

EUROPEAN SURVEY OF LANGUAGE TESTING AND ASSESSMENT NEEDS

Report: part one – general findings

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When EALTA was launched in the spring of 2004, its expressed mission was:

To promote the understanding of theoretical principles of language testing and assessment, and the improvement and sharing of testing and assessment practices throughout Europe.

As one way of achieving this, it has as an objective, *to provide training in language testing and assessment.*

In order to provide the kind of training and professional development needed by teachers and others involved in language testing and assessment (LTA), it is necessary to establish what this need is. This involves considering such questions as which distinct groups may be identified, which activities in LTA these are engaged in and how much training they have in these activities, and how they perceive their own needs in training in LTA. Only after assessing these needs can EALTA take the first step in addressing them, viz through the development of a training module, one of a series of activities (activity 5) on the agenda of ENLTA, the EU-supported network project responsible for giving EALTA and its aims a 'kick start'.

It was thus decided that ENLTA activity 5 (working with activity 2) should commence by conducting a European survey of needs in LTA. In order that this should be done efficiently, ensuring that there would be time to act on the findings, a web-based survey form, with automatic data compilation, was designed in February 2004, and put into operation from March to mid-April. The findings were then analysed and presented to the inaugural EALTA conference at the end of May, and are currently the basis for a training event for teachers and teacher trainers being developed for trialling in spring 2005.

The design of the survey form and the analysis of data were jointly carried out by ENLTA partners at the universities of Bergen, Jyväskylä and Lancaster.

The report, which will be in two parts, will present an account of the survey form, the responses, and the analyses and principal findings to have emerged. This first part considers the overall dataset (University of Bergen). Part two deals with the data according to region/country (University of Jyväskylä).

The survey form

The survey form was designed to target three types of 'stakeholder' in LTA: 1) language teachers, 2) language teacher trainers and 3) 'experts', i.e. those who are employed by organisations that design school-external tests and examinations. All respondents were asked to complete a preliminary set of 'background' questions before selecting one or more of the three parts of the form intended to map the needs of each of the three target groups. The coordinators of ENLTA activity 5 and 2 (which was incorporated in this activity) (University of Bergen and Jyväskylä) as well as computing experts at the University of Lancaster (the coordinating institution) had overall responsibility for the design and analysis of the survey.

The background questions were intended to tap relevant information on the respondents, such as the country they work in, the nature of their involvement in language teaching/assessment, the language(s) they deal with, their qualification and professional role, and importantly, the extent of their formal education or training in LTA. This data was designed to help identify which data came from which of our three groups, and whether distinct needs were attached to these groupings, or others, e.g. on the basis of country or language.

Within each of the subsequent sections of the survey, questions were grouped thematically, e.g. classroom-based activities used in assessment, purpose of assessment, content of assessment. Within these thematic areas, each question consisted of three parts, relating to:

1) whether the respondents are or have been involved in the type of LTA concerned, 2) the extent to which they have received formal training in this and 3) the extent to which they perceived a need for such training. The teachers' and teacher trainers' questions followed similar themes, although the questions on involvement were different, as trainers were asked if they were training teachers in the activity, rather than carrying it out with their own students. Experts were asked questions on quite different themes, such as item writing and developing testing systems.

Responses

In all, 914 respondents submitted answers to at least one part of the form. 37 European countries were represented, with 50 respondents from non-European countries. The number of respondents from each country varied considerably, from 172 in Finland to 1 in a handful of countries, such as Iceland and Malta. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents across countries.

Table 1: Where respondents came from

Finland	172	Estonia	33	Switzerland	8	Serbia and Montenegro	2
Sweden	73	Bulgaria	32	Czech Republic	7	Macedonia	2
United Kingdom	73	Poland	32	Russian Federation	6	Other European country	2
Romania	51	Hungary	27	Latvia	5	Croatia	1
non-European country	50	Ireland	25	France	4	Denmark	1
Slovenia	47	Norway	25	Austria	3	Iceland	1
Greece	44	Belgium	21	Azerbaijan	3	Malta	1
Turkey	37	Lithuania	16	Portugal	3	Ukraine	1
Netherlands	35	Italy	13	Slovakia	3		
Spain	35	Germany	11	Andorra	2		

Although the registered number of respondents seemed to be fairly evenly distributed across the parts of the form, (Part1: 741, Part 2: 709, Part 3: 689), the distribution of actual responses differed significantly, with more responses to part 1 than to parts 2 and 3. This suggests a slight flaw in the way data was registered. Table 2 shows the numbers of responses to items in each part of the form.

Table 2: The numbers of responses to items in each part of the form

	Numbers of responses per item
Part 1 (teachers)	522-614
Part 2 (teacher trainers)	181-212
Part 3 ('experts')	198-228

