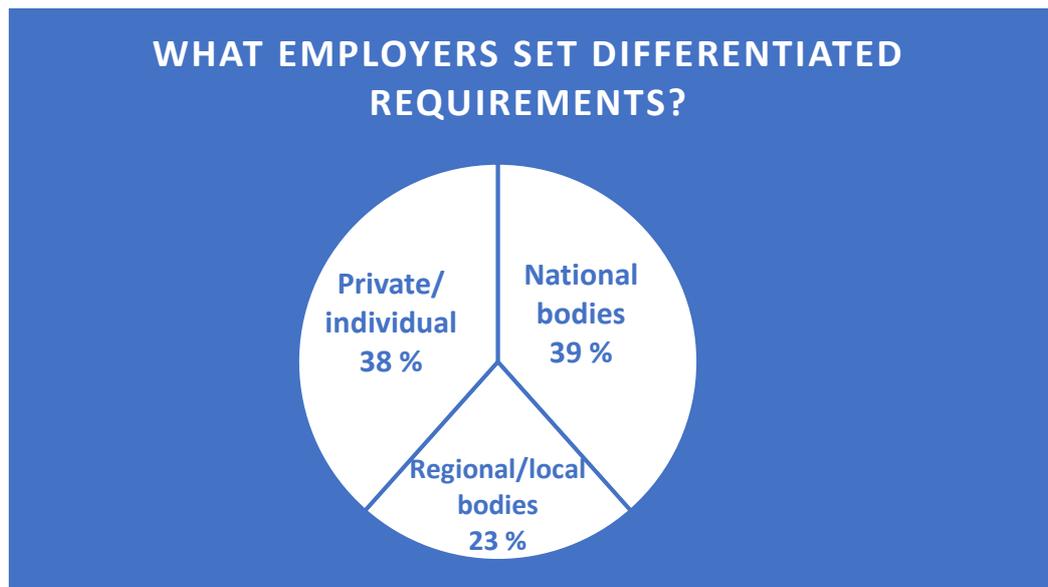
*Figure 1 Countries with tests yielding differentiated scores vs. differentiated requirements set.*

When differentiated requirements are set by different agents in society, the context in which most countries set differentiated requirements is for citizenship (n=8), followed by an equal number (n=7) for employment and permanent residence. Only four countries of the 24 responding countries set differentiated requirements in relation to university admission according to our respondents, as is clear from Figure 2 below.



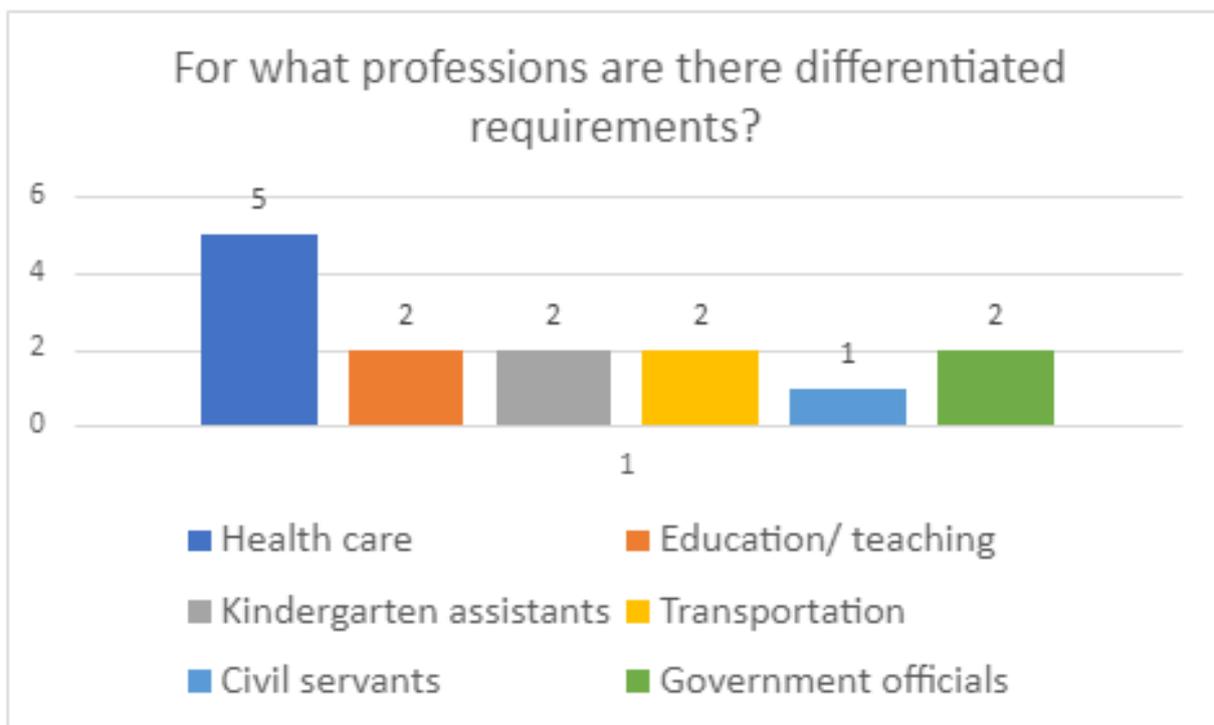
*Figure 2 Differentiated requirements in different context*

When differentiated requirements are set for access to the labour market, they are set equally by national bodies (39%) and private/individual employers (38%). Regional and local bodies set differentiated requirements to a somewhat lesser degree:



*Fig 3 What employers set differentiated requirements.*

We also asked which professions most often required differentiated language requirements to be set. As figure 4 below shows, this is primarily the case in the health care sector, but differentiated requirements are also set in the labour market for transportation, education, kindergarten, civil servants and government officials.



*Fig 4. For what professions are there differentiated requirements?*

When differentiated requirements are set, our respondents report, not surprisingly, that lower requirements are typically set in the written skills, reading and writing.

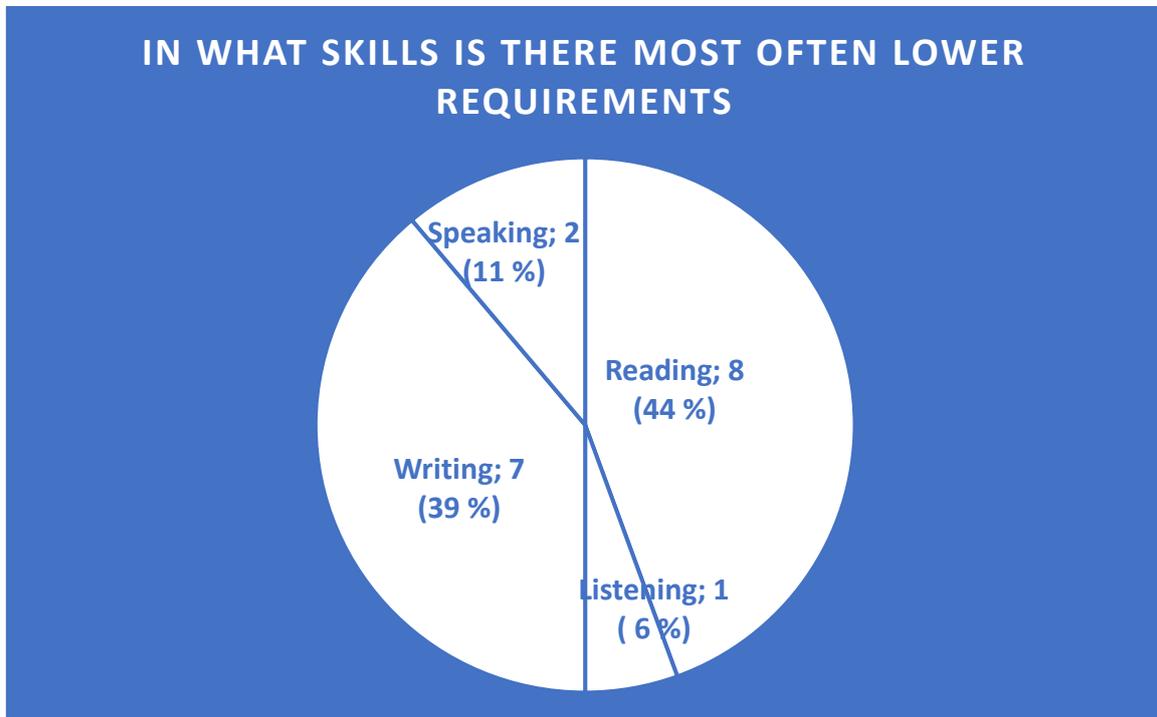


Fig 5 In what skills is there most often lower requirements.

### Examples of good practice

In the next part, examples of good practice from different countries are presented. We invited ALTE members who develop language tests providing separate scores for the different skills to write about their tests as well as about the use of their test in society, focusing specifically on context where differentiated language requirements are set. The questions we wished to shed light on through data from different countries were:

- a) *how is the test structured and what are the reasons for measuring the skills separately?*
- b) *how do test takers perform on the different parts of the test?*
- c) *to what extent do different stakeholders set differentiated language requirements (integration policy, labour market, higher education, other)?*

These questions form the basis of the texts describing examples of good practice when it comes to uneven profiles from five countries in alphabetical order: Finland, Germany, Norway, Romania, and the UK. It is important to underline, though, that even if presented as examples of good practice, there might still be room for improvement of both tests and test use.

