Re-Assessing Assessment in EAP: Challenges and Opportunities

November 13, 2010
PTE Academic Research Programme

At Pearson we believe in the importance of research and its role in informing the ongoing development and validation of our language tests. This year we launched an External Research Programme offering support for funded and non-funded research, as well as graduate internships.

Examples of external research work currently underway with PTE Academic:

Construct Validity of the Pearson Test of English Academic: a Multi Trait-Multi Method Approach
(Dr. Hye K. Pae, University of Cincinnati)

Tasks, Proficiency, and Assessing L2 Listening Comprehension
(Dr. Tineke Brunfaut, Dr. Andrea Revesz, Lancaster University)

 Detecting Test Cheating Behaviour
(Dr. Zhan Shu, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro)

We will shortly be releasing details for Pearson’s 2011 External Research Programme and welcome proposals from BALEAP members, their colleagues and graduate students. We are particularly interested in the following topics:

- Test taker perception of machine scoring
- Academic success and PTE Academic performance
- Effects of different item formats

If you would like more information about the programme, please email us at pltsupport@pearson.com

Trialling PTE Academic at your institution
If you are interested in finding out more about PTE Academic and the possibility of trialling the test with some of your students, please contact Dr. Alaric Rae at alaric.rae@pearson.com for more information.

www.pearsonpte.com
The 2011 BALEAP Biennial Conference

EAP Within the Higher Education Garden: Cross Pollination Between Disciplines, Departments and Research

10 to 12 April 2011, University of Portsmouth

Plenary speakers: Ian Bruce, University of Waikato, New Zealand; Janette Ryan, Monash University, Australia, and Oxford Brookes University; Dominic Scott, Chief Executive, UKCISA; John Swales, University of Michigan, USA.

More information about the events and submitting abstracts is available at www.baleap.org.uk.

Defining the Research Space: Literature Reviews and Research Questions

Pre-conference inaugural event of the new Research Training Event Series (ResTES)

9 April (pm) and 10 April (am)

For informal enquiries:
Richard.Hitchcock@port.ac.uk
John.Wrigglesworth@port.ac.uk
Dear Delegate

We are delighted to welcome you to the BALEAP-Nottingham PIM. This PIM brings together lecturers, researchers, exam providers and publishers with an interest in assessment in English for Academic Purposes to help create an excellent opportunity to re-assess assessment in EAP.

The PIM is being hosted by the Centre for English Language Education (CELE), School of Education, University of Nottingham.

The programme offers an exciting mix of presentations. We are delighted that we have had such response to the call for papers and that we have been able to include presentations that we are certain will cover the wide range of interests of the delegates.

You will find full details of the PIM programme in this booklet.

If you have any queries please don’t hesitate to ask one of the conference Organising Team. You will see us wearing an ‘ASK ME’ badge.

We hope that you enjoy the BALEAP-Nottingham PIM.

The Organising Team
**Venue**
The BALEAP-Nottingham PIM is being held at the Business School South and Amenities buildings, Jubilee Campus, The University of Nottingham.

**Registration Desk**
The PIM registration desk will be in the foyer of Business School South. The foyer is also where coffee and lunch will be served, and where delegates will also be able to visit the book stands.

**Sessions**
Please refer to this booklet for information about the plenary, paper and closing sessions.

**Rooms**
Sessions will take place in rooms A24, A25, A26 and B52 of the Business School South and in A02 and A18 of the Amenities building. The Amenities building is just across the road from the Business School South building.

**Smoking**
The University operates a non-smoking policy and delegates are asked not to smoke in any of the rooms or buildings.
### Programme Overview

All rooms in **Business School South** (*unless otherwise indicated*)

