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Occupation-Specific Language Assessments in Ontario: Report on Consultations

September 30, 2016

OCECCA
Implementation
and Evaluation
Project

TOUCI ISTONE
INSTITUTE
COMPETENCY EVALUATION EXPERTS

**COMMUNICATION
PROGRAM**

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Introduction

Between 2011 and 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) funded the Michener Institute of Applied Health Sciences to complete a project¹ that laid the groundwork for an accessible, inter-professional, full-service Ontario Centre of Excellence for Communication Competency Assessments (OCECCA).

In 2014, as part of the expansion of its services to internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs), Touchstone Institute (formerly the Centre for the Evaluation of Health Professionals Educated Abroad) established the Communication Program. The program is currently responsible for undertaking the follow-up to the OCECCA Project – a three-year OCECCA Implementation and Evaluation Project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (MCIIT) that is scheduled to complete in March 2017.

The Communication Program now serves as a hub for occupation-specific language assessments and other related resources and services for IEHPs and regulatory colleges and has begun to conduct research and tendered specialized consulting services.

The central component of the project, and the subject of this report, is the feasibility of transferring several occupation-specific language assessments for IEHPs already developed in Ontario to Touchstone Institute for administration through the Communication Program. Only health-related, occupation-specific language assessments that had been developed in accordance with appropriate test development principles and considered to have market potential (as identified in the OCECCA Project) were included.

This report will summarize the activities undertaken by the Communication Program in relation to the following occupation-specific language assessments:

1. Canadian English Language Benchmark for Nurses (CELBAN)
2. Optometric English Language Proficiency Exam (OELPE)
3. Michener English Language Assessment (MELA)
4. International Pharmacy Graduate Language Assessment (IPGLA)
5. Language Assessment in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (LAPOT)

Following a description of the project methodology and relevant background, a discussion on the outcomes of the consultations regarding the potential transfer of the tools listed above is provided. The report is concluded with a discussion of the current state, outcomes and findings from this consultation process.

¹ For more information, please see the [OCECCA project website](#).

Project Methodology

Methodology

In order to complete this project, the Touchstone Institute team completed the following activities:

1. Background research regarding the following:
 - a. Funding for the development of occupation-specific language assessments
 - b. Development details of each of the occupation-specific language assessments (year, process, whether language benchmarking was completed, the type of test that was developed)
 - c. Stakeholders involved
 - d. Usage of the tool since development
 - e. Current ownership of intellectual property and/or licensing
2. Consultations and negotiations with stakeholders
3. Analysis of stakeholder feedback and/or negotiations
4. Summary of progress: which occupation-specific language assessments may be able to be transferred, using which transfer model
5. Next steps for occupation-specific language assessments transfer

Roundtable Discussion Format

The roundtable discussion format was selected as the approach for the consultations and negotiations with stakeholders. This approach encourages participants to join in an equal exchange of information through dialogue. In this format, each person is given equal right to participate, as illustrated by the idea of a circular layout referred to in the term roundtable. Given the sensitivities around intellectual property, the team felt that, as much as possible, this would be the best format for the discussion.

The discussion model was, overall, successful. The roundtable format was effective in engendering knowledge exchange, an informed discussion and laying the groundwork for a strong stakeholder relationship. In the case where a roundtable discussion was not held, the consultation was completed through an online survey and subsequent teleconference with the lead organization.

Background

The Development of Occupation-Specific Language Assessments

The development of specific-purpose language assessments in Canada began in the early 1990s. The first instance of an occupation-specific language assessment to be used in a regulatory context was the development of a midwifery-specific language assessment.² This Government of Ontario initiative was soon followed by a broader, multi-jurisdictional initiative led by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) to develop an occupation-specific language assessment for nurses based on their national language proficiency framework (the Canadian Language Benchmarks, CLB). Following these early initiatives, there were several factors that contributed to the development of additional specific-purpose language assessments within Canada.

First, there has been an increasing emphasis on the challenges faced by internationally educated professionals (IEPs) seeking professional registration in Canada. In Ontario, initiatives to promote access to professions and trades (APT) for skilled immigrants began in the 1990s,³ following the recommendations of a Task Force on Access to Professions and Trades.

In the mid-2000s, four Canadian jurisdictions (Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia), with Ontario being the first,⁴ passed fairness legislation. These acts were designed to ensure that the registration requirements and processes of professional regulatory bodies, including those related to language proficiency, were transparent, objective, impartial and fair. The purpose of this legislation is to reduce and/or eliminate barriers to the professional registration of IEPs.

Significantly, this legislation also caused regulators to scrutinize their registration requirements and processes and often included developing or updating their language proficiency policies. In some cases regulators also questioned whether using standardized language tests, often designed for entry to post-secondary academic programs, was the best way of assessing an applicant's language skills to enter a profession in Canada, and considered whether a context- (profession-) specific assessment might be a more valid way to do this. This interest was substantiated by initiatives, both in Canada and in Australia, and in the academic literature in applied linguistics that specific-purpose language training and testing had benefits over general-purpose approaches.

In 2009, the federal government introduced the *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*.⁵ The *Framework*, developed by the provincial/territorial/federal Forum of Labour Market Ministers, had as its purpose "to articulate a new, joint vision for governments to take concerted action to improve the integration of immigrants and other internationally trained workers into the Canadian labour market."

² Mendelsohn, D., & Stewart, G. (1999). Developing the Midwives' Language Proficiency Test: A Field-specific Performance Test *ESP Malaysia*, Vol. 6.

³ The Access to Professions and Trades Unit of the Ontario government was established in 1995. For a full chronology of APT initiatives dating from 1967 to 2002 when Bill 189 – *Removal of Occupational Barriers Act* was first introduced as a private member's bill in the Ontario legislature. Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (March 28, 2003): *Chronology of Access to Professions and Trades Initiatives in Ontario*: <http://www.jswontario.org/upload/737/Prompt-%20Historical%20Paper%20and%20websites%200303.doc>.

⁴ The Ontario *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act* was passed in 2006 and can be found at: http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_06f31_e.htm.

⁵ Government of Canada, Forum of Labour Market Ministers. (2009). *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/credential_recognition/docs/pcf.pdf.

At the federal level, the Foreign Credential Recognition Program (FCRP)⁶ helps implement the *Framework* by providing funding to pan-Canadian projects designed to achieve the *Framework* goals.

With an increasing emphasis on access issues for IEPs, both the federal and provincial governments have made significant funding available to regulatory bodies, professional associations, certification bodies and post-secondary institutions to undertake research and develop new assessment tools to facilitate access for qualified IEPs. As part of this, a number of projects were funded to benchmark the language demands of specific professions and develop occupation-specific language assessments.

There has also been a significant amount of academic research undertaken regarding occupation-specific language assessments.⁷

An English-speaking jurisdiction that has been at the forefront of this innovation is Australia, where the Occupational English Test (OET)⁸ was developed and has been in use since the late 1990s. The impetus for developing the OET was the dissatisfaction of the government and regulators with the results of existing standardized English-language tests. The OET was developed as a communicative test contextualized to the assessment of candidate's English-language use within medical/health care settings. Over the last 20 years, the OET has been frequently reviewed and analyzed in the literature; McNamara (1996)⁹ gives a full account of the development of the test and associated validation research. The OET is currently administered every month in 29 countries around the world.

