



Degrees of Proficiency: Building a strategic approach to university students' English language assessment and development

Final Report 2013

Lead institution: Curtin University

Partner institutions: RMIT, Swinburne University, The University of Sydney

Project leader and team members: Katie Dunworth (Project leader), Helen Drury, Cynthia Kralik, Tim Moore, Denise Mulligan (Project manager)

Report author: Katie Dunworth

<www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au>



Support for the production of this report has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, and where otherwise noted, all material presented in this document is provided under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/legalcode>.

Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to:

Office for Learning and Teaching
Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education
GPO Box 9880,
Location code N255EL10
Sydney NSW 2001

<learningandteaching@deewr.gov.au>

2013

ISBN 978-1-921916-91-5 print
ISBN 978-1-921916-92-2 online

Acknowledgements

The project team would like to acknowledge the many individuals who contributed to the project by participating in the online survey or interviews; who gave feedback on early versions of the website; and who attended dissemination presentations and provided comments on many aspects of the project.

The team also wishes to thank the members of the reference group for their input and advice:

- Associate Professor Sophie Arkoudis
- Mr Alex Barthel
- Dr Anna Ciccarelli
- Associate Professor Cathie Elder
- Dr Judith Rochecouste.

In addition, the team is indebted to the following:

- External evaluator, Professor Andy Kirkpatrick (Griffith University)
- Website designer, Mr Alex Lee (BeanIT)
- Graphic artist, Ms Emily Purser (University of Wollongong)
- Financial administrator, Ms Pat Davies (School of Education, Curtin University)
- Reference group member Mr Alex Barthel (independent consultant) who ran a project dissemination workshop on behalf of the project team.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

AALL	Association of Academic Language and Learning
AEI	Australian Education International
ALAA	Applied Linguistics Association of Australia
ALTAANZ	Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd
BALEAP	British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
ELP	English language proficiency
ELT	English language teaching
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
IEAA	International Education Association of Australia
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LA	Learning Advisor
NEAS	National ELT Accreditation Scheme
OLT	Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching
PELA	Post-entry language assessment
RELC	Regional English Language Centre
RMIT	RMIT University
SCU	Southern Cross University
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
WA	Western Australia
WAND	West Australian Network for Dissemination

Executive summary

The project that is the subject of this report was conducted by a cross-institutional team from four universities: Curtin University (lead institution), RMIT, Swinburne University and The University of Sydney.

The primary objective of the project was to provide universities with data and tools that would be of assistance in developing a strategic approach to the development of students' English language use in a tertiary environment. There were two particular areas of focus: the use of post-entry English language assessment tools to analyse language need; and the provision of strategies and activities to enhance student language development.

More generally, the project aimed to advance the current body of knowledge on English language development in a tertiary context, and map existing institutional approaches to and practices in post-entry student English language assessment and development across the entire university sector in Australia. The primary outcome from the project, it was anticipated, would be to increase the capacity of Australia's universities to improve students' language use by making accessible evidence-based guidance on the most effective strategies for language enhancement.

The main deliverable for the project was the creation of a comprehensive online resource that maps current institutional strategies for post-entry student English language assessment and development, that offers advice for those seeking information and guidance in this area and that provides guidelines on ways in which the success of a given approach can be evaluated. A secondary deliverable was the production of a substantial number of conference papers, journal articles and reports to the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT). Details of these latter deliverables can be found in Chapter 4 of this document.

The online resource is a website that contains two major sections: reference material and more practical information on developing an institutional strategy. The 'reference material' includes the project's conceptual framework and a guided tour of the website, has links to research reports and policies, and presents a database of university policies, procedures and activities related to post-entry student language assessment and development.

The practical component of the website provides information on the development of an institutional strategy. The pages include information on planning an institutional approach, on post-entry language assessment (PELA), on activities for enhancing language use, on evaluation and on addressing common issues and challenges. Most importantly for the project's goals, there is also a section that identifies good practice across the sector.

The website was designed to contain many opportunities for feedback. There is a prominent 'feedback' tab on the right hand side of every page on the website, as well as a top-menu tab, that opens out into a feedback form where email messages can be sent to the project leader. There are also login options available. The URL for the website is <www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au>.

It is expected that the impact from the project will be more long-term than immediate, although feedback indicates that the project is already well-known by language development professionals within the higher education sector. Ultimately, the project's impact will be assessed by the number of hits the website receives, the number of citations the project team's work obtains in the scholarly and research literature, and the extent to which universities refer to the website as they seek to improve institutional approaches to student English language development.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
List of acronyms and abbreviations	4
Executive summary.....	5
Table of Contents.....	7
Tables	8
Chapter 1: About the project.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Project contributors	10
Consultation, communication and dissemination	11
Evaluation	12
Chapter 2: Background and literature review	13
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	16
Research paradigm.....	16
Ethics.....	16
Data collection and analysis	17
Chapter 4: Outcomes and deliverables	20
Expectations	20
The Website.....	20
Presentations and written output.....	22
Evaluation	24
Summary of outcomes and deliverables.....	25
Critical success factors.....	25
Factors that impeded success	26
Dissemination	26
Linkages	27
Project evaluation and impact	27
References	28
Appendix A.....	31

Tables

Table 1: Internal communication plan.....	11
Table 2: External communication plan	11
Table 3: Project evaluation plan	12
Table 4: Planned elements of the website	21
Table 5: Presentations on the project	23
Table 6: Written output	24
Table 7: Summary of outcomes and deliverables.....	25

Chapter 1: About the project

Introduction

The project that is the subject of this report was conducted by a cross-institutional team from four universities: Curtin University (lead institution), RMIT, Swinburne University and The University of Sydney. These universities were selected as representing a geographically broad spectrum of higher education providers with diverse student populations that include international students, regional and remote students, and students classified as being from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Data from the *My University* website and other public sources illustrate the diversity of the institutions from an international perspective:

- Curtin University has over 45,000 students located in Australia, its campuses in Sydney, Sarawak and Singapore, as well as in transnational partner locations. Over 35 per cent of the student population comprises international, fee-paying students.
- RMIT is a dual-sector university with more than 70,000 students studying face-to-face, online or by distance at its campuses in Melbourne and regional Victoria, in Vietnam, and at partner institutions throughout the world.
- Swinburne University is also a dual-sector institution, and has multiple campuses including one in Malaysia. The university has over 23,000 students, with international students constituting over 35 per cent of the undergraduate cohort.
- The University of Sydney has more than 50,000 students, with international students comprising over 22 per cent of enrolments.

The primary objective of the project was to provide universities with data and tools that would be of assistance in developing a strategic approach to the development of students' English language use in a tertiary environment. There were two particular areas of focus for the project: the use of post-entry English language assessment tools to analyse language need; and the provision of strategies and activities to enhance student language development.

More generally, the project aimed to advance the current body of knowledge on English language development in a tertiary context, and map existing institutional approaches to and practices in post-entry student English language assessment and development across the entire university sector in Australia; in the process identifying those approaches which have been found to be the most effective. The primary outcome from the project, it was anticipated, would be to increase the capacity of Australia's universities to improve students' language use by making accessible evidence-based guidance on the most effective strategies for language enhancement.

The main deliverable for the project was the creation of a comprehensive online resource that maps current institutional strategies for post-entry student English language assessment and development, that offers advice for those seeking information and guidance in this area and that provides guidelines on ways in which the success of a given approach can be evaluated. More details of this online resource are presented in Chapter 4. A secondary deliverable was the production of a substantial number of conference papers, journal articles and reports to the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT).

Project contributors

Contributors to the project included the project team and project manager, the reference group, the external evaluator, consultants for website and graphic design, and administrative staff at Curtin University. Their roles are explained briefly below. Other contributors included survey respondents and interviewees, workshop and presentation participants, and visitors to the project website.

Project team: All project team members were involved in the design of data collection instruments, the collection and analysis of data, production of material for the website and dissemination of information about the project. The project leader was additionally in charge of the overall driving of the project, budget issues, liaison with individuals and organisations external to the project, production of reports, and supervision of the project manager and consultants.