## Finland

*Mari Honko & Ari Huhta, Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä*

### ***A) The test – structure and reason for measuring the skills separately***

The National Certificate of Language Proficiency (NCLP, “Yleiset kielitutkinnot”) is a high-stakes Finnish language examination, which measures adult language learners’ proficiency in nine languages (English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Northern Sámi, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish) with four skill-specific tests (speaking, writing, listening and reading). Interaction and mediation skills are not tested separately, but they are to some extent integrated into the above tests. The NCLP is divided into three examination levels which are comparable to CEFR levels A, B and C: basic (NCLP levels 1–2 ≈ CEFR A1–A2), intermediate (levels 3–4 ≈ B1–B2) and advanced (levels 5–6 ≈ C1–C2). The examination is managed by the [Finnish National Agency for Education](#) (EDUFI) and administered by the [Centre for Applied Language Studies](#) (CALs) at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. CALs has been a full member of ALTE since 1996.

Although Finland is a bilingual country with two official languages, Finnish and Swedish, Finnish is the dominant language in most localities. This also impacts the languages studied by immigrants who often take the NCLP examination. The intermediate level Finnish language examination holds the ALTE Q-mark and is the most popular exam in the NCLP with more than 7,000 participants annually. In 2012–2020 most participants in the intermediate level Finnish language exam took the examination for one or more of the following purposes: to acquire Finnish citizenship (79.7 %) or to apply for a job (37.1 %) or a place of study (27.5 %). For many, the NCLP also provides an important opportunity to receive (objective) feedback on their language skills and how their language learning progresses.

The intermediate level Finnish examination is available in paper-pencil format. However, some trials with the digital versions of the intermediate and advanced level tests of Finnish and English as well as all Northern Sámi tests have been carried out. The NCLP is, thus, slowly moving towards digital testing but there is still a need for both technical development and research into the effects of digitization on the validity and fairness of assessment. The literacy skills required and the support provided is adapted to the skill and level of examination. The instructions and task materials require some reading, but the amount of reading is kept reasonable. The speaking tests are either face-to-face interviews (basic level) semi-authentic responding and discussion tasks taken in a language/computer lab and recorded for subsequent rating (intermediate level) or both (advanced level). The participant may use

written instructions (basic and intermediate level) or task titles (advanced level) to support answering. The tests of listening and reading comprehension consist mostly of multiple choice and true-false items which do not require writing (or speaking) and answering open-ended questions does not require substantial writing skills. In the listening and speaking tests, when administered in a language/computer lab, the written task instructions are also heard as recordings to minimize the impact of reading on test performance. The writing test consists of three tasks, which the participants can do at their own pace, but within an overall time limit. The test organizer provides technical support to participants in all tests and at all stages of the examination.

After the examination, participants will receive certificates reporting their language proficiency profile in all four skills. For example, in an intermediate level examination, the result may be as follows:

listening comprehension	speaking	reading comprehension	writing
4 ( $\approx$ B2)	3 ( $\approx$ B1)	3 ( $\approx$ B1)	below3 ( $\approx$ <B1)

*Table 1: Example of results across skills (the Finnish National Certificate of Language Proficiency)*

Profile assessment such as the current one has been in use in the NCLP since 2012, when a separate vocabulary and grammar test was discontinued, as was the reporting of overall proficiency levels in the certificates. The removal of the overall proficiency level from the certificate was intended to encourage stakeholders to think about the language requirements in their contexts more carefully and take learners' skill profile into account. Reporting skill profiles also makes it visible that the language proficiency profile is often uneven.

### ***B) Test results on the different parts of the test***

The unevenness of the general language proficiency profile of the NCLP test-takers is rather a rule than an exception. In 2012–2020 altogether 57% of participants ( $n\approx 61,500$ ) in the Finnish intermediate level exams and 62% of participants in the parallel Swedish exams ( $n\approx 3,800$ ) had uneven proficiency profiles, meaning that less than half of the participants received the same result in all four skills. Writing was the weakest skill across the years, with 45.8% of participants in the Finnish exams falling below B1 (NCLP level 3). Reading comprehension was the strongest with 17.7% receiving B2 (NCLP 4) and 57.2% B1 while 25.1% remained below B1. The results in listening comprehension were slightly weaker (11.7% – 55.7 – 32.5%, for B2, B1 and below B1, respectively), and those for speaking fell between these and writing results

(13.1% – 44.8% – 42.2%). Many test-takers, including about a third of all participants in Finnish intermediate level exams, have taken the examination more than once. A typical participant takes the examination twice, but some attempt it more than ten or even twenty times. The skill-tests cannot be taken separately.

***C) To what extent is the profiled approach used in society?***

The NCLP, EDUFI or any other institutions do not specify or instruct for what purpose or how the results of the NCLP may or should be used. For example, higher education institutions make independent decisions on what level of proficiency they require from their students and how that proficiency should be demonstrated. In addition, educational institutions and employers can administer their own entrance or recruitment tests instead of or in addition to the NCLP. Comprehensive information on the use of the NCLP in general, or the profile assessment, is not available. However, the use of the examination in applying for citizenship has been specified in detail. One requirement for becoming a Finnish citizen, regulated by legislation, is to have at least satisfactory ( $\approx$ B1 level) skills in either Finnish or Swedish (or in Finnish or Finnish-Swedish Sign Language). B2 (YKI 4) level is required for eligibility for higher education. Therefore, the intermediate level Finnish (and Swedish) examinations are the most crucial ones for the participants applying for citizenship, as well as for those who intend to study in higher education in Finland.

However, there are many exceptions to the language proficiency requirements. For example, an applicant for citizenship does not have to meet the language proficiency requirement in all skills: according to Finnish Immigration Service, the applicant needs satisfactory proficiency in one of the following skill combinations: speaking and writing, listening and writing, or reading and speaking. Although the eligibility for higher education is defined nationally, the requirements of specific degree programmes can be set higher at the local level. The language requirements in teacher education for instance, vary from B2 to C1 depending on the university's language policy. Those working as teachers in Finland are required to have excellent command (C1 or higher) of the language of instruction, and, thus, in some universities, the fulfilment of this criterion is ensured even before a study place is granted.

In some university contexts, such as in the Academic Readiness Screening system at the University of Jyväskylä, the language proficiency of the doctoral students and the students in the international Masters' programs is not assessed separately but as part of more general evaluation of readiness for studies. This evaluation is adapted to the student's field of science and study program. Similarly, there are no separate requirements of language proficiency in the

Integra program (U. of Jyväskylä) for the immigrants with university education background; the assessment of the students' Finnish and English skills is integrated into the more general evaluation of their readiness, including strategic literacy skills, motivation to study, and aptitude. Language proficiency required in vocational studies can be demonstrated by taking the NCLP but several other ways to demonstrate proficiency are also used in that strand of education. Typically, language requirements are defined with reference to a particular proficiency level, which means either an overall proficiency or proficiency across all the skills at the required level. Exceptions exist, however, and some vocational programs require students to demonstrate the required level in two or three skills only.

## Germany

*Stefanie Dengler (Goethe-Institut) and Beate Zeidler (g.a.s.t. e. V.)*

### ***A) The test – structure and reason for measuring the skills separately***

We would like to start by pointing out that uneven profiles can be reported in different ways. Common to them is the fact that test users do not just receive an overall result in the form of a grade or a level for their language competence as a whole, but separate results for each skill. They, however, differ in the way that the skills results contribute to the overall result, and in the mode of test administration, in the following ways: the overall result can be obtained either by summing up the skills results or groups of skills results into a compound result, or by applying a decision rule that states which combinations of skills results will be acknowledged as which overall result (thus following roughly a compensatory or a conjunctive model as described in Kaftandjieva 2010, p. 15.) Test administration may either require that the test be taken as a whole, or that subgroups of skills have to be taken together, or that each skill has its own module and can be taken separately.

We describe one test which is modularised so that each skill can be tested separately (Goethe-Zertifikat B1) and one test which has to be taken as a whole but assigns separate CEFR levels for Receptive Skills, Speaking, and Writing, and uses a decision rule with a minimum requirement (Deutsch-Test für Zuwanderer – DTZ).

### *Goethe-Institut, Goethe-Zertifikat B1*

The Goethe-Zertifikat B1 is a so-called modular exam. It was jointly developed by the Goethe-Institut, the University of Fribourg in Switzerland and the ÖSD (ÖSD Zertifikat B1) and can be taken worldwide. The Goethe-Zertifikat B1, based on the 'can-do' descriptors of the *Common*

*European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*, consists of four modular exams, one for each skill: Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking. Each skill is tested separately, and each module must be passed with at least 60 percent of the maximum points. In order to provide a valid result for each skill, the modular tests include 30 items for Reading and Listening, and a couple of tasks based on the ‘can-do’ descriptors of the CEFR for Writing and Speaking. The four modules can be taken individually or together, with four separate module certificates being the equivalent of the single overall certificate. Due to the system of separate modules, there must be a break of at least fifteen minutes between each modular exam session. There can be different candidates as well as a changing number of candidates attending each session.