In the early 2000s, the federal government was reviewing ways to improve the Canadian immigration system, in particular to improve the labour market integration of skilled immigrants. As skilled immigrants to Australia have much better employment outcomes than in Canada, several studies were funded by the federal government to better understand the contributing factors to success.¹⁰ As revealed in the research: "Since 1999, Australia, in contrast [to Canada], has used research evidence to exclude economic category applicants at risk of poor employment outcomes at point of entry, by considerably expanding pre-migration English language testing and mandatory credential assessment, and awarding bonus points for high-demand occupations." These findings, including the successful and sustained use of the OET as part of the Australian immigration system, may have also bolstered interest in funding the development of occupation-specific language assessments in Canada.

Susan Boshier's research provides some support for the rationale for developing specific-purpose language assessments by focusing on the specific ways in which nurses, in contrast to doctors and other health care professionals and paraprofessionals, use English both in the clinical setting as well as in nursing education.¹¹ Dan Douglas' research focused on the value of specific-purpose language assessments in a number of health and non-health related professions. There are several specific-purpose English-language assessments that are used internationally, for example the BULATS (Business

⁶Foreign Credential Recognition Program web page: http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/credential_recognition/foreign/index.shtml.

⁷ Douglas, D. (2005). "Testing Language for Specific Purposes" in *Handbook of Second Language Research* Edited by Eli Hinkel.

⁸ The OET tests the following 12 professions: dentistry; dietetics; medicine; nursing; occupational therapy; optometry; pharmacy; physiotherapy; podiatry; radiography; speech pathology; and veterinary science. All four language domains are tested – listening, speaking, reading and writing – with an emphasis on contextualised communication for professional purposes. The Speaking and Writing sub-tests are specific to each profession, while the Listening and Reading sub-tests are common to all candidates. For more information about the OET, see: <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/>.

⁹ McNamara, T. (1996). *Measuring Second Language Performance*. Harlow, Essex, UK: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.

¹⁰ Hawthorne, L. (2008). The impact of economic policy on labour market outcomes for degree-qualified migrants in Canada and Australia. Institute for Research in Public Policy. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from: <http://irpp.org/research-studies/choices-vol14-no5/>.

¹¹ Boshier, S. (2013). English for nursing. In Paltridge, B., & Starfield, S. (Eds.), *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*.

Language Testing Service) and the ELPAC (English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication). Indeed, even the globally accepted TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) has the specific purpose of testing candidates' language skills for academic purposes.

In Canada, research undertaken in 2011 on behalf of the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Sciences (CSMLS) regarding the workforce integration of IEHPs underlined how important language skills are to professional integration and patient safety, and suggested that regulators "investigate the value of developing new tests designed to assess profession-specific language and communications skills."¹²

At the same time, language testers began to scrutinize these emerging assessments, particularly those used for high-stakes decisions such as professional licensure. In 2001, Tim McNamara argued that applied linguists' increased understanding of the social impact of language testing combined with more scientific construction of assessments necessitated that test developers and test users develop a new level of responsibility in their involvement with language testing.¹³ In an evaluative report of the ELPAC, Charles Alderson called for stronger practices in development and administration of high-stakes language assessments.¹⁴ An internal report commissioned by The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (The Alliance) applied these recommended practices: it enlisted a third-party evaluation of their recently developed language assessment for physiotherapists and occupational therapists.¹⁵

Emerging from this context, the OCECCA Project proposed to establish a centre of excellence that would implement only occupation-specific language assessments that had been validated and ensure the maintenance required for ongoing reliability and stakeholder trust.

The OCECCA Implementation and Evaluation Project

As an organization that works closely with regulators on the evaluation of internationally educated health professionals, Touchstone Institute is keenly aware of the importance of maintaining high standards in assessment. Ensuring reliability, validity and objectivity are standards set by the assessment community, espoused by the Office of the Fairness Commissioner and upheld by assessment institutions. As occupation-specific language testing is a requirement of some health care regulators (e.g., College of Nurses of Ontario, College of Respiratory Therapists, College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario, College of Radiation Laboratory Technologists of Ontario), and considering the critical role of communication in the safe practice of health professionals, Touchstone Institute has undertaken the OCECCA Implementation and Evaluation Project.

The following section provides an overview of five Canadian occupation-specific language assessments developed in recent years. These are the tests that Touchstone Institute has explored, and in two cases is already, or in the process of, administering as part of the OCECCA Implementation and Evaluation Project.

As of 2015, of the five occupation-specific language assessments examined by Touchstone Institute for this project, two are currently being administered and are accepted by health regulators as evidence of having met the language proficiency requirement of professional registration: the Canadian English

¹² CSMLS. (2011). *Workforce integration of IHEPs: On the perception that language and culture are impediments to workplace integration*. Retrieved from https://www.caot.ca/pdfs/WFI_Report_E.pdf.

¹³ McNamara, T. (2001). Language assessment as social practice: Challenges for research. *Language Testing*, 18(4) 333–349.

¹⁴ Alderson, Charles J. (2008). *Final report on a survey of aviation English tests*. Lancaster University.

¹⁵ Khaled, B., Stewart, G., & Strachan A. (March 2012). *Language assessment for physiotherapists and occupational therapists – LAPOT: Report on evidence of validity*. Internal report prepared for The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators.

Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN) and the Michener English Language Assessment (MELA). Both assessments had strong evidence of reliability and validity from test development research reports.

Another, the Optometric English Language Proficiency Exam (OELPE) has been used successfully within a bridging program to identify appropriate supports that might be required for non-native speakers of English entering the program. Like MELA, the OELPE is used for academic purposes, to determine applicants' language proficiency levels prior to entry into mainstream and bridging education programs for IEHPs. Unlike MELA, the OELPE is not currently used within the higher stakes purposes of professional registration.

Two other assessments, the LAPOT and IPGLA had undergone significant research studies related to test reliability and validity. However, these tools have remained dormant since this research was completed, and are therefore of interest to OCECCA. The LAPOT had been pilot tested and approved for use in bridging programs. An evaluation of the assessment's potential for use in a high stakes role determined that additional test development and validation should be undertaken. The IPGLA, on the other hand, underwent a thorough validation process. Concurrent validity with existing language proficiency exams used for licensure was established, and consultations with test takers and pharmacists led to confirmation of strong face and content validity¹⁶.

Proposed Transfer Models

One of the important steps in this project was to identify some of the potential transfer models that could be used to facilitate the transfer of administration of any of the assessments to Touchstone Institute. To this end, staff in the Communication Program identified four different options, from a full-transfer, where the Intellectual Property (IP) associated with the test, test administration and on-going quality assurance, maintenance and sustainability would be the full responsibility of Touchstone Institute, to a basic contract for test administration only.

The four options for assessment transfer are outlined as follows. These models informed subsequent discussions with occupation-specific language assessment stakeholders about the feasibility and possible option of transfer to Touchstone Institute.

Option 1: Full Exam Transfer to Touchstone Institute

- Intellectual Property (IP) purchase, if applicable
- Cost associated with exam transfer (legal fees, etc.)
- No financial support will be required by the test developer/owner
- Transition agreement is negotiated
- Ongoing partnership may be established
- Touchstone Institute becomes fully responsible for exam quality and sustainability

¹⁶ LCRT Consulting. (February 2010). *Pharmacy language assessment validation: Final report*. Internal report prepared for the International Pharmacy Graduate Program, Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Toronto.

