Empower Test Scoring

A guide to Empower Competency Test Scoring

Version 2.0

January 2018

Contents

A guide to Empower Competency Test Scoring

1) What are Unit Progress Tests (UPTs), Speaking UPTs & Competency Tests (CTs)?

Overview

There are six levels for Empower, aligned to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* and these levels are A1, A2, B1, B1+, B2 and C1.

There is a Unit Progress Test and Unit Speaking Test for each unit (12 units for levels A1, A2 and B1, and 10 units for levels B1+, B2 and C1) and two Competency Tests (mid-course and end-of-course) for each level of the course.

Unit Progress Tests (UPTs)

A Unit Progress Test is taken by learners at the end of each unit of the Empower coursebook and a Competency Test is taken at the mid-point of the course, with another one taken at the end of the course. All the content in these tests is linked to the material taught in the Empower course, to create a cohesive journey of learning, assessment and feedback, with each assessment providing the basis for future study recommendations.

We recommend to centres and teachers that learners take the Unit Progress Test at the end of each C lesson in the coursebook/on the CLMS, as at this point learners have encountered all the language that features in the test in lessons A–C. However, if it suits the teaching situation, the Unit Progress Test could equally well be set for learners to take after the D lesson or after Review and Extension.

Learners have two attempts at each Unit Progress Test. The first attempt is timed. On completion learners receive a score and are directed towards further practice material. The practice material will vary, depending on the score attained, and so will specifically target those areas learners have problems with. At the end of My Practice, learners have the

opportunity to take the test again, with no time restrictions. In this second attempt, learners only answer items that they answered incorrectly on their first attempt. Following the second attempt, learners can review the test