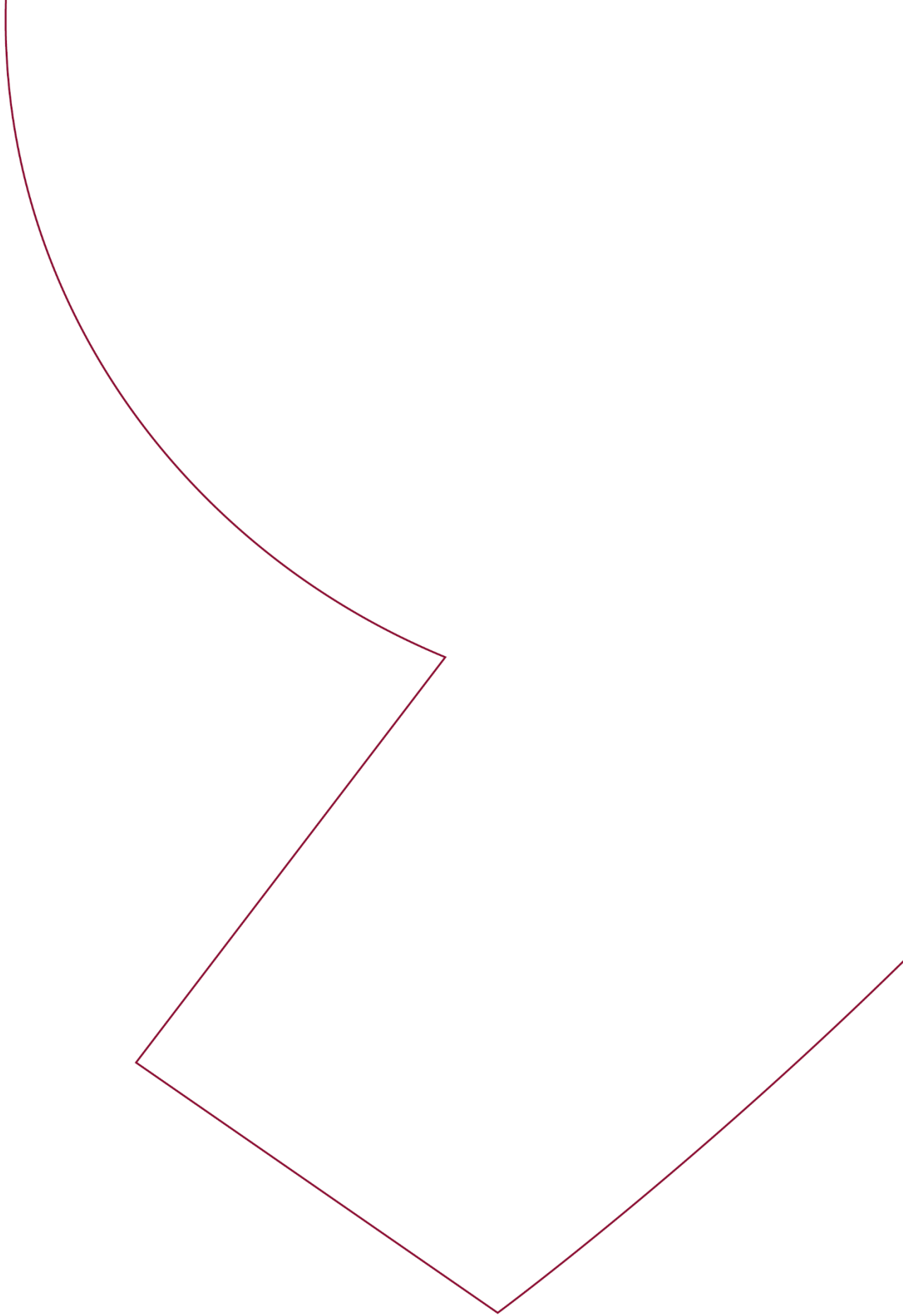


**LANGUAGE TESTS STANDARD  
CODE OF CONDUCT HIGHER EDUCATION**

PROCESS DESCRIPTION  
ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE TESTS