The same system of modular testing applies for the Goethe-Zertifikat B2 and C2, for the C1 level a modular exam will be set up from 2023. The Goethe-Zertifikat C2 was the first modular exam offered by the Goethe-Institut in 2012, followed by B1 (2013) and B2 (2018). The Goethe-Zertifikat C1 will close the gap and make it possible to prove the command of the four skills Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking on different levels from B1 to C2. The procedure of combining different levels satisfies the individual demands and goals of each learner, ensures transparency and a sense of achievement on the part of the learner. In addition, modular examinations mean an economic and organizational advantage for the participants, because they only have to book or repeat the necessary modules and can concentrate on these in their preparation.

As far as we know, the requirements for the recognition of language certificates by public bodies have not yet been adapted to a modular system. This may not be the case for other bodies such as employers, demanding a more individualized language profile of a candidate.

*Deutsch-Test für Zuwanderer (DTZ)*: The DTZ was designed jointly by Goethe-Institut and telc GmbH, at the request of the Federal Office for Migration and Integration (BAMF). It was administered by telc 2009 – 2022 and is being administered by g.a.s.t. since 2023. It is the end-of-course-test for migrants who follow the BAMF language instruction programme, but it can also be taken without having attended the course. It is based on the *Common European Framework of Reference* and measures at levels A2 and B1, i.e., the result can either be B1 (or higher), A2, or below A2. The test consists of three parts: Receptive Skills, Writing, and Speaking. For each of these parts the test taker receives a separate result of B1, A2 or below A2, and the overall result is found by way of a decision rule which defines which combinations of results will be considered as an overall B1, A2 or below A2. The decision rule is as follows:

for both target levels, A2 and B1, at least the Speaking part plus one other part has to be at target level. One skill may be below the target level.

The rationale behind this is that the CEFR itself does not closely define an overall language competence for each level, but rather defines each skill separately, and the only scale which addresses ‘overall’ competence, i.e., the Global Scale, is additive in its approach, in that it combines key descriptors from each skill into one scale. As the legal requirements are described in a more general way, but stating level B1 as the necessary level (see below in chapter C), it is left open which combinations of different levels reached in each skill will be acknowledged, and taken together, as ‘B1’. This gap had to be filled during the development of the test. Requiring an independent ‘B1’ level in each skill was deemed to be too demanding, especially as the predecessor of the DTZ, the Zertifikat Deutsch, had followed a compensatory strategy where weak ability in Writing could be fully compensated by a good performance in the Receptive Skills and in Speaking, and it was also deemed plausible that ‘getting around’ in the country of the target language would not require an equally high competence in all skills.

The Speaking skill was judged to be the key skill for integration into the receiving society by BAMF, so that it was specified that the overall result should never be better than the Speaking result. Otherwise, it was left open to the candidates’ individual learning history and specific conditions which of the remaining skills should also meet the B1 requirements, and which weaknesses might be compensated.

As there is only one official test user for the DTZ (namely, BAMF), the idea that different test users should be able to specify different combinations of skills for their purposes, did not play a role. What did play a role was the idea that indeed B1 may have more than one face, and that there should be a certain openness towards test takers’ individual strengths and weaknesses. A combined approach was therefore developed: In order to assess the skills, it was found necessary to closely follow the skill-by-skill organisation of the CEFR, as a CEFR mapping would then make much more sense. For the overall result, however, a compensatory model was found.

### ***B) Test results on the different parts of the test***

*Goethe-Zertifikat B1:* For level B1 it can be stated that the pass rates for the productive skills are often higher than for the receptive skills Listening and Reading. Nevertheless, there are also country-specific differences here and a general rule cannot be established.

*Deutsch-Test für Zuwanderer (DTZ)*: The test can only be taken as a whole, therefore the numbers of test takers per skill are identical. As to the results, it can clearly be said that the Writing skill proves to be the most difficult one for test takers, while the Speaking skill appears to be the most accessible one. This is perhaps not surprising, as all candidates learn in an immersive situation and have to deal with oral situations, while writing or reading are of lesser importance for many.

***C) To what extent is the profiled approach used in society (integration policy, labour market, higher education, other?)***

Regarding the use of the profiled approach, even the degree to which the CEFR as such is used to describe language competence varies with the context. The legal requirement for permanent residence in Germany as in §43 (2) Aufenthaltsg (Law on Residency) is described as a competence that allows foreigners to ‘be conversant with conditions in Germany to a degree that allows them to act autonomously in all matters of daily life, without help or intercession of third parties’ (“mit den Lebensverhältnissen im Bundesgebiet so weit vertraut werden, dass sie ohne die Hilfe oder Vermittlung Dritter in allen Angelegenheiten des täglichen Lebens selbständig handeln können”), and §3 IntV (Regulation on the Implementation of Integration Courses for Foreigners and Resettlers) further specifies this as the level at which language course takers can ‘act linguistically in an independent manner in daily life within their environment, and can take part in a conversation or communicate in written form according to their age and level of education’ (“im täglichen Leben in seiner Umgebung selbständig sprachlich zurechtfinden und entsprechend seinem Alter und Bildungsstand ein Gespräch führen und sich schriftlich ausdrücken”). §17 IntV then defines B1 in a general way as the level which meets the requirements defined in §3 IntV. This makes sense as B1 is envisaged as the threshold level which allows learners to ‘act independently in a country in which that language was the vehicle of communication in everyday life’ (van Ek/Trim 1990).

Earlier studies showed that for university entrance a CEFR level requirement is common practice in 22 of the 28 contexts (countries or regions) that were studied, including Germany (Deygers et al., 2018). While in educational contexts the CEFR is thus well established, although there is no evidence for the profiled approach, this is not the case as far as the labour market is concerned. A study conducted in 2019 (C. H. Carlsen et al., 2019) found that of 15 countries looked at, nine (among them Germany) stipulate national language requirements for some sectors of the labour market, and six do not. In those professions that are not in some way regulated by law, language requirements specified by employers however very seldom make

reference to a CEFR level in Germany. A search in the database of the German Employment Agency conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018 revealed that of 1,021,336 jobs on offer at that time, only ca. 8% required a knowledge of German, and only 0.04% asked for a specific CEFR level. If even the CEFR as such is not widely used, it is unlikely that the profiled approach plays a noticeable role in any labour context.

## Norway

*Hanne Lauvik (HK-dir) & Cecilie Hammes Carlsen (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences)*

### ***A) The test – structure and reason for measuring the skills separately***

*The Norwegian language test for adult migrants (Norskprøven for voksne innvandrere, hereafter Norskprøven)* is developed by the full member of ALTE, HK-dir, on assignment of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The test received the ALTE Q-mark in 2018, renewed in 2023. The test is based on the *Common European Framework of Reference* and measures at levels A1, A2, B1 and B2, with Under A1 also being a possible result. The test consists of four parts: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The reading, listening, and writing parts are digital, while the oral test is a face-to-face exam. The reading and listening parts are partly adaptive. Approximately 20 000 candidates take Norskprøven every year. The test is compulsory for refugees and family reunion, for whom the test serves the purpose of an achievement test following a state financed course of Norwegian, while one may also take the test as a proficiency test, e.g., without following a particular course beforehand.

Importantly, in Norskprøven the four language skills, listening, reading, writing, and speaking/interacting are measured in four separate parts, each providing separate CEFR-based scores. The listening test is a multiple-choice test and does not depend on writing skills at all and strives towards requiring as little reading skills as possible, with instructions being read aloud and answer alternatives are given either as pictures, numbers or very simple, familiar written words. This is possible since the test is digital. The reading test requires reading only; no writing or oral replies are required. Candidates give their responses by choosing the right written or picture alternative, or manipulate text in other ways, for example by sorting paragraphs into the right order, by clicking on a word in a text etc. The written test requires some reading of instructions/tasks, but also here an attempt to isolate the skill in question from other skills has been a guiding rule, especially at lower levels. The oral production/interaction

test, which is a peer exam, requires no reading or writing whatsoever, only listening and speaking/interaction.

The test developers of Norskprøven acknowledge several important advantages of measuring the four skills separately (Carlsen & Moe, 2014). Firstly, it allows the group of adult migrants with limited reading and writing skills (around 20% of refugees and those coming to Norway for family unification purposes) to perform better in the oral skills of listening and speaking/interaction. These learners often have more uneven profiles than learners with higher levels of education (Carlsen, 2017; Carlsen & Hamidi, 2023), and for this group, it is particularly important to be given the chance to show their oral abilities in separate parts not depending upon their reading and/or writing skills. Secondly, independent tests of the different skills allow candidates who fail to obtain the level they need or desire in one or several skills to sit again for only one or some parts of the test, which is advantageous both for economic and pedagogical reasons: candidates don't have to pay for more parts of the tests than they need, and they may prepare in a more focused way for the part of the test which is most difficult for them. The main advantage, however, is that it allows users of the test results (policy makers and employers) to set differentiated language requirements for different contexts like residency/citizenship, labour and education. Whether test users take full advantage of this possibility will be further explored below.

