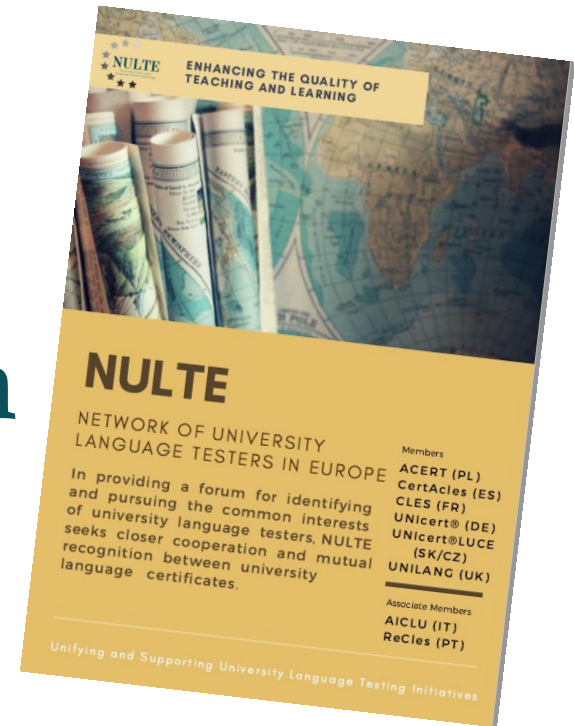


Minimum standards and quality assurance in university language testing: harmonising assessment practices within the NULTE network

Network of University Language Testers in Europe

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What is NULTE?

- the Network of University Language Testers in Europe – under the umbrella of CercleS. (European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education. CercleS is a confederation of language associations representing academics and language teachers.)
- the group of language test providers at European universities, which have developed their individual language (learning and) testing systems at national level
- and who strive for stronger co-operation and mutual recognition in HE

Who is NULTE?

Members

- ACERT (PL)
- CertAcles (ES)
- CLES (FR)
- UNICert[®] (DE)
- UNICert[®]LUCE (SK/CZ)
- UNILANG (UK)

Associate Member

- ReCles (PT)

The history of NULTE

- CercleS Focus Group on Testing and Assessment: 1st Meeting in Toulouse in Nov. 2009 – themes identified: needs analysis, workshops, guidelines, mutual recognition
- Further meetings of CercleS Focus Group on Testing and Assessment: Oct. 2010 (Messina), Nov. 2011 (Madrid), Oct. 2013 (Barcelona), Jan. 2015 (Brno)
- 1st Meeting of test providers in 2015 (Göttingen): comparing testing systems
- 2nd Meeting of test providers in 2017 (Göttingen): finding common grounds, creation of “NULTE”
- 3rd Meeting of test providers in 2018 (Nice): developing Memorandum of Cooperation
- CercleS Conference 2018: signing Memorandum of Cooperation

What are the aims of NULTE?

- developing common standards in language education & practice and in language testing & assessment in HE
- ensuring quality in the provision of language teaching and testing services in HE
- setting standards in recognising equivalence in qualifications between HEI
- contributing to language assessment literacy and to the expertise in developing tests at universities
- contributing to the improvement of language teaching and learning at tertiary level

(from: NULTE Memorandum of Cooperation)

What makes NULTE certificates special?

- university context
- focus on productive skills
- context sensitive
- importance of (academic/professional) content
- research-based
- transparency: guaranteeing CEFR level and minimum level in each language skill
- positive washback effect on teaching & on assessment

NULTE Quality Assurance Framework

Minimum standards concerning the following aspects:

- Test purpose and specifications
- Test design and item writing
- Quality control and test analyses
- Test administration
- Washback effect and impact
- Certificates
- Optional features

(see: NULTE Memorandum of Cooperation)

What are the future perspectives of NULTE?

Quantitative aspects

- future co-operation
- more partners
- increased visibility

Qualitative aspects

- enhance validity of our tests / certificates
- increase the quality of our examinations (even further)
- monitoring of examinations across borders

How can we harmonise assessment practices within the NULTE network?