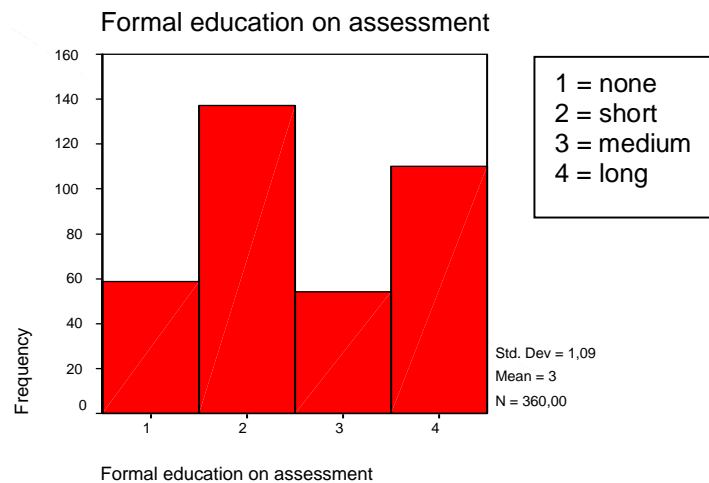
These figures are further complicated by the fact that there was a degree of overlap in the way the sections were designed. Teacher trainers and 'experts' are often language teachers at the same time. And many teachers are employed part time by examination boards. Thus a first step prior to analysing the data, was to find a means of sifting out the group who represent perhaps the most important and significant group: the 'grass roots' language teachers. This was done with reference to the background data; any respondent who answered 'yes' to having the role of language teacher/lecturer but 'no' to all other roles, such as teacher trainer, material writer or employee of examination board, were defined as 'teachers' for the purposes of the survey. In all, this category contained 361 respondents.

Analyses and findings: overall data

In the analyses reported here, each 'stakeholder' group (teachers, teacher trainers, and experts) is considered in turn. No account is taken here of regional differences.

1 TEACHERS

Figure 1: teachers: degree of formal education in assessment



The first question to be analysed in the dataset concerned how much formal education in LTA had been received by the group. What was striking was that few teachers (less than one sixth) claimed to have had no training, and quite a large group claimed to have had long term training (almost one third). This figure suggests that either the question has not been interpreted quite as intended, or that the respondents are not actually typical grass roots teachers. This may be the case, as the questionnaire in most countries has only reached a limited number of teachers. For this reason, the findings in this section may have to be interpreted as representing a more 'assessment-aware' group than would be normally expected. A separate investigation, based on

a questionnaire filled in by EALTA conference participants, reported on in the conclusion, lends support to this interpretation.

The findings reported in the remainder of this section are based on two kinds of analyses. Both were used in order to tap the need for training in any aspect. The first uses a cross tabulation of the *yes* responses to the question '*are you engaged in this activity?*' and the *none* responses to the question '*how much training have you received?*'. The numbers shown in these graphs are simply the raw figures of how many untrained teachers are operating with the aspect or activity concerned. These figures give an indication of which activities are relatively frequently carried out by teachers without training in them. Generally speaking, this is regarded as an indication of need for training in the activity concerned. However, a low figure here may suggest that the activity is simply not happening to a great extent, which may be due to lack of training, thus it is necessary to also consider what the teachers themselves feel as a need for training.

The second analysis is therefore a percentage-wise description of the responses to the question relating to how the teachers perceive their own need for training. Here, all positive responses (to the question of how much training is needed) were collated, to yield a single percentage of *yes* to the need for any training, which is then compared with the percentage of *no* responses. As in the first analysis, we looked for 'peaks' within the thematic areas, indicating needs priorities. However, it was also considered important to look at the actual percentages of respondents who identified an activity as being in need of training in, or not. Generally speaking, around 40% and 60% gave the 'yes' response, with considerably fewer giving a 'no' response.

The findings are presented and discussed in the order of the questions on the form. As there was little variation in the responses within some areas, only the more salient findings will be shown graphically.

Classroom-focussed assessment

As Figure 2 shows, *using ready-made tests, giving feedback and using informal, continuous assessment* are among activities more commonly carried out without training. *Using portfolios* (here defined as 'ELP or other portfolios') and *preparing one's own tests* are relatively little engaged in untrained. However, Figure 3 indicates that teachers themselves, unsurprisingly, perceive little need (more gave the 'no' than the 'yes' response) for training in *using ready made tests*, yet feel significant need, around 50% 'yes' to around 10% 'no') for training in *preparing tests, interpreting results, giving feedback, using self-assessment* and, above all, at around 60%, in *using portfolios*, where there were hardly any 'no' responses.

Figure 2: Cross-tabulation: teachers carrying out activities and absence of training, in classroom-focussed assessment

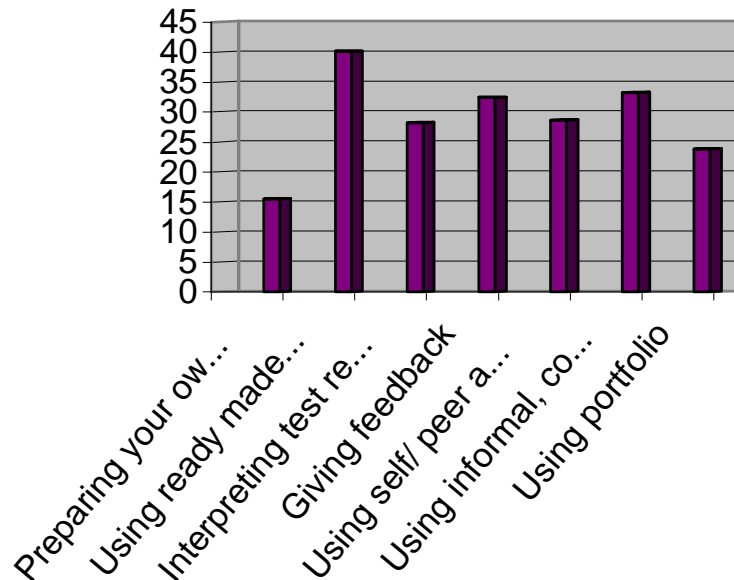
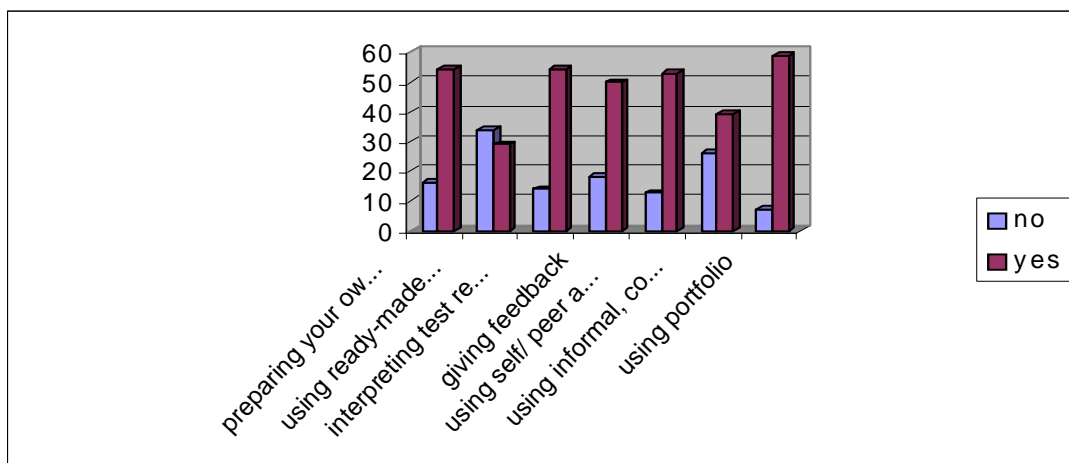