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<td>9.00 - 9.45</td>
<td><strong>Registration</strong></td>
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| 9.45-10.00 | **Welcome message**  
Dr. Julie King  
Director of the Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham | B52        |
| 10.00-11.00| **Open plenary**  
*Challenges and opportunities in EAP assessment*  
**Special Professor Liz Hamp-Lyons**  
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham | B52        |
| 11.00-11.30| **Coffee break - Foyer**                                             |
| 11.30-12.10| **Concurrent sessions (1)**                                          |
|            | *We do make a difference: Assessing the development of writing over an EAP programme*  
**Steve Issitt**  
University of Birmingham EISU | A24        |
|            | *5 easy steps to better testing*  
**Michael A. Abberton**  
EAP Subject Leader, NCUK | A25        |
|            | *Assessing the academic essay on a high-stakes presessional: A ‘best–fit’ approach*  
**Martin Seviour and Beverley Dickinson**  
Nottingham Trent University | A26        |
|            | *Sweetening the pill: Helping students to digest and act upon assessment feedback*  
**Sarah Brewer**  
International Study and Language Centre, University of Reading | A02        |
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| 12.15-12.55  | **Integrating assessment in EAP**  
Julia Molinari and Anne Kavanagh  
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham | A24      |
|              | **Selecting language proficiency tests for university entry: Why a handy table isn’t up to the task**  
BALEAP Testing Working Party | A25      |
|              | **The creation of an EAP Speaking Test: Rationale and reality**  
John Slaght  
ISLC, University of Reading | A26      |
|              | **The business of assessment: Investigating and exploiting a group case study**  
Ann Smith and Juliet Thondhlana  
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham | A02      |
|              | **Feedback on writing and its links to pedagogical goals and students’ needs in generalist EAP**  
Constantine Dimitrou, LLU  
Queen Mary, University of London | B18      |

**13.00-14.00** Lunch break - Foyer

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| 14.00-14.40  | **Authenticity in EAP assessment – Reading and writing**  
Claire Murby and Klaus Mundt  
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham | A24      |
|              | **Applying the EALTA guidelines for good practice in language testing and assessment: A practical case study on the Pearson Test of Academic English**  
Ying Zheng  
Research Director, Pearson | A25      |
|              | **Assessing answers to questions in oral presentations**  
Simon Williams  
Sussex Language Institute, University of Sussex | A26      |
|              | **The Shelt Test: Designing and delivering an EAP admissions test for Sheffield Hallam University**  
Judith Rossiter and Brett Clifton  
TESOL Centre, Sheffield Hallam University | A02      |
|              | **The Fortress of Ecbatana – bypassing plagiarism through promoting scholarship**  
Nick Pilcher  
School of Marketing, Tourism & Languages, Edinburgh Napier University Business School, Edinburgh Napier University | B18      |
## Concurrent sessions (4)

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<td>Prithvi Shrestha</td>
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### 15.30-16.00 Coffee break - Foyer

### 16.00-17.00 Closing session

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<td>Ying Zheng</td>
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<td>Psychometrician and Research Director, Pearson</td>
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Challenges and Opportunities in EAP assessment

Liz Hamp-Lyons
Special Professor, CELE, University of Nottingham
Editor, Journal of English for Academic Purposes

Abstract
In this paper I reflect on whether we have gone forward or back in EAP assessment in the past two decades. Covering areas such as the relative prominence of integrated assessment, performance assessment, authenticity in test content and tasks, specificity, attention to learners’ needs, as well as more ‘political’ questions such as the continuing dominance of “big tests” and the growing intervention of national politics in the international movement of people, including those seeking advanced education, these reflections will lead to no answers but many questions.
We do make a difference: Assessing the development of writing over an EAP programme

Steve Issitt
University of Birmingham EISU

Abstract
All of us involved in EAP are in the assessment business in one form or another and it is axiomatic that the courses we devise, operate and teach are predicated upon an idea of language improvement. We expect and may proclaim that attendance on our courses will make students better than they were before. Less clear however is the nature of this development. Here, I attempt to specify areas where student writing has improved and examine certain linguistic features such as lexical density, error free units, word frequencies and aspects of syntactic complexity, amongst others. The data for this presentation comes from approximately 300 scripts from a range of presessional EAP programmes of 20, 15, 10 and 6 week duration. Scripts were matched and their linguistic features compared using computer (wordsmith 5) and manual means.

What emerges is a picture of increasing structural flexibility and a greater facility in the production of written academic English over a relatively short time period.