Option 2: Partial Exam Transfer: Exam Administration transferred, gradual IP transfer (Touchstone Institute manages exam development and renewal)

- Negotiated agreement re. transfer of Intellectual Property (IP)
- Cost associated with partial exam transfer (legal fees, etc.), and ongoing agreements
- Financial support will be required by the test developer/owner
- Contract for test administration will be required
- Transition agreement is negotiated
- Ongoing partnership terms must be established
- Touchstone Institute and test developer/owner share responsibility for exam quality and sustainability

Option 3: Administrative Transfer: No IP Transfer, Test Development and renewal transferred

- Contract for test administration and research and development will be required
- Cost associated with administration contract (legal fees, etc.), and ongoing costs associated with test maintenance and development
- Test administration fees will go to Touchstone Institute to support test infrastructure
- Test developer/owner is responsible for exam quality and sustainability

Option 4: Administrative Transfer: No IP Transfer, No Test Development Transfer

- Contract for test administration will be required
- Cost associated with administration contract (legal fees, etc.), and ongoing agreements
- Test administration fees will go to Touchstone Institute to support test infrastructure
- Test developer/owner is responsible for exam quality and sustainability

Project Activities: Success and Progress

1. The Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN)

Current Status: *Language benchmarking completed. Tool developed and implemented. Currently used for entry and/or diagnostic purposes for entry into IEN bridging education programs and for high-stakes registration purpose.*

a) Development and Usage

CELBAN is an assessment tool designed to measure the English language proficiency of internationally educated nurses (IENs) seeking to enter the nursing profession in Canada. The development of CELBAN was undertaken by the Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (CCLB) in 2001 as a multi-year project. The CCLB owns CELBAN (intellectual property and license) and is responsible for its on-going maintenance.

CELBAN was created through the following:

- Completion of a feasibility study regarding the development of a nursing-specific English language assessment
- Language benchmarking of the language demands of nursing
- Development of the tool

CELBAN was first used in 2004 and the challenges associated with this implementation are well documented in the *Phase III: Implementation of CELBAN January – June 2004 Final Report*.¹⁷

From 2004 to 2014, CELBAN was administered by the Canadian English Language Assessment Services (CELAS) Centre at Red River College in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The CELAS Centre oversaw CELBAN test sessions across the country through their central office staffed by the equivalent of three full-time staff as well as speaking assessors and writing scorers hired on a contract basis. In 2013 CELBAN was available through post-secondary educational institutions and immigrant-serving agencies in eight locations, mainly across western Canada: Richmond, Surrey (BC); Calgary, Edmonton (AB); Regina, Saskatoon (SK); Winnipeg (MB); and Hamilton (ON).

There are two types of CELBAN tests: the Official CELBAN, which is administered for high-stakes registration purposes, and Institutional CELBAN, which is quite widely used by education institutions for entry into bridging education programs for IENs¹⁸. Official CELBAN has three versions, and their use is rotated through the Administration Sites in an effort to ensure that IENs who take the test repeatedly are tested using different versions. Institutional CELBAN is shorter and primarily used for diagnostic purposes in the context of educational programs.

CELBAN was accepted for several years by nursing regulators as one of a number of English language proficiency tests IENs could complete to meet the English language proficiency requirement. In 2011 the National Fluency Working Group (NFWG) of the Registered Nurses Registration Counterparts agreed that CELBAN and IELTS would become the only two English language proficiency assessments that would be accepted for the registration of nurses (including Licensed/Practical Nurses, Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners) in all jurisdictions (except Quebec) across Canada¹⁹. This appears to have increased demand for CELBAN, as can be seen by the annual administration numbers contained in a table in the following section.

b) Testing Feasibility of Implementation

In 2014 Touchstone Institute initially contacted the CCLB to make a request to become a CELBAN test site, and was directed to CELAS (the national test administrator at the time). Negotiations with CELAS were undertaken in 2014 to become a Toronto test site and for collaboration purposes with regard to test research and development for the CELBAN.

In August 2014 the CELBAN test owner, CCLB, terminated their contract for administration with CELAS and a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new national administrator was issued. Touchstone Institute responded to the CCLB's RFP and was ultimately the successful bidder. In September 2014 Touchstone Institute established a new national administrative centre - the CELBAN Centre at Touchstone Institute - in Toronto, in a transfer agreement similar to Option 2 of the identified transfer models.

¹⁷ Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (CCLB). *Phase III: Implementation of CELBAN, January – June 2004 final report*. Retrieved from [http://www.celban.org/celban/document_library/PHASE_III_final_public_report_3_\(10-05\).pdf](http://www.celban.org/celban/document_library/PHASE_III_final_public_report_3_(10-05).pdf).

¹⁸ CELBAN has been used by approximately 30 post-secondary institutions and other organizations such as the CARE Centre for Nurses and Mohawk College.

¹⁹ College of Nurses of Ontario. Fluency: A key element. *The Standard*, Winter 2010. Retrieved from: www.cno.org/Global/pubs/mag/TSMVol35No4.pdf.

Through Touchstone Institute the CELBAN test continues to be available through post-secondary educational institutions and immigrant-serving agencies²⁰ across Canada. Touchstone Institute currently administers approximately 500 assessments quarterly to IENs across Canada and is actively expanding to establish more test administration sites, including expansion in eastern Canada. Touchstone Institute is also undertaking on-going improvements to test content and administration procedures and a test impact study is underway.

These activities demonstrate success for the OCECCA Implementation and Evaluation Project given that the nursing profession is the largest health profession in Canada. Regulated nurses (registered nurses licensed/registered practical nurses and psychiatric nurses) are the largest group of health professionals within the paid healthcare workforce in Canada. In 2014 there were 383,949 regulated nurses in Canada²¹. To give an example of application numbers, in 2014 almost 4,000 IENs applied for registration in Ontario alone²².

While there has been widespread acceptance of CELBAN for several years, the “reach” of CELBAN was in the first few years modest in comparison to the number of IENs applying for registration in Canada. This may have been due in part to the fact that CELBAN was offered at a limited number of locations, with no sites in Toronto or anywhere in eastern Canada. Also, the decision by nursing regulators to recognize CELBAN as one of only two English language tests accepted as evidence of language fluency increased demand substantially.

Year	CELBAN Administrations
2007	516
2008	575
2009	722
2010	544
2011	574
2012	823
2013	1,148
2014	1,143
2015	1,985*

*first full year CELBAN administered by Touchstone Institute

²⁰ Immigrant Language & Vocational Assessment Referral Centre in Calgary, MacEwan University in Edmonton, St. Charles Adult Education Centre in Hamilton, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University in BC and Red River College in Winnipeg.

²¹ Canadian Institute for Health Information: Regulated Nurses. (2014). Retrieved from https://www.cihi.ca/en/nurses_2014_pubsum_en.pdf

²² College of Nurses of Ontario. *Applicants Summary 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.cno.org/globalassets/docs/general/applicantssummary.pdf>.

c) Results of Implementation

As of the end of 2015, Touchstone Institute was administering CELBAN at seven sites across Canada:

- Vancouver, BC: Ashton College
- Calgary, AB: Immigrant Language and Vocational Assessment – Referral Centre (ILVARC)
- Edmonton, AB: MacEwan University, Alberta College Campus
- Winnipeg, MB: Winnipeg English Language Assessment and Referral Centre (WELARC) and Red River College
- Toronto, ON: Touchstone Institute
- Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan

In 2016, Touchstone Institute added two additional testing sites in the west (Vancouver and Winnipeg) to address the demand for tests in those regions and an additional test site is planned for Halifax, which will represent the first time ever that CELBAN will be available in eastern Canada.

On January 1, 2015, there were 41 CELBAN speaking assessors. Over the course of the year, Touchstone Institute trained 31 new speaking assessors across four provinces. Touchstone Institute now has access to more than 90 Certified CELBAN speaking assessors, which represents an 80% increase over the year.

The Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (CCLB) remains the proprietor of the IP associated with CELBAN and Touchstone Institute pays a percentage fee to the CCLB on a quarterly basis.

