

**Response to the Joint Committee on Migration
Inquiry into skills recognition, upgrading and licensing**

The testing of English language competency has become increasingly necessary in the light of current community concern about the quality of English language testing for entry to Australian educational institutions and professional contexts.

The Occupational English Test (OET) is a specific purpose performance based test owned and administered by the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) in Melbourne. It was developed in the early 1990s to provide an appropriate form of English language assessment for overseas qualified health professionals.

Its rigorous development involved an analysis of the language used in context by a range of health professionals to enable profession specific tasks to be developed which had a strong correlation to the communicative requirements of the workplace and hence high face validity. This work was conducted by a team of leading ESL test developers at the University of Melbourne Language Testing Resource Centre (MLTRC) lead by Professor Tim McNamara a world leader in international language testing. MLTRC were also involved in the development of the scoring criteria and assessment protocols which include double marking of the speaking and writing subtests, where rater reliability and interpretation of criteria can lead to issues of reliability. Double marking allows the application of statistical tests designed to identify rater characteristics and check on an individual rater's internal consistency, further improving the reliability of the score given.

MLTRC have maintained a strong relationship with the OET since its development and have conducted on going research into a number of critical aspects of ESL testing using OET data and specifications.

The model used by the OET has the capacity to be expanded to other trades and professions. Its focus on assessing communicative competence in a relevant context gives it high face validity in comparison to more general tests of English, and its existing regime of double marking all speaking and writing performances offers those who rely on the results of the test an extremely high level of reliability.

The staff of the CAE OET are keen to foster this style of language testing as a model for use within the Trade occupations identified in the Skilled Migration List.

CAE OET staff would be pleased to provide additional information to the committee.

Thank You

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