### ***B) Test results on the different parts of the test***

Skills Norway publish the [results of Norskprøven](#). The overview shows the percentage of test candidates obtaining the different CEFR levels on the different parts of the test. As the below table showing the results of the different parts of the tests at one test administration (summer 2023) shows.

<b>Results Norskprøven</b>	Skills/part of the test	<b>No result %</b>	<b>Under A1 %</b>	<b>A1 %</b>	<b>A2 %</b>	<b>B1 %</b>	<b>B2 %</b>	<b>Total number of candidates</b>
<b>Summer 2023</b>	<b>Reading</b>	0	3	24	31	24	18	6 779
	<b>Listening</b>	0	2	19	39	21	19	6 626
	<b>Oral production</b>	0	1	10	38	33	18	8 516
	<b>Written production</b>	4	1	12	41	35	8	7 118

*Table 2: Candidates' results on the different parts of Norskprøven summer administration 2023, in percentages.*

It is important to note that, in order to tailor the written and oral parts of the tests to candidates' levels of proficiency, candidates chose between tests at broad levels for these skills; A1-A2, A2-B1 or B1-B2. For both parts, raters are instructed to assess the candidates also at the levels beneath the lowest level of the chosen test, meaning that a candidate sitting for the B1-B2-test may receive results from Under A1 to B2. If it becomes evident during the examination of the oral test that a candidate has the possibility to obtain a level above the highest level of the test chosen, the examiner should give a task at a higher level in order to assess the candidate at this level. In this sense, there is some adaptivity also in the oral test. This, however, is not possible in the written test, which is why the percentage of candidates obtaining B2 in the written part of the test is significantly lower than for the other skills. To get a more correct impression, we need to see the results in relation to the three different levels of the written test, as displayed below:

<b>Results written part of Norskprøven Summer 2023</b>		<b>No result</b>	<b>Under A1</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>
		<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
	<b>A1-A2 test</b>	8	3	36	53	0	0
	<b>A2-B1 test</b>	3	0	5	53	39	0
	<b>B1-B2-test</b>	0	0	0	13	62	25

*Table 3: Candidates' results on the written production part of Norskprøven, summer 2023 with chosen test level, in percentages.*

In 2023 the part of the test which most candidates took for a second (or third) time, was the written production part, as was the case also for the other years since Norskprøven was administered for the first time in 2014. This indicates that written production is the most challenging skill, which underscores the importance of measuring the different language skills in independent parts.

	READING	LISTENING	SPEAKING	WRITING
All parts of test	101669	101099	110780	108222
Number of candidates taking parts of test only once	70799	71127	78492	68202
Number of candidates taking parts of tests more than once	30870	29972	32288	<b>40020</b>

Table 4 Number of candidates from 2014 to September 2020 taking different parts of Norskprøven.

***C) To what extent is the profiled approach used in society (integration policy, labour market, higher education, other?)***

As one of few CoE-member states, Norwegian *immigration policies* set differentiated language requirements for permanent residency and citizenship (Rocca et al., 2020): While most countries set the same level requirement in all four skills, the formal language requirement in Norway is level A1 in only the oral production/interaction part of the test for permanent residency, and B1 in the oral part for citizenship. While the explicit language requirement is oral, there is however an additional requirement to pass a knowledge of society test for citizenship<sup>7</sup>. This test is also in Norwegian, and it is a written multiple-choice test requiring both Norwegian skills and reading skills (it is however possible to apply to take the test orally, but HK-dir does not have information about how often this option is granted).

The Norwegian discrimination act stipulates that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, including language, is illegal. However, setting specific requirements such as language requirements to certain groups, is not a violation of the law if the requirements can be justified as relevant for purpose. In the *labour market*, most employers setting formal CEFR-based language requirements do so referring to the same level for all four skills (Schmaus et al., forthcoming). There are some exceptions. In 2017 there was a national language requirement that non-native speaking kindergarten assistants document proficiency in Norwegian. The requirement was set at B1 in reading, listening and speaking, while a lower level, A2, was required in writing. Similarly, Tide transport company requires A2 in reading

<sup>7</sup> The test for permanent residence can be taken in 27 different languages, including Norwegian. For 11 of these languages the test includes audiofiles of questions.

and writing, but a higher level, B1 in listening and speaking. These examples are however exceptions rather than the rule in Norwegian labour market.

## Romania

*Dina Vilcu – BBU-RCI Consortium for Testing Romanian as a Foreign Language*

### ***A) The test – structure and reason for measuring the skills separately***

*BBU-RCI Consortium for Testing Romanian as a Foreign Language* administers examinations of Romanian at the levels A1, A2, B1 and B2, which received the ALTE Q-mark in 2015. The Consortium also administers examinations at the levels C1 and C2 without the ALTE Q-mark. There used to be a very low number of test takers for the levels C1 and C2. In consequence, the examinations for these levels were not submitted to the ALTE audit. However, the interest for the examinations at levels C1 and C2 seems to grow constantly. The examinations for Romanian as a foreign language are developed mainly by Babeş-Bolyai University, while the partner The Romanian Cultural Institute has a role especially in functioning as a test centre outside the country. The examinations were developed based on the *Common European Framework of Reference* and revised after the CEFR Companion Volume was published.

The test consists of five parts (listening, reading, elements of communication, construction – grammar and vocabulary, writing and speaking – production and interaction). The introduction of a component for testing grammar and vocabulary was decided based on the fact that the majority of test takers use the results of the examinations (levels B1 or B2) for entering higher education in Romania. Mastering the grammatical structures and rules, and controlling a wide range of vocabulary was considered important for the academic context. Moreover, it was considered that the presence of this part in the examination would be an incentive for language learners to focus also on grammar and vocabulary aspects within communication, helping them with their language studies.

Testing the linguistic competences in a specific component of the examination is in line with the action-oriented approach of the CEFR. From this perspective, the linguistic competences, as part of communicative language competences, can be seen as instruments to empower the language learner. Not seen as an objective in itself, mastering and continuously enhancing the linguistic competence allows language learners and users to engage with ever-growing confidence in tasks and activities related to their social, professional or educational environment. Having this aspect in view, the tasks and items included in the component of

elements of communicative construction reflect the use of the language in real situations of communication and have a significant degree of authenticity. They are based on authentic texts of different natures (e.g. descriptive, narrative, interactive, instructional) and test not so much the grammatical form as rather the adequacy of the use of a word or grammar form in a given context.

Besides the academic context, the component, and its results (presented separately on the certificate, as for all the other components), might be of interest for certain groups of stakeholders, like employers in various domains. Not necessarily aware of the criteria the language testers use in the assessment grids for grading oral and written productions or what elements of grammar and vocabulary might be included in the input texts for the receptive components, these stakeholders might have a better understanding of the certificate holders' linguistic competences, and this might contribute to their employment.

The examination in its entirety is in line with the action-oriented approach of the CEFR in that it focuses on testing the candidates' receptive and productive skills (80% of the test) with only 20% aiming at verifying the linguistic competences.

Questionnaires for feedback are administered not only for all the test takers, but also for the participants in the processes of piloting and pretesting. Suggestions from the feedback have been taken forward to diversify the types of tasks in this component; to enlarge the range of vocabulary and grammar tested; and even of increasing the level of difficulty of the tasks. However, no test taker has so far suggested removing the component from the examination. Consequently, it has been concluded that the component is seen as useful, and the testing organisation constantly strives to keep the test aligned with test takers' needs, for their benefit and that of other stakeholders.

The examinations were used as end-of-course exams in the programme of preparatory year until the beginning of the pandemic, with a participation of about 100 candidates per examination per year. In 2021 the administration outside the country started, for the beginning with very low numbers of candidates. The certificate issued for this examination (levels B1 or B2) are accepted for higher education in Romania. However, this is just one of the numerous language certificates accepted for educational purposes in our country, a major factor impacting on the number of candidates taking the examinations our consortium provides.

The structure of the examination is similar for all four levels (A1 – B2). They have the same components and differ in the type of tasks and items included. There are also small differences in the number of items (in the component of elements of communication construction). Each component is measured separately and allocated an equal number of points

from the total of 100 (20 points per component). The number of points obtained by the candidate for each of the components is displayed on the certificate, along with the final mark. Passing the examination is conditioned by making the cut off score per examination. Making the cut off score for each component is not a condition for passing the examination, even if this is calculated. The developers of the test took this decision based on the fact that the candidate might use the good results obtained for some of the components for particular contexts, where proving a good level in some skills might be important, in spite of lower results obtained for other components.

In the listening part the assessment is partly integrated. The main focus is on the listening skill, but the test taker is required to do some reading for the items of binary or multiple choice and also some writing for fill in the gap items (only for the levels B1 and B2). However, writing accuracy is only allotted a small part of the total scores, the focus being on the understanding of the input. At levels A1 and A2 some of the exercises use pictures in order to ease the understanding of the items. The reading part does not involve other skills. The items are binary choice, multiple choice, multiple matching, etc. The exercises in the component elements of communication construction always include compact texts or dialogues and theoretical elements of grammar are never tested. The purpose of the component is to check the adequate understanding of the word/ phrase/ sentence by the test taker (e.g., correctly understanding tense, number, person, etc.) or the control the test taker has over the use of these elements adequately. The writing part always includes an interactive task (answering a personal letter, a message, an e-mail) and a productive one (letter, essay, narration, etc.). Here also the skills are partially integrated, with the test takers having to understand the rubrics and the input message they need to answer. The oral component has three parts: interaction with the examiner; interaction with another test taker and oral production. For the first two parts the input is oral, while for the last one the input consists of pictures and some written questions.