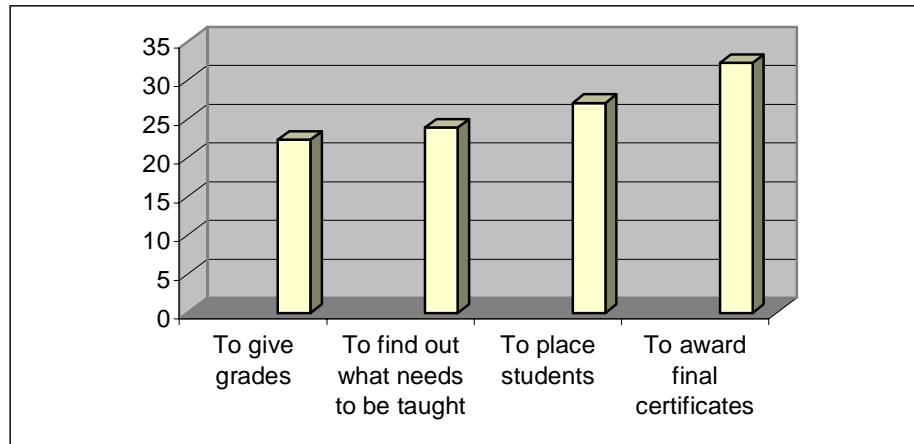
Figure 3: Perceived training needs in classroom-focussed assessment



Purposes of assessment

Figure 4 shows that it is more common for teachers to engage in assessing *to award certificates* or *to place students* in an untrained way than for diagnostic or grading purposes. However, here is little difference in the responses on the teachers' perceived needs in training for assessing for different purposes (not shown); the figure were rather 'half-hearted' at around 40% across the board, and a rather high percentage of 'nos' (20-25%). There is a slight tendency to regard the greatest need as that concerning testing for diagnostic purposes, i.e. to *find out what needs to be taught*. The conclusion is perhaps that there is a general need for training whatever the purpose, with no overwhelming feeling of need for any particular purpose.

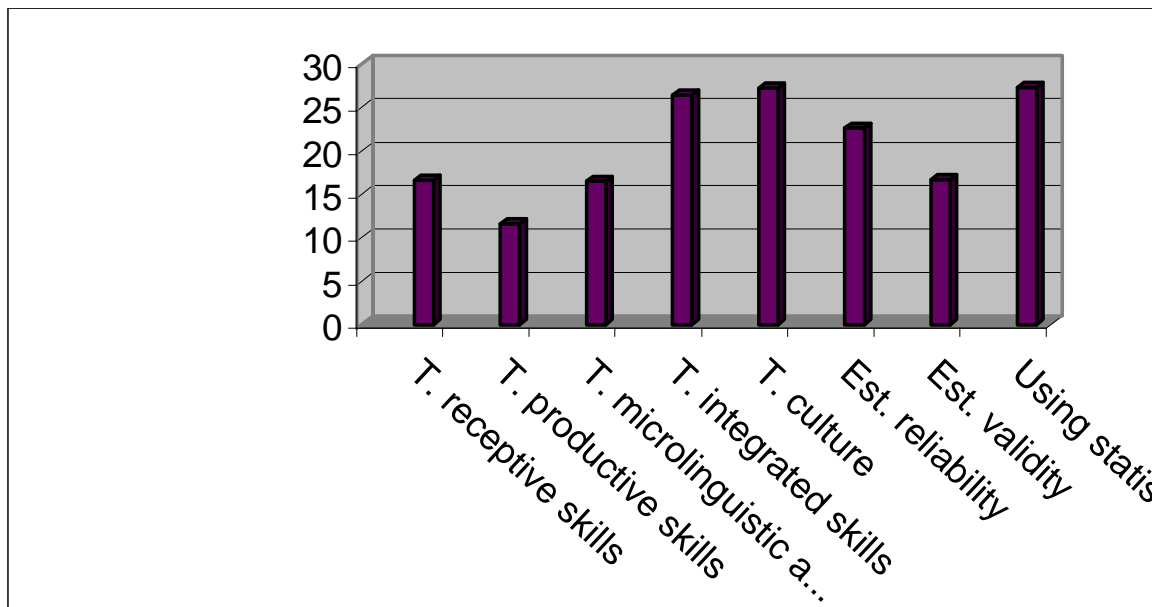
Figure 4: Cross-tabulation: carrying out activities and absence of training, in purposes of assessment



Content and Concepts

Figure 5 shows a considerable range in the responses regarding the content and concepts relating to the assessment teachers are engaged in without training. *Using statistics* and *assessing culture* and *integrated skills* appear to be most commonly carried out without training, slightly ahead of *establishing reliability*. *Assessing productive skills* appears to be least likely to be carried out with no training. The data for teachers' perceived needs showed little variation in responses in this area, but a clear need shown for training in all areas, with around 50% 'yes' and 10% 'no'.