**NATIONAL COMMISSION  
NRTO  
THE NETHERLANDS ASSOCIATION OF  
UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES**



# **LANGUAGE TESTS STANDARD CODE OF CONDUCT HIGHER EDUCATION**

PROCESS DESCRIPTION  
ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE TESTS

**NATIONAL COMMISSION  
NRTO  
THE NETHERLANDS ASSOCIATION OF  
UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITIES OF THE NETHERLANDS**

Hobéon Management Consult

**Date**

1 November 2023

**Authors**

Ms H.E. Hanssens

Ms O.C. de Bas-Kersten

# CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1.	Definitions	1
1.2.	Aim	1
1.3.	Starting point	1
1.4.	Supervision and guarantee	1
1.5.	Level playing field	1
<b>2.</b>	<b>VALIDATING AUTHORITY</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1.	Basic requirements for a validating authority	2
<b>3.</b>	<b>SCOPE OF CERTIFICATION</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1.	Results of the audit	3
3.2.	Term of validity	4
<b>4.</b>	<b>STEP-BY-STEP PLAN</b>	<b>5</b>
4.1.	Auditors	6
4.2.	Remote screening or screening on-site	7
4.3.	Documents to be assessed	7
4.4.	Example audit programme (see appendix)	7
<b>5.</b>	<b>PROCEDURE FOR TRANSITION SCHEME FOR LANGUAGE TESTS ALREADY INCLUDED IN THE LANGUAGE TABLE</b>	<b>8</b>

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Definitions**

*Validating authority: The authority designated by the language test assessment committee to assess language tests.*

*Language test assessment committee : Representatives of the UNL, VH, and NRTO, to whom the umbrella organizations have given the mandate to make decisions on inclusion in the language table.*

*Language test provider (or supplier): The organization developing a language test submitted for validation. It is also the organization instructing the validating authority.*

## **1.2. Aim**

To assess language tests and their organization independently and expertly.

## **1.3. Starting point**

This document describes the quality requirements formulated in the standard and the process steps.

## **1.4. Supervision and guarantee**

The language test assessment committee will evaluate the effects of the standard and the accompanying process yearly. The evaluation will be recorded in a report. The interim adjustment of agreements requires the consent of the umbrella organizations. If changes are implemented, those concerned will be informed by the umbrella organizations. In the case of changes in legislation and regulations, the umbrella organizations will check if the standard and the accompanying process need adjustment.

## **1.5. Level playing field**

The underlying principle of access to the language table is to create a level playing field. It means that:

1. All language test providers have an equal point of departure.
2. Two comparable language test providers in a similar situation will be treated the same.
3. Reasonableness: Conditions to be set or changes in the situation must be reasonable. It means that requirements, conditions or rules may not have high pass marks to the extent that this would distort a level playing field and deny access to – some – language test providers. Reasonable is what is fair and acceptable within the context.
4. Institutions must allow for at least three language tests in the language table.
5. A level playing field aims to meet the interests of prospective students. Language tests may be used to gain admission to multiple programmes, preventing students from making unnecessary costs.

## **2. VALIDATING AUTHORITY**

A validating authority assesses language tests and their organization. The language test assessment committee, mandated by the umbrella organizations, designates the validating authority. The umbrella organizations have designated Hobéon as a preferred supplier. If a language test provider wishes to use another validating authority, the language test assessment committee must consent to that validating authority. Such authorities have demonstrated that they and the experts they deploy meet the basic requirements described below.

Language test providers that wish to be considered for inclusion in the language table select and contact a validating authority. The language test provider instructs the validating authority and, therefore, will assume the costs of validation and certification for its account.

### **2.1. Basic requirements for a validating authority**

A set of requirements is needed, which a validating authority and the experts it deploys must fulfil to guarantee the expertise and independence of a validating authority.