The separate measuring of the skills/ exam components has more advantages. First of all, both the test taker and potential beneficiaries of the results can see a detailed profile of the certificate holder. Based on this, the test takers know what skills they need to improve, if they are interested in doing this. At the same time, the potential beneficiaries can select a candidate for study or for a job even if he/she did not score very high in all the exam components according to the language needs the candidate should respond to and the demands of the language context he/she needs to integrate into. Measuring the skills separately also has the advantage of a more objective assessment and more relevant result for each skill. Being in the possession of a language certificate for a certain level does not guarantee access into a certain

position, but does not hinder it either, since a very good result in speaking, for example, on a B1 certificate might be enough for an educational/ a receiving institution or employer who might need B2 in speaking from the candidate.

***B) Test results on the different parts of the test (statistics)***

The results obtained by the test takers sometimes show considerable differences between the number of points obtained for each of the component, confirming the existence of uneven profiles. For example, for level B2 the differences recorded between the highest and the lowest number of points per component was between 2.6 points (17.4 – 20 points) and 9 points (11 – 20 points).

The most challenging component of the examination proves to be elements of communication construction (grammar and vocabulary), followed by listening.

***C) To what extent is the profiled approach used in society (integration policy, labour market, higher education, other?)***

**1. Higher education.** The main purpose for which test takers need a language certificate in Romanian is that of pursuing higher education studies. In 2016 the Ministry of Education in Romania issued an order through which the studies of Romanian language in the programme of preparatory year will finish with an examination with the minimum level B1 ([www.edu.ro](http://www.edu.ro)). Many universities which organise the programme of preparatory year adopted this minimum level as acceptable for the students who graduate from this programme. Unfortunately, the receiving institutions do not seem to adapt their demands, the universities accepting the certificate of preparatory year rather than demanding a certain level. A large number of universities in Europe condition admission to studies in the official language by having minimum B2 level in the language (Deygers et al., 2018).

**2. Labour market.** The legislation concerning the employment of persons from other countries does not include any requirement for Romanian language certification (<http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/en>). This might depend directly on the employer. However, people from other countries who come to work in Romania are recruited either for lower qualified jobs, and for this segment of employees no language requirement are in place; or for highly qualified jobs in multinational corporations, where the main language used is not Romanian (Carlsen et al., 2019). Given this situation, there is still little request for language

certification in the labour market in Romania. However, those moving to Romania, permanently or for longer periods of time, mainly for personal reasons (rather than professional) sometimes obtain a language certificate with the idea that this might improve their chances of finding a job in Romania in the future.

**3. Citizenship.** Those who intend to become Romanian citizens are not required to have a language certificate. The only way in which they are tested in the language is through the KOS questions they are asked when having the interview for obtaining citizenship. The requirement related to the Romanian language and KOS for those who apply for Romanian citizenship are as follows: they need to prove that "they know the Romanian language and have elementary notions of Romanian culture and civilization, to a sufficient extent to integrate into the social life of the country; they know the provisions of the Romanian Constitution and the national anthem" ([www.e-guvernare.ro](http://www.e-guvernare.ro)). While these rather vague requirements and the lack of necessity of being in possession of a language certificate for a certain level might seem to advantage the applicant, they are also a potential source of abuse. Numerous applicants have related the highly stressful situation in which totally unexpected questions were addressed to them. Even if they knew the language, they panicked because of the crucial decisions that might have resulted from their answers. In cases where they could not reply, the examiner sometimes accused them of not knowing the language, denying them the Romanian citizenship.

In conclusion, even if our examinations offer a detailed language profile for the certificate holders, this aspect does not seem to be very much considered and used for the advantage of the person who passed an examination in Romanian or for the potential receiving institution. When a higher education institution requires a language certificate, this is accepted simply because it comes at the end of a programme of preparatory year and similar certificates will be aligned to this level (B1, as shown above), which might not be actually enough for the new student. Some of employers do have an interest in the language competence of their applicants and can appreciate the level the employees would need to deal with on the requirements of the job. Some examples are: the Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca requires a certificate in C1 level for hiring a professor; or a travel agency which required a B2 certificate for travel guides. None of the potential (higher) education institutions, organisations or employers showed an interest in a detailed profile of the candidate. However, we consider that offering a detailed profile of the test taker on our certificate might help both the candidate and the users of test results in using it in. Moreover, it is hoped that this aspect, together with the supplementary information

the certificate itself contains, and that the test provider offers can contribute to building language assessment literacy of language certification in all interested parties.

## The United Kingdom

*Ann-Marie Murphy & Natasha Weeds (Cambridge University Press & Assessment)*

### ***A) The test – structure and reason for measuring the skills separately***

Test takers in the UK have a choice of English language proficiency tests, some of which are described below. Each of these tests offers a grade for the overall performance, but also assesses test taker competency in individual components and gives a breakdown of the scores for each. Below are some examples.

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test is a high-stakes exam that covers the four language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) and is offered in two modules - Academic and General. Which module the test taker decides to take depends on their reasons for taking the exam. The academic module is designed for people planning to study in higher education or seeking professional registration. The General Training module is suitable for test takers planning to train, undertake work experience or study at below degree level in English-speaking environments. IELTS can also be used as a requirement for migration.

Each of the four components within the test is carefully designed to focus on one particular skill, and test takers receive individual scores for each of the four test components. This results in a more equitable form of task design when compared with tests that assess multiple skills simultaneously and makes it easier to control task difficulty across the many different test versions produced each year. This can also be of particular value for professions where some language skills are deemed to be more important than others. The average of the four components provides the overall band score, which is mapped against CEFR.

<https://www.ielts.org/-/media/publications/quality-and-fairness/quality-and-fairness-2015-uk.ashx>

IELTS is delivered in a paper-based, computer-based and online formats.

## Linguaskill

A modular online test, Linguaskill, assesses all four language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking, and it is available as two options, General and Business. The Reading and

Listening module is adaptive: an individual’s previous answer determines the difficulty of the next question. Each question the candidate answers helps the computer to understand their level better. The test finishes when the candidate has answered enough questions for *Linguaskill* to identify their level accurately.

**How adaptive testing works in Linguaskill**

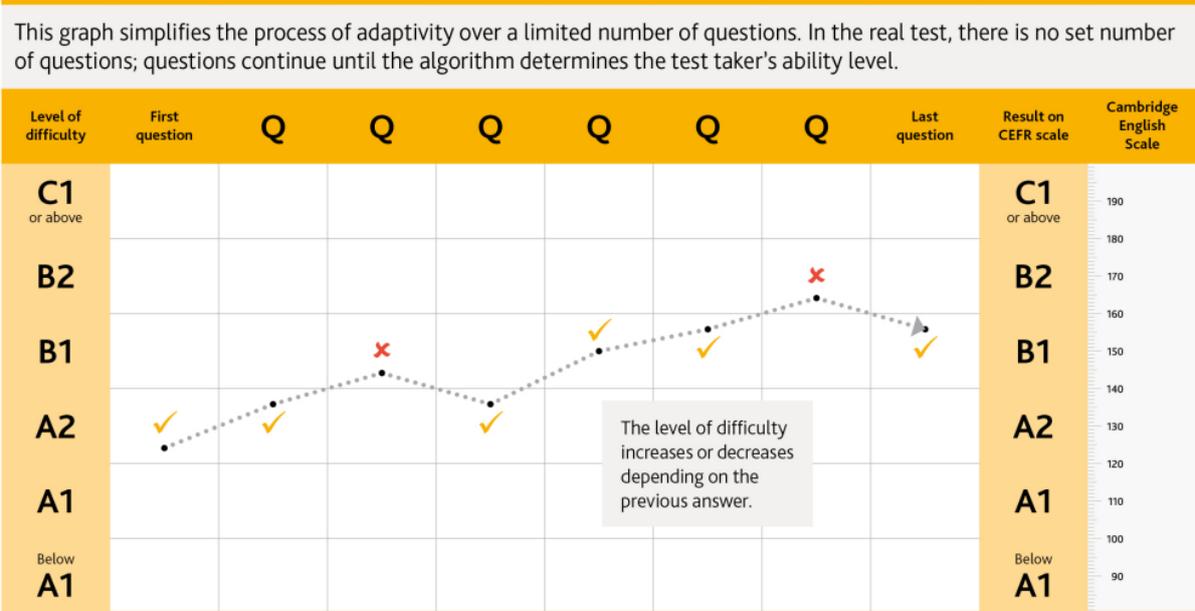


Figure 6: Adaptive testing, *Linguaskill* (UK)

The Writing module uses automarker technology. Candidates input answers using a computer keyboard and their answers are automatically marked by the computer.

As a result, every candidate receives a unique version of the test tailored to their ability level. This means that the test is suitable for all abilities and offers a personalised experience.