Project manager: The role of the project manager was to assist in the design of data collection instruments, manage the survey distribution process, collate data from the survey, organise reference group and team meetings including travel and accommodation when required, provide assistance in the preparation of project reports, manage the project timeline, and engage in general administration.

Reference group: The project's reference group, membership of which is listed in the 'Acknowledgements' section of this report, was selected on the basis of its members' breadth of expertise and knowledge in areas complementary to the project: international education, language proficiency, academic literacy and post-entry language assessment. The terms of reference for the reference group, devised initially by the project team and approved by the reference group members at their first meeting, were to:

- Comment/provide feedback on progress reports.
- Advise the project team on potential challenges in relation to the project.
- Comment on project design, research tools, implementation, dissemination and other issues.
- Assist in supporting the objectives of the project and raising awareness of the project within the higher education sector.

External Evaluator: The selection of the external evaluator was decided by the project team in consultation with the reference group. The role of the external evaluator was to function as an independent assessor, who was able monitor the project's progress, critically analyse data presented as the project developed and provide both formative feedback over the duration of the project and a summative evaluation of the project on its completion.

Consultants: Consultants were employed to provide website design and hosting and graphic design services. The company which designed the website was selected because it hosts the website for the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL). At the proposal stage of the project, agreement was obtained from the executive of that organisation that the project website could be located within the AALL's website. This meant that the website would be sustainable over a period of time that went beyond the life of the project.

Financial administrator: Administration of income and outgoings for the project budget was undertaken by the accounts staff in the School of Education at Curtin University. The school manager prepared the budget income and expenditure documents.

Consultation, communication and dissemination

Consultation and communication took place at a number of levels within the project. A communication plan was developed that was divided into 'internal communication', which related to team, OLT and reference group communication issues, and 'external communication', which related to communication with the education community more broadly. Within these two overarching categories, the plan incorporated two types of communication: engaged dissemination and information dissemination. The former referred to active participation of and interaction between those involved; the latter described essentially one-way forms of communication. All team and reference group meetings had a formal agenda and were minuted, with minutes distributed for confirmation to all participants. The face-to-face meetings for both the team and reference group meetings were held in Melbourne.

Table 1: Internal communication plan

Form of interaction	Medium of communication	Number
Team members	Email list for regular discussions	Multiple
	Teleconferences	2
	Face to face meetings	3
Team and reference group	Teleconferences	1
	Face to face meetings	2
	Written reports	4
Team and OLT	Contract confirmation	1
	Written reports	3
Team and external evaluator	Email and phone discussions	Multiple
	Written reports to evaluator	3
	Interim evaluation report	1
	Final evaluation report	1

Table 2: External communication plan

Medium	Details
Survey	Email distribution to inform potential respondents about project; data obtained from survey respondents in Australian universities.
Workshops	To be held in each team member's state, to provide information about the project and to obtain feedback on website.
Website	Feedback opportunities built into website.
Colleagues	Feedback from colleagues within team members' own institutions.
Other peers	Data from interviewees, informal email feedback.
Conferences	AIEC, ALTAANZ, ALAA, ISANA, HERDSA, RELC, BALEAP, AALL.
Newsletters	AALL newsletter, relevant email lists.
Journal articles	Articles in selected refereed journals.

The external communication plan identified communication between team members and the Australian education community. The plan incorporated three communicative functions: to publicise the project, to obtain data that would inform and strengthen the robustness of the findings, and to engage the higher education community with the project and its deliverables.

Evaluation

The project was evaluated through various mechanisms, at multiple points throughout the project. The following criteria were used: viability; achievement of outcomes and deliverables; extent of awareness of the project within the Australian higher education sector; degree to which the project addressed needs as reported by stakeholders; and sustainability of the project outcomes. Evaluation was both formative, in that it was obtained prior to the conclusion of the project and informed subsequent project activities, and summative, obtained at the project's conclusion. The evaluation plan is presented below.

Table 3: Project evaluation plan

Focus	Purpose	Evaluation source	Evaluation points
Project plan	To evaluate usefulness and viability of the project as a whole	Feedback from team members' colleagues, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and OLT reviewers.	Prior to project commencement
Project management	To evaluate management of budget, risk, communication, conflict resolution, administration	Reference group, team member reflections, independent evaluator.	At each team and reference group meeting, evaluation report
Project outcomes	To evaluate fit between planned and eventual outcomes	Team member reflections, reference group feedback, independent evaluation.	At the end of the first year, at conclusion of project
Project deliverables	To evaluate the degree to which deliverables meet stakeholder needs	Team member reflections, feedback from peers and colleagues, workshop participants, reference group, website feedback form, independent evaluator.	On piloting website, during workshops, at launch of website, at final project evaluation
Project impact	To evaluate the extent of the project's sustainability and influence	Website feedback mechanism, website hits, citations in scholarly papers, production of research reports, independent evaluator.	Post-completion of project at three month, then six-month intervals

Chapter 2: Background and literature review

The project was initially devised in 2010, at a time when for at least five years the English language use of students in higher education had been the subject of considerable attention in the media, in scholarly and research articles (e.g. Birrell, 2006; Bretag, 2007; Sawir, 2005), and even in government-sponsored reports (Baird, 2010; Bradley, Nunan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Knight, 2011). In 2007, the Australian Government, through Australian Education International (AEI) and the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), convened a national symposium which identified priority action items (AEI, 2007). A subsequent project funded by the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and undertaken through the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) culminated in 2009 with the production of the *Good Practice Principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities* (DEEWR, 2009), which affirmed the importance of English language proficiency in higher education. In 2010, the steering committee responsible for the development of the *Good Practice Principles* was invited to develop them into a set of standards for higher education. While these remain in draft form (*English Language Standards for Higher Education*, 2012) because of the intervening establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority (TEQSA), they are available for download and are widely known among language development experts in the university sector.

While these calls for action were focused at the time on international students in particular, it was clear that language had become an issue because of the increasing diversity of the student body for reasons additional to the increase in international student numbers – for example, the implementation of widening participation policies. Indeed, some studies have revealed a higher level of need among domestic than international students (Larcombe & Malkin, 2008; Scouller, Bonanno, Smith & Krass, 2008).

The 2007 national symposium, its discussion papers and final report, and the subsequent release of the *Good Practice Principles* were indicators that there was a movement in higher education towards the development of sector-wide and institution-wide approaches to the issue of student English language assessment and development. The national symposium's final report (AEI, 2007) had called for a number of specific actions. These included greater use of diagnostic language tests, an increase in the embedding of language development within disciplinary studies, more research, a higher level of collaboration across the sector, and the establishment of national standards for English language competence.

In response, a number of universities have begun to review their activities and implement new approaches and strategies. Some of these have been reported at conferences and in the literature (Brigg, 2011; Nallaya, 2012; RMIT, 2010; Victoria University, 2010). However, at the start of the project it was not clear to what extent the issue had been approached systemically throughout the sector, what organisational strategies universities had in place to implement the *Good Practice Principles*, and what measures universities used to ascertain whether they had been successful in implementing them.

The call for “a more generalized use of diagnostic tests (for all students) including post-entry” (AEI, 2007, p. 17) in the final report from the 2007 national symposium was echoed in the *Good Practice Principles*, which argued that “students’ English language development needs [should be] diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with ongoing opportunities for self-assessment” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3). This recommendation appears to have been embraced with little delay within the higher education sector, as reports on their use, or planned use, began to emerge in the literature shortly afterwards (e.g. Dunworth, 2009; Dyson, 2009; Elder & von Randow, 2008; Harris, 2010; Ransom, 2009; Read, 2008; von Randow, 2010), generating considerable discussion on the purpose, validity and impact of what became known as PELAs (post-entry language assessments).