Figure 5: Cross-tabulation: carrying out activities and absence of training, in content and concepts



External tests and exams

Figure 6 shows a high degree of engagement in *reviewing* and *writing items* and in *using statistics* without training. However again, there is perceived to be a need for training in all activities relating to external testing, as Figure 7 bears out, with 40-50% 'yes' and 10-15% 'no'. Aspects perceived as being in considerable need of training include *defining assessment criteria*, *acting as oral examiner/interviewer* and *taking part in rating*.

Figure 6: Cross-tabulation: carrying out activities and absence of training, regarding external test and exams

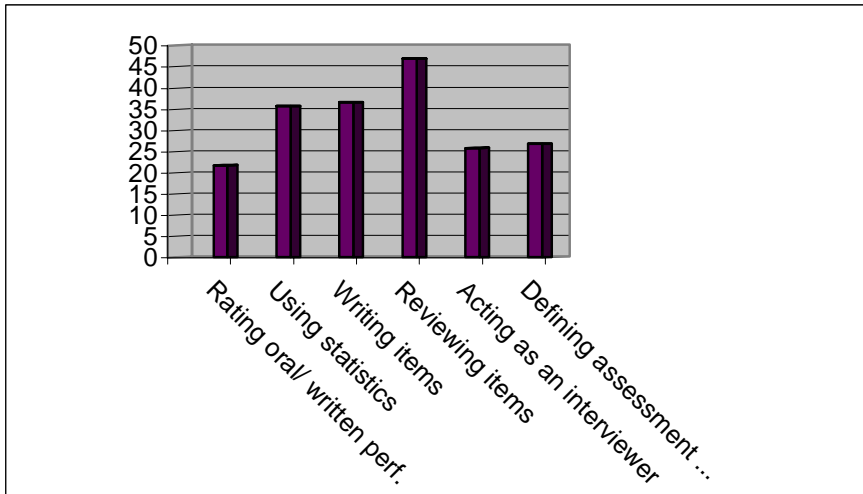
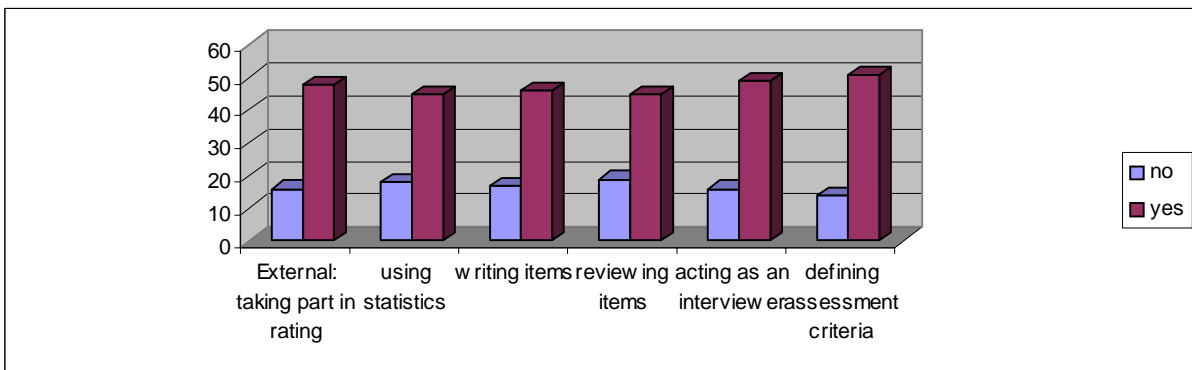


Figure 7: Perceived training needs regarding external test and exams



Tentative conclusions on teachers' needs

To sum up the findings in this section, most activities are being carried out with teachers who have no training in these. Moreover, there is generally perceived to be a need for training across the board. In only one single activity did more teachers say 'no' than 'yes' to needing training. Generally the response was overwhelmingly weighted toward 'yes'. Certain activities/aspects did, however, emerge as being particularly likely to be engaged in with no training, or seen by teachers themselves as being in particularly in need of training in. These are:

- Using ELP/other portfolios, preparing own tests, peer/self assessment, interpreting results, using continuous informal assessment and giving feedback

- Assessing aspects of culture, assessing integrated skills, establishing reliability and validity, statistics
- Reviewing and writing items, statistics, defining criteria, rating, interviewing

2 TEACHER TRAINERS

In this section, the analyses reported on are also of two types, but with a slight difference from the previous section. As we are interested in finding teachers' needs primarily, it was important to gather information on what training is actually being given to teachers, whether pre- or in-service. Therefore a question was posed regarding whether teacher trainers actually give such training for each of the activities/aspects. This is shown in graphical form as the valid percentages (because there was a lot of missing data in this section) of respondents answering that they give training as *pre-service*, *in-service*, *both* or *not at all*.

