

# Setting and Monitoring Professional Standards: a QMS approach

## Developing the ALTE code of Practice (1994)

Striving for fairness for stakeholders of the examinations  
The Code of Practice identifies the roles of three groups of stakeholder in the testing process:

- the examination **developers** – e.g. members of ALTE
- the examination **takers** – primary users – who take the examinations by choice, direction or necessity
- the examination **users** – secondary users – who require the examination for some decision-making or other purpose

## The Code of Practice lays down four broad areas of responsibility:

- developing examinations
- interpreting examination results
- striving for fairness
- informing examination takers

Striving for fairness is a shared responsibility involving all stakeholders

## The ALTE Principles of Good Practice

Based on VRIP features

- Validity
- Reliability
- Impact
- Practicality

Plus additional feature

- Quality of service

## Considerations for ALTE Members

The two aspects of quality needed to be considered:

- Better understanding of Principles of Good Practice – theoretical concerns and knowledge
- The practical application of the principles within each ALTE organisation
  - developing better systems
  - managing innovation and change
  - monitoring standards

## Features of QM Systems

- Effective initiatives for QMS usually involve:
- A public statement – often in the form of a Code of Practice or Charter
- A commitment to the change process typically involving the following steps:
  - Define your mission = role of institution, future ambitions/aims
  - Assess what you currently do
  - Identify areas in need of improvement
  - Decide on measures of improvement and the action plan
  - Carry out action to bring about improvement
  - Review progress and revise plan

## Applying an ALTE QMS (2000-05)

QMS approach:

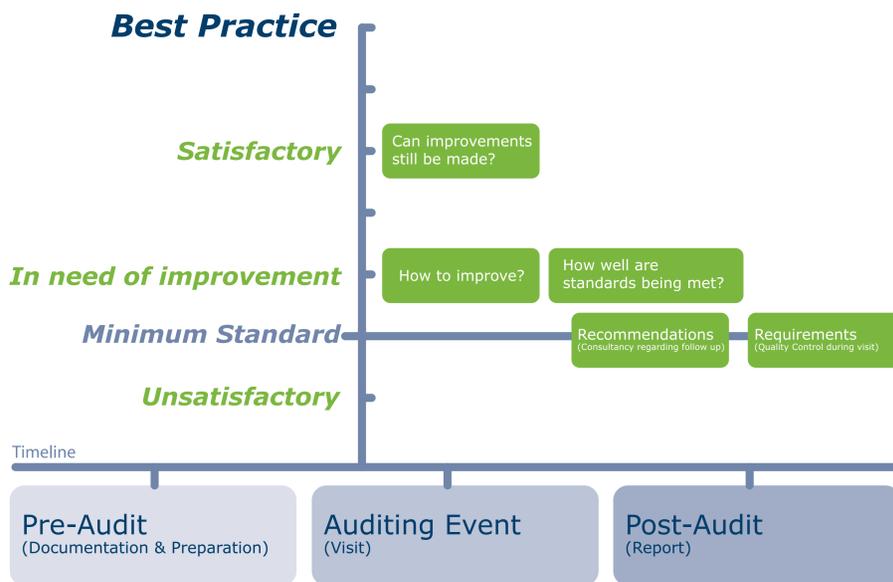
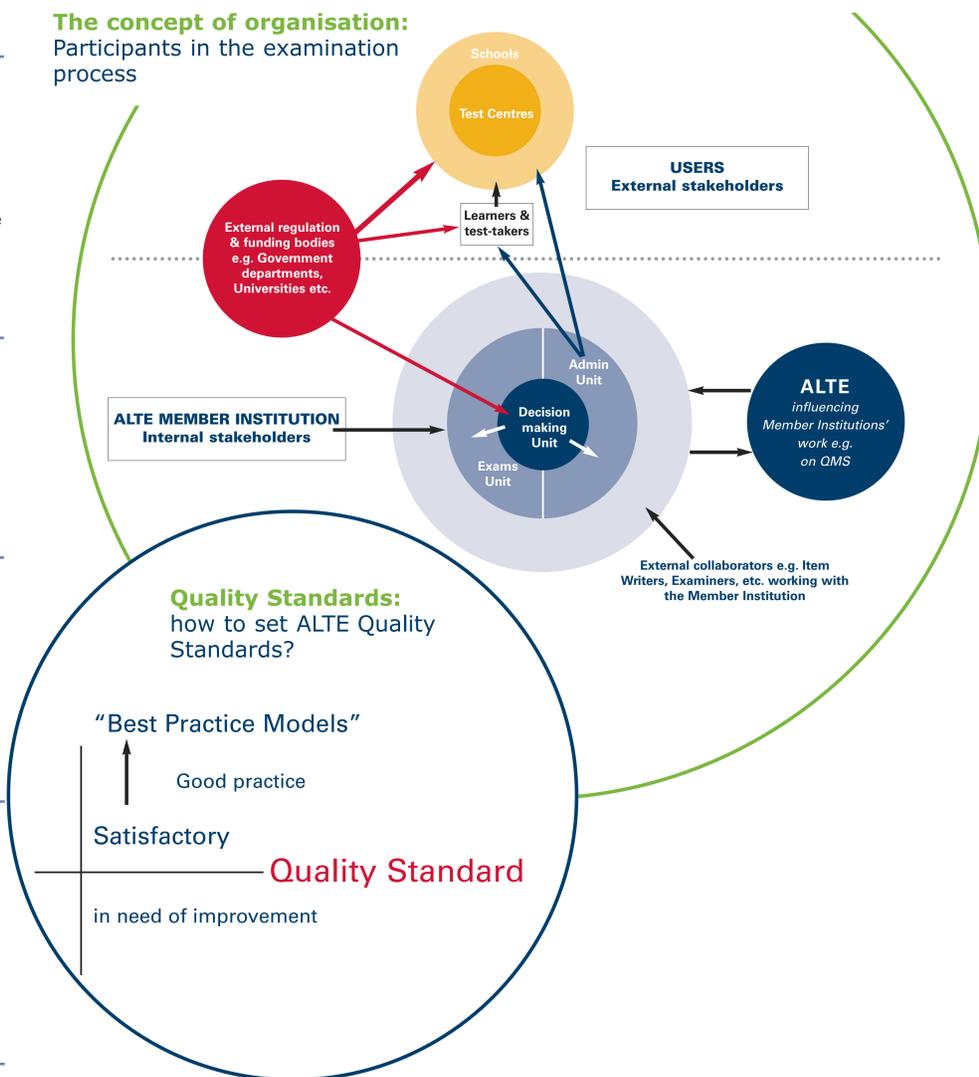
Seek to understand the nature of your "organisation" and to involve all participants