The call for a greater level of embedding of English development within the disciplines was also met with increased activity within the sector, and a concomitant increase in research studies and reports. Most of the studies focus on small-scale embedding activities, but there is a positive trend emerging that this approach has a positive impact on student learning, at least as measured by academic results (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012; Kennelly, Maldoni, & Davies, 2010; Mort & Drury, 2012; Stappenbelt & Barrett-Lennard, 2008). The key finding of a previous ALTC project, which focused on the discipline of accounting, provides an illustrative example of the centrality of language: “it is the English language competency of students undertaking accounting assessment that has the most impact on student learning” (Jackson, Watty, Yu & Lowe, 2006, p. 95). However, at the time the current project was commenced, it did not appear from the literature that ‘embedding’ as a strategy had been taken up to any great extent at an institutional level or was widely practised. Since this project was commenced, two OLT fellowships have been awarded in the area of embedding language within the disciplines, although they have yet to report.

There have also been numerous research papers which have reported on other activities undertaken within universities to promote student English language development. These include investigations into generic language development activities as provided by specialist units within universities (Dunworth, 2013), individual consultations (Chanock, 2007; Wilson, Li, & Collins, 2011; Woodward-Kron, 2011), and credit-bearing language development units (Fenton-Smith, 2012; Storch & Tapper, 2009). Outside institutional language and learning units, peer programs that feature a language development component are also on the increase (e.g. Harvey-Bravo & Monaghan, 2011). There was little evidence at the start of the current project, however, that such programs and activities formed part of a strategic approach to student language development articulated by the institution, and it became clear that a sector-wide comparative investigation would generate valuable data.

One issue that has stood in the way of the development of institutional approaches to student English language proficiency is a lack of consensus about the construct in question. The *Good Practice Principles* define English language proficiency as “the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their university studies” (DEEWR, 2009, p.1). Such a definition was intended to send a message that language was more than the use of ‘correct’ form, but did little to shed light on how this might be assessed or described operationally. Subsequent descriptions moved towards common agreement that there were three major domains of English language use relevant to students in higher education: everyday contexts, academic

contexts and professional contexts (Arkoudis, Baik, & Richardson, 2012; Harper, Prentice, & Wilson, 2011; Murray, 2010). Although all of these authors located language use within an overall communicative paradigm, none of them expressed consensus on the way that language development might take place within these contexts.

This is no small issue, since choices made about appropriate language development activities are predicated on a particular view of language. For example, the 'academic literacies' model (Lea & Street, 2006), which informs some of the language development work undertaken within universities, would eschew a view of language as a set of skills that can be taught generically and transferred across contexts. There does seem to be a need for the development of an appropriate theoretical model, since in its absence institutions and employers have turned to the use of descriptors and levels identified by the major international language tests, most particularly IELTS. The need has been further emphasised by the recent publication by TEQSA of its terms of reference for quality assessments under the theme of English language proficiency, since they specifically include the need for institutions to demonstrate "how, and how effectively, expected ELP learning outcomes are established, monitored, assessed, and achieved throughout the course of study. *This includes identifying the definitions of appropriate levels of English used for various cohorts of students*" (TEQSA, 2013, p. 4, italics added).

Thus, the background for the current project was one in which, in an environment of increasing student diversity, there had already been a desire expressed across the higher education sector for national and institutional strategies to address the issue of student language proficiency, although there appeared to be no clear understanding of the construct under discussion. The project was devised to assist institutions seeking to develop institutional approaches: to give them easy access to information about what was occurring across the sector, to provide examples of good practice, and to identify steps that might be taken to introduce a successful and sustainable institutional approach to student English language assessment and development.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research paradigm

The project was conducted within the theoretical framework of pragmatism, using a mixed methods approach. Pragmatism views social phenomena as multifaceted and multidimensional (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) and, commencing from a position of uncertainty informed by prior knowledge, seeks to uncover knowledge in all its multiple layers (Feilzer, 2010) and apply in practice the solutions to posed questions. A study within this paradigm is conducted from the perspective that knowledge is socially situated within the reality of the experienced world, that it arises out of actions and situations (Creswell, 2008), and that it is always tentative and subject to change over time (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Thus, the pragmatic perspective accepts that there are multiple ways of knowing and that research questions can be addressed by identifying what works within a given context, avoiding the dualism of alternative approaches to research. Such a position was considered to be appropriate for a study that was to examine models of practice that had been created within the cultures of individual higher education institutions.

A corollary of the pragmatic paradigm is that research is not limited to any specific methodological technique, and as a consequence pragmatism is most often associated with the use of mixed methods for data collection and analysis. The mixed methods approach, it has been argued, should be recognised as a third research paradigm, along with qualitative and quantitative research (Denscombe, 2008) because it claims a unique worldview and has its own techniques and vocabulary (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). For this study, mixed methods were considered appropriate for reasons related to complementarity and triangulation. In order to explore the multiple realities that exist within the area under investigation, it was necessary to employ both qualitative and quantitative approaches, as each was likely to uncover different types of data. The limitations and biases inherent to any single method would be avoided, strengthening the robustness of the results. The findings would therefore be able to draw on the benefits of contextualisation conferred by qualitative approaches and the replicability of quantitative approaches (Krippendorff, 2004). In addition, the use of mixed methods would assist in 'developing the analysis and building on initial findings using contrasting kinds of data' (Denscombe, 2008, p. 272), and a more complete picture of the English language development in higher education would be revealed.

Ethics

Approval to conduct the study was sought and obtained initially from the lead institution, Curtin University (Approval number EDU-83-11). Prior to the commencement of data collection, ethics approval was also obtained from each team member's employing institution. In accordance with ethics guidelines, those invited initially to participate in the study (via email invitation) were informed about the aims of the project and assured that data would be treated as confidential, and that they and their institution would be de-identified. All data that could lead to the identification of any individual were retained in password-protected electronic files.

Data collection and analysis

The project incorporated a number of strategies to ensure that its scope was manageable within the resources allocated. First, all team members had considerable experience in the area under investigation and the flat leadership structure ensured that responsibility for completion of specific stages or aspects of the project were distributed to promote the efficient collection and analysis of data. Second, while language development in universities underpins many other learning activities, the project focused only on issues that could be directly attributed to English language development. It did not consider at a specific level broader issues that might have a language component, such as study skills, information literacy, professional skills or any other desirable skills, knowledge, competencies or attributes that universities recognise as important. Third, while some of the results made reference to transnational students and overseas locations, the analysis and conclusions drawn were limited to the Australian context.

Four data collection strategies were employed: survey research, interviews, case studies and document analysis, or what has also been termed 'desk research'. These are described in more detail below.

Survey data were collected through online questionnaires submitted via email invitation to over 600 potential key informants in all universities in Australia. They included language and learning professionals, deans or directors of teaching and learning, and senior managers. It was anticipated that the response rate would not be high, as it was likely that senior staff within a university would pass the survey on to the person deemed most 'relevant' in their institution; from anecdotal information obtained from some respondents, this appears to have been the case. A total of 173 respondents commenced the survey (approximately 28 per cent), but not all of these completed it, or provided useable information. Ultimately, the analysis was conducted using 132 surveys, which represented responses from 37 of Australia's 39 universities, and between one and seven survey responses from each of those institutions. Universities in all of Australia's states and territories were represented. Asked to name their role in the institution, 54 respondents stated that they were learning advisors (LAs) or communication unit coordinators; 12 were associate deans teaching and learning (or equivalent); five were senior managers at pro vice-chancellor level or above; and four were heads of school or department. The remaining respondents either clicked the option of preferring not to say or omitted the question.

The survey commenced with questions on post-entry language assessment (PELA) instruments in use in universities. These included descriptive questions on the nature of the PELA and were followed by questions about its impact, advantages, disadvantages and the problems or challenges associated with its implementation. The second section of the survey focused on language development policies and their implementation, and the kinds of strategies and activities respondents' institutions had in place to assist students to develop their language use. The survey concluded with some open-ended questions designed to elicit more general information about respondents' views on their institution's approach to student language development.