The second analysis is similar to the first reported in the previous section. A cross-tabulation is made of yes responses to the question of whether they give any training in the aspect/activity (found by collating yes responses to *pre-service*, *in-service* and *both*) and the *none* responses to the question '*how much training have you received?*'. This gives an indication of what is being trained in by people with no relevant formal education in the subject.

Classroom-focussed assessment

Figure 8: actual training given in classroom-focussed activities

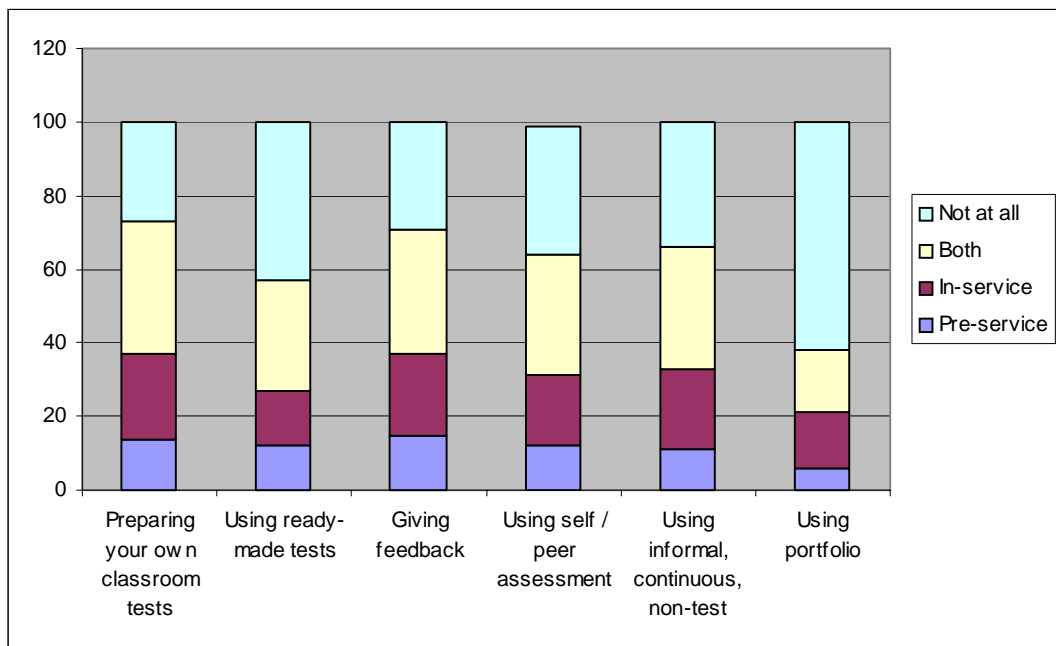


Figure 9: Cross-tabulation: giving training and absence of own training regarding classroom-focussed assessment

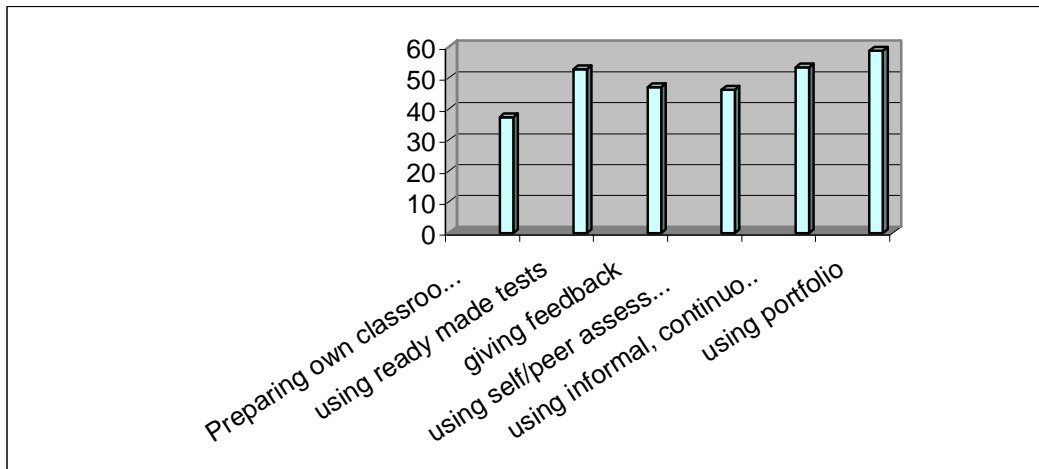
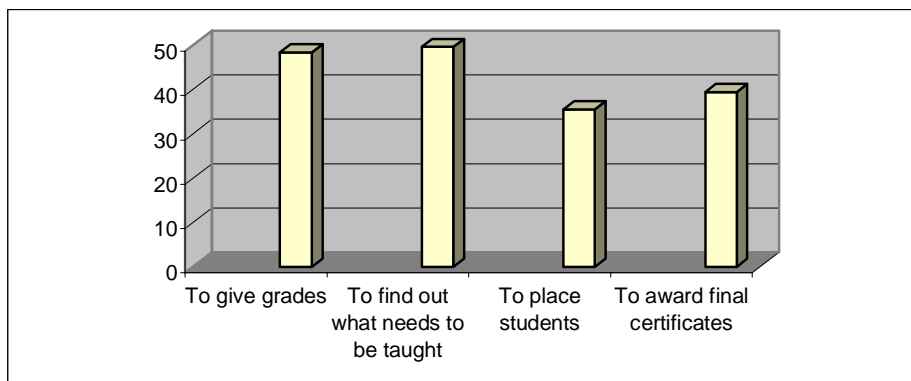


Figure 8 shows that most classroom-focussed activities are taught by around 60-70% of the teacher trainer respondents. However, the figures are slightly lower for *using ready-made tests* and much lower for *using portfolios* (under 40%). Figure 9 shows that these two activities are among those that, when taught, are most commonly done so by people without training in them; however, only *preparing own tests* has a relatively low score on this statistic. These facts need to be interpreted in the light of what was established about teachers' needs in the area of classroom-focussed assessment. Here, *portfolio use* was highlighted as an area of great need, with aspects such as *peer/self assessment*, *interpreting results*, *using continuous informal assessment* and *giving feedback* also in need of training. It must be concluded that teacher trainers needs coincide largely with those of teachers, with *portfolio assessment* as a clear priority area.