CEQs

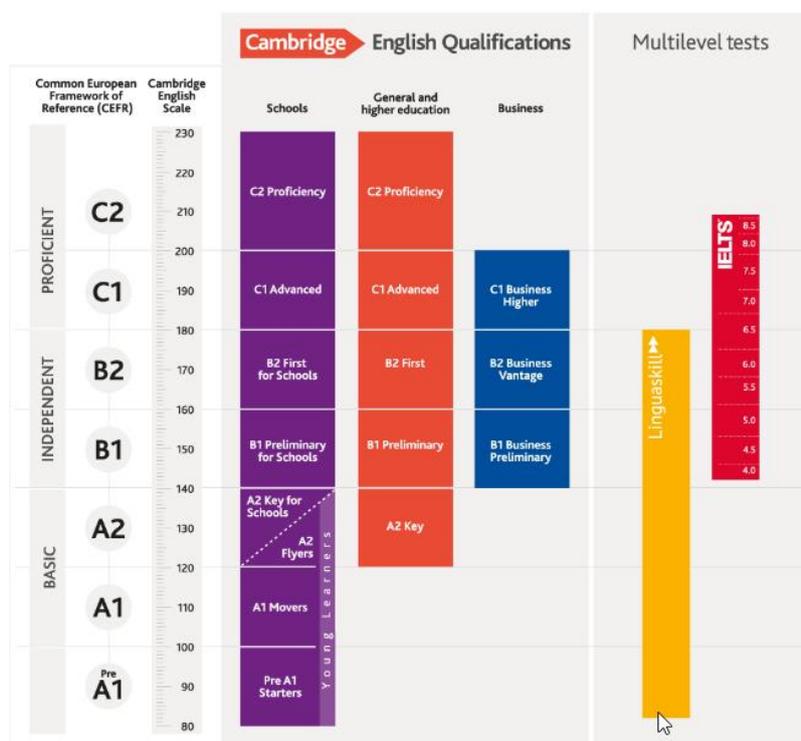


Figure 7: Personalised test experience (UK)

Cambridge English Qualifications are in-depth exams based on research into effective teaching and learning. Each exam focuses on a level of the CEFR, helping learners to improve their speaking, writing, reading and listening skills.

CEQs have four separate skill components and report separately and overall. When testing a skill in isolation, it's easier to know more exactly what is being measuring and all CEQ task types have been developed and refined over the years to provide more precise measurement of individual skills and subskills. For more information please see: <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/blog/benefits-of-testing-the-four-skills/>

### ***B) Test results on the different parts of the test (statistics)***

IELTS is assessed on a nine-band scale. Each band corresponds to a level of competence in English and is mapped against the CEFR. IELTS test takers receive a Test Report Form setting out their overall band score and their scores on each of the four components: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each of the component scores is weighted equally.

The overall band score is calculated by taking the average of the total of the four individual component scores. Overall band scores are reported to the nearest whole or half band. The following rounding convention applies: if the average across the four skills ends in .25, it is rounded up to the next half band, and if it ends in .75, it is rounded up to the next whole band.

A test taker who received, for example, an overall IELTS band score 6 or 6.5 would be described as a ‘Competent user’ and mapped against an ‘Independent user’ at B2 level on the CEFR scale.

There is significant volume of data about the jagged profiles in IELTS, and it is used not only to indicate a test taker’s competence in any specific skill, but also to identify potential malpractice. There is often a clear relationship between test taker’s first language and their profile, resulting in receptive skills of Reading and Listening being higher than productive skills of Writing and Speaking. There is often a clear pattern of Listening and Speaking being interconnected as one is inevitably integrated in the other.

The language of daily life used in Linguaskill General is suitable for university admission or exit, and recruitment for roles in a non-business-specific environment. For example, UK language schools use it as a placement test with new students to ensure they are on the right course for their ability. Companies use it to assess the English level of both current staff and new hires. As Linguaskill provides detailed results, it is easy to spot areas for improvement. Linguaskill Business tests English used in a business and corporate setting and is most suitable for recruitment in organisations where employees are expected to be familiar with the language of business.

Linguaskill assesses English language ability from below A1 to C1 and above on the CEFR:

Score	CEFR level
180+	C1 or above
160–179	B2
140–159	B1
120–139	A2
100–119	A1
82–99	Below A1

Table 5: Linguaskill scores and CEFR levels (UK)

# Test Report

Linguaskill General

Candidate name

Candidate number

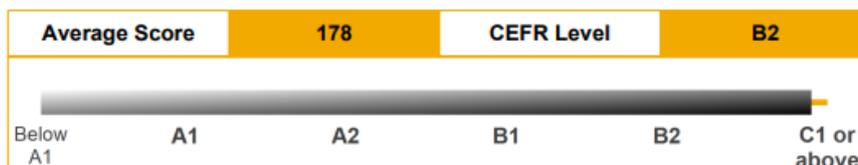
Example Candidate

Date of birth

Organisation

01 January 2000

Example Organisation



Skill	Test Date	Score	CEFR Level
Listening	10 March 2020	180+	C1 or above

Can follow complex spoken language related to daily life and work and unfamiliar topics. Can extract details and key information, and infer intentions that are not explicitly stated. Can follow the sense of spoken information even when it is not clearly structured.

Skill	Test Date	Score	CEFR Level
Reading	10 March 2020	180+	C1 or above

Table 6: Linguaskill test report (UK)

The candidate's Cambridge English Scale score for each skill is tested and, if more than one skill has been taken, an average Cambridge English Scale score will show the associated CEFR level. You can now take all skills individually, on-demand and independently.

All CEQ candidates receive a Statement of Results, and if they are successful in the exam, they will also receive a certificate.

The Statement of Results includes:

- **A result** - the final grade you obtained for your exam.
- **An overall score** - your overall Cambridge English Scale score for the whole exam.
- **A CEFR level** - the [Common European Framework of Reference](#) level that you achieved.
- **An individual component scores** - your Cambridge English Scale score for each of the skills measured by the exam; Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking (and Use of English for some exams). With these individual scores you easily see how you performed across the exam and which skills you may need to improve on.



**Cambridge Assessment  
English**

**First Certificate in English**

**Statement of Results**

Candidate name  
**First Name Last Name**

Place of entry  
**TEST123**

Centre Reference  
**GB599 0002**

To be quoted on all correspondence

Verification Number  
**A9712160**

Session  
**13 AUGUST 2021**

Result  
**Pass at Grade B**

Overall Score  
**174**

CEFR Level  
**B2**

CEFR Level	Cambridge English Scale	Certificated Results	Reading	Use of English	Writing	Listening	Speaking
<b>C1</b>	180 — 190	Grade A					
		Grade B	173	174	178	178	173
		Grade C					
<b>B2</b>	170 — 179	Level B2					
		Level B1					
<b>B1</b>	140 — 159						

First is an examination targeted at Level B2 in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference.

Candidates achieving Grade A (between 180 and 190 on the Cambridge English Scale) receive a certificate stating that they have demonstrated ability at Level C1. Candidates achieving Grade B or Grade C (between 160 and 179 on the Cambridge English Scale) receive a certificate at Level B2.

Candidates whose performance is below Level B2, but falls within Level B1 (between 140 and 159 on the Cambridge English Scale), receive a certificate stating that they have demonstrated ability at Level B1.

Examination results can be quickly and securely verified online at: [www.cambridgeenglish.org/verifiers](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/verifiers)

**THIS IS NOT A CERTIFICATE**

Cambridge Assessment English reserves the right to amend the information given before the issue of certificates to successful candidates.

Results	Score
<b>Pass at Grade A</b>	180 — 190
<b>Pass at Grade B</b>	173 — 179
<b>Pass at Grade C</b>	160 — 172
<b>Level B1</b>	140 — 159

Candidates who take First and score between 122 and 139 on the Cambridge English Scale do not receive a result, CEFR level or certificate.

Cambridge English Scale scores below 122 are not reported for this examination.

**Other**

**X** - the candidate was absent from part of the examination  
**Z** - the candidate was absent from all parts of the examination  
**Pending** - a result cannot be issued at present, but will follow in due course  
**Withheld** - the candidate should contact their centre for information  
**Exempt** - the candidate was not required to sit this part of the examination

Figure 8: Cambridge assessment, first certificate in English (UK)

**C) To what extent is the profiled approach used in society (integration policy, labour market, higher education, other?)**

**Integration policy:** In the UK, there are legal requirements from the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI), who is responsible for the UK's visa system, regarding proving English competence.

The approved Secure English Language Tests (SELT) currently are:

- Pearson: 'PTE Academic UKVI' or 'PTE Home'
- PSI Services: 'Skills for English UKVI'

- Trinity College London: ‘Secure English Language Tests for UKVI’ – Integrated Skills in English (ISE) or Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)
- IELTS SELT Consortium: ‘IELTS for UKVI’ or ‘IELTS Life Skills’
- LanguageCert: ‘LanguageCert International ESOL SELT’

To explore the IELTS example further, the approved Secure English Language Tests (SELT) include two tests within IELTS SELT Consortium: ‘IELTS for UKVI’ or ‘IELTS Life Skills’. For example, for someone applying as innovator, skilled worker or student, they need to take a test that shows reading, writing, speaking and listening abilities, potentially at a higher competency level, such as IELTS for UKVI, whereas when applying for settlement or citizenship, or as a sportsperson, more emphasis is placed on day-to-day communication, and it may be sufficient for applicants to take a test that assesses their speaking and listening abilities, such as IELTS Life Skills, which is targeted at demonstrating language proficiency at lower levels.

