1.1.5 Melbourne Language Centre English Proficiency Test Process

1.0 Introduction

This document is a comprehensive guide to the Melbourne Language Centre Test (MLCT), a possible component of Acknowledge Education's (AE) student admission process. The MLCT is designed to assess English language proficiency for those who have not met requirements via traditional means such as IELTS or PTE tests. This document details the procedures, guidelines, and protocols related to the MLCT, highlighting the steps AE takes to ensure the test's fairness, accuracy, and integrity. This guide traverses various aspects of the MLCT, including registration, test administration, taking the test, retake policies, appeals and complaints, privacy and security, and the vital role of feedback in continually improving the MLCT.

2.0 Scope

This document is primarily relevant for prospective students of AE who need to take the MLCT to demonstrate their English proficiency. Additionally, it provides essential guidelines for test administrators, educators, and AE staff involved in the administration and scoring of the MLCT. This document is also beneficial for any stakeholder involved in the testing process or those who need to understand the policies, procedures, and standards associated with the MLCT, including third-party educational advisors or consultants.

3.0 Test Objective

The objective of MLCT is to provide an effective and equitable measure of a candidate's English language proficiency, which is crucial for successful academic performance in AE courses. The test assesses key areas of English language competency, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. By allowing prospective students who do not have valid IELTS or PTE scores to demonstrate their English proficiency, the MLCT ensures that no capable student is denied the opportunity to pursue their academic aspirations. It aims to provide a fair, reliable, and consistent measure of English language proficiency, enabling AE to admit the most suitable candidates into its academic programs.

4.0 Test Development

Over three decades, Melbourne Language Centre (MLC) has established itself as a trusted institution for English language teaching and proficiency testing. Since AE's inception in 1988, MLC has been committed to offering high-quality English language training to international students from diverse cultural backgrounds. AE's reputation is built on a robust academic curriculum, continuously adapted and monitored to ensure AE's students achieve their language learning objectives.

MLC provides a spectrum of courses catering to different proficiency levels and needs, ranging from General English Courses for elementary to upper-intermediate levels to the rigorous English for Academic Purposes course that readies students for tertiary education. Our IELTS preparation course also helps students enhance their scores in the General and Academic modules, ensuring a solid foundation for optimal test performance.

AE is the parent organisation of MLC and is known for its work with international students. Our expertise is reflected in the 2022 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching's (QILT) student experience survey, where 90% of the students surveyed from AE expressed a positive outlook on their skill development, and 85% commended the quality of teaching at AE. Leveraging years of experience and a nuanced understanding of the diverse needs of AE's learner base, MLC has utilised this specialist knowledge in developing the Melbourne Language Centre English Proficiency Test (MLCT). Inspired by the IELTS Language Proficiency Test, the MLCT is a reliable indicator of a candidate's readiness to engage in studies across different educational courses offered at AE.

The MLCT evaluates four essential language domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The assessment process leverages a dual approach, with the first two areas measured through an online test module. At the same time, the latter two are evaluated via real-time, face-to-face assessments, providing a comprehensive evaluation of English language proficiency. This methodology ensures students possess the necessary digital literacy to navigate AE's learning management system efficiently. At the same time, AE's highly qualified teaching staff can evaluate each student's English proficiency in person. This dual approach facilitates identifying and resolving discrepancies between online and physical testing outcomes, thus ensuring a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of a student's language skills. Where differences between these testing formats are identified, AE can reassess students under invigilated conditions, thereby maintaining the integrity and precision of AE's evaluation process.

MLCT is designed to maintain a uniform testing experience for all students. This approach ensures that every student has an equitable opportunity to engage with the testing process and perform to the best of their abilities. This way, the MLCT measures proficiency and upholds AE's commitment to fair and unbiased assessments.