Purposes of assessment

The findings on needs related to purposes, in the case of teachers gave no particular priority areas. The same can be said for teacher trainers. The figure (not shown) for the extent that training is given, indicate that training in assessment for all purposes is given by about 60% of teacher trainers. However, Figure 10 shows that it is most common for training to be given in *giving grades* and *assessing to find out what needs to be learnt* by people without training in these themselves.

Figure 10: Cross-tabulation: giving training and absence of own training, regarding assessment purposes



Content and Concepts

Figure 11: actual training given in content and concepts

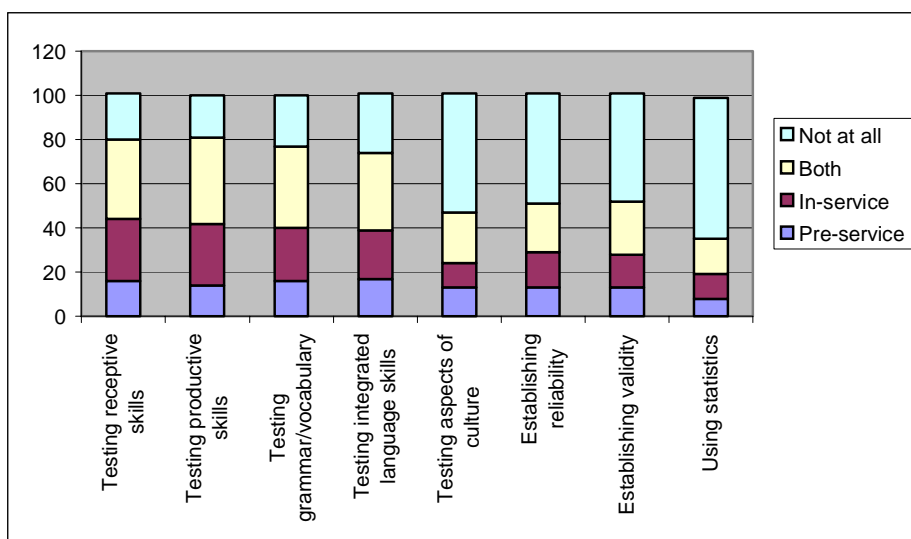
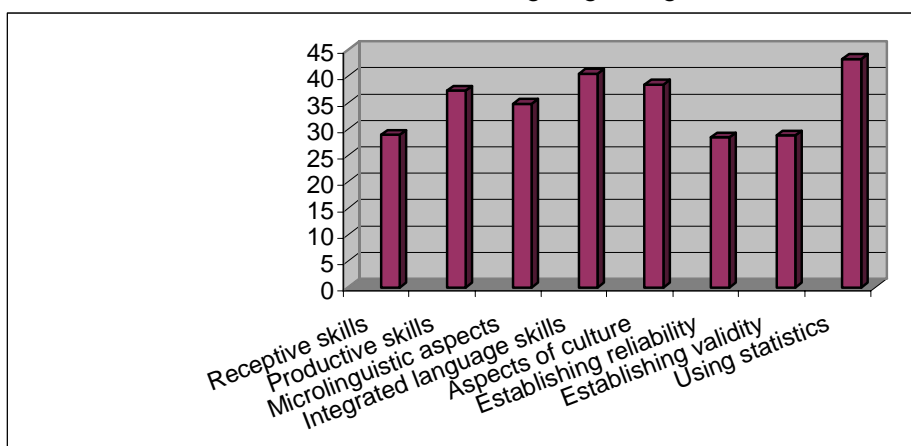


Figure 12: Cross-tabulation: giving training and absence of own training, regarding content and concepts



As Figure 11 shows, there are clear differences in the degree to which different content and concepts in assessment are taught to teachers. The most basic concepts – *assessing receptive* and *productive skills*, *microlinguistic skills* (e.g. grammar/vocabulary) and *integrated skills* – are taught by 80% of the respondents, while the *assessment of culture*, along with *establishing validity* and *reliability*, as well as *statistics* are only taught by around 40%. Figure 12 shows that of the most commonly taught elements, *assessing productive* and *integrated skills* are most likely to be taught without training. It also seems that where the *assessment of culture* and *statistics* are taught, this is done so to a large extent without training. Thus it seems that, while teachers expressed a clear need for training in this area across the board, the training being offered is sparse in some elements and given by people without training in most. *Statistics* and the *assessment of culture* emerge as elements with most acute training needs.

Tentative conclusions on trainers' needs

To sum up, it seems that teacher trainers' needs are similar to teachers, judged either on the basis of what they are giving little training in, or what they are training in on the basis of little specialist qualification.

Areas of greatest need appear to be:

- Using ELP/other portfolios, peer/self assessment, interpreting results and giving feedback, informal continuous assessment
- Assessing to award grades, assessing to find out what needs to be taught
- Aspects of culture, integrated skills, establishing reliability and validity, statistics, productive skills

3 EXPERTS

The analysis of experts' data was carried out similarly to that of teachers, i.e. firstly, cross tabulations were carried out between aspects that were practised and the absence of any training in these, and secondly, the experts' own perceived need for training were expressed as percentages of yes/no responses.