B1	2-facet	IELTS Life Skills – B1 Speaking & Listening	IELTS SELT Consortium	Pass
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Table 7: IELTS Life skills (UK)

See further details about IELTS and relationship with UKVI here: <https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/take-ielts/which-ielts-test/ukvi/score>

Other than that, uneven profiles are not taken into account: You can prove your knowledge of English by passing an [approved English language](#) test.

You must pass at least level A1 on the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages \(CEFR\) scale](#) for your first visa application. You can choose to take a higher level test. If you pass level B1 or higher, you can use your test result again when you apply for settlement after five years. Your test still needs to be on the [approved list of qualifications](#) and your test certificate must not have been withdrawn by the test provider.

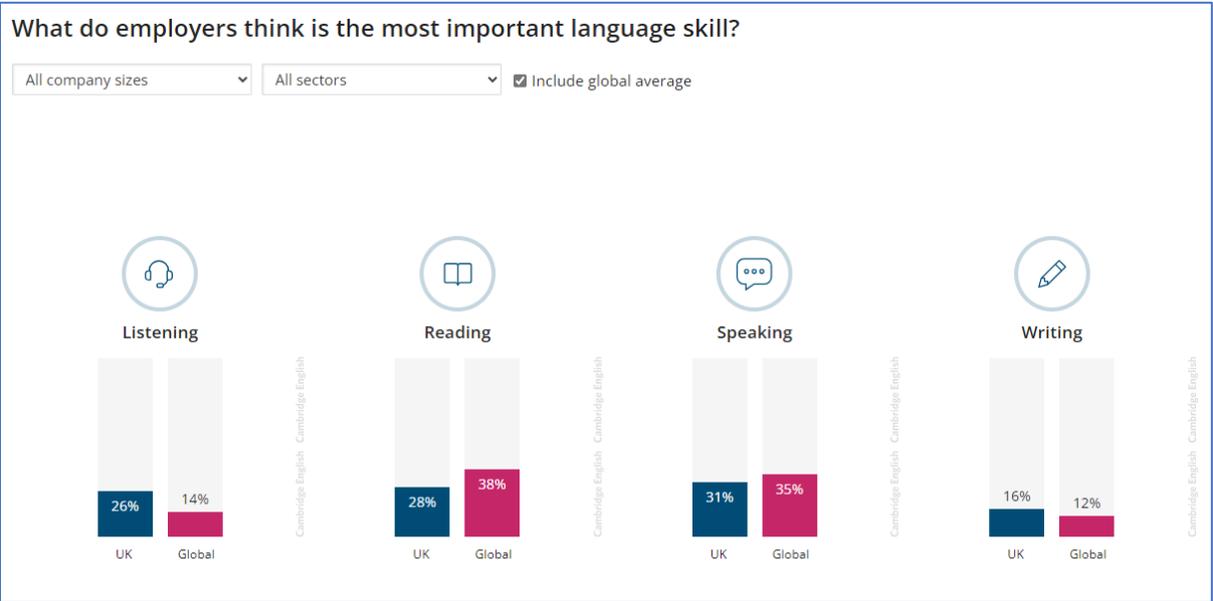
**Labour market:** Skilled workers (for visa purposes) must prove they can read, write, speak and understand English to at least level B1 on the CEFR.

B1	4-facet	IELTS for UKVI	IELTS SELT Consortium	Listening: 4.0; Speaking: 4.0; Reading: 4.0; Writing: 4.0
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Table 8: IELTS for UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI)

Where two or more components (reading, writing, speaking and listening) of a test are examined and awarded together, for example a combined exam and certificate for reading and writing skills, the applicant must show that they achieved the required scores in all the relevant components during a single sitting of that examination.

For the labour market more generally, there is not much guidance on individual skill requirements. However, in 2017 an English at work global survey of 5000 employers were asked which skill they valued most highly and they said ‘reading’ but when asked how they measured this, they said ‘during the interview process’ which was the least robust way of measuring a skill. See research executive summary [335794-english-at-work-executive-summary.pdf \(cambridgeenglish.org\)](https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/research/335794-english-at-work-executive-summary.pdf)



**What does this mean?**  
Employers told us that it is important to have proficiency in all four language skills, but the most important is reading, followed by speaking.

Figure 9: Employers’ opinion about the relative importance of different language skills.

Also note the following report which shows that some employers do take language proficiency according to skill into consideration rather than just the overall score <http://englishatwork.cambridgeenglish.org/>

**Higher education:** As IELTS is a popular and trusted test for demonstrating English language ability for work or in academic settings, it is recommended by most higher education providers in the UK. The requirements vary and may depend on the course of study the applicant has

chosen. For example, most courses at Lincoln university require an overall IELTS band score 6.0, with a minimum of 5.5 in each element. Durham university requires band 7.0 IELTS with no component under 7.0 for a direct entry into Postgraduate research in History, whereas for the Doctoral programmes in Law school, the requirement is 7.0 overall with no component under 6.5 (for Postgraduate Law writing must be 7.0)

While IELTS offers guidance to institutions for interpreting the scores, it is at the education provider’s discretion to set the threshold.

The table below gives guidance on acceptable IELTS band score requirements for different programmes. However, it should be noted that many diverse variables can affect student performance, of which language ability is but one.

<b>Band Score</b>	<b>Linguistically demanding academic courses</b>	<b>Linguistically less demanding academic courses</b>	<b>Linguistically demanding training courses</b>	<b>Linguistically less demanding training courses</b>
7.5 – 9	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
7.0	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.5	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.0	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable
5.5	English study needed	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable

Table 9: IELTS scores for higher education (UK)

With CEQs most universities distinguish between grades and standardised scores and often state the minimum required in each skill area, see [Student visa : Knowledge of English - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

There is usually a difference between recruiting universities and selecting universities re their focus on the profiles of level, see:

Selecting: <https://warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/apply/english-language-requirements/>

Recruiting: <https://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/international/study/applying/Pages/English-Language-Requirements.aspx>

Differentiated requirements – awareness raising

As the survey among ALTE members revealed, even though language tests yielding differentiated scores exist (19 countries), relatively few countries in comparison exploit this

opportunity in setting differentiated scores (12 countries). Less than 10% of the responding countries set differentiated requirements for university admission and around 25% for entrance to the labour market. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies (C. H. Carlsen et al., 2019; OECD, 2023). Considering language requirements within the migration context, the scenario appears similar: the last Council of Europe and ALTE Survey (Rocca et al., 2020) reported that only 2 out of 10 countries provide differentiated requirements for pre-entry; 3 out of 11 for temporary residency; 3 out 20 for permanent residency and 3 out of 33 for citizenship<sup>8</sup>.

What can the reasons be for this lack of differentiated requirements? One possible explanation could be found in policy makers and employers' lack of awareness of the natural character of uneven language profiles on the one hand, and their lack of familiarity with the existence of language tests providing differentiated scores, on the other.

We find a similar lack of awareness in the educational field, at least at macro level: national curricula developers generally stress as main teaching goal the need to achieve the holistic CEFR level provided by the course<sup>9</sup>. While the presence of thematic modules appears widespread (e.g., focused on topics related to knowledge of society courses), the same is not the case for specific modules focusing on single abilities, evidently integrating the course which aims to develop the four language skills in parallel. These second kind of modules are absent in the majority of member states, apart from few examples within the new Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) program 2021-2027<sup>10</sup>. Their implementation could constitute a good practice, coherent with the profiled approach, allowing learners to attend an enhanced course on a gap to be filled or a skill to be improved according to the actual language use in their daily life.

A higher degree of awareness about uneven profiles as natural in all language users and language learners in particular, as well as knowledge about uneven profile testing, could also be a great advantage in the labour market. We consider it to be of paramount importance in order to achieve a more open and inclusive labour market if more employers at local, regional and national levels were more familiar with the profiled approach of the CEFR and the possibility to set differentiated language requirements. One way to achieve this could be to

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<sup>8</sup> Report, Figures 5, 7, 9 and 11.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.idaveneto.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/linee\\_guida.pdf](https://www.idaveneto.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/linee_guida.pdf)

[https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Integration/Integrationskurse/Kursteilnehmer/Merkblaetter/630-036\\_merkblatt-auslaenderbehoerde-englisch.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=7](https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Integration/Integrationskurse/Kursteilnehmer/Merkblaetter/630-036_merkblatt-auslaenderbehoerde-englisch.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7)

<sup>10</sup> [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-funds/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund-2021-2027\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-funds/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund-2021-2027_en)

improve connections between educational and vocational learning environments, aiming at creating a common ground by ensuring a constant and active involvement of both employers and employees. The sharing of concrete examples related to language use within the occupational domain (for instance for different occupations) could serve as response to the need to make abstract descriptors more concrete and understandable, in line with one of the main objectives of the [Linguistic Profiles project](#). We would like to point the reader also to other Council of Europe tools aimed at raising awareness about the language profile, e.g., the self-assessment grid<sup>11</sup>, available in 34 languages, and the European Language Portfolio, particularly the section Language Biography<sup>12</sup>. The outcome in using tools like these would be a more authentic representation of *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990) to what extent it is meant as a person's ability to use the language in concrete situations related to the daily life; situations where e.g., one skill could be expected as higher in comparison to other skills.