The basic requirements a validating authority must meet when validating language tests are the following:

1. An independent party performs the validation task. The validating authority and the experts it deploys for the validation task do not have a functional relationship with the language test provider concerned.
2. The validating authority is experienced in the certification or validation of organizations, processes and products.
3. Experts perform the validation task. Specific requirements are imposed on content and test auditors (see 'auditors').
4. A language test will be validated following the procedure established for this purpose. In addition, the validating authority has or develops a procedure that shows who performs specific parts of the procedure.
5. The results of the validation inspection will be written down in a report.
6. The validating authority works under the instruction of the relevant language test provider.
7. The validating authority has a complaints procedure that will be complied with.
8. The validating authority will sign a statement of confidentiality and integrity.
9. Validating authorities have set up a system of external supervision that monitors product certification and validation.
10. Validating authorities will be prepared to take part in activities to guarantee the quality of its products and processes. These activities may be set up as calibrating sessions.

### **3. SCOPE OF CERTIFICATION**

The scope deals with the testing, sampling, possible test outcomes and validity period.

The standard sets the direction. The elaboration will be done by the language test provider and assessed by the validating authority. It means that the language test provider must be able to indicate in a transparent and traceable way which considerations they had for their interpretation and elaboration of the direction given by the standard. The validating authority's experts should assess whether the interpretation and elaboration have taken place within the scope of the standard.

Certification is based on:

1. An audit of the standard's process and organizational requirements by auditors skilled for this purpose, and
2. An audit of the product requirements as described in the standard for each language test offered. The audit of the product requirements is done by one or more test and content experts.

An audit consists of an organizational and product audit. The organizational audit will be composed of a review of the available documentation and, if applicable, a self-assessment. If possible, a site survey will establish compliance in practice. The product audit will review the quality, assessment, and results of the language test.

#### **3.1. Results of the audit**

The assessment of the language test and the associated organization may lead to three possible decisions:

1. All the applicable requirements from the standard have been fulfilled. For the relevant language test, the provider then gets positive advice for certification and inclusion in the language table;
2. One or more points for improvement that do not preclude inclusion in the language table have been identified. The provider has six weeks to submit an improvement plan to the validating authority, which must approve it and, where appropriate, indicate the validating authority's involvement in implementing the proposal. The validating authority will recommend certification after establishing that the improvement process has resulted in the requested improvements. If the requested improvements are not performed, the ultimate consequence is that certification will be withheld. In the latter case, the language tests already administered will not lose validity so that students will not be duped if no certification or recertification occurs;
3. The applicable requirements from the standard have not been fulfilled sufficiently. It may result from:
  - a. Too many points for improvement;
  - b. A fatal error.

In that case, the provider receives negative advice for certification. They may implement improvements and request certification again. Requests for new certification can be made in the following application round, between 1 October and 1 April, before the following academic year.

In agreement with the language test assessment committee, the validating authority will define which of the three decisions will be made or which pass mark will be applied in its procedure.

The validating authority will decide on the structure of an assessment report. It is essential that the language test assessment committee can follow the structure.

### **3.2. Term of validity**

The validity of certification of language tests is as follows:

1. The standard will be introduced on 1 January 2024. The language test providers in the current language table can use a transition scheme. The scheme runs from 1 January 2024 until 1 April 2025. The language test providers currently included in the language table will have an additional quality test on prerequisite aspects. The procedure of this quality test will be described in section 5 of this process description. In doing so, these providers will also be tested based on Dutch principles, and no distinction will be made between the various language test providers. Exemptions for testing to the standard do not apply.
2. For inclusion in the language table per September (new academic year), the application must be made between 1 October and 1 April before the start of that academic year. Requests for validations after 1 April cannot be fulfilled before the start of the following academic year.
3. In principle, the certification of a language test provider is valid for six years. Before the expiry of a certification, recertification takes place; pending the evaluation of the standard and the process on 1 October 2029, the certification based on this standard will retain its validity.
4. The provider will notify the validating authority of any interim changes in processes or organization or adjustments required from changes in legislation and regulations. The validating authority will then determine the following:
  - a. The impact the adjustment has on the certification and which actions may be required to retain certification;
  - b. In the case of substantial changes, the provider will make arrangements with the validating authority concerning actions to be taken. The ultimate consequence may be that the provider must go through the certification process again, wholly or in part.

If a validating authority receives information about changes or possible changes, or complaints about a certified provider in another way, the validating authority will contact the relevant provider. The above procedure will be followed.