- NULTE steering committee
- stronger cooperation, exchange and interaction, e.g. through participation on scientific committees and at national conferences / workshops / seminars
- CercleS focus group activities: focus group on “Language Testing & Assessment”
- jointly organised workshops and seminars

How can we harmonise assessment practices within the NULTE network?

- comparative studies, e.g.:
 - on results in listening, reading and writing tests
 - on speaking
- joint projects, e.g.:
 - implementation of CEFR CV
 - developing scenarios for mediation activities in testing
 - exchange on good practice and challenges in scenario-based testing
 - revision of assessment practices for testing speaking
 - revision of assessment practices for testing writing

What are the positive outcomes of the NULTE initiative?

- qualification of our students
- facilitating mobility for university students and staff
- facilitating admission to postgraduate programmes
- employability
- career opportunities

Description of certification systems within NULTE

Criteria	UNICert	UNICert LUCE	CLES	ACERT	CertAcles	UNILANG
Difference between your test and a commercial test	exclusively based at HEIs; certification and teaching are inseparably linked; addresses students and university staff members; task-based exam	tailor-made to university studies in general and specific fields of studies; addressing the needs of tertiary level of education and specific professions	task-based approach / scenario-based integrated approach to testing, i.e. all activities and tasks are linked; competency-based approach, can be used as achievement test (end-of-course exam)	national academic language test; certifies academic and general language ability; correlated with CEFR scales; recognized by 30 universities in Poland	developed within universities in accordance with ACLES guidelines and with a vocation of service to our surrounding community; responds to the needs of the university community	Assessment is designed by universities to match specific learning outcomes which in turn correspond to a specific provision. UNILANG certificates of recognition are free.
Responsibility for the tests	decentralised system – accredited institution and its teachers are responsible for the tests; accreditation: UNICert® Executive Committee – staff members from various language centres; under the auspices of AKS	development team at Language Centre; accreditation board: language teachers representing member universities; CASALC (Czech and Slovak Association of Language Centres and Language Teachers at Universities)	The Executive Committee (Coordination Nationale CLES) <small>NULTE certification systems, version 23 March 2018</small>	Association of Academic Foreign Languages Centres (SERMO)	development team at Language Centre; responsibility with university to which the Language Centre belongs. ACLES is in charge of auditing and accrediting member institutions	Decentralised system. Participating universities appoint external examiners who are UNILANG approved.

Description of certification systems within NULTE

Criteria	UNICert	UNICert LUCE	CLES	ACERT	CertAcles	UNILANG
Central layer of quality assurance	Yes Under constant revision; through auditing and accreditation procedure, close cooperation, professional development activities (workshops, regional meetings, conferences), substantial material and guidelines available	Yes UNICert ^o LUCE involved in setting standards for the language teaching programmes as well as testing including quality assurance; results permanently discussed with the institutions involved in the UNICert ^o LUCE system. Currently, a manual on testing is being prepared to be disseminated among the member institutions.	Yes Coordination: procedures are functioning well at national level; Responsibility for the quality of the exams: deputy directors and validation committee	Every test is sent to the accreditation board who analyse it and verify the quality of exam tasks and the appropriacy of the language level. If test meets the requirements of CEFR level and is of the adequate quality, the accreditation is prolonged.	Centres need to accredit themselves to administer CertAcles exams every two years by submitting extensive information on their specifications, scales, rating, statistical analysis of past exams, information on the validity of their construct, professional expertise of developing team, etc	Quality assurance is provided by university's own mechanisms (assessment and validation processes). To be a UNILANG approved external examiner, candidates need to demonstrate a minimum of five years of CEFR related work, be supported by a senior colleague and application needs to be approved by two members of UNILANG executive committee.