Becoming the national administrator entailed the establishment, by Touchstone Institute, of the infrastructure to deliver CELBAN across Canada, including establishing test sites, scheduling, online registration and payment, data collection, reporting mechanisms and the training of a roster of skilled assessors. It is anticipated that in future this infrastructure may allow economies of scale and that it can be leveraged to allow for the administration of other occupation-specific language assessments across Canada.

2. Optometric English Language Proficiency Exam (OELPE)

Current Status: *No language benchmarking done. Tool developed and implemented. Currently used for low-stakes diagnostic purposes (to determine whether additional language training required) as part of entry into bridging education program.*

a) Development and Usage

The OELPE was initially developed as the Canadian English Language Assessment for Optometrists (CELAO) by the English Language Institute at Renison University College, University of Waterloo.²³ This was undertaken in partnership with the School of Optometry when the school developed the International Optometry Bridging Program (IOBP)²⁴ in 2007. Of the tools being reviewed for the project, this is the only

²³ Julia Williams. *The Canadian English Language Assessment for Optometrists* (undated). Retrieved November 20, 2011, from: http://atwork.settlement.org/downloads/atwork/Breakout_23&32_Julia_Williams_Optomtric_Assessment_tool.pdf.

²⁴ See website of the International Optometric Bridging Program (IOBP) at: <https://uwaterloo.ca/international-optometric-bridging-program/>.

one that was developed independently, without government funding. It emerged organically as a need within the program, which was addressed by the Language Training Centre.

The original intention was to develop enhanced language training, not a language test. However, it was determined that an assessment would be useful to initially identify the specific English language training needs of IOBP participants. The assessment is currently used as part of the IOBP, but not as a screening tool. The assessment identifies the language strengths and weaknesses of IOBP participants and indicates where more language skill development is required. The language learning opportunities provided are designed to enhance the overall effectiveness of learning within the IOBP.

Participants undergo the OELPE at entry to the IOBP. Most participants requiring additional language supports are involved in the IOBP II, which is a one-year bridging program.²⁵ All IOBP II participants initially undergo two weeks of intensive language training. Language supports are also provided throughout the entire five months of theoretical and laboratory training that occurs at the beginning of the program. In the laboratory setting, an English language teacher provides support and instruction alongside an optometry professor. Some IOBP II participants needing additional English language skills development are also directed to participate in an evening English class throughout this five-month period. The language skills of IOBP participants are then assessed again prior to their externship (clinical) placement.

The IOBP is offered every two years and the number of participants is relatively small (11 – 13 participants in each cohort of IOBP II participants).

b) Testing Feasibility of Implementation

From February to December 2014, Touchstone Institute undertook outreach and discussions with the OELPE test owners (Renison University College at the University of Waterloo) about the potential to have the OELPE transferred to Touchstone Institute. There were a number of reasons why these discussions were initiated:

Touchstone Institute was undertaking the development of the Internationally Graduated Optometrist Evaluating Exam (IGOEE),²⁶ which was slated to replace the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) previously used to determine eligibility for placement in the IOBP. Since Touchstone Institute was developing expertise in working with the profession, it made sense to offer an occupation-specific language assessment for optometry delivered at the same site and, if possible, in conjunction with the IGOEE. In summary, reasons for Touchstone Institute to house the OELPE are outlined below:

- There was a need to review and identify updates required to the OELPE and Touchstone Institute had the expertise in competency-based language assessment to do this.
- Renison University College at the University of Waterloo has had some concerns about any potential conflict of interest in being the OELPE administrator and the provider of language instruction and bridging education. For this reason it was felt that it would be better to have an objective third-party agency undertake the assessment of internationally educated optometrists.

In March 2014, Touchstone Institute signed an agreement with Renison University College to begin the review of the OELPE. From February to September 2015, Touchstone Institute undertook and completed

²⁵ IOBP I is a four-month program for internationally educated optometrists who have been assessed as having optometry education and skills that require them to complete a much shorter orientation to optometry practice in Canada.

²⁶ Touchstone Institute began administering the IGOEE in June 2015. See <http://www.touchstoneinstitute.ca/competency-assessment/igoee.aspx>.

the OELPE Review Project. In October 2015, the next steps needed to renew the test were clearly outlined with the test owner and discussions were undertaken to have the OELPE transferred to Touchstone Institute.

c) Results of Consultations

As of January 2016, a process for OELPE transfer from the University of Waterloo was outlined and agreed upon. In 2016, the OELPE will be transferred to Touchstone Institute in its entirety (Option 1 of the identified transfer models), will be revised by Touchstone Institute and will become an additional test offered to internationally educated optometrists as part of the Communication Program.

3. Michener English Language Assessment (MELA)

Current Status: *Language benchmarking for the profession not completed. Tool developed, validated and implemented. Currently used for high-stakes purpose (minimum score required) for entry into bridging education programs and professional registration purposes.*

a) Development and Usage

MELA was developed in 2004 as a language assessment that measures English language communication skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking using the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB).²⁷ MELA is set in the context of health care and is used by The Michener Institute as a pre-requisite for entry into their health care programs²⁸ for internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs). For entry into Michener Institute programs, IEHPs must obtain a MELA score of 8 (equivalent to CLB 8) in each of the four skill areas. MELA is administered over four hours and comprises four subtests: **Speaking Interview (30 minutes); Listening (45 minutes); Reading (1 hour) and; Writing (1 hour).**

A MELA validation project was completed in 2009 for the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Health Sciences (CSMLS).²⁹ This research informed the establishment of acceptable cut scores for MELA, as well as IELTS and TOEFL (iBT), for the regulator's entry-to-practice requirements. This research convinced the stakeholder health regulatory colleges of the validity of MELA and regulatory colleges began accepting MELA results for the purpose of professional registration.

The five health regulatory organizations that accept MELA as evidence of English language proficiency are:

- Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Health Sciences (CSMLS)³⁰
- College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario (CMLTO)
- College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario (CRTO)

²⁷ LCRT Consulting and Access and Options for Internationally Educated Health Professions. *Development of an occupation specific language assessment for health science professions, based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2005.* <http://www.proverbia.ca/docs/may6.18.pdf>.

²⁸ The Michener Institute of Education at UHN offers education in a number of health professions, including respiratory therapy, radiological technology, medical laboratory technology and chiropractic.

²⁹ CSMLS. (March 2009). *Language proficiency testing for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists: Validating Cut scores and a new testing tool.* Retrieved November 30, 2011, from: http://www.csmls.org/images/csmls/Publications_and_Research/Research/CSMLS_Project_Report_to_Ministry_-_Final.pdf.

³⁰ CSMLS is the national certifying body for medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants (MLAs). CSMLS sets the national standard for certification of MLTs and MLAs recognized by all Canadian regulatory bodies (except Quebec) and sets and administers the national examinations.

- College of Medical Radiation Technologists of Ontario (CMRTO)
- College of Massage Therapists of Ontario (CMTO)

MELA has undergone significant study. Another MELA validation project, entitled *Fair and Effective Language Assessment for Internationally Educated Allied Health Professionals* and funded by MCI, began in 2009 and was completed at the end of 2011. The Michener Institute was the lead organization for this project and the research was completed by LCRT Consulting. This project included revisions to MELA and its re-launch in early 2012.

Other research initiatives by CSMLS and CMRTO provided additional evidence for the validity of the tool. Both projects worked to set defensible cut-scores for their respective language policies. The resulting reports provided equivalent cut scores for three language proficiency tests: TOEFL, IELTS and MELA.³¹

As a result of these various studies and the different uses of MELA test results, there are a range of cut score requirements depending on the context.