## 4. STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. The supplier of the relevant language test contacts the validating authority.
2. The supplier and the validating authority will have an exploratory discussion about the procedure and certification possibilities.
3. The validating authority will make a proposition. After approval of the offer, the validating authority will send the language test provider a confirmation of the assignment. The costs of certification are for the account of the language test provider.
4. The validating authority and the language test provider will have an intake meeting for practical arrangements, a first analysis of the available information, and to give further information about the certification procedure. The following will be agreed:
  - a. The content and scope of the sample.
  - b. The date of the organizational and process audit.
  - c. How to access the test instruments.
  - d. Mode of reporting.
  - e. The test instruments to be validated.

As soon as these arrangements have been made, they will be put down into writing.

5. With a self-assessment consisting of a clear and concise document of no more than ten pages with references to appendices related to the standard's requirements, the language test provider shows to meet the standard's requirements and will substantiate it with a material explanation or relevant documents.
6. The validating authority performs a document analysis to come to a first assessment. The organizational and process audit programme will be drafted based on the analysis. If possible, the audit takes place on-site.
7. The validating authority will agree on the organizational and process audit programme with the language test provider.
8. The language test provider organizes any additional information and schedules the interviews. The interviews are for verification and gaining in-depth knowledge. The aim is to achieve a proper picture of the quality of the language test provider, the language test and its organization in connection to the standard.
9. The validating authority carries out the organizational and process audit. Several panel meetings will be held.
10. Based on the standard, the validating authority assesses the process followed to construct and maintain the language test, the process of administering the test, and the associated organization's quality.
11. The validating authority performs the product audit.
12. The validating authority reports the findings from the assessment. It will include quality advice, if any.
13. The validating authority sends the language test provider a draft report to check for factual inaccuracies.
14. The language test provider checks the draft report for factual inaccuracies and returns the report to the validating authority with suggestions for improvement, if any.
15. The validating authority assesses the language test provider's feedback and includes it in the report where appropriate.
16. The validating authority performs a final edit.
17. The validating authority submits the final report to the language test assessment committee with a mandate from the umbrella organizations.
18. The language test assessment committee assesses the report and decides for inclusion in the language table.
19. The National Commission communicates the decision to the language test provider and the validating authority.

In a timeline, the above roadmap looks as follows:

Audit week -6	The language test provider sends the information and documentation. The validating authority's lead editor checks whether it meets the requirements within five working days. The language test provider is notified by email. If the information or documentation does not suffice, the validating authority will tell which points fail, and the language test provider will be given one chance for recovery within the agreed period. As soon as the language test provider has resubmitted the information, the timing is back to T-6. The consequence is that the audit date will be postponed.
Audit week -5	The validating authority arranges with the language test provider to further detail the audit programme and submit any specific documentation.
Audit week -2	The language test provider submits the requested specific documentation digitally.
Audit week -1	The validating authority and the language test provider determine the final audit programme.
Audit week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process audit on-site, with feedback in broad outline at the end.</li> <li>• Product audit.</li> </ul>
Audit week +4	The validating authority sends the language test provider the draft report for feedback.
Audit week +5	The language test provider returns the concept draft report with feedback, if any.
Audit week +6	The audit panel determines the final report and the advice to the language test assessment committee .
Audit week + max 12	If the validation examination results in an improvement plan, the procedure can be extended by at least six weeks.

#### 4.1. Auditors

The auditors who are deployed by the validating authority must meet the following criteria:

- a. At least one material expert in the area of the English language in higher education (academic English).
- b. At least one test expert with experience in establishing competence in the English language in all language skills at various levels (listening, reading, writing, speaking and conversing).
- c. At least one lead auditor is certified to operate as an auditor and to assess and establish the quality of the processes.

## **4.2. Remote screening or screening on-site**

The advice for new certifications (or acknowledgements) is to conduct a physical audit. The advice for recertification (without interim changes or signals showing issues regarding the quality of the test and its organization) is to conduct a remote audit. It is essential to discuss the processes formulated by the language test provider and its operation with the language test provider. Screening language test providers outside the Netherlands can be done online, even if it concerns new certifications.