Description of certification systems within NULTE

Criteria	UNicert	UNicert LUCE	CLES	ACERT	CertAcles	UNILANG
University-specific extent of the exam	Language is taught in an academic context. Topics, input material and tasks are oriented at this context.	Language is taught in an academic context. Topics, input material and tasks are oriented at this context.	This is no longer the case now (open to public)	The examination is an achievement test which completes a language course at a university. There are some differences among universities as far as foreign language syllabi are concerned. This stems from the fact there requirements vary from one university to another. Some programmes are closely linked to candidate's fields of study others are academic. Nevertheless, ACERT examination is related to CEFR levels.	The exams are university specific in the sense that they have university needs in mind as regards social responsibility, encouragement of positive washback, language assessment literacy for stakeholders and impact	Assessment is designed by individual universities.

Description of certification systems within NULTE

Criteria	UNicert	UNicert LUCE	CLES	ACERT	CertAcles	UNILANG
To what extent are the tasks used in the exam authentic?	The productive tasks are reflect or simulate real life situations. The receptive tasks are based on authentic texts but the tasks could be more authentic, they focus on the needs of students	The universities with certified programmes are encouraged to use authentic materials.	Authentic documents (written, audio, video); Authentic approach (integrated skills)	The exam tasks are based on the syllabus which in turn has been tailored to the needs of each faculty. Hence, they reflect the teaching objectives at the university. Furthermore, the sources of texts are current journals, magazines, news and professional source materials.	Tasks used in the exams are authentic in the sense that they use authentic input and attempt to obtain authentic communicative responses. However, practicality and reliability issues need also be taken into consideration	This will vary between universities but there tends to be a strong emphasis on communication and use of authentic material.
Academic tasks	Yes, Tasks are based on needs analysis, teachers cooperate with specialists in the fields – all institutions try to produce tasks as authentic as possible.	Yes, Tasks are based on needs analysis, teachers cooperate with specialists in the fields – all institutions try to produce tasks as authentic as possible.	Yes	Yes	No	Some universities might opt for this approach for higher levels.

Description of certification systems within NULTE

Criteria	UNiCert	UNiCert LUCE	CLES	ACERT	CertAcles	UNILANG
Reflection of tasks for the students' future academic / professional needs / linguistic situations	Tasks are based on needs analysis, teachers cooperate with specialists in the fields – all institutions try to produce tasks as authentic as possible	It depends, in some case, e.g. Faculty of Arts, introduces purely academic tasks because of the heterogeneity of their study groups.	Current situation: up to now CLES B is oriented towards the use of language in the university environment. Future developments: Open to all → professional use is also targeted	The tasks aim at assessing field specific vocabulary, the ability to read professional literature, the ability to understand academic and scientific listening texts, the ability to describe processes, appliances, systems, trends, to analyse and draw conclusions, to persuade in writing and in speaking, etc.	The tasks are aligned to the CEFR and in this sense they reflect the contexts of use specified in table 5 of the framework	The tasks are often aligned to the CEFR.

Description of certification systems within NULTE

Criteria	UNicert	UNicert LUCE	CLES	ACERT	CertAcles	UNILANG
Role of LSP / academic content	Academic content is the core idea of the system, LSP is an important part, particularly with faculty-specific programmes. General academic language and genres are taught in programmes where the learners come from different disciplines.	Academic content is the core idea of the system, LSP is an important part, LSP is taught at the faculties, where the groups of learners are homogenous coming from one field, however, the academic language and genres are taught at the same time. Purely general academic language and genres are taught in the cases where the learners come from different disciplines.	medical, law, and scientific	See above	LSP is not assessed	Some universities offer LSP type of programmes and UNILANG would be suitable.
Role of content in the exam in general	The content is inseparable part, the language level cannot be free from the content. They are closely interlinked. Discrete item testing is not supported.	The content is inseparable part, the language level cannot be free from the content. They are closely interlinked. Discrete item testing is not supported.	?	This depends on the university programme and to what extent the exam is Language for Specific Purposes oriented. Generally, content plays a significant role.	As content is key for validity purposes, it plays a central role. However if content is here understood as TBA, this is not the method used in CertAcles exams.	The content is inseparable part, the language level cannot be free from the content.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Questions? Comments? Suggestions?



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