The Michener Institute is the sole administrator of MELA. LCRT Consulting³² has had an ongoing service agreement to administer MELA for The Michener Institute since its development. The Michener Institute owns MELA and provides significant in-kind support for its administration, including registration services, payment processing, booking the time and assessment space to administer MELA and the provision of the results to candidates. LCRT Consulting is contracted to provide experienced and trained assessors to administer MELA and complete the assessments, and has also maintained the test over the years. Assessments are conducted only at The Michener Institute's site in downtown Toronto.

The number of test administrations and the number of test-takers annually over the most recent three years is as follows:

Year	Number of MELA administrations	Number of individual test-takers
2013	15	103
2014	9	92
2015	7	58

As indicated in a previous section, individuals attempting MELA included those completing it for one of the following:

- Admission to a full-time Michener education program
- Admission to a bridging education program for IEHPs
- Professional registration

³¹ CSMLS. (March 2009). *Setting language proficiency standards for accreditation in health care professions*. Retrieved from https://csmls.org/csmls/media/documents/publications/reports/Standard_Setting_How_to_Guide_-_Final_-_March_31.pdf.

³² For more information, please see <http://www.themela.com/>.

b) Testing Feasibility of Implementation

Touchstone Institute undertook a roundtable discussion with MELA stakeholders (see Appendix 2) on November 24, 2015. At this session, stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the current administration of MELA, but also indicated that few of their applicants for registration use it. As many IEHPs begin the registration process pre-arrival, or must provide evidence of language proficiency for the purpose of immigration, the majority complete tests such as IELTS or TOEFL before arriving in Canada and submit these test results to the regulator with their application.

In order to fully explore the possibility of having MELA administration transferred to Touchstone Institute, a follow-up discussion was also held at The Michener Institute on December 15, 2015. At that meeting there was some discussion of whether a pilot project could be undertaken to see if MELA could be delivered as a pilot by Touchstone Institute in other Canadian jurisdictions.

c) Results of Consultations

Touchstone Institute tested the feasibility of offering MELA in western Canada by working with the CSMLS to identify possible number internationally educated medical laboratory technologist (IEMLT) applicants in the west. CSMLS data indicated that in 2015 only seven clients required language testing; of those, only two were in the west. This would indicate that there is no need outside of Ontario at this time.

At the December 2015 meeting, it was clear that having MELA offered at The Michener Institute offers several benefits to their students, many of whom are international applicants, and it also supports the Michener's bridging initiatives. It also makes it possible for The Michener Institute to provide a service to its regulator partners.

Therefore, the conclusion was that there would be no benefit to IEHPs by transferring MELA administration to Touchstone Institute and such a move might be less convenient and offer less of an integrated service pathway for Michener students entering bridging or full-time health sciences programs.

4. International Pharmacy Graduate Language Assessment (IPGLA)

Current Status: Test developed and validated. Language benchmarking completed. Test implemented as part of the Enhanced Language Training program, currently inactive.

a) Development and Usage

The development of a language assessment tool for international pharmacy graduates (IPGs) was preceded by a significant effort within the bridging program to address language and communication skills of IPGs. Austin and Rocchi Dean (2004) wrote about the importance of language instruction and assessment within the bridging program for international pharmacy graduates (IPG): "A key finding of the IPG program is the importance of embedding ESP language supports throughout the curriculum, and providing additional time and resources to support learning of both clinical competencies and language skills. A vital component of the curriculum is the partnering of pharmacist teaching assistants and English language teachers, and the development of formative and summative assessment models that allow input from both."³³

³³ Austin, Z. & Rocchi Dean, M. (2004). Development of a curriculum for foreign-trained pharmacists seeking licensure in Canada. *Pharmacy Education*, 4(3/4), 143–151.

Having determined that a full Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) intended on measuring language skills and communication competence was too expensive and onerous³⁴, the IPG program looked at developing an occupation-specific language assessment for this purpose, and work was undertaken to develop a pharmacy-specific language assessment. The development of the IPGLA was a project led by the University of Toronto and funded by MCI. The project built on the expansive body of research already completed for the PLA tool, including a language benchmarking analysis. LCRT Consulting developed two versions of the IPGLA in 2006 and the assessment was intended to be used as part of University of Toronto's International Pharmacy Graduate (IPG) Bridging Program.

An IPGLA validation study was completed in early 2010 that compared average test-taker performance at different IELTS bands to corresponding IPGLA test scores. This comparison was intended to inform the process of choosing the appropriate IPGLA cut score for IPG Program admission. Based on IELTS band 7 across all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), the corresponding IPGLA score (reported as a CLB) was determined, as shown in the table that follows.

Language Skill	CLB
Speaking	9
Listening	9
Reading	8
Writing	8

In addition to this, in June 2010, the CCLB approached the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) and proposed a joint project to develop national language benchmarks for pharmacy. Funding from the Foreign Credential Recognition Program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) was provided to the CCLB to work with NAPRA to benchmark the language demands (in French and English) of both pharmacy occupations (pharmacists and pharmacy technicians) in Canada.

The final report was completed in November 2011.³⁵ It provides information on the benchmarks of speaking, listening, reading and writing tasks used by pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in Canada. The work was not validated by NAPRA members and therefore no specific initiatives have been planned to develop a profession-specific language assessment for pharmacy professions nationally based on this work. This opens the possibility for the IPGLA to act as a potential tool to be implemented nationally.

While IPGLA was developed in close collaboration with stakeholders and was favourably reviewed, it is not currently being used. In Ontario, this is due to changes in the entry requirements for the IPG bridging program. Candidates are now required to meet the Ontario College of Pharmacists' (OCP's) language proficiency requirement³⁶ as a pre-requisite to entry. There were also unresolved sustainability issues regarding implementation and ongoing maintenance of the IPGLA assessment.

³⁴ Austin Z., Galli M., & Diamantouros A. (2003). Development of a prior learning assessment for pharmacists seeking licensure in Canada. *Pharmacy Education*, 3, 87–96

³⁵ LCRT Consulting. (February 2010). *Pharmacy language assessment validation: Final report*. Internal report prepared for the International Pharmacy Graduate Program, Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Toronto.

³⁶ The OCP requires applicants to meet the common national language proficiency requirements, established by NAPRA in 2006, and revised in 2014. While each Canadian pharmacy regulator has their own policy regarding how applicants may meet this requirement, the acceptable scores for language assessment tests are common and IPGs providing language assessment test results do so through the Gateway. The NAPRA language proficiency requirements can be found at: http://napra.ca/Content_Files/Files/Language_Proficiency_Requirements_for_Licensure_Pharmacist_June_2014_b.pdf.

Many stakeholders involved in the benchmarking project were also involved in the IPGLA work, so there may be willingness and/or opportunities for future work to implement a profession-specific language assessment to be used as part of the assessment for IPGs entering bridging programs or applying for licensure.