5.0 Candidate Registration

The candidate registration process for the MLCT is initiated when a student applies for a course at AE's institution without providing evidence of meeting English requirements. For instance, the student might not have valid IELTS or PTE results, even though they meet all other entry prerequisites or have a conditional offer, as assessed by the student admissions team. In such cases, the student is provided with an opportunity to consider undertaking the MLCT to measure their English proficiency.

Simultaneously, the candidate is given a link to AE's online booking system. This system allows the student to schedule their speaking and listening test conveniently. This

streamlined process ensures that students can quickly and efficiently start their journey towards demonstrating their English proficiency.

6.0 Test Administration

The MLCT administration is managed to ensure fairness, accuracy, and consistency across all test iterations.

6.1 Online Component

The online component of the MLCT, hosted on Moodle, assesses reading and writing. Upon receiving their unique login details, candidates must complete the reading test within 60 minutes and the writing test within 40 minutes. The instruction for the test is as follows:

> ***Reading test:***
>
> *Please read the following information before beginning:*
>
> *You are not to receive any additional help from outside sources such as dictionaries, translators, websites, or friends.*
>
> *This test includes three long texts, which range from descriptive and factual to discursive and analytical. It consists of 40 questions designed to test a wide range of reading skills.*
>
> *You will have 60 minutes to complete the test. The remaining time will be displayed at the top right of each page.*
>
> *Before you begin, please ensure your 5-digit Offer ID is handy.*
>
> *When you have finished, please click "Finish attempt", then "Submit all and finish".*
>
> *When you are ready, you may begin.*
>
> ***Writing test:***
>
> *Please read the following information before beginning:*
>
> *You are not to receive any additional help from any outside source such as dictionaries, translators, websites, or friends.*
>
> *In this test, you are required to write about 200-250 words in the form of a short essay. You must choose one of the two topics provided and provide a full and relevant response.*
>
> *You will have 40 minutes to complete the test. The remaining time will be displayed in the top right of each page.*
>
> *Before you begin, please make sure you have your 5-digit Offer ID handy.*

When you have finished, please click "Finish attempt", then "Submit all and finish".

When you are ready, you may begin.

6.2 Speaking and Listening Test

Using the link provided, candidates can independently schedule their speaking test based on their convenience. This system ensures flexibility and is designed to accommodate the needs of international students across different time zones.

The speaking and listening tests are conducted in real time through a virtual platform. AE's highly qualified teaching staff administer these tests and ensure the test conditions are supportive yet consistent.

6.3 Test Integrity and Reliability

To maintain the integrity of the MLCT, any incongruities between the online and in-person testing meeting or exceeding two score points will prompt an invigilated re-test. For example, a re-test would be triggered if the student achieved reading 7.0 and writing 7.5, but the speaking and listening test results are 5.0. Three versions of each step are available to ensure the student does not benefit from previous test awareness. This step is critical to upholding the accuracy of AE's assessment and ensures all candidates are given equal opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

7.0 Test Taking

The MLCT is administered under strict guidelines to ensure fairness and consistency across all candidates. The rules and conditions under which the test is taken are outlined below:

7.1 Testing Environment

Candidates must take the test in a quiet, well-lit environment with a stable internet connection. This is to minimise disruptions and facilitate optimal test-taking conditions. During the test, candidates are not permitted additional help from outside sources, such as dictionaries, translators, websites, or friends. Candidates must have access to speakers and headphones for some test elements.

7.2 Test Duration

The online tests should be completed within 60 minutes for reading and 40 minutes for writing tests. Students have continual access to the test time remaining as they progress through the online component.
The speaking test duration varies but typically lasts around 15-20 minutes.

7.3 Test Navigation

Candidates must answer all questions on each page before moving on to the next. Returning to a previous page once the "Next page" button has been clicked is impossible.

7.4 Test Submission

Once completed, candidates should click "Finish attempt", then "Submit all and finish" to ensure their test is successfully submitted.