Follow-up interviews were held with 20 of the respondents who had agreed to participate by providing their contact details in a separate part of the questionnaire. In general, the interviews were intended to obtain more details where it was felt that survey data were contradictory or insufficient, or if a specific activity had been described that was of particular interest because of its uniqueness. More specifically, it was felt that there were two areas of interest that had not emerged from the survey responses and which were important for the project outcomes: activities or strategies which could be described as 'good practice', and ways of evaluating strategies to enhance language development. In addition, in consideration of the project's ultimate goals, the interviews also included a question on the outcomes from the project that interviewees would find most useful.

The third data collection strategy involved ethnographic studies at four universities. This stage was intended to produce rich, multifaceted qualitative data from an emic perspective that could lead to the development of a deep understanding of institutional approaches to student English language development in a tertiary context. The researchers in each institution sought to address the same four questions:

- What is the institution's approach to language assessment and development, and by what process did it come into being?
- What are the factors that have facilitated the development of an effective language assessment and development approach, strategy or activity?
- What are the barriers to developing an effective overall approach to language assessment and development or specific activity?
- What constitutes effectiveness of the approach to language assessment and development in the context of the individual institution?

In order to enable a comparison of the different institutions, the data were recorded in similar ways. Each researcher was responsible for the data obtained from his or her own institution and conducted a preliminary process of data reduction and theme identification, and then reported back to the project team in writing using a specifically designed template. The sources for data collected from each institution were expected to vary according to local context, but were to include internal policy and strategy documents, quality audit and other evaluative reports, meeting minutes, website content, focus group interviews with staff or students, field notes and researcher reflections. Since each case study was to be presented from an emic perspective, the researcher's own interpretations of strategies, events and approaches were considered an essential component of this part of the study. Once the templates had been completed for all four institutions, the data were further analysed using a constant-comparative approach based on grounded theory (Creswell, 2008) in order to draw out the key themes that transcended individual institutions, as well as those concepts that might be linked to specific cultural or educational contexts.

The final approach, desk research, comprised the collation and analysis of all publicly available electronic data on the institutional approaches to PELA and student language development in Australian universities. Data sources included institutional websites, quality audits, official information from government departments and the *My University* website, internal reports and other miscellaneous documents.

Through the use of a mixed methods approach, the data analysis phase could be seen to involve complementarity, development and expansion (Onwuegbuzie, Bustamante, & Nelson, 2010). For example, data obtained through the surveys were elaborated and enhanced through the interviews; the findings from the survey helped inform the development of the interview protocol; and the findings from the case studies expanded the breadth of the study. The integration of the results with regard to data reduction and display and the analysis process of 'abductive logic, intersubjectivity and emic-etic perspectives' (Onwuegbuzie, Bustamante, & Nelson, 2010, p. 59) ensured that ultimately the findings were as valid and robust as possible.

Chapter 4: Outcomes and deliverables

Expectations

At an overarching level, there were two expected outcomes from the project. The first was that the current body of knowledge on English language assessment and development in a tertiary context would be advanced, from the descriptive process of mapping existing approaches and strategies across the sector as well as from the analysis of current approaches and strategies as obtained through the different data collection measures. It was expected that the second outcome from the project would be to provide Australia's universities with evidence-based information on the most effective strategies for language enhancement that would assist them to make decisions about future action in this area. Both of these outcomes were contingent on the successful production of the deliverables described in the following paragraph.

The primary deliverable for the project was the creation of a comprehensive web resource that maps current institutional strategies for post-entry student English language assessment and development, offers advice for those seeking information and guidance in this area and provides guidelines on ways in which the success of a given approach can be evaluated. A secondary deliverable was the production of a substantial number of conference presentations and written reports or articles on the study. The ways in which the success of the deliverables could be evaluated included the number of visitors to the website as measured by the number of hits; the extent to which website visitors participated in feedback opportunities; the extent of the uptake of the project's recommendations; and, from a long-term perspective, the extent to which the findings and the website are cited or acknowledged in the scholarly literature.

The Website

The project proposal stated that the website would include the elements identified in *Table 4* on the following page. The overall content had therefore been identified prior to commencement of the project, and it had been anticipated that the development of the actual website would take place on an ongoing basis over the life of the project as the data obtained in each phase of the study were analysed. However, the website design did not eventuate in the way that had been planned because it became clear that the 'architecture' of the website should not be designed until all the data had been analysed and stakeholders had been consulted as to the optimal format.

The website's architecture is now in its final form, although the content is likely to continue to evolve. At its most basic level, the website contains two major sections: reference material and more practical information on developing an institutional strategy. The 'reference material' includes the project's conceptual framework and a guided tour of the website; identifies the draft *English Language Standards*; has links to research reports and policies; and presents a database of university policies, procedures and activities related to post-entry student language assessment and development. There is also a 'frequently asked questions' section, which was informed by issues that were raised by audience members at presentations, or by questions asked by participants in the survey or interviews.

Table 4: Planned elements of the website

Element	Function
Database	To provide information about strategies and activities in all universities in Australia. The database should be dynamic, sustainable and capable of growth, providing a comprehensive and sustainable national resource for academic staff, administrators and managers.
Guide	To assist universities seeking to initiate or improve an English language education strategy. The guide would focus on implementing good practice identified through the study's research findings.
Evaluation	To provide a set of criteria by which universities could evaluate the degree to which their institutional approaches to the development of English language proficiency have attained good practice targets.
Information	To describe the case study results from four universities in a way that would assist other institutions to identify the most effective institutional strategies for student language development.
Development	To provide access to a community of practice that includes, for example, experts in the field who are able to provide mentoring or consultancy on English language development.

The major component of the website is based on the findings from the research, and provides information on the development of an institutional strategy. The first item on the home page menu, *Planning an institutional approach*, provides summaries of the stages of development identified in the case studies, and includes a downloadable document outlining good practice in this area. This is followed by specific information on PELAs and activities for enhancing language use. There is also a section on evaluation, as well as common issues and challenges. Most importantly for the project's goals, there is also a section that identifies good practice across the sector with regard to institutional strategies, PELA, embedding language in the disciplines, credit-bearing units, workshops and consultations, e-learning and peer-to-peer activities.

There are also several vignettes that relate to the case studies. These were produced to try to provide an insight into the lived experience of the people who participated in the study, and to illustrate the kinds of issues that could impact on the success of any institutional approach to language development and assessment.

Finally, given the importance to the project team of making the website as interactive as possible and providing its target audience with opportunities for input, the website contains many opportunities for feedback. There is a prominent 'feedback' tab on the right hand side of every page on the website, as well as a top-menu tab, that opens out into a feedback form where email messages can be sent to the project leader. In addition, visitors to the website have the opportunity to access material that is limited to those with a login account. Those who log in are able to upload information that can be viewed by anyone else with a login account. It was envisaged that the kind of information that visitors would like to upload would include details of conferences and other events likely to be of interest, as well as information about consultancy services offered in the area of post-entry student language assessment and development. The URL for the website appears on the front page of this report.

Presentations and written output

The production of conference presentations and written reports and articles was identified as a deliverable rather than simply as a means of dissemination. While some funded projects identify the final report to the OLT as the primary means by which the findings will be presented, this was not the case with this project. Thus, in this report the actual findings are described only briefly. It was envisaged that outputs through scholarly and research outlets would be the major way, other than the website itself, in which detailed research data would be presented, and issues explored.

The identification of conference presentations and written reports and articles as a deliverable was predicated on the understanding that these were to play an integral part in the study itself. Presentations at key conferences, for example, was seen as an important way in which the study could be introduced to stakeholders so that their views and feedback could be integrated into the construction of the website, thereby building a communal sense of ownership of the resource. Similarly, knowledge that the project was being conducted was a prerequisite for feedback and the development of a resource that was able to meet the perceived needs of stakeholders. Because of this desire for interaction and feedback, the project evolved to focus primarily on opportunities for interaction with regard to this deliverable, i.e. oral presentations rather than written reports. There was an understanding that detailed descriptions of the findings in, for example, journal articles, could be the focus once the website was established and functional. *Table 5* below identifies the avenues through which information about the project and its findings have to date been presented.