## Self-evaluation and quality improvement

Trends so far:

- Test Design and Construction
- Administration
- Processing – marking, grading, issue of results
- Analysis and Review

## The concept of organisation: Participants in the examination process



ALTE Code of Practice (CoP): the auditing process

## Procedures for Auditing: Aims and Approach (Pilot 2005)

The ALTE Code of Practice Procedures for Auditing derives from ongoing work on the Code of Practice and also draws on approaches to auditing adopted by EAQUALS and ISO 9001.

The formal external scrutiny of ALTE members' standards is the culmination of a long process of working towards establishing audited "quality profiles" across the ALTE framework of examinations.

The aim of the process is to allow ALTE members to make a formal, ratified claim that a particular test or suite of tests has a quality profile appropriate to the context and use of the test.

- Different tests are used in different contexts, by different groups of test users. There is no intention to impose a single set of uniform quality standards for all ALTE exams.
- Members requesting an audit of their quality systems and procedures are invited to build an argument that the quality standards within a test or suite of tests are sufficient and appropriate for that test or suite of tests.
- It is this argument which is the subject of the audit, rather than the organisation itself (which is often dealt with by other systems of regulation, e.g. ISO 9001, government regulators etc.)
- Each audit considers one test, suite of tests or testing system.
- The audit has both a consultancy and quality control role.
- The audit aims to establish that minimum quality standards are being met in a way that is appropriate to the context of a test, and also to offer recommendations towards best practice where, though quality standards are appropriate, there is still room for improvement.
- If quality standards are not being met, ALTE members will collaborate with the audited organisation to implement an action plan aimed at working towards and ultimately reaching the quality standards.

## Minimum standards for establishing Quality Profiles in ALTE examinations

The Quality Profile is created in each case, by explaining how the examination meets the following minimum standards, and by providing adequate evidence.

1		The examination is based on a theoretical construct, e.g. on a model of communicative competence.
2	Test construction	You can describe the purpose and context of use of the examination, and the population for which the examination is appropriate.
3		You provide criteria for selection and training of test constructors and expert judgement is involved both in test construction, and in the review and revision of the examinations.
4		Parallel examinations are comparable across different administrations in terms of content, stability, consistency and grade boundaries.
5		If you make a claim that the examination is linked to an external reference system (e.g. Common European Framework), you can provide evidence of alignment to this system.
6		All centres are selected to administer your examination according to clear, transparent, established procedures, and have access to regulations about how to do so.
7	Administration & Logistics	Examination papers are delivered in excellent condition and by secure means of transport to the authorized examination centres, your examination administration system provides for secure and traceable handling of all examination documents, and confidentiality of all system procedures can be guaranteed.
8		The examination administration system has appropriate support systems (e.g. phone hotline, web services etc).
9		You adequately protect the security and confidentiality of results and certificates, and data relating to them, in line with current data protection legislation, and candidates are informed of their rights to access this data.
10		The examination system provides support for candidates with special needs.
11	Marking & Grading	Marking is sufficiently accurate and reliable for purpose and type of examination.
12		You can document and explain how marking is carried out and reliability estimated, and how data regarding achievement of raters of writing and speaking performances is collected and analysed.
13	Test analysis	You collect and analyse data on an adequate and representative sample of candidates and can be confident that their achievement is a result of the skills measured in the examination and not influenced by factors like L1, country of origin, gender, age and ethnic origin.
14		Item-level data (e.g. for computing the difficulty, discrimination, reliability and standard errors of measurement of the examination) is collected from an adequate sample of candidates and analysed.
15	Communication with Stakeholders	The examination administration system communicates the results of the examinations to candidates and to examination centres (e.g. schools) promptly and clearly.
16		You provide information to stakeholders on the appropriate context, purpose and use of the examination, on its content, and on the overall reliability of the results of the examination.
17		You provide suitable information to stakeholders to help them interpret results and use them appropriately.

Ref. Piet van Avermaet, Henk Kuijper, Nick Saville (2004).

A Code of Practice and Quality Management System for International Examinations. LAQ 1: 2&3. Special Issue: The Ethics of Language Assessment. Guest Editor, Alan Davies.

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