The University of Toronto currently owns the IPGLA blueprint and tool.

b) Testing Feasibility of Implementation

Touchstone Institute held a roundtable consultation with IPGLA stakeholders on February 22, 2016. This discussion was extremely helpful in bringing all parties up to date on past IPGLA development activities and the significant changes that have been implemented in the registration requirements and processes for IPGs over the past few years. These changes include the following:

- Opening of the Pharmacists' Gateway Canada³⁷ as the single entry point for IPGs applying to register in Canada, as of August 2014
- Implementation, in July 2015, of a revised language proficiency policy of the Ontario College of Pharmacists,³⁸ which now allows IPGs to meet the language proficiency requirement through completion of a number of standardized language proficiency tests, but also includes the option for applicants to provide non-objective evidence of language proficiency (e.g., evidence of successful completion of education or work experience in English or French)
- An initiative by the Ontario College of Pharmacists to introduce the Practice Assessment of Competency at Entry (PACE)³⁹ to eventually replace the Structured Practical Training (SPT) requirement of registration
- Recent changes to the format and delivery of the International Pharmacy Graduate (IPG) program at the University of Toronto (move to online delivery, changes engendered by revised registration regulation that makes completion of the bridging program mandatory for some IPG applicants, introduction of PACE rather than SPT etc.)
- Introduction of the PharmD (Doctor of Pharmacy) program at the University of Toronto, with the first students in this program graduating in 2015.

While these educational and regulatory developments are not all directly relevant to language testing and potential uses of IPGLA, it is clear that the pharmacy profession has undergone very significant changes. Also, it is clear that regulatory and educator stakeholders have devoted significant financial and human resources to these initiatives at both the provincial and pan-Canadian levels for the last several years.

The roundtable meeting served to re-enliven the discussion about the significant work that had gone into the development and validation of the IPGLA. There was broad agreement among the stakeholders on a few issues:

- IPGLA would need to be reviewed and updated in order to be used now, regardless of any future re-purposing.

³⁷ <http://www.pharmacistsgatewaycanada.ca/>

³⁸ Ontario College of Pharmacists. Language proficiency requirements for pharmacists. Retrieved from <http://www.ocpinfo.com/registration/training-exams/language-proficiency/language-pharmacists/>.

³⁹ Ontario College of Pharmacists. Practice assessment of competency at entry (PACE). Retrieved from <http://www.ocpinfo.com/about/key-initiatives/pace/>.

- Ontario College of Pharmacists and/or University of Toronto would likely be the incubator for any future IPGLA developments due past involvement and the significant number of IPGs applying for registration in the province.
- Given the introduction of the national Gateway, future uses for IPGLA should ideally be brought to NAPRA for discussion and approval.

Some ideas that were generated regarding potential future use of the IPGLA included:

- Using it as a self-assessment tool as part of the Gateway. The Gateway currently has two self-assessment tools: 1. to assess readiness and provide information on what it means to be a pharmacist in Canada; and 2. to assess pharmacy skills and practice, via case studies.
- Revising IPGLA in order to offer it online, with the interview portion via Skype or some sort of videoconferencing tool.
- Having new PACE assessors review IPGLA as subject matter experts and evaluate the authenticity of tasks, etc.
- Identifying a business case for use of IPGLA – to administer at the provincial level and/or at the national level.
- Re-purposing IPGLA for use with pharmacy technicians.
- Re-purposing IPGLA for education purposes; for example, as part the enhanced Canadian pharmacy skills curriculum of the IPG program, specifically as part of the skills check conducted on the first and last day of the course.
- Acceptance of IPGLA as a non-objective proof of language proficiency in order to meet OCP's registration requirement.
- Using it for professional development for communication competency for the PACE assessors.

c) Results of Consultations

Stakeholders agreed that they would like to continue the discussion regarding possibilities for bringing IPGLA up-to-date and into usage for any of the purposes indicated above with the caveat that much additional development would be required in order to bring the tool up-to-date. Stakeholders were also very positive about the potential for Touchstone Institute to be able to facilitate these discussions and/or provide expertise in renewing or re-purposing the tool.

The consultations did ascertain that transferring IPGLA to Touchstone Institute is not feasible or desirable for several reasons. Firstly, the intellectual property for the tool will remain with the University of Toronto, where there is potential for repurposing it as a supplementary service for the International Pharmacy Program. Secondly, it was determined the need for such a test would be low given in 2015 only 40 applicants to the OCP were required to provide evidence of language proficiency, be it objective or non-objective evidence.

The Communication Program will continue to facilitate a discussion among stakeholders to identify further needs in this area, in particular in reference to pharmacy technicians.

5. Language Assessment in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (LAPOT)

Current Status: *Language benchmarking completed and test developed. Assessment validated for low-stakes use but not validated or approved for high-stakes application, such as professional registration. Never implemented.*

a) Development and Usage

The LAPOT project began in 2009 led by the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy regulators (the Alliance) in partnership with the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario (COTO) and the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario (CPO). First, a language benchmarking exercise was completed in June 2010 by the CCLB that established that language demands in both professions are comparable. As a result of this work, it was determined that the following benchmarks appropriately reflected the language tasks associated with the typical job tasks of physiotherapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT):

Language Skill	CLB
Speaking	8
Listening	8
Reading	9
Writing	8

Based on the benchmarks, an online profession-specific language assessment tool, called the Language Assessment in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (LAPOT), was developed. The LAPOT tool is entirely computer-based. All four language domains (reading, writing, listening and speaking) can be tested virtually via a series of audio/video simulations and recording and other assessment events. The results of the assessment may then be accessible anywhere in Canada by an assessor who can review the submission and evaluate a candidate's performance based on a standardized scoring rubric. Six subject matter experts (i.e., OT and PT practitioners) were involved in the LAPOT development to ensure that content included was grounded in the modern, day-to-day practice environment.

Alpha and beta testing were undertaken to help ensure the overall validity and reliability of the tool using "real life" subjects. This proved the tool is reliable and valid for determining an applicant's language capabilities (level, areas of strength and weakness) and identifying areas of concern in reference to professional communication competencies. The regulatory bodies involved in the project wanted to know whether the assessment could be used defensibly as part of the professional registration process. A feasibility study was therefore commissioned.

The feasibility study, completed in 2011, resulted in three recommendations:

1. An expert opinion should be sought to determine whether the test was ready for use for high-stakes purposes, such as professional registration.
2. The tool could be used for low-stakes diagnostic purposes, such as determining an applicant's language capabilities (level, areas of strength and weakness) before he/she entered a bridging education program.
3. The scores on the standardized language proficiency tests (such as TOEFL, IELTS, CANTest) already accepted by OT and PT regulators should be revised, based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks study conducted as part of the test development process.

As a follow-up to these recommendations, a formal tool evaluation project was commissioned in 2012, and the results indicated that before LAPOT could be used as a standardized, high-stakes assessment for professional registration, additional review, analysis and validation research needed to be carried out.⁴⁰

Around that time, the physiotherapy credentialing requirements, in particular, were increased to make them more comparable to that of other professions. A study⁴¹ commissioned by physiotherapy regulators established a link between language proficiency level and performance on the licencing exam. The Alliance Board believed that by increasing language proficiency requirements, the internationally educated candidates taking the licencing exam had a greater likelihood of passing and integrating into the profession in Canada. The Alliance increased the proficiency levels required of international applicants and decreased the number and type of language assessment tools acceptable for credentialing purposes.

Although the project partners continue to be supportive of the initiative, a number of factors have posed challenges to the implementation of LAPOT. These included:

- On bequest of the Alliance, a language testing expert group reviewed LAPOT and determined that the tool required further development and validation before it could not be used for high-stakes purposes. The level of resourcing required to complete the validation work was beyond The Alliance's capacity at the time.
- The number of internationally educated occupational therapists and physiotherapists who would require an English language proficiency exam numbered approximately 40-50 annually, making the possibility of administering the test on a cost recovery basis a challenge for any organization that takes on the project.
- The Alliance Board felt quite strongly that increasing the TOEFL and IELTS requirements to levels comparable to CLB 8/9 levels was sufficient to address language assessment needs.
- Over time, champions from each of the organizations involved in the project left their positions in the organizations or became less involved due to other priorities.
- The vast majority of IEPTs and IEOTs seeking credentialing are still in their home countries. Regulators are unsure about the benefit in implementing a language assessment that could be accessed only in Canada instead of relying on the easy-to-access and relatively inexpensive assessment tools already available overseas (such as the IELTS or TOEFL).