However, what was striking was that the experts expressed a very uniform across the board need for training in all elements. Therefore, only the cross tabulations will be presented and discussed here for most areas. The areas asked about were quite different from those asked of the other two groups. These were: *item writing and rating, developing tests and assessment systems, and CEF-related assessment*.

Item writing and rating

Figure 13: Cross-tabulation: carrying out activities and absence of training, regarding item writing and rating

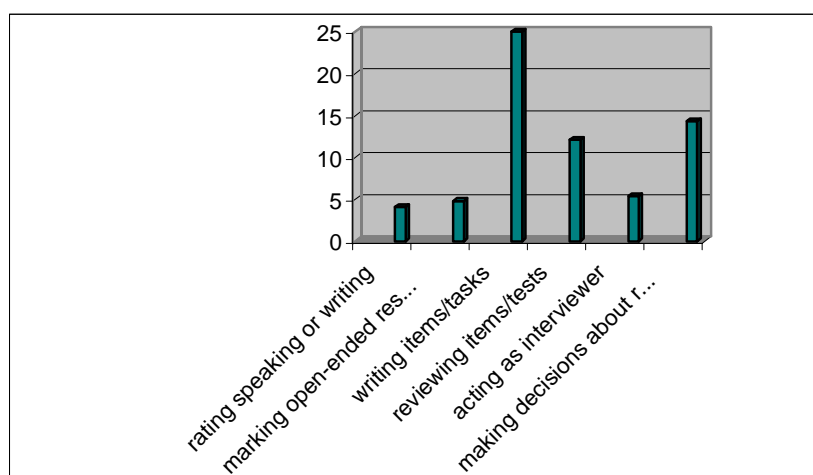


Figure 13 shows very clearly that the activities carried out most often on the basis of no training by 'experts' are *item writing* (overwhelmingly) as well as *reviewing items* and *making decisions about test composition*. It seems that activities to do with the actual examining and rating are less in need of training.

Developing tests and assessment systems

Figure 14: Cross-tabulation: carrying out activities and absence of training, regarding item writing and rating

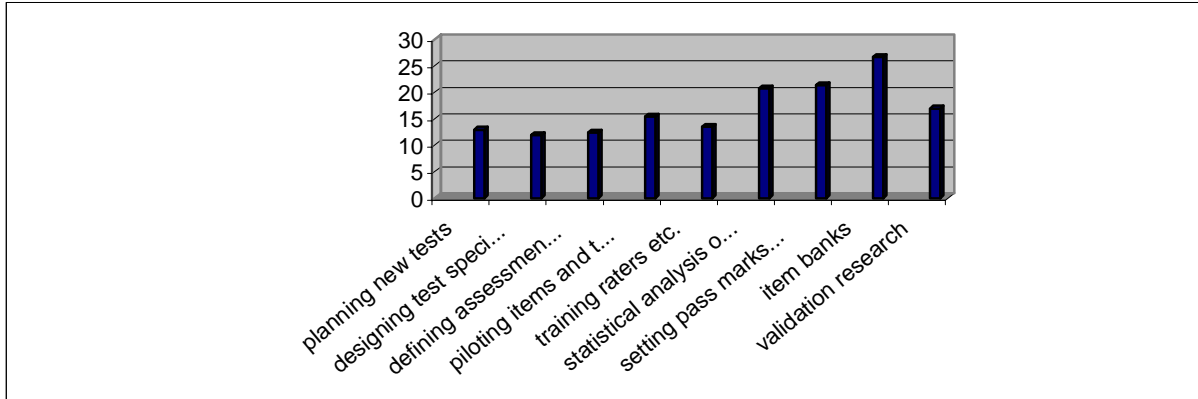


Figure 14 shows a similar diversity in the degree of training experts have in the tasks they do regarding developing tests and assessment systems. Here *creating item banks* is most likely to be done without training, with *statistical analysis* and *setting pass marks* in close second place. It thus seems that the tasks most closely connected with developing tests themselves are less in need of training than tasks associated with assessment systems.

CEF- related assessment

This section considers only two activities: making new tests, based on the CEF and relating existing ones to the CEF. Figure 15 shows overwhelmingly that experts are much more likely to relate existing tests to the CEF without training than to create tests to the CEF without training. This could be due to the fact that the latter is a relatively new activity, which few of those asked are actually engaged in. However, a glance at the responses to the question regarding the need for training, in Figure 16, reveals an overwhelming agreement among experts themselves that there is a need for training in both aspects.

Figure 15 : Cross-tabulation: experts carrying out activities and absence of training, regarding testing to the CEF

