

# PTE Academic global field test

March 2009

## Introduction

Globalization has resulted in an explosion in the number of English language learners worldwide. Research reveals that nearly two billion people will learn English as a second language – or foreign language – over the next 20 years and that 300 million people are reported to be studying English each year in China alone. It is projected that speakers of English as a second language will soon outnumber those who speak it as a first language.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, students are more mobile and able to pursue their degrees abroad, with more than 500,000 studying annually in the United States and 350,000 in the United Kingdom, the top two destinations for international studies. Colleges and universities, as well as government organizations and other institutions, are increasingly faced with the challenge of effectively evaluating the English language proficiency of candidates for admissions. To ensure success for their program participants, these institutions must be able to assess overall abilities in terms of reading, writing, listening to and speaking English in an accurate and efficient manner.

Pearson, the global leader in test development and delivery, is developing PTE Academic in response to demand from its higher education, government and other customers for a test that will more accurately measure the English communication skills of international students in an academic environment. The new test will accurately measure the reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities of test takers who are non-native speakers of English and who want to study at institutions where English is the principal language of instruction.

Launching globally in 2009, PTE Academic will be offered to students in collaboration with the Graduate Management Admission Council® (GMAC®). GMAC is well known worldwide as the owner of the Graduate Management Admission Test® (GMAT®). In addition, it will be delivered in a phased approach through Pearson VUE's test centers in a variety of countries. Another member of the Pearson family of businesses, Pearson VUE is the global leader in electronic testing for regulatory and certification boards, providing a full suite of services from test development to test delivery to data management.

To develop this comprehensive new computer-based English language test, Pearson is working with internal and external test development experts on all aspects of PTE Academic. In addition, the company has conducted an extensive field test program to evaluate PTE Academic's test items and measure their effectiveness in assessing a test taker's ability to communicate in English in an academic environment. The results of the field test have informed every aspect of the development of PTE Academic, such as its innovative test item types, test delivery and availability and the design of the test's computer display screens.

This paper provides an overview of PTE Academic field test process, its findings and the next steps in the development of this new test of academic English language ability.

## Summary of global field test implementation

In 2007-2008, Pearson launched a worldwide field test program to test its new computer-based international academic English test. The results of the field test will allow the developers of PTE Academic to evaluate all aspects of the test as well as to calibrate all test items and the automated scoring engines for the written and spoken portions of the test.

Conducted in two phases, this extensive international field test included more than 10,000 test takers from 38 cities in 21 countries, including China, Japan, India, Pakistan, Poland, Israel, Brazil and South Korea.

The field test included test takers born in 158 different countries speaking 126 different languages. Among the native languages of participants were Mandarin, Indonesian, Hindi, Vietnamese, French, Cantonese, Spanish, Korean, Gujarati, Japanese, Urdu, Hebrew, Thai, Polish, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil and Turkish. In addition, approximately 12% of the participants were native English speakers, which allowed researchers to validate the test results.

The target age for PTE Academic is 17 to 35 years of age and more than 92% of PTE Academic field test participants fell in that range. Additionally, demographic data and other information were collected from participants such as gender and how and for how long they had been studying English.

To mirror how PTE Academic will be delivered at launch, test takers were given the flexibility to schedule their tests online at a time that was convenient for them. Tests were delivered either by appointment or during special testing event days at designated Pearson VUE test centers around the world. Each participant took the three-hour test in a single session.

## Field test results and next steps

Field test participants responded very positively to their experience with PTE Academic. In fact, more than 80% of the test takers who participated in the test said they would recommend it to their friends and colleagues.

This field test allowed Pearson to gather all test taker response data and calibrate the automated scoring engines for writing and speaking for PTE Academic, as well as to evaluate the test items and results. A field test of this magnitude provided the company with comprehensive information about the innovative and integrated item types included on PTE Academic, as well as feedback on the test takers' experience with the testing process and their perceptions of the test.

Pearson's Technical Advisory Group, composed of international experts on language testing and psychometrics, provides ongoing evaluation and advice on Pearson's research on the field test results and the development process of PTE Academic. In addition, Pearson has commissioned independent researchers from the language testing and psychometric communities to participate in a comprehensive research program on a range of aspects related to PTE Academic.

PTE Academic research initiatives include:

- Standard setting with the Common European Framework (CEF)
- Academic vocabulary development observed in PTE Academic test takers' writing and its relation to internationally recognized language proficiency descriptors (CEF)
- Vocabulary development reflecting CEF as a function of PTE Academic test scores
- Sensitivity review of PTE Academic items
- Concordance study with other major English language tests

Supported by the power of this comprehensive field test study and in-depth research, PTE Academic is on track to launch in October 2009 as a state-of-the-art accurate assessment of the Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking abilities of test takers who are non-native speakers of English.

Colleges, universities, government organizations and other institutions interested in becoming a PTE Academic-recognizing institution can visit [www.pearsonpte.com](http://www.pearsonpte.com) or send an e-mail to the appropriate email address below for more information.

<b>North and South America:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:usreco@pearson.com">usreco@pearson.com</a></b>
<b>Canada:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:canreco@pearson.com">canreco@pearson.com</a></b>
<b>United Kingdom and Ireland:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:ukireco@pearson.com">ukireco@pearson.com</a></b>
<b>Europe, Middle East, Africa and India:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:emaireco@pearson.com">emaireco@pearson.com</a></b>
<b>Asia Pacific, Australia, New Zealand:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:apacreco@pearson.com">apacreco@pearson.com</a></b>

## About Pearson

Pearson (NYSE:PSO), the global leader in education and education technology, reaches and engages today's digital natives with effective and personalized learning, as well as dedicated professional development for their teachers. This commitment is demonstrated in the company's investment in innovative print and digital education materials for preK through professional learning, student information systems and learning management systems, teacher development, career certification programs and testing and assessment products that set the standard for the industry. The company's respected brands include Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall, Addison Wesley, Benjamin Cummings, the Stanford Achievement Test, the Wechsler family of assessments, SuccessNet, MyLabs, PowerSchool, SuccessMaker and many others. Pearson's comprehensive offerings help inform targeted instruction and intervention so that success is within reach of every student at every level of education. Pearson's commitment to education for all is supported by the global charitable giving initiatives of the Pearson Foundation. Pearson's other primary businesses include the Financial Times Group and the Penguin Group.

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