Because of the desire to obtain stakeholder feedback at an early stage of the project, the conferences were selected to ensure that audiences for the team members' presentations would represent the wide range of stakeholders identified in the project proposal document. For this reason, the emphasis in the first year was on presentations within Australia, at conferences which would attract educational administrators and managers, academic staff across disciplines, student advisors and staff with particular interest and expertise in post-entry English language assessment and development. Given that English language development is often seen as having particular relevance for international students, it was also decided that presenting at conferences with an international focus would be of great value at an early stage. As *Table 5* illustrates, the conferences that were selected were the Australian International Education Conference, which attracts a very wide variety of participants across the range of stakeholders identified; the ALTAANZ and ALAA conferences, which would attract those interested in language assessment and testing and applied linguistics; and the ISANA conference, which would be attended by those interested in student advising and support. The project team were invited to present at the NEAS ELT Management Conference in May 2013, thereby also accessing TESOL educators and managers. For the second year of the project, it was believed that it would be useful to disseminate information about the project internationally, and papers were accepted for the RELC Conference in Singapore and the BALEAP Conference in the UK.

Table 5: Presentations on the project

Oral presentations			
Date	Event	Location	Title
7/11/11	WAND Sharing Day	Perth	Degrees of proficiency: building a strategic approach to university students' English language assessment and development.
25/5/12	AALL Symposium	Sydney	Assessment and development of students' English language proficiency: what is your institution doing?
2/10/12	AIEC Conference	Melbourne	Degrees of proficiency: building a strategic approach to university students' English language assessment and development.
9/11/12	ALTAANZ Conference	Sydney	Degrees of proficiency: post-entry English language assessment in Australia's universities.
12/11/12	ALAA Conference	Perth	Evolution or intelligent design: Australian universities' approaches to the development of student English language proficiency.
4/12/12	ISANA Conference	Auckland	Enhancing the student experience: Approaches to the development of English language proficiency.
6/2/13	AALL Symposium	Perth	Embedding English language into the disciplines: latest developments and best practice
7/2/13	Teaching and Learning Forum	Perth	Student English language development in Australia's universities: Developing an institutional approach.
18/3/13	RELC Conference	Singapore	Post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) in higher education: Issues, challenges, approaches.
19/4/13	BALEAP Conference	UK	Planning for success: Developing an institution-wide approach to the enhancement of student English language use in Australia's universities
16/5/13	NEAS ELT Management Conference	Sydney	Findings from a Nationwide Project: Developing English language proficiency in Australian universities.
4/2013	SCU (Gold Coast) Information session	Queensland	Degrees of proficiency: building a strategic approach to university students' English language assessment and development.
1/7/2013	HERDSA Conference	Auckland	The place of English language development in the higher education curriculum

At the time of writing of the final report, written output has been limited, for the reasons given above. To date one research-based report has been completed and published, although others are in the process of being developed. However, that research report was of particular value for dissemination of information about the project, since the report was

prepared for a national symposium on student English language competence, attended by 140 representatives of public and private higher education institutions in Australia, organised by AEI and the IEAA as a follow up to the influential national symposium held in 2007.

Table 6: Written output

Date	Publication	Title
1/2012	AALL Newsletter Volume 5, Issue 1	Awards (brief descriptive information)
8/2012	WA AALL Newsletter	Another exciting English language initiative! (Brief descriptive information)
12/2012	AALL Newsletter Volume 5, Issue 1	OLT Projects (brief descriptive update)
2/2013	AEI/IEAA: Five years on: English language competence of international students	In-course language development

Evaluation

The external evaluator provided his interim evaluation in October 2012. At the time of his appointment earlier that year, he had been provided by the project team with an evaluation information sheet that described the project and its goals, identified the purpose of the evaluation, and explained the role of the evaluator. The information sheet included some key questions that it was believed the external evaluator should address, three formative followed by three summative. These are listed below.

- How appropriate are the project's activities in relation to achieving the project's goals?
- How effectively is the project team functioning?
- How can the project be made as sustainable as possible?
- To what extent have the project's outcomes and deliverables been attained?
- To what extent do the project's outcomes and deliverables provide innovative and practical benefits to the sector?
- What are the major lessons that have been learnt from the project?

The interim evaluation addressed the first three, formative, questions. The evaluator noted that the project was on track to meet its objectives. However, the evaluation report included some specific recommendations. The first was that the case study data should be integrated into a summary report identifying the kinds of activities or strategies that 'worked' and those that did not. This recommendation was taken up by the project team in the form of a downloadable 'Good Practice' document located on the project website, and has made its way into the case study 'vignettes'. The second recommendation, acknowledging the central role of the website to the project, was that the final project and reference group meetings should be conducted face-to-face (a teleconference had been planned), and that the main topic for discussion should be the website. This recommendation was taken up in February 2013. The third recommendation was that the project team should produce a reflective piece on their experience of the project as a whole, which could be submitted for publication in an appropriate journal. This recommendation was acknowledged by the team, which has commenced this task.

The final evaluation report is at Appendix A.

Chapter 5: Project reflections

Summary of outcomes and deliverables

The outcomes and deliverables for this project are described in detail in Chapter 4. A summary table appears below.

Table 7: Summary of outcomes and deliverables

Plan	Result
The provision of a 'blueprint' for Australian universities that would enable them to identify and implement the most effective strategies for enhancing student English language proficiency.	Research-based resource in the form of the website.
Contribution to the existing body of knowledge on diagnostic language assessment and the efficacy of language development activities.	Data obtained from study is available through the website, conference presentations and reports.
The production of a website that maps institutional practices, provides guidance on good practice, offers advice and assistance to those seeking support, and provides guidelines on strategy and activity evaluation.	Website has been produced that includes all these elements. URL is < www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au >
The production of a substantial number of conference papers, journal articles and reports.	Eight national or international conference presentations are finalised or confirmed, with numerous other local events completed. One report was completed with several journal articles to follow.

Critical success factors

Details of the critical success factors are presented below.

- A major factor for the success of the project was the extent to which participants, from survey respondents to interviewees and contributors to the case studies, were willing to share their beliefs, ideas and experiences. The project team members were able to collect a wealth of rich data for analysis and have confidence in the integrity of their findings. The use of multiple methods was also a strength, and ensured that the findings were sufficiently wide-ranging and incorporated multiple perspectives.
- In spite of team members being located across three states and two different time zones, communication played an important role in the success of the project. All team members attended every meeting, including for a full day at a key stage of the project. Ideas were floated and discussions held on a frequent basis by group email outside the formal meeting times.
- Collaboration within the team, operating with a flat management structure, was also a strength. Each team member attended all meetings, including of the reference group; was involved in the design of the survey and subsequent analysis; took sole responsibility

for the production of one case study report; provided feedback on minutes, reports and plans; contributed to the website content; and assisted in disseminating information about the project through conference presentations, workshops and other events.

- The reference group members and external evaluator (who also attended one meeting of the reference group) were selected for their nationally-acknowledged expertise in the area under investigation. Their input was extremely valuable, as was their willingness to publicise the project when they had the opportunity.
- The supporting information provided by the ALTC, later the OLT, synthesised from the experience of numerous past studies, was instrumental in ensuring that the project was able to set up systems that could facilitate success. Such systems included having in place a communication and dissemination strategy, a conflict resolution plan, publications guidelines, and an evaluation framework. In addition, there was an early OLT-chaired teleconference for new project leaders and a workshop for project managers in July 2012.

Factors that impeded success

Details of those factors which impeded progress or success are presented below.