Biography
Steve Issitt works at the University of Birmingham. He is involved in presessional programmes and is interested in writing and language development and academic literacy.
**5 easy steps to better testing**

**Michael A. Abberton**  
EAP Subject Leader, NCUK

**Abstract**  
This workshop will provide a basic refresher on key terms and practices, look at the exam design process and provide easily accessible practical tips on how to write better tests. Participants will be asked to work through some problems on a worksheet, give feedback to the group and discuss how they could improve the quality and usage of tests in their establishments.

The workshop will be based on current best practice, but will also make reference to the new book by Bachman and Palmer, *Language Assessment in Practice* (OUP, 2010).

**Biography**  
Michael A. Abberton is EAP Subject Leader, Head of EAP, syllabus and assessment design and exam writing for NCUK and a member of BALEAP TEAP Working Party.

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**Assessing the academic essay on a high-stakes presessional: A ‘best-fit’ approach**

**Martin Seviour** and **Beverley Dickinson**  
Nottingham Trent University

**Abstract**  
This presentation will report on an attempt to design a practical ‘best-fit’ approach to assessing academic essay writing on a 20-week ‘high-stakes’ pre-sessional. This approach aims at improving the reliability of the assessment while retaining its authenticity. In particular we will look at the success of the approach in pre-empting collusion and plagiarism, encouraging genuine engagement with texts and ideas and providing opportunities for ‘feedforward’ as well as consistent and fair summative judgement.

**Biographies**  
Martin is Programme Leader for pre-sessional EAP at NTU. Previously he was Head of English at Westminster International University in Tashkent and Deputy Director of the British Council in Uzbekistan.

Beverley worked in adult education teaching ESOL before moving to Poland to lecture at a language teacher training college in Poland. She has been teaching EAP at NTU since September 2008.
Sweetening the pill: Helping students to digest and act upon assessment feedback

Sarah Brewer
International Study and Language Centre, University of Reading

Abstract
The most immediate impact of any assessment tends to be the grade awarded rather than comments in any accompanying feedback. For students on pre-sessional courses, however, there is often important information embedded in assessment criteria used for feedback, which they need to respond to. This information is often neglected because it is seen as part of a summative response and because the terminology may, in fact, be impenetrable to learners.

This presentation reports on some tasks developed in an extended writing class which were designed to familiarise students with the assessment criteria and descriptors that are used to provide a final grade on a research-based essay. The aim was (a) to provide much more explicit feedforward to develop students’ metacognitive awareness and a better understanding of the objectives of their studies; and (b) to help them understand the assessment feedback and use it more productively in their future studies.

Biography
Sarah has been teaching at the University of Reading for 8 years on both in-sessional and pre-sessional courses. Her interests include teaching research skills and extended writing, and developing assessment tasks.
Integrating assessment in EAP

Julia Molinari and Anne Kavanagh
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham

Abstract
Despite the well-documented reasons for abandoning integrated skills assessment in IELTS in favour of discrete testing (Charles and Taylor 1997; Davies 2008), this presentation argues in favour of reconsidering the value of integrating the assessment of reading and writing in pre-sessional EAP courses. Given that EAP teachers should know “what the expectations of academic departments are” (Alexander, Argent and Spencer: 180) and that students should learn to write with these expectations in mind, learners should be exposed to more authentic processes such as the development of critical thinking skills in reading for writing. This presentation reports on the design, construction and delivery of an integrated reading for writing EGAP test (Paltridge 1992; Plakans 2008, 2009a, 2000b) which aims to measure learners’ progress rather than their achievement. The relative merits and limitations of adopting such an approach will be analysed and recommendations for future development will be made.

Biographies
Julia and Anne have been teaching at CELE on presessional EGAP courses for the past two years. They have extensive experience in TEFL both in the UK and abroad.
Room A25 – Business School South

Selecting language proficiency tests for university entry: Why a handy table isn’t up to the task

BALEAP Testing Working Party

Abstract
This presentation will present the work of the Testing Working Party on the revision of the BALEAP Guidelines on English language tests for university entry. The presenters will outline the rationale for the guidelines and distribute a sample of the work completed to date. We will then report on the process and criteria we have adopted for compiling the guidelines. We will follow this with proposals for how colleagues might use the guidelines to develop assessment literacy among their own EAP staff and more widely within their institutions. Finally, we will allow time for participants to raise questions and offer feedback on the work that has been completed so far. The working party aims to present the finished product as a booklet and web pages at the conference in April.