## **4.3. Documents to be assessed**

List of possible documents:

- a. Strategic multi-year plan/year plan/team plan, including a vision on examination
- b. Collaboration agreements
- c. Evaluation of collaboration and the associated arrangements for improvement and monitoring of it
- d. Test regulations
- e. Method, procedures, rules and guidelines
- f. Possible agreements entered into with candidates
- g. Overview of the total number of tests administered, including the results
- h. Overview of certificates issued
- i. Test analysis, including conclusions and actions for improvement (and its results)
- j. Language tests and the associated assessment models
- k. Accountability documents stating clearly how the test has been adjusted to the levels as formulated in the standard and how the pass mark was determined
- l. Quality handbook describing the safeguarding of validity, reliability, transparency and solidity
- m. Evaluation data of tests administered
- n. Improvement or maintenance plan for the relevant language test
- o. Complaints registration (and handling)
- p. Rules and guidelines for the test committee
- q. The annual report of the test committee
- r. CVs of examiners, invigilators and constructors

## **4.4. Example audit programme (see appendix)**

## **5. PROCEDURE FOR TRANSITION SCHEME FOR LANGUAGE TESTS ALREADY INCLUDED IN THE LANGUAGE TABLE**

A transition scheme has been set up for language tests already included in the language table. Following this scheme, these language tests and their providers will undergo an additional quality check on prerequisite aspects. The material aspects of language tests already included in the language table have been sufficiently assessed, underpinned and recorded via Ofqual. By conducting an additional quality check, these providers have already been assessed based on the Dutch principles. This procedure is valid during the transition period from 1 January 2024 to 1 April 2025.

The following steps have been included in the procedure of the transition scheme:

1. During an intake session between the validating authority and the language test provider, practical arrangements will be made, and the documentation to be submitted by the language test provider will be agreed upon.
2. The language test provider demonstrates to fulfil the requirements of the standard with documentation agreed in advance.
3. The validating authority performs a document analysis to come to a first assessment.
4. A panel meeting between representatives of the language test provider and the validating authority will be organized. A half-day programme will be set up for this purpose.
5. Based on the standard, the validating authority assesses the process followed to construct and maintain the language test, the process of administering the test, and the associated organization's quality.
6. The validating authority reports the findings from the assessment. It will include quality advice, if any.
7. The validating authority sends the language test provider a draft report to check for factual inaccuracies.
8. The language test provider checks the draft report for factual inaccuracies and returns the report to the validating authority with suggestions for improvement, if any.
9. The validating authority assesses the language test provider's feedback and includes it in the report where appropriate.
10. The validating authority performs a final edit.
11. The validating authority submits the final report to the language test assessment committee with a mandate from the umbrella organizations.
12. The language test assessment committee assesses the report and decides for inclusion in the language table.
13. The National Commission communicates the decision to the language test provider and the validating authority.

## APPENDIX 1: Audit programme example

Hrs.	Activity	Name and position of discussion partners	Standard
8:45 – 9 a.m.	Room open & reception		
9 – 10 a.m.	Presentation of organization, construction and administering of tests and language tests to be administered	Management, policy officers, quality officers, test constructors and test assessors	
10 – 11 a.m.	Discussion of construction and language of the language test (including the connection of the language test to the desired level)	Two test constructors and two test setters	
11:15 – 12:15 a.m.	Discussion about administering and assessing language test	Two or three test assessors, possibly also two invigilators	
12:15 a.m. – 1 p.m.	<i>BREAK (lunch and possibly assessment of additional documents)</i>		
1 – 2 p.m.	Discussion of logistics of administering language tests	Three organizational staff members/quality officials/test committee	
2 – 3 p.m.	Discussion of the connection of the test to the qualification requirements	Four to six constructors, assessors, quality officials	
3 – 3:30 p.m.	Preparation of feedback on results	Panel	
3:30 – 4 p.m.	Feedback on the first results from the panel	All parties involved	

**Hobéon**

Lange Voorhout 14  
2514 ED Den Haag  
+31 (0)70 30 66 800  
[info@hobeon.nl](mailto:info@hobeon.nl)  
[www.hobeon.nl](http://www.hobeon.nl)