- The most problematic issue was the loss of key personnel. Because of circumstances beyond the control of any member of the project team, the original intention to involve five universities was ultimately reduced to four. In accordance with the project's risk management plan the workload was re-distributed after a search for a replacement had been unsuccessful, but the issue did take up some time before it was addressed, leading to some delays in progress.
- Some challenges were also experienced because of bureaucratic or administrative issues, for example in the finalising of ethics approval within the partner institutions, and the organisation of contracts for key personnel.
- The original timeline set for the development of the website was overly ambitious. It had been anticipated that the website would be developed on an ongoing basis, as the data analysis unfolded. However, it became clear as the project progressed that the architecture of the website would need to be in place prior to the completion of website content, and that the architecture could not be finalised until clear themes had emerged from the research data collected. The result of this delay meant that the beta version of the website had to be released to stakeholders for comment before team members had fully had a chance to deliberate on the final content, which in turn means that the process of amendment, change and addition to the website is likely to be more extensive than had been envisaged.

Dissemination

In addition to the forms of dissemination that have already been described in this report, several activities are proposed to go beyond the formal end of the project. There is a wealth of research data that has yet to be published through journal articles. These are planned to be completed over the next twelve months. Conference presentations are also planned to continue into the future as different forums for dissemination become available, including

the AIEC, English Australia and AALL conferences in the second half of 2013. The promotion of the website itself will occur through the distribution to all universities of postcard-sized summaries of the project and website details. Preliminary plans to 'launch' the website at a relevant conference have yet to be finalised.

Linkages

The results from the project are closely linked to two OLT fellowships that were awarded in 2012: to Associate Professor Carmela Briguglio (Embedding English language development into the disciplines) and Associate Professor Sophie Arkoudis (Embedding English language learning in higher education curricula). The website for this project includes information on embedding English language development in the disciplines, and the website will continue to be monitored and amended in the light of the outcomes from these two fellowships. The project also drew on the expertise (through the reference group) of the project leader for a previous OLT-funded project that investigated student English language growth (RocheCouste, Oliver, Mulligan, & Davies, 2010).

The project was also closely linked to a national symposium organised by AEI in collaboration with the IEAA: *Five Years on: English language competence of international students*, as the project leader was invited to submit a discussion paper and deliver a presentation on the topic of in-course language development. Links have also been built with the national organisation NEAS, which invited the team to present at their annual ELT management conference in May, 2013.

Project evaluation and impact

The final report from the external evaluator is not due until June 2013, and the impact of the project is likely to be more long-term than immediate. However, it is clear that the project is already well-known by language development professionals within the higher education sector. Email feedback has already been received from a number of language development specialists, commenting on the website, making suggestions for further amendments or correcting problematic hyperlinks. In the longer term, the impact will be assessed by the number of hits the website receives, the number of citations the project team's work obtains in the scholarly and research literature, and the extent to which universities take up the advice that is offered on the website to improve institutional approaches to student English language development. In the short term, the project team is encouraged to have received written email comments such as the following:

- "Just had a quick look at your project website. It looks really impressive. You have done so much in this project! It is certainly a great resource for all of us who are involved in this area but also for non-specialists who want to find out more".
- "Congratulations to you and your team for creating this wonderful resource".
- "Easy to navigate and very user-friendly".
- "I've had a look at a few areas on the site and it certainly looks like a valuable resource for all unis to draw on to get ideas on how to develop language proficiency of their students... I know I'll be referring to it a lot... I appreciate you all compiling this info in one place. It's invaluable!"

References

- AEI [Australian Education International]. (2007). *Outcomes from a national symposium: English language competence of international students*. ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Arkoudis, S., Baik, C., & Richardson, S. (2012). *English language standards in higher education*. Camberwell, Vic: ACER.
- Baird, B. (2010). *Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students. Review of the Educational Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, 2000*. ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Birrell, B. (2006). Implications of low English standards among overseas students at Australian universities. *People and Place*, 14(4), 53-64.
- Bradley, D., Nunan, P., Nugent, H., & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education: Final report*. ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Bretag, T. (2007). The Emperor's new clothes: Yes, there is a link between English language competence and academic standards. *People and Place*, 15(1), 13-21.
- Briggs, N. (2011). English language enhancement and the Good Practice Principles. Paper presented at the *Australian Education International Conference*, 11-14 October, 2011, Adelaide, South Australia.
- Chanock, K. (2007). Valuing individual consultations as input into other modes of teaching. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*. 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.aall.org.au/journal/ojs/index.php/>
- Cresswell, J. (2008). *Educational Research*. (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- DEEWR [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations]. (2009). *Good practice principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities*. Retrieved from www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/Documents/Final_Report-Good_Practice_Principles.pdf.
- Denscombe, M. (2008). Communities of practice: A research paradigm for the mixed methods approach. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 2(3), 270-283.
- Dunworth, K. (2013). In-course student English language development. In AEI/IEAA (2013), *Five years on: English language competence of international students. Outcomes report*. (pp. 52-74). Retrieved from <http://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/54>
- Dunworth, K. (2009). An investigation into post-entry English language assessment in Australian universities. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 3(1), A1-A13.
- Dyson, B. (2009). Understanding trajectories of academic literacy: How could this improve diagnostic assessment? *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 3(1), 52-69.
- Elder, C., & von Randow, J. (2008). Exploring the utility of a web-based English language screening tool. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 5(3), 173-194.
- English Language Standards for Higher Education*. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.aall.org.au/sites/default/files/FinalEnglishLanguageStandardsMay2012_0.pdf
- Feilzer, M. Y. (2010). Doing mixed methods research pragmatically: Implications for the rediscovery of pragmatism as a research paradigm. *Journal of Mixed Method Research*, 4(1), 6-16.

- Fenton-Smith, B. (2012). Facilitating self-directed learning amongst international students of health sciences: The dual discourse of self-efficacy. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 6(1), A64-A76.
- Harper, R., Prentice, S., & Wilson, K. (2011). English language perplexity: Articulating the tensions in the DEEWR "Good Practice Principles". *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 2(1), 36-48.
- Harris, A. (2010). Addressing English language proficiency in a business faculty. In *Educating for sustainability: Proceedings of the 19th annual Teaching and Learning Forum*, 28-29 January 2010. Perth: Edith Cowan University. Retrieved from <http://otl.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf2010/refereed/harris.html>
- Harvey-Bravo, D., & Monaghan, A. (2011). Student Linx peer mentoring. Paper presented at ANZSSA Conference, 2011. Retrieved from http://anzssa.epicconferences.com.au/images/Presentations/2011_HarveyBravo_Monaghan_Mon_1600_Wattle.pdf
- Jackson, M., Watty, K., Yu, L., & Lowe, L. (2006). *Assessing students unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian universities. Final report to the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education 2006*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: The Carrick Institute.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Kennelly, R., Maldoni, A., & Davies, D. (2010). A case study: Do discipline-based programmes improve student learning outcomes? *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 6(1), 61-73.
- Knight, M. (2011). *Strategic review of the student visa program 2011: Report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from http://www.immi.gov.au/students/_pdf/2011-knight-review.pdf
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. London: Sage.
- Larcombe, W., & Malkin, I. (2008). Identifying students likely to benefit from language support in first-year law. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 27(4), 319-329.
- Lea, M., & Street, B. (2006). The "Academic Literacies" model: Theory and applications. *Theory into Practice*, 45(4), 368-377.
- Mort, P., & Drury, H. (2012). Supporting student academic literacy in the disciplines using genre based online pedagogy. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 6(3), A1-A15.
- Murray, N. (2010). Conceptualising the English language needs of first year university students. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 1(1) 55-64.
- My University (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://myuniversity.gov.au/>.
- Nallaya, S. (2012). UniSA's approach to enhancing student experience through the implementation of a learning, language and literacies (L3) model. Paper presented at the ISANA Conference, December 2012, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Bustamante, R., & Nelson, J. (2010). Mixed research as a tool for developing quantitative instruments. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), 56-78.
- Ransom, L. (2009). Implementing the post-entry English language assessment policy at the University of Melbourne: Rationale, processes, and outcomes. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 3(2) 13-25.
- Read, J. (2008). Identifying academic language needs through diagnostic assessment. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 7, 180-190.
- RMIT. (2010). *English language development project*. Downloaded from: <http://rmit.com.au>