Biography
The Testing Working Party membership includes Diane Schmitt, Bruce Howell, Jenifer Spencer, John Wigglesworth, Chris Sinclair and Philip Nathan. They bring together close to 100 years of EAP experience.

Room A26 – Business School South

The creation of an EAP Speaking Test: Rationale and reality

John Slaght
ISLC, University of Reading

Abstract
The decision to develop a speaking element as part of the Test of English for Educational Purposes Test (TEEP) was based partially on the need to fill a void in this high-stakes test, but also as a way of providing a more objective measure of oral performance other than continuous assessment currently based on classroom observations. The aim was to produce a test to match the academic needs of the candidates through paired-speaking in order to ‘broaden the range of interaction task types’ (Saville & Hargreaves, 1999) and to provide ‘effective washback’ (Hughes, 2004). The Centre’s testing unit created the specifications, topics, format, marking criteria and standardisation procedures. Teachers were involved in trialling and creation at every stage of the process in order to ensure that the test did replicate normal classroom activities and would provide an accurate measure of performance based on the students’ likely future academic needs.

Biography
John is Director of Assessment and EAP lecturer at the International Study and Language Centre, University of Reading.
The business of assessment: Investigating and exploiting a group case

Ann Smith and Juliet Thondhlana
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham

Abstract
A needs analysis study of academic literacy demands in the disciplines at the University of Nottingham (Thondhlana and Gao, 2009) revealed an increasing use of assessed group projects. This session will report an investigation into a group case study project in a first year undergraduate business module, Computers in Business. This involved examining the group task components and task assessment and interviewing the module convenor. One significant finding has been the types of difficulties students have with the group project task.

This presentation will provide a brief overview of the group case study project from Computers in Business. Then the types of difficulties students have with each component will be explored. Finally, we will show how this information is benefiting the assessed group projects in the Foundation Certificate Programme at the Centre for English Language Education by encouraging students to engage more effectively in group work and group assessment.

Biographies
Ann Smith has extensive experience as a TESOL/EAP teacher, teacher trainer, examiner and materials developer in Asia, Canada and at CELE. Her interests include syllabus design and group collaboration.

Juliet Thondhlana has extensive experience teaching EAP, ESP and Applied Linguistics. Her interests include group collaboration, academic literacies and intercultural communication.
Feedback on writing and its links to pedagogical goals and students’ needs in generalist EAP

Constantine Dimitrou
LLU, Queen Mary, University of London

Abstract
In a mixed-discipline, Foundation-year, Pre-Masters programme, tutors prepare students for Masters study in various disciplines, each with its own levels of writing complexity, and discourse norms. While having a general idea of what their various Masters writing demands are, we cannot usually apply this knowledge in writing exercises for various reasons (following K. Hyland). However, we can still use our writing feedback sheets (and lessons) for pedagogical purposes, e.g. seeking to improve students’ literacy, degree of independence and sub-skills such as: task completion, argument, proof/paraphrasing, topic choice, cohesion, coherence. I will discuss the generalist pedagogical purposes of the feedback criteria in the PMP programme and the way they’ve been employed. Lastly, I will discuss my view on how certain feedback language is understood by newly-inducted L2 students, and what needs to be done if it isn’t understood.

Biography
Constantine is an EAP/ESOL/ESP tutor (UK, Italy & Greece) from Canada with degrees in TEFL & Educational Research. Interests: academic culture & literacy, L1-skills transfer, mind mapping, corpora, patterned language & argumentation.
Abstract
The reliance on common formats for testing English proficiency can be attributed to the practicability of those tests. However, it is doubtful that they fully reflect the language abilities predominantly required in academic life. Thus, it seems that the exploration of valid alternatives is essential. Inspired by that, a combined critical reading and writing test in an EAP setting was developed with emphasis on a higher degree of authenticity. This presentation discusses the challenges the development of the test posed, as well as the opportunities it may open up for EAP assessment. This test format may provide an adequate alternative to approaches that have a stronger focus on practicability than authentic academic work. The conclusions drawn highlight difficulties that permeate all areas of assessment and indicate that the ongoing reliance on common test formats may well be due to limitations to the means that are at an EAP unit’s disposal.