7.5 Speaking and Listening Tests

The MLC team understands that tests can sometimes bring about anxiety or nervous tension. As such, AE's qualified English test facilitators prioritise establishing a relaxed and comfortable environment for candidates during the speaking test. This is achieved through open communication, supportive engagement, and patience, ensuring the candidate's readiness to begin the trial.

Before commencing the speaking test, the facilitator will introduce themselves, explain the testing procedure, and provide an opportunity for the candidate to ask any questions they may have. The facilitator will take time to clarify any doubts or uncertainties, ensuring that the candidate fully understands the process. If a candidate is unsure about any aspect of the test, they should seek clarification from the test administrator before proceeding to the testing phase.

While AE's facilitators aim to reduce test-related anxiety, they cannot assist in formulating or improving responses. This is because the core objective of the MLCT is to gauge a candidate's language proficiency level accurately. Therefore, candidates are encouraged to answer each question independently, honestly, and to the best of their ability.

7.6 Violation of rules

Any violation of the testing rules may result in disqualification or invalidation of test results.

8.0 Test Scoring

The MLCT sections undergo assessment using the respective scoring procedures applicable to each section. In the reading test, students are awarded a raw score determined by the accuracy of their answers. This raw score is transformed into band scores, mirroring the IELTS scale from 0 to 9, through a conversion table.

In the writing and speaking segments, proficient English educators evaluate students' performance, employing specific criteria encompassing task accomplishment, coherence, vocabulary usage, grammar precision, fluency, and pronunciation proficiency. The band scores span from 0 to 9, allowing for the inclusion of half-bands (e.g., 5.5, 6.5).

In the listening test, examiners leverage the oral communication component to gauge students' aptitude in comprehending spoken language. This evaluation encompasses their ability to understand questions and assimilate intricate details. The listening section is also marked from 0 to 9.

9.0 Test Result Distribution

After the test assessment, the MLC head teacher compiles a test report containing essential details about the test taker. This includes the student's name, ID number, and intended course. The test results, including scores for each test segment and an overall score, are also included. Furthermore, the report consists of a recommendation indicating whether the student meets the minimum English requirement for the chosen course. When the student falls short of the English requirement, the report suggests the number of weeks of English preparation necessary to attain the desired score.

The test report is transmitted to the admissions team. They relay this information to the pertinent student and the associated agent.

10.0 Appeals and Retakes

Generally, AE encourages students to learn and improve from each testing experience; however, concerning the MLCT, AE acknowledges that providing repeated test attempts dilutes the reliability of the test as an assessment of English proficiency. Therefore, the following requirements concerning test retakes are implemented:

10.1 Retake Limitations

Candidates who cannot meet the English proficiency threshold after taking the MLCT can retake the test.

10.2 Review and Remark

Candidates who believe their MLCT scores do not accurately reflect their English proficiency may request a review or remark of their test using AE's dedicated form and process for remark and review. To initiate this process, candidates must complete a remark/review application form requiring them to present a compelling academic argument for the remark. In these pinpointing areas, they believe their assessment was under-marked.

A different qualified teacher will reassess the test results if substantial evidence justifies a review or remark. The grade determined through this second assessment process will supersede the initial score and stand as the candidate's final grade. This policy ensures a fair and thorough evaluation of each candidate's performance and maintains the integrity of the MLCT.

It's important to note that the purpose of this process is not to question the professional judgment of the original assessor but to provide a secondary level of review where a credible case has been made for potential under-marking. We recommend that candidates use this process judiciously and with a solid basis for their appeal.

10.4 Appeal and Complaint

Candidates with grievances that fall outside the scope of the remark/review process can engage in AE's appeal process. This process provides a platform for candidates to formally express any concerns or issues not addressed by the remark/review process.

The appeal process ensures all candidates have the right to a fair and impartial hearing. To initiate this process, candidates must provide a comprehensive account of their grievances and submit it through the official channels of AE.