The development of practical tools supporting employers in setting justified and appropriate language requirements for employment would be more than welcome, enabling employers to take into account the employees' needs as well as the linguistic levels in different skills necessary in order to carry out a certain job in a secure and professional way. As one step towards achieving this, the [ALTE LAMI action plan 2024-2026](#) dedicates a work package specifically to this (WP5), as testimonial of the requested engagement of the scientific community.

We would highly recommend language testers to take responsibility for raising awareness and informing stakeholders about the content, construct, and appropriate use of their tests scores, including the possibility to use uneven scores in setting differentiated requirements. This is in line with what is stated by ALTE in two minimum standards (MS) out of the 18<sup>13</sup> created over the years to build an assessment use argument of the validity to the tests in connection with the ALTE audit and Q-mark. Indeed, MS16 and MS17 focus on the need to provide information to stakeholders on the appropriate context, purpose, use of the exam and its content, in order to help stakeholders to interpret the results adequately and use them appropriately. It is hoped that this will lead to greater awareness of the to-do statements provided by the CEFR, once again the first step towards the profiling approach.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/self-assessment-grid>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-language-biography>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/minimum\\_standards\\_en.pdf](https://www.alte.org/resources/Documents/minimum_standards_en.pdf)

## Summary and way forward

As we have shown in this report, the CEFR/CEFR Companion Volume uphold uneven profiles as the normal case in all language use, first and second language use alike. A just language policy, both in relation to language requirements for residence and citizenship, and for education and employment, should therefore take this into consideration and set legitimate and differentiated requirements. This would facilitate migrants' integration process and ultimate language learning, as underlined by the Council of Europe document [\*Time for Europe to get migrant integration right\*](#). Council of Europe, Strasbourg (Council of Europe, 2016).

The survey among European language testers revealed that uneven profiles is a poorly exploited opportunity in Europe today: Indeed, many language tests measure language skills separately and report individual scores in the different language skills, yet in many countries the uneven profiles are not considered when language test users set language requirements for access to higher education, employment or residency and citizenship. In some countries, this is indeed done, and examples of good practice in this respect are included in the report for illustration and inspiration. The examples from different countries show that uneven profiles are the rule rather than the exception when language test scores are analysed, i.e., the example from Finland showing that less than half of the test takers obtain the same result in all four skills. The examples also show that writing seems to be the most difficult skills for language learners (as it is also for first-language users, one could add), therefore the one skill in which lower requirements for education, employment, residence, and citizenship would be most beneficial if social justice, inclusion, and democratic participation is the aim. The report also reveals that even when uneven profiles are provided by test developers, policy makers and employers often fail to explore this possibility in setting differentiated requirements. The reason for this may be a lack of awareness of uneven profiles being the typical language profile of language learners and language users alike, and a lack of familiarity with the content of the CEFR-levels, the profiled approach, as well as the existence of tests yielding separate scores in separate skills. In the report, we stress language test developers and test providers' responsibility in informing test users about the content, construct, and appropriate use of their tests.

Through the ALTE LAMI work with the uneven profile project, through the survey we conducted, as well as through discussions with ALTE LAMI members and other language test professional, we have gained a greater understanding of whether uneven profiles are provided by test developers and the degree to which they are reflected in language requirements. There is still much to be done in terms of awareness raising and information about the possibility of

setting differentiated requirements. It is our hope that this report, along with the recently developed ALTE MS18 focusing on raising awareness about language testers' responsibility for securing that their tests are interpreted and used in a beneficial way, can contribute to a more socially just use of language tests and language requirements in European society following the recommendations of the ALTE Code of Practice and in line with the values of the Council of Europe of human rights, equal opportunities and inclusion for all.

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## Appendix

### Invitation to ALTE-members to take part in the survey on uneven profiles

**Fra:** ALTE <Secretariat@alte.org>

**Sendt:** tirsdag 22. februar 2022 11:04

**Til:** ALTE <Secretariat@alte.org>

**Emne:** ALTE LAMI Survey about uneven profiles

**Viktighet:** Høy

Dear ALTE Members/Individual Expert Members and Associate Members,

We have received the message below from the chairs of the [LAMI SIG](#) (Lorenzo Rocca and Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen) and Sabrina Machetti.

Could you please help Lorenzo, Cecilie and Sabrina, answering the questionnaire below? It will take just 5 minutes. The link to the survey is in the email below, together with further info about the scope of the project.

Thanks

ALTE Secretariat

\*\*\*\*\*

*One of the ongoing projects of the ALTE LAMI project group focuses on uneven language profiles. With this, we mean the extent to which language tests measure the different language skills (like reading, writing, listening and speaking) in distinct parts of the test yielding separate scores. We wish to map both:*

*1) whether different countries have language tests for adult migrants yielding separate scores in different skills, and*

*2) whether different agents in society set differentiated language requirements or requirements only in some of the skills, in relation to for instance university admission, employment, residency or citizenship.*

*We hope you will help us gather this information by responding to this short questionnaire. It takes around 5 minutes to respond. The questionnaire contains no sensitive questions.*

*To reply, follow this link: <https://www.survey-xact.no/LinkCollector?key=8HZFG6GES29K>*

*Thank you for your help!*

*Lorenzo, Sabrina and Cecilie*

The questionnaire sent out in SurveyXact

**UNEVEN PROFILES (ALTE LAMI Project)**

*One of the ongoing projects of the ALTE LAMI project group focus on uneven language profiles. With this, we mean the extent to which language tests measure the different language skills (like reading, writing, listening and speaking) in distinct parts of the test yielding separate scores. We wish to map both 1) whether different countries have language tests for adult migrants yielding separate scores in different skills, and 2) whether different agents in society set differentiated language requirements or requirements only in some of the skills, in relation to for instance university admission, employment, residency or citizenship. We hope you will help us gather this information by responding to this short questionnaire. It takes around 5 minutes to respond. The questionnaire contains no sensitive questions.*

Country (write name)\_\_\_\_\_

**I work for a test organization which is**

- (1) A full member of ALTE
- (2) An affiliate member of ALTE
- (3) Not an ALTE member
- (4) Other

**Comment:**\_\_\_\_\_

**In my country, there are language test(s) for adult migrants yielding separate scores for different language skills.**

- (1) m Yes
- (2) m No
- (3) m I don't know

**What skills are scored separately?**

- (1) Reading (written reception)
- (2) Listening (oral reception)
- (3) Writing (written production and/or interaction)
- (4) Speaking (oral production and/or interaction)
- (9) I don't know
- (10) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**In my country, there are cases of differentiated language requirements, i.e. different levels required for different skills, or requirements in only some of the skills**

- (1) Yes
- (2) No
- (3) I don't know

**For what contexts are there different requirements in different skills or only requirements in some skills?**

- (1) Employment
- (2) Admission to higher education
- (3) Permanent residency
- (4) Citizenship
- (5) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- (6) I don't know

**To your knowledge, which employers set different requirements in different skills or only requirements in some skills?**

- (1) National bodies
- (2) Regional or local bodies (e.g. municipalities)
- (3) Private/individual employers
- (5) I don't know

(6) None

(7) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**To your knowledge, for what jobs are there different requirements in different skills or only requirements in some skills?**

(1) Health care

(2) Education/teaching

(3) Kinder garden assistants

(4) Transportation (taxi/bus drivers etc)

(5) Civil servants

(6) Government officials

(7) None

(8) I don't know

(9) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**For what skills are there lower requirements or no requirements?**

(1) Reading (written reception)

(2) Listening (oral reception)

(3) Writing (written production and/or interaction)

(4) Speaking (oral production and/or interaction)

(8) I don't know

(9) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have any other comments related to uneven profiles or differentiated requirements?** \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you so much for your responses!

Sabrina, Lorenzo and Cecilie

Criteria for cleaning the SurveyXact Data set (reducing number of respondents to one per country)

<b>CRITERIA FOR DATA CLEANING/REDUCTION</b>	
1	Delete all entries without country specified
2	Delete all entries with countries outside Europe (USA, Japan, Australia etc.)
3	Where several entries for one country: delete the respondents, who replied "I don't know" or left blank the question whether there are tests yielding uneven profiles in their country (S3-3)
The remaining countries with several responses should be reduced to one per country, the criteria for selection between several entries per country described below:	
6	If one of the several entries from the same countries, responded "I don't know" to the central question of whether differentiated requirements are set (q. 15), the most well-informed respondent was kept.
7	If there were responses from affiliate and full members for the same country, keep the full members (q.2.1 (full member))
8	Among the then remaining several responses for the same country, keep the entrance most aligned with the other responses from the same country

## ALTE LAMI report, 2023

Cecilie Hamnes Carlsen, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Lorenzo Rocca, Società Dante Alighieri

Sabrina Machetti, University for Foreigners of Siena