As the LAPOT project ended, the Ontario PT bridging program had just been transferred from Ryerson University to the University of Toronto, so it was just becoming established; the University of Alberta program had not yet begun. As a result, neither of these programs were quite "ready" to take on the use and validation of LAPOT. The LAPOT is an assessment appropriate for this low stakes context, and its implementation for this purpose could still be considered if technical and intellectual property issues can be addressed.

⁴⁰ Barkaoui, K., Stewart, G., & Strachan, A. (2012). *Language assessment for physiotherapists and occupational therapists – LAPOT: Report on evidence of validity*. Confidential Internal Report Prepared for The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators.

⁴¹ NRG Research Group. (August 2, 2011). *Assessment of English language test outcomes in relation to licensing exam outcomes*. A study commissioned by the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, and the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia.

The LAPOT tool was hosted online by a private company called ThinkingCap,⁴² and therefore delivery was dependent on having an agreement on service and upkeep with this organization. As time has passed since the initial development of the tool, the delivery platform would now need to be upgraded to current technical standards, requiring further resource investments.

b) Testing Feasibility of Implementation

Touchstone Institute endeavored to organize a round-table discussion with LAPOT stakeholders, including representatives from occupational therapy and physiotherapy regulatory bodies and bridging education programs and the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (as listed in Appendix 2). However, this proved very difficult to achieve for various logistical reasons; therefore, a different approach was adopted: an online survey was sent to all stakeholders and a web conference was held with the CEO of The Alliance.

The survey and web conference were focused on exploring the following issues:

- Gaining a better understanding of the challenges that had prevented the LAPOT from being implemented
- Gaining more understanding from stakeholders who had been involved in the development and testing of LAPOT regarding their sense of the strengths and utility of the tool
- Gauging whether the bridging education programs might be interested in using it for low-stakes (diagnostic) purposes
- Understanding the feasibility and potential costs, intellectual property issues regarding bringing this tool up to date (content, platform) to enable administration
- Determining whether there might be a role for the Communication Program at Touchstone Institute to be involved in LAPOT administration

c) Results of Consultations

The survey responses were very informative. While many of the individuals initially involved with LAPOT development have moved into other roles, those who had been subject matter experts or who had beta-tested the tool felt that it was a well-developed tool with relevant content. However, OT and PT bridging education program representatives expressed the following:

- The tool was far too lengthy (four hours) to be useful as an entry assessment in their program.
- The use of standardized English language assessments (IELTS, TOEFL) is satisfactory for determining entry into the physiotherapy education programs.
- There is no great need for a specific-purpose language assessment for internationally educated physiotherapists and occupational therapists at this time; the greater need is for educational tools to develop profession-specific communications skills within bridging education programs.
- LAPOT might be useful to have available as a diagnostic and/or skills development tool.
- McMaster University, which runs the Occupational Therapy Examination and Practice Preparation Program (OTepp) has developed its own tool – the McMaster Assessment of Comprehension and Communication – for use in its program, and therefore does not foresee a use for LAPOT.

⁴² Website: <http://www.thinkingcap.com/>.

Discussion with The Alliance was also very enlightening and revealed contextual information that explained why the LAPOT had not been implemented (see “Testing Feasibility of Implementation” section). Now that a number of The Alliance priority challenges, such as revising the credentialing process, have been successfully addressed, there might be some interest by The Alliance Board of Directors in taking another look at and perhaps re-purposing the LAPOT tool. Some possibilities might include making the content available to bridging education programs for use as part of the communications curricula or making the tool available online as a pre-arrival orientation resource for IEPTs and IEOTs who are considering migrating to Canada.

At this time there appears to be no need for, or possibility of, having the LAPOT administered as an assessment tool or transferred to Touchstone Institute. One positive result of Touchstone Institute's discussions with The Alliance was an agreement by The Alliance to share the physiotherapy occupational therapy language benchmarking report completed as part of the LAPOT project. This will be very valuable to add to the body of knowledge being gathered by the Communication Program regarding occupation-specific language assessments.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The purpose of this project was to determine the feasibility of transferring the following occupation-specific language assessments for IEHPs to Touchstone Institute for administration through the Communication Program:

1. Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN)
2. Optometric English Language Proficiency Exam (OELPE)
3. Michener English Language Assessment (MELA)
4. International Pharmacy Graduate Language Assessment (IPGLA)
5. Language Assessment in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (LAPOT)

Before and throughout this consultation process, three of these assessments were in use and actively administered. CELBAN and MELA are accepted by health regulatory bodies as evidence to meet the language proficiency requirement of professional registration and by post-secondary educational institutions for entry into bridging education programs. OELPE is being used for diagnostic purposes such as determining English language learning needs upon entry into the University of Waterloo optometric bridging education program. IPGLA and LAPOT were inactive and since their development had never been fully implemented for either regulatory or educational purposes.

Results

CELBAN: The transfer of the administration of CELBAN to Touchstone Institute has been a tremendous success. Touchstone Institute has been able to:

- Develop a national administrative infrastructure for registration, payments, data collection etc. that now has the potential to be used for the administration of other occupation-specific language assessments
- Expand delivery capacity and increase the total number of IEN test-takers
- Begin steps to open test centres in eastern Canada, which will increase CELBAN availability to IENs across Canada

- Increase the pool of trained assessors, who could also be deployed as assessors for other specific-purpose language assessments, and leverage Touchstone Institute's expertise in competency assessment to renew and update the CELBAN tool

OELPE: The transfer of OELPE from Renison University College to Touchstone Institute is in process and anticipated to be completed in March 2016. Touchstone Institute is a natural home for this occupation-specific language assessment for a number of reasons:

- With its expertise in language assessment, the Communication Program has reviewed the OELPE and is now in the process of updating the OELPE.
- As the infrastructure for CELBAN delivery has already been developed, adding delivery of an additional assessment is simple and cost-effective.
- Having the administration of the OELPE co-located at Touchstone Institute will be convenient for internationally educated optometry applicants, and there is the possibility for optimal coordination of the scheduling of the two exams.
- Touchstone Institute helps fulfil the regulators' duty to ensure that assessments are fair and impartial, by providing internationally educated optometry applicants with an independent assessment of their language skills. They can then provide this result to an educational institute, which can provide additional English language training.

MELA: The consultation determined that there would be no benefit to IEHPs of transferring MELA administration to Touchstone Institute. Having MELA administered, as it is now, at The Michener Institute offers several benefits to their students, many of whom are international applicants. It also supports Michener's bridging education initiatives and makes it possible for The Michener Institute to provide a service to its regulator partners. Therefore any transfer of administration might actually be less convenient and offer less of an integrated service for Michener students entering bridging or full-time health science programs.

IPGLA: At this time it is not feasible to consider any option regarding administration of the IPGLA by Touchstone Institute. The IPGLA consultation generated many ideas for the renewal and future uses of IPGLA but significant resources, stakeholder engagement and efforts would be required to undertake these initiatives. While there appears to be some interest, it is not possible from this brief consultation to gauge the real level of commitment of pharmacy stakeholders to undertake these activities, especially given the significant number of ongoing changes and potentially competing priorities regarding pharmacy regulation and education.