Biographies
Claire holds a BSc Psychology and Information Systems and a PGCTEAP. She has experience teaching EFL/ESP/EAP in the UK and Asia.

Klaus has an MA Southeast Asian Studies and a PGCTEAP. He has several years teaching EFL/ESP/EAP in Europe and Asia.
Applying the EALTA guidelines for good practice in language testing and assessment: A practical case study on the Pearson Test of Academic English

Ying Zheng
Research Director, Pearson

Abstract
The purpose of the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) is to promote the understanding of the theoretical principles of language testing and assessment and the improvement and sharing of testing and assessment practices throughout Europe. One of the instruments by which EALTA pursues its goals is through the publication of the Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment.

Pearson reviewed the application of EALTA Guidelines in the development of the PTE Academic. The test development process of PTE Academic was checked against the Guidelines relating to 1) Test Purpose and Specification; 2) Test Design and Item Writing; 3) Quality Control and Test Analyses; 4) Test Administration; 5) Review; 6) Washback; and 7) Linkage to the CEF.

In this presentation we will look at the process and benefits of applying EALTA Guidelines to language tests and assessments, using PTE Academic as a practical case study.

Biography
Ying Zheng is Research Director at Pearson.

Assessing answers to questions in oral presentations

Simon Williams
Sussex Language Institute, University of Sussex

Abstract
Many EAP courses now include an oral presentation as part of their assessment. Whether this takes the form of a poster presentation or a talk to PowerPoint slides, it typically includes a closing question and answer session that may receive its own score. But does this score reflect the presenter’s further display of subject knowledge (competence), or the strategies used to answer the questions (performance) or a mixture of both? To consider the relative weight of subject-matter and predictive validity in this interactive part of the presentation, a systemic functional
The Shelt Test: Designing and delivering an EAP admissions test for Sheffield Hallam University

Judith Rossiter and Brett Clifton
TESOL Centre, Sheffield Hallam University

Abstract
The Shelt Test at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) was developed following a long-standing partnership with a business school in Beijing. We had designed and delivered a 1 year full-time EAP course there for over 10 years. Although we no longer run the course there, we were asked to provide an exit test for the students, many of whom progress from the EAP course to HNDs in China, followed by top-up degrees at SHU and other UK universities.

We saw this as an opportunity to design a test which we could, if necessary, use as an alternative to IELTS for SHU admissions and which could be used by other SHU links across the world.

We will describe the process of developing the test; the positives, the negatives and the arguments! Then we'll show examples of test materials and explain the trialling and delivery of the test.
The Fortress of Ecbatana – bypassing plagiarism through promoting scholarship

Nick Pilcher
School of Marketing, Tourism & Languages, Edinburgh Napier University
Business School, Edinburgh Napier University

Abstract
UKHE’s overemphasis on avoiding plagiarism can put scholarship ‘blinkers’ on students, so that they avoid plagiarism rather than critique and analyse. This session presents a feedback process and tool that helps non-native (and native) speakers focus on scholarship and bypass plagiarism. The tool is the result of students approaching the author noting that they had received a low mark, despite not plagiarising. The tool is based on the Fortress of Ecbatana taken from the histories of Herodotus. This fortress consisted of seven concentric coloured defensive walls with the treasures at the top. The fortress is used as an analogy to give feedback to students focusing on five categories of language, structure, focus, (use of) sources and criticality. Students need to show scholarship, and bypass plagiarism to break through the higher circles of the fortress. Details of how the tool has been used and copies of it will be given out.

Biography
Nick Pilcher is a lecturer in In-sessional English for Academic Purposes at Edinburgh Napier University. His research interests are in qualitative research, experiences of learning and qualifications frameworks.
Dynamic assessment of academic writing: macro-Themes and hyper-Themes

Prithvi Shrestha
OpenELT, Department of Languages, The Open University

Abstract
Academic writing has been seen as problematic for undergraduate students in higher education when they have to write texts in a particular discipline such as business studies. Assessing such texts to enhance students’ writing development is a big concern. This pilot study employed dynamic assessment procedures designed according to the principles of Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind (Vygotsky, 1978) in order to support students’ academic writing development. It focused specifically on macro-Theme and hyper-Themes, and took place in the context of open and distance learning. The study examined the four drafts of three assignment texts each of the two students over six months following Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar. The findings showed that dynamic assessment procedures appeared to enhance the students’ academic writing development, especially the macro- and hyper-Themes development. The paper concludes that it may be possible to address the undergraduate students’ writing development concerns by following the dynamic assessment procedures. However, implementing these procedures fully needs to make concessions for the time it takes to carry out the procedures.