- Rochecouste, J., Oliver, R., Mulligan, D., & Davies, M. (2010). *Addressing the ongoing language growth of international students. Final report to the ALTC*. Retrieved from: <http://www.altc.edu.au/project-addressing-ongoing-english-monash-2007>
- Sawir, E. (2005). Language difficulties of international students in Australia: The effects of prior learning experience. *International Education Journal* 6(5), 567-580.
- Scouller, K., Bonanno, H., Smith, L., & Krass, I. (2008). Student experience and tertiary expectations: Factors predicting academic literacy amongst first-year pharmacy students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(2), 167-178.
- Stappenbelt, B., & Barrett-Lennard, S. (2008). Teaching smarter to improve the English communication proficiency of international engineering students - Collaborations between content and language specialists at the University of Western Australia. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 9, 198-210.
- Storch, N., & Tapper, J. (2009). The impact of an EAP course on postgraduate writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 8, 207-223.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- TEQSA. (2013). *Quality assessment: English language proficiency. Terms of Reference*. Retrieved from <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/for-providers/quality-assessments>
- Victoria University. (2010). *VU English language support and development strategy*. Retrieved from: <http://tls.vu.edu.au/portal/site/policies/resources/VUenglishlanguagestrategy.pdf>
- von Randow, J. (2010). How much language do they need? The dilemma English-medium universities face when enrolling English as an Additional Language students. *CELT: Collected Essays on Teaching and Learning Vol 3*, (pp. 172-176).
- Wilson, K., Li, L., & Collins, G. (2011). Co-constructing academic literacy: Examining teacher student discourse in a one-to-one consultation. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 5(1), A139-A153.
- Woodward-Kron, R. (2007). Negotiating meanings and scaffolding learning: Writing support for non-English speaking background postgraduate students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 26(3), 253-268.

Appendix A

Degrees of Proficiency: Building a Strategic Approach to University Students' English Language Assessment and Development Final Evaluation

The main purpose of the overall evaluation of the project is:

to provide formative advice to the project team members to assist them to improve the overall project design and to use the data collected in the most effective way;

to assess the extent to which the project achieves its intended outcomes and make recommendations to achieve sustainability beyond the life of the project.

The key **formative questions** which the evaluator needs to address are:

How appropriate are the project's activities in relation to achieving the project's goals?

How effectively is the project team functioning?

How can the project be made as sustainable as possible?

The key **summative questions** which the evaluator needs to address are:

To what extent have the projects outcomes and deliverables been attained?

To what extent do the project's outcomes and deliverables provide innovative and practical benefits to the sector?

What are the major lessons that have been learnt from the project?

The interim evaluation focussed on addressing the **formative questions** listed above. The interim evaluation will be updated below, along with the evaluation of the key summative questions. First however, in order to provide the context, a brief summary of the project, its aims and the major planned outcomes are provided.

Project Summary (taken from the first progress report)

The project is an inter-university investigation into institution-wide approaches to post-entry English language assessment and language development in the university sector. The investigation will map and analyse existing approaches and their guiding beliefs and values, provide case study data from the five [later reduced to four] participating universities on factors which enhance or inhibit the effective development of students' English language levels, and develop criteria for the evaluation of the range of approaches in place. The results from the project will be made available nationally through an online resource.

Aims (taken from the original application)

Build capacity within Australian universities to facilitate high levels of student English language proficiency among an increasingly diverse student body;

Map current institutional approaches and practices in post-entry English language assessment and student English language development across the entire higher education sector in Australia; and identify and describe those which are most effective;

Advance the body of knowledge on English language development in a tertiary context.

The main deliverable of the project will be a comprehensive on-line resource that:

a) maps extant institutional strategies for post-entry English language assessment and post-entry English language development nationwide;

b) provides a guide that assist universities to establish effective institutional approaches to these areas;

c) offers advice and assistance to those seeking support;

d) provides guidelines on ways in which the success of a given approach can be evaluated.

The key formative questions (KFQ)

I include here excerpts from the interim report, but updated to show the extent to which the project team acted upon the recommendations made in that report.

KFQ 1 How appropriate are the project's activities in relation to achieving the project's goals?

The activities have been relevant and appropriate and, as will be illustrated below, the team has been able to achieve its goals. The data that has been obtained from the online survey, the desk research and the case studies is rich and justifies the mixed method approach adopted by the team.

KFQ 2 How effectively is the project team functioning?

The loss of one participating university caused both concern and delays. However, the loss of one team member has not negatively affected the project as the goals have been accomplished. It was unfortunate that the loss of one university meant there would be one fewer case study from which to draw. However, the data from the remaining four case studies proved both diverse and rich. This was recognised by the team in its progress report of October 2012 which stated:

When it became clear that the survey was generating very rich data, and that many respondents indicated a willingness to be interviewed to provide greater detail on their own institutions, it was decided that four case studies would be sufficient to achieve the project goals

The team worked well together and also worked effectively with the reference group and other stakeholders. As recommended in the interim report, the team held an additional face-to-face meeting at which the website architecture for the online resource received substantial and crucially useful discussion.

KFQ 3 How can the project be made as sustainable as possible?

In the interim report I wrote 'An appropriate web design which presents findings which demonstrate ways in which people can facilitate and implement change in their own institutions is crucial for the sustainability of the project. At the same time, the website needs to be interactive in that people can themselves contribute to it, possibly by providing their own examples of best (or poor) practice. This is why it is reassuring to see that the team is taking the development and design of this website so seriously'. I am satisfied that the completed online resource meets these criteria. I return to this below in my discussion of the key summative questions.

The key summative questions (KSQ)

KSQ 1 To what extent have the projects outcomes and deliverables been attained?

As noted above, the main deliverable of the project was to be a comprehensive on-line resource that:

- a) maps extant institutional strategies for post-entry English language assessment and post-entry English language development nationwide;
- b) provides a guide that assist universities to establish effective institutional approaches to these areas;
- c) offers advice and assistance to those seeking support ;
- d) provides guidelines on ways in which the success of a given approach can be evaluated.

As indicated in the progress report of October 2012, the project team made the decision to postpone the design of the website 'until the team has a clear picture of the architecture that will best suit the needs of stakeholders using the website'. This online resource is the main deliverable of the project, so it was crucially important that its design was appropriate. It was also important that the findings and information on the website should be presented in such a way that stakeholders are able to use them to facilitate change in their own institutions. Thus, the website must not be a 'static repository of current practice', but should be 'used/contributed to in an

ongoing basis by the sector' (Reference Group Minutes August 2012, point 5). The decision to temporarily delay the design, along with the decision to appoint a professional web site designer, proved to be highly justified, given the final product.

The final project report includes this table which outlines the planned elements and their functions of the website.

Element	Function
Database	To provide information about strategies and activities in all universities in Australia. The database should be dynamic, sustainable and capable of growth, providing a comprehensive and sustainable national resource for academic staff, administrators and managers.
Guide	To assist universities seeking to initiate or improve an English language education strategy. The guide would focus on implementing good practice identified through the study's research findings.
Evaluation	To provide a set of criteria by which universities could evaluate the degree to which their institutional approaches to the development of English language proficiency have attained good practice targets.
Information	To describe the case study results from four universities in a way that would assist other institutions to identify the most effective institutional strategies for student language development.
Development	To provide access to a community of practice that includes, for example, experts in the field who are able to provide mentoring or consultancy on English language development.

The website is accessible at the following url: www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au

The database is very user-friendly and provides the information indicated above. This includes: links to Concepts, where the complexity concerning the concepts and definitions of language proficiency are discussed and where further links to research in the field is provided; TEQSA and Threshold Standards; and a Database of each of Australia's universities which gives information about English language entry requirements, policies relating to these, the type of academic support provided, the types of tests provided and the online support for English language development each university provides.

In addition to providing easy access to a wealth of reference material, the website also has a major section devoted to developing strategies connected with English language policy and practice. This section of the website includes entries on 'Planning an Institutional Approach', 'Post-entry Language Assessment', 'Language Development Strategies', 'Evaluation of Strategies', 'Examples of Good Practice', ' and 'Common Challenges and Issues'.