LAPOT: It is not feasible to consider any option regarding administration of the LAPOT by Touchstone Institute. OT and PT bridging education programs did not express a great need for LAPOT and indicated that it was too lengthy. As the LAPOT uses an online platform that is not owned by The Alliance, there would be significant technical and licencing complexities involved with operationalizing its use. LAPOT content would also probably need to be updated, as it is several years old. While the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators' CEO had indicated some interest in exploring alternatives or low-stakes use of the LAPOT for pre-arrival, self-assessment or educational purposes, it is most appropriate that The Alliance, which led the LAPOT development project, take the lead on this.

Positive Outcomes of the Consultations

This project had a number of benefits, beyond achieving the goals of the consultation itself. While the complete transfer of three of the occupation-specific language assessments (MELA, IPGLA and LAPOT) was deemed neither desirable nor feasible at this time, the stakeholder consultations served to achieve the following:

- Increase regulatory and educational stakeholder engagement with Touchstone Institute and make them aware of the expertise and services available through Touchstone Institute's new Communication Program
- Provide an opportunity for knowledge exchange, understanding of history of past collaborations and occupation-specific language assessment developments in Ontario
- Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to re-engage in discussion about the utility of occupation-specific language assessments and/or other types of language and communication assessments
- Activate discussion about alternative uses for materials (language benchmarking reports, exam blueprints, test content) developed but currently not in use
- Open discussion about test-holders sharing foundational research to add to Touchstone Institute's body of knowledge as a Centre of Excellence
- Begin discussion around opportunities for future collaboration, for example on a health-specific assessment that could be used by a number of professions

Additional Findings

One of the issues that was explored during the background research and consultations was why some of the occupation-specific language assessments that were developed over past years were implemented and are used to this day, and others have never been active. One of the observations has been that those that were successfully implemented (CELBAN, MELA and OELPE) had a number of common features:

- They were developed for use as part of bridging education or for program entry purposes, as well as, in the case of CELBAN and MELA, professional registration (high-stakes) purposes.
- They were put into use immediately or soon after development.
- In the case of CELBAN and MELA, the occupation-specific language assessments were validated for high-stakes purposes and accepted by regulators for meeting the language proficiency requirement of registration.
- These assessments use basic delivery technology that requires less frequent updating: paper-based with audio/visual input, not computer- or web-based platforms, therefore they are easier to update and create new versions.
- They were housed and delivered by post-secondary educational institutions.
- In the case of CELBAN, there are a high number of potential test-takers across Canada, as IENs make up the largest group of IEHPs in Canada.

The knowledge exchange that has occurred through these consultations and what has been learned from the transfer of CELBAN administration has been very valuable to Touchstone Institute. This foundational work and the positive stakeholder engagement achieved will inform and serve to position the

Communication Program as a hub for occupation-specific language assessments delivery and research in order that it may continue to provide services for IEHPs, regulatory colleges and educational institutions in Ontario.

Appendix 1: Occupation-Specific Language Assessments

	CELBAN	MELA	OELPE	IPGLA	LAPOT
<i>Test Fee</i>	\$375	\$280	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Estimate Annual Examinees⁴³ in Ontario</i>	500	80	40 ⁴⁴	40	15
<i>Estimate Annual Examinees across Canada</i>	2,000	N/A		N/A	N/A
<i>Development Funded by</i>	Gov. AB / Gov. ON (MTCU) / CIC (ON) / Gov. MB / Gov. BC	MCI	Renison University College, University of Waterloo	MCI / Health Canada	MCI
<i>Developed by</i>	Red River College under contract with CCLB	LCRT Consulting under contract to Michener Institute	Renison University College	LCRT Consulting under contract with UT IPG Program	Fusion Global Education and Thinking Cap under contract with Alliance / COTO / CPO
<i>Standard Setting</i>	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
<i>Validated for High Stakes</i>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Benchmarking Study</i>	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
<i>Blueprint</i>	No, only general specs	Specs and blueprint	No	Specs and blueprint	No
<i>Number of Versions</i>	3	3	5	2	1
<i>Development Date (Currency)</i>	2005 (video content seems much older)	2006	2006	2006	2010
<i>Mode</i>	Paper-based with audio/visual input	Paper-based with audio/visual input	Paper-based with audio/visual input	Paper-based with audio/visual input	Online ⁴⁵
<i>Ownership of Intellectual Property (IP)</i>	Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks (CCLB)	The Michener Institute	Renison University College	University of Toronto	The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators
<i>Potential Income (Ontario only)</i>	\$187,500	\$22,400	N/A (assume \$250 = \$10,000)	N/A (assume \$250 = \$10,000)	N/A
<i>Potential Income (across Canada)</i>	\$750,000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Lawyers' Fees to Effect Transfer</i>	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000

⁴³ CELBAN and MELA based on current practice; OELPE based on projections from previous practice; IPGLA and LAPOT based on OCECCA. 50% of the reported number of IEHPs seeking licensure in this profession (OCECCA Project).

⁴⁴ There is only one English language optometric bridging program in Canada.

⁴⁵ Platform owned by ThinkingCap: <http://www.thinkingcap.com/>.

Appendix 2: Stakeholders Consulted

The Touchstone Institute team organized and facilitated all consultations:

- Cameo Allan, Project Coordinator, Touchstone Institute
- Paulette Blais, Policy Analyst and Researcher, Blais Consulting Inc.
- Andrea Strachan, Director, Communication Program, Touchstone Institute

1. Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN)

- Not applicable, as the transfer of CELBAN administration was completed through a request for proposal process with the Canadian Centre for Language Benchmarks.

2. Optometry English Language Placement Exam (OELPE)

- Murray Turnour, Director, International Optometric Bridging Program, University of Waterloo
- Christa Schuller, Senior Instructor/IOBP English Program Coordinator, English Language Studies Renison University College, University of Waterloo
- Julia Williams, Director, English Language Studies, Coordinator, Applied Language Studies Renison University College, University of Waterloo

3. Michener English Language Assessment (MELA)

- Valerie Browne, Director of Registration Services, College of Massage Therapists of Ontario
- Bessie Carydis, Director of Certification and Prior Learning Assessment, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science
- Carolyn Menezes, Manager of the International Department, The Michener Institute
- Caroline Morris, Director of Professional Practice, College of Medical Radiation Technologists of Ontario
- Gillian Nichol, Director of Continuing Education, The Michener Institute
- Christine Nielsen, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science
- Bruce Russell, Principal, LCRT Consulting
- Kevin Taylor, Registrar and CEO, College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario

4. International Pharmacy Graduate Language Assessment (IPGLA)

- Vince Bowman, Manager, Registration Programs, Ontario College of Pharmacists
- Marie Rocchi, Academic Director, International Pharmacy Graduate Program, University of Toronto
- Bruce Russell, Principal, LCRT Consulting
- Theresa Schopf, Manager of Gateway Operations, National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities
- Deanna Yee, Registration Advisor, Ontario College of Pharmacists

5. Language Assessment in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy (LAPOT)

- Sue Baptiste Program Director, Occupational Therapy Examination and Practice Preparation Program
- Colleen Britton, Co-Director, Alberta Internationally Educated Physiotherapists Bridging Program
- Shari Hughes, Associate Registrar, Practice, College of Physiotherapists of Ontario
- Elinor Larney, Registrar, College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario
- Nancy Lidstone, Administrative Assistant, Occupational Therapy Examination and Practice Preparation Program
- Katya Masnyk, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators
- Bernadette Martin, Associate Dean, Strategic Initiatives Rehabilitation Medicine Physical Therapy, University of Alberta
- Sharon Switzer-McIntyre, Assistant Professor, Vice-Chair of Education Department of Physical Therapy, Ontario Internationally Educated Physical Therapy Bridging Program