

A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Finland

Institution: Foundation Innove

Type of context: National

Educational sector: Upper secondary

Main focus: Test

SUMMARY

Name: Tests for a national language – ALTE Q-mark

Abstract:

Audit process for the Innove Foundation's language tests for the Estonian language (ALTE Q-mark)

Stage: Evaluation

Theme: Assessment

CEFR aspects used: Levels, Descriptors, Assessment with defined criteria

Main features of this example:

- Thorough analysis/external audit of large-scale [national] tests
- ALTE has developed 17 minimum standards for establishing quality profiles in ALTE members' examinations. The standards cover five main areas: the principles of test construction, administration and logistics, the marking and grading process, statistical analysis and communication with stakeholders
- Levels A2, B1, B2, C1 in focus; all passed the audit and received the ALTE Q-mark (the organisation's quality indicator)
- The standards ensure fairness across the entire examination process, from initial test development to final presentation of results
- Dialogue regarding possible room for improvement

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Validity, Transparency, Coherence



2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background: A need to validate/assure the quality of high-stakes national tests (for levels A2, B1, B2 and C1) by means of an external audit performed by ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe). *For example, people who apply for Estonian citizenship must provide proof of having passed the Estonian language proficiency test at level B1.

Stated aims: The aim was to ensure that the Estonian language proficiency examinations are valid and reliable and meet 17 minimum standards, covering the principles of test construction, administration and logistics, the marking and grading process, statistical analysis and communication with stakeholders.

Steps/stages:

- 1 – building a validity argument, adding supportive documents and data
- 2 – physical audit
- 3 – reviewing the validity argument, adding more documents and data
- 4 – report

Timeline: The audit took place in 2014.

Quality Assurance procedures employed:

Following the steps of the rigorous ALTE audit and demonstrating fulfillment of ALTE core requirements. ALTE has established a set of 17 common standards covering all aspects of test construction, administration and logistics, marking and grading, test analysis, and communication with stakeholders. Examination providers present detailed information and evidence (data, documents, etc.) for each parameter of the standards.

The whole procedure is based on a guide that must be followed to assure quality as ALTE has established a set of common standards for its members' exams, which cover all the stages of the language testing process mentioned above. Details are available at www.alte.org > Setting standards.

The Q-mark is valid for a defined number of years (6), after that a new audit must be undertaken to renew it.

3 RESULTS

What was achieved: The four tests, for levels A2, B1, B2 and C1, passed the audit. The Q-mark is valid until 2020. After this, a new audit will be done.

Impact: It is felt that the more exams in Europe that are awarded the Q-mark the better, as it is a rigorous audit. The Q-mark allows test users to be confident that an exam is backed by appropriate processes, criteria and standards.

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example

Information on the examinations: <https://www.innove.ee/en/examinations-and-tests/estonian-language-proficiency-examinations/>

ALTE: <http://www.alte.org/>

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Advice on this theme; things to remember:

- After audit make an action plan for the future and take all the recommendations for improvement into consideration.
- When developing tests, ALTE standards should be followed from the very beginning.
- Familiarisation sessions with the CEFR as theoretical and practical guidance should be held on a regular basis.
- Send press releases when you have some good news to share.

Advice on this theme; pitfalls to avoid:

- Everything should be documented, cataloged and translated into English - it saves a lot of time later.