Biography
Prithvi is a Lecturer in ELT at the Open University. He has designed and taught EAP courses and EAP assessment. His current research focuses on academic writing assessment and instruction.
Challenges and opportunities: Assessment from a materials development point of view

David Hill
Pearson Longman

Abstract
Which language skills are critical to student success in higher education? Which language skills do we need to assess on EAP courses? How can these be assessed effectively and constructively? And what are some implications for materials development? This presentation will address these questions with reference to international research and to a materials development project involving blended learning and continuous, formative assessment with an emphasis on the integration of skills.

Biography
David is based in Australia where he has gained extensive experience in teaching and management of EAP programmes. He is one of the authors of the Academic Connections and EAP Now! series of EAP course books.

Assessing technical topics in student projects - Can we do it fairly?

Jenifer A. Spencer
Freelance

Abstract
EAP students intending to study technical subjects are sometimes encouraged to attempt only generalised aspects of their subjects for essays or projects, on the grounds that assessment of more technical aspects would present too many problems. This presentation, based on a corpus including EAP student essays and projects from a range of disciplines, as well as assignments, theses and research papers from students and staff in two universities, aims to present the case for allowing students to work as closely as possible to topics and genre conventions they really need.

Insights and examples from this corpus will be used to explore the problems of assessing fairly EAP assignments that are quite technical in nature and pose challenges to the teacher’s understanding and to suggest principles and strategies for this type of assessment, and the audience will have the opportunity to add suggestions from their own experience in the discussion time.

Biography
Jenifer has over 15 years of EAP experience, and is a co-author of EAP Essentials, (Garnet). Her present interests are editing academic papers and books for academic publishers.
**Room A02 – Amenities Building**

**The Swansea English Language Test (SWELT). Reinventing the wheel? Pros and cons of running an in–house admission test**

**Steve Tanner**  
Swansea University

**Abstract**  
SWELT is now in its fourth year of operation. It is designed and administered by Swansea University (ELTS) staff and is used (i) for matriculation purposes available on demand (ii) as a marketing tool for overseas recruitment (iii) for progression from Pre–sessional courses within Swansea University.

This session will examine issues surrounding the test, including standard setting, comparability with standard tests (e.g. IELTS), trialling, benchmarking, item analysis and other procedures for reliability and validity, impact and staff development. Issues surrounding reliability of various reading item types will be discussed, as well as the use of a test of vocabulary based on the Academic Word List and the extent to which this correlates with other test components.

**Biography**  
Steve Tanner is Coordinator English Language Testing at Swansea University.

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**Room B18 – Amenities Building**

**It’s the cognition, stupid!**

**Simon Kinzley**  
Freelance

**Abstract**  
Considerable evidence indicates that, when evaluating overseas students’ writing, lecturers in universities where English is the L1, regard semantic issues related to logic, information processing and lexis as more likely to impact negatively upon essay scores than problems with superficial linguistic features (Carlisle & McKenna 1991; Vann, Lorenz & Meyer 1991; Wall 1981; Wall, Nickson, Jordan, Allwright, and Houghton: 1988). Connected to this, Hirsch and Harrington (1980) argue, “communicative effectiveness of compositions (is) based on the writer’s familiarity with the essay topic” (cited in Hamp-Lyons 1988: 37) while Kroll (1990: 142) suggests “‘good’ essays might be written in “bad” English and “bad” essays might be written in “good” English”.

Nevertheless, it seems that many pre–sessional writing courses still predominantly assess language.

**Biography**  
Simon Kinzley is doing a Ph.D. at Lancaster University. He is researching the impact of academic writing programmes on the academic success of students once they commence their degree programmes.
What do we mean when we say a student is ready for academic study?

Panel Convenor
Julie King
Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham

Panel Members
Andrew Blackhurst
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