Once an appeal is received, it is examined by an independent academic and administrative staff panel. The panel ensures a fair hearing and provides a resolution based on the merit of each case. It's important to remember that the appeals process is designed to address specific grievances that cannot be resolved through the remark/review process and, therefore, should be utilised judiciously and following AE's guidelines.

11.0 Privacy and Security

AE takes the protection of candidate data extremely seriously. All candidate information, including personal details and test results, is handled and stored following strict data protection laws and policies. We employ rigorous security measures to protect against unauthorised access, alteration, disclosure, or destruction of personal information.

11.1 Data Storage

Data is stored on secure, encrypted servers with restricted access, ensuring that only authorised personnel can retrieve or handle candidate information.

11.2 Test Integrity

Regarding test integrity, AE has implemented measures to ensure a fair and unbiased testing environment for all candidates. The test development and administration processes are monitored to maintain a consistent standard. The MLCT is standardised, ensuring all candidates are given the same testing conditions and evaluated on the same scale. Where integrity is questioned, invigilated re-tests are required, and strict protocols are in place to prevent and detect any form of cheating or misconduct. Furthermore, to ensure fair grading, tests are marked by qualified staff, with processes in place for double marking and reviewing results where necessary.

12.0 Continuous Improvement

12.1 Feedback

Feedback is integral to AE’s process to improve the MLCT continually. We collect feedback from candidates, test administrators, educators, and language proficiency experts.

Candidates are encouraged to provide feedback on their test experience via a post-test survey. This feedback often relates to the testing environment, the clarity of instructions, the difficulty of test items, and the overall test experience.

Test administrators and educators provide informal feedback on the logistics and administration of the test, the appropriateness of test content, and observations of candidate behaviour and performance during the test at staff meetings.

Language proficiency experts review the test items periodically to ensure they continue to accurately measure English language proficiency as per international standards and reflect changes in language use and education.

Based on the feedback received, AE has recently made some significant changes to the MLCT. We have introduced more precise instructions for certain test sections and improved the user interface of AE's online testing platform to enhance the overall candidate experience. We've also revised some of AE's test items to better align with current English language usage and teaching methodologies.

12.2 Benchmarking the MLCT

An in-depth analysis is routinely conducted to benchmark the performance outcomes of students who enter AE courses via the MLCT. These outcomes include graduation rates, course completion, withdrawals, deferrals, course cancellations, and refund requests. The data is then compared with the outcomes of students who entered AE courses through traditional English language proficiency measures such as IELTS and PTE tests.

These analyses consistently demonstrate that students admitted through the MLCT perform at comparable levels and often surpass their counterparts who gained entry using IELTS or PTE measures. Students who gain access to AE courses are less likely than other students to contribute to student attrition figures. This reinforces the reliability and validity of the MLCT as a robust measure of English language proficiency that aligns with the demands of AE's academic courses.

Conclusion

In summary, AE is dedicated to upholding the integrity and accuracy of the MLCT as a fair and rigorous measure of English proficiency. This document outlines our commitment to a thorough, transparent, and reliable evaluation of candidates' readiness for AE's academic courses. By implementing systematic analysis, collecting feedback, and enforcing stringent quality assurance processes, AE ensures the ongoing relevance and robustness of the MLCT.

Document Information

Document Name	Melbourne Language Centre English Proficiency Test Process
Document Number	1.1.5
Purpose	To make clear the process for undertaking and assessing the MLC English Proficiency Test.
Audience	☒Staff | ☐Students| ☐Public
Category	Student Participation and Attainment
Subcategory	Admission
Approval Date	01/08/2023
Effective Date	01/08/2023
Review Date	Under review as at April 2026
Policy Advisor	Cyrus Nickson, Director of Education
Approving Authority	Director of Education
Contact	Regulatorcompliance@ae.edu.au

8.0 Change Log

Date	Version	By	Notes
01/08/2023	1.0	Narelle Whatley	Creation of document in conjunction with Cyrus Nickson, Director of Education.