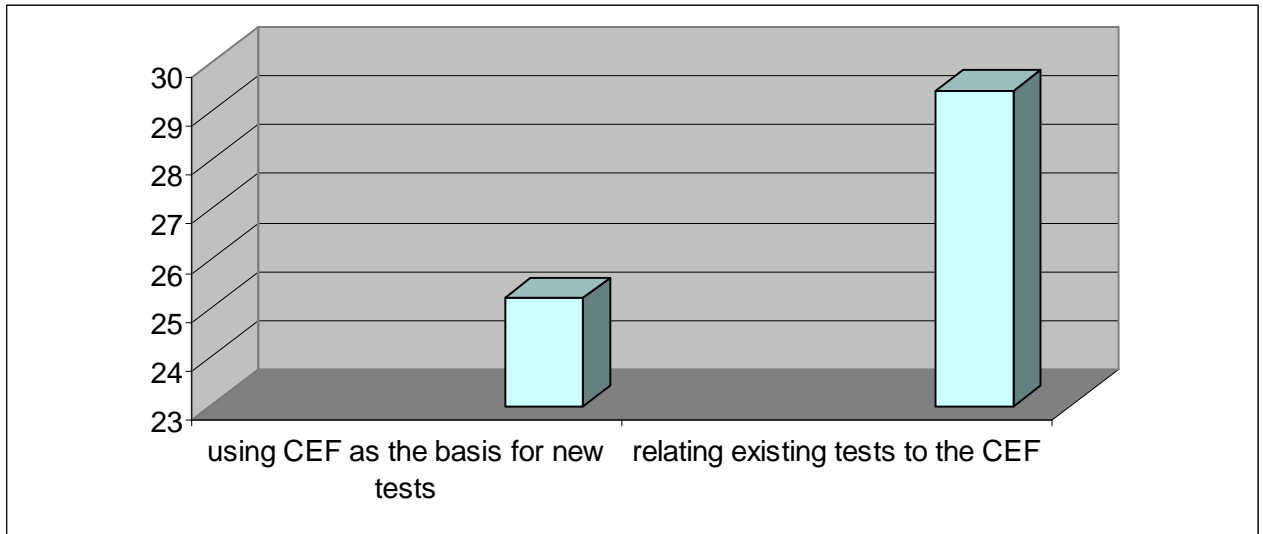
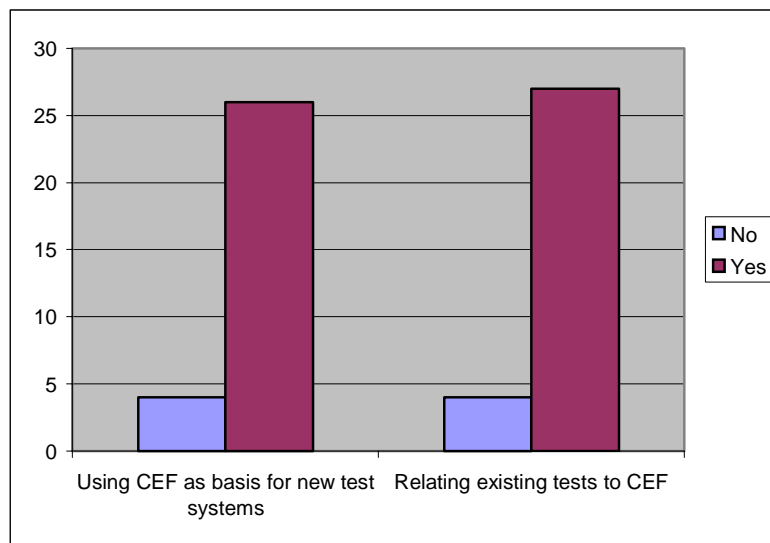


Figure 16: Perceived training needs regarding testing to the CEF



Tentative conclusions on experts' needs

Experts perceive themselves as being in need of training across the board. Areas of particular need are:

- Item writing, reviewing items or tests, making decisions about composition of tests
- Statistical analysis, setting pass marks, creating/maintaining item banks, doing validation research
- Relating existing tests to the CEF, using CEF as basis for new test systems.

Tentative conclusions

What this report reveals is limited, both by the size and representativeness of the dataset itself and by the fact that indicators of need are based on interpretations of both questions and answers, which may be flawed.

However, certain tendencies do emerge. The first is that the different stakeholders (teachers, teacher trainers and experts) all have needs, both assessed by what they claim to be doing without training, and by how they perceive their own needs. The first two groups seem to have similar needs, while experts have their own particular needs. Certain aspects and activities emerge as being priority areas. These tend generally to be the less traditional areas of assessment, such as portfolios, including ELP, and testing to the CEF. Since the survey was carried out to ultimately establish a basis for designing training events, the following implications for these may be as follows:

- Common training events could be designed for both teachers and teacher trainers
- These should aim to cover the needs revealed here as pressing; however, it is likely that more 'core' needs may exist for grass roots teachers (further investigation needed)
- A separate, specialist, training event would be necessary to cater for experts' needs.

As a final word, the results from a rather small follow-up survey (21 respondents spread quite evenly over 14 countries), carried out during the first EALTA conference in Slovenia, are considered. This survey was undertaken since the respondents from the main survey had answered questions on their own behalf, and it was uncertain how far they were typical representatives of their countries. Thus a questionnaire was made asking for information relating to the situation in respondents' countries. Table 3 shows a summary of the responses. The responses bear out, and provide some reasons for the needs revealed in the survey. While much of the language teaching community sees the need for training, little is offered in higher education/teacher training, and most teachers have little background other than practised-based for their LTA activities.

Table 3: responses from follow-up survey (21 respondents, 14 countries)

Are any formal courses in language assessment offered in higher education?	Yes: 19%	No: 71.4%	Don't know: 9.5%
How many teacher training institutions offer courses on language assessment?	At least half: 19%	Few: 47.6%	Don't know: 33.3%
How important a role does LTA play in training courses in your country?	Very : 4.8%	Not very: 76.2	Don't know:19%
Does the language teaching community believe that teachers should receive training in LTA?	Yes: 42.9%	No: 33.3%	Don't know :23.8%
What background in LTA do you think most teachers have?	Practice- only: 71.4%	Short course: 23.8%	Longer prof. training: 4.8%

The surveys, both main and follow up, despite their limitations, leave no doubt that there is a need, among all stakeholder groups, for more formal education and training in LTA, and that this, currently is not being catered for in European education systems.