The 'Common Challenges and Issues' section is worthy of special mention, as this has been developed from information obtained from the project team's on-line survey, interviews with university staff and the four case studies, all of which were undertaken as part of the project.

In my view, the website meets the ambitious goals set for it by the project team. This view is shared by relevant stakeholders, as can be seen by this sample of user feedback:

- "Just had a quick look at your project website. It looks really impressive. You have done so much in this project! It is certainly a great resource for all of us who are involved in this area but also for non-specialists who want to find out more".

- “Congratulations to you and your team for creating this wonderful resource”.
- “Easy to navigate and very user-friendly”.
- “I’ve had a look at a few areas on the site and it certainly looks like a valuable resource for all unis to draw on to get ideas on how to develop language proficiency of their students... I know I’ll be referring to it a lot... I appreciate you all compiling this info in one place. It’s invaluable!”

As mentioned above, it is essential that stakeholders feel able to use the information provided in the website in ways that will enable them to facilitate change in their own universities. It is still too early to judge whether this is the case, but, in addition to the comments cited above, the monthly number of website hits in 2013 indicate that it is becoming a popular resource.

Monthly hits 2013

January:	94
February:	156
March:	258
April:	436

This shows a significant monthly increase of hits and suggests that the online resource is becoming better known and that its quality and value are attracting an increasing number of stakeholders.

KSQ 2 To what extent do the project’s outcomes and deliverables provide innovative and practical benefits to the sector?

The comments made by the website users above indicate that the outcomes and deliverables provide innovative and practical benefits. In addition to the online resource, the project also promised deliverables in the forms of ‘a substantial number of conference papers, journal articles and reports to the Australian Government office for Learning and Teaching’.

Table 5 of the Final Project Report (reproduced below) gives the list of conference papers delivered and where.

Oral presentations			
Date	Event	Location	Title
7/11/11	WAND Sharing Day	Perth	Degrees of proficiency: building a strategic approach to university students’ English language assessment and development.
25/5/12	AALL Symposium	Sydney	Assessment and development of students’ English language proficiency: what is your institution doing?
2/10/12	AIEC Conference	Melbourne	Degrees of proficiency: building a strategic approach to university students’ English language assessment and development.
9/11/12	ALTAANZ Conference	Sydney	Degrees of proficiency: post-entry English language assessment in Australia’s universities.
12/11/12	ALAA Conference	Perth	Evolution or intelligent design: Australian universities’ approaches to the development of student English language proficiency.

4/12/12	ISANA Conference	Auckland	Enhancing the student experience: Approaches to the development of English language proficiency.
6/2/13	AALL Symposium	Perth	Embedding English language into the disciplines: latest developments and best practice
7/2/13	Teaching and Learning Forum	Perth	Student English language development in Australia's universities: Developing an institutional approach.
18/3/13	RELC Conference	Singapore	Post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) in higher education: Issues, challenges, approaches.
19/4/13	BALEAP Conference	UK	Planning for success: Developing an institution-wide approach to the enhancement of student English language use in Australia's universities
16/5/13	NEAS ELT Management Conference	Sydney	Findings from a Nationwide Project: Developing English language proficiency in Australian universities.
4/2013	SCU (Gold Coast) Information session	Queensland	Degrees of proficiency: building a strategic approach to university students' English language assessment and development.
1/7/2013	HERDSA Conference	Melbourne	The place of English language development in the higher education curriculum

The table shows that information about and findings from the project have been disseminated in a wide range of settings, both in Australia and overseas. In the first year of the project, the aim was to focus more on Australia and provide information about it to administrators and academics. In the second year it was thought it would be appropriate and valuable to reach international audiences. I gather that this has been of particular potential impact in the case of the BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English as an Academic Language) conference in the UK, as great interest was expressed in running a similar project in the UK.

Written outcomes are less impressive at this time, but this is perhaps only to be expected, given that the project has only recently been completed. One research report, prepared for the National Symposium on student English language competence, has been prepared. However, the team are encouraged to ensure that the papers presented at the conferences outlined are turned into articles and submitted to relevant influential journals. In my interim report I also suggested that the team prepare a reflective journal article on the project as a whole, in which the problems and issues they encountered are described and how these were overcome are addressed. I gather this is underway.

KSQ3 What are the major lessons that have been learnt from the project?

The Final Project Report contains a section on the team's reflections on critical success factors and those that impeded success. I include these here before commenting on them.

- A major factor for the success of the project was the extent to which participants, from survey respondents to interviewees and contributors to the case studies, were willing to share their beliefs, ideas and experiences. The project team members were able to collect a wealth of rich data for analysis and have confidence in the integrity of their findings. The use of multiple

methods was also a strength, and ensured that the findings were sufficiently wide-ranging and incorporated multiple perspectives.

- In spite of team members being located across three states and two different time zones, communication played an important role in the success of the project. All team members attended every meeting, including for a full day at a key stage of the project. Ideas were floated and discussions held on a frequent basis by group email outside the formal meeting times.
- Collaboration within the team, operating with a flat management structure, was also a strength. Each team member attended all meetings, including of the reference group; was involved in the design of the survey and subsequent analysis; took sole responsibility for the production of one case study report; provided feedback on minutes, reports and plans; contributed to the website content; and assisted in disseminating information about the project through conference presentations, workshops and other events.
- The reference group members and external evaluator (who also attended one meeting of the reference group) were selected for their nationally-acknowledged expertise in the area under investigation. Their input was extremely valuable, as was their willingness to publicise the project when they had the opportunity.
- The supporting information provided by the ALTC, later the OLT, synthesised from the experience of numerous past studies, was instrumental in ensuring that the project was able to set up systems that could facilitate success. Such systems included having in place a communication and dissemination strategy, a conflict resolution plan, publications guidelines, and an evaluation framework. In addition, there was an early OLT-chaired teleconference for new project leaders and a workshop for project managers in July 2012.

Factors which impeded progress or success are presented below.

- The most problematic issue was the loss of key personnel. Because of circumstances beyond the control of any member of the project team, the original intention to involve five universities was ultimately reduced to four. In accordance with the project's risk management plan the workload was re-distributed after a search for a replacement had been unsuccessful, but the issue did take up some time before it was addressed, leading to some delays in progress.
- Some challenges were also experienced because of bureaucratic or administrative issues, for example in the finalising of ethics approval within the partner institutions, and the organisation of contracts for key personnel.
- The original timeline set for the development of the website was overly ambitious. It had been anticipated that the website would be developed on an ongoing basis, as the data analysis unfolded. However, it became clear as the project progressed that the architecture of the website would need to be in place prior to the completion of website content, and that the architecture could not be finalised until clear themes had emerged from the research data collected. The result of this delay meant that the beta version of the website had to be released to stakeholders for comment before team members had fully had a chance to deliberate on the final content, which in turn means that the process of amendment, change and addition to the website is likely to be more extensive than had been envisaged.

These critical reflections are thoughtful and to the point. It is fair to say that the success factors far outweighed those that impeded progress, and the project has delivered what it promised. The main outcome is an online resource which provides highly valuable information to those involved

in English language policy and practice at Australian universities. In addition to offering an important resource and database, its aim is to also offer opportunities for stakeholders to continue to use and contribute to it for the future. Early figures and feedback on the website suggest that this is certainly the case and my prediction is that it will continue to be a key resource for many years to come. In closing, I therefore would like to congratulate the Project Team and the Director for successfully managing and completing what was a complex task and for developing an online resource that has every chance of being of great value to the Australian university sector as a whole. It also has the potential of creating international impact and being transported overseas. It is possible, for example, that a similar resource will be developed in the UK, using the Australian resource as a model.

In closing I reiterate, in the form of recommendations, the importance (i) of the team producing journal articles based on the conference presentations, and (ii) of continuing to monitor the use of the online resource, ensuring that feedback is responded to in a timely way.

[Signed]

Professor Andy Kirkpatrick, External Evaluator

21 May 2013