

ELSA, a brief history

During the late eighties Brian Hough and Theunis Horne, founders of Hough & Horne (Johannesburg), designed and developed an English literacy skills training programme for South African adults. This programme – Hands-On English – is a scientifically graded one as the painstaking compilation of a core vocabulary preceded its inception.

ELSA Elementary - how it started...

The eight modules comprising the Hands-On English programme span eight grades (i.e. two per ABET level). When the first three or four modules were introduced in the market place, trainer-facilitators started clamouring for a placement guide to augment the training programme. This made lots of sense. Theunis Horne, ably assisted by Patti Haak, took charge of the project.

Initially, extracts from the first three training modules were used to grade and then slot learners into the Hands-On programme. It soon became evident that the **ELSA**, as the pseudo-placement guide was named, needed to be standardised (admin., scoring, interpretation) as it was being used nationally. This, in turn, led to the incorporation of national norms (mother-tongue users of English across the spectrum), research and field-work (with HSRC statistical back-up), regular updating and ultimately a proper diagnostic/prescriptive report to accompany each grading. The latter was a natural next step because employers and educators were saying: "Don't tell us we have problems. Diagnose the problems and tell us how to solve them."

And Now...

In 2014, ELSA takes another progressive step when it goes online. The 'new' ELSA is unique:

- **One assessment** for Elementary & Intermediate. All candidates engage in initial activities as in ELSA Elementary. Only if results are beyond NQF 1, Intermediate activities will be introduced for FET band benchmarking.
- No more inaccurate placement decisions!
- No more unnecessary subjection to higher end proficiency activities, so saving time.
- **Immediate** results.
- 'Birds-eye view' **dashboard diagnostic** report per candidate.
- Dashboard reports for **batch data**



ELSA Intermediate then followed...

The next development came as no surprise because Horne had discovered that the **ELSA** was an excellent predictor of trainability outcomes at all levels. Employers of white-collar staff were buying for an **ELSA** that spanned 13 grades, i.e. up to Grade 12+/FET+. This led to an upward extension of the **ELSA** and a mitosis, viz. **ELSA Elementary** (aimed at the blue-collar employee) and **ELSA Intermediate** (aimed at the white-collar employee). To date more than 1 000 000 ELSA's have been processed.

A further development was a tertiary **ELSA**. Unlike the **ELSA Intermediate**, which is an upward extension of the **ELSA Elementary**, the tertiary **ELSA** – named **ELSA PLUS** – is a cloned model. It was commissioned by the University of Pretoria, is aimed at tertiary and prospective tertiary students nationally and was successfully launched in January 2001. **ELSA PLUS** is however not used anymore, because of the better application of **ELSA Intermediate** to pinpoint Literacy levels when not within the required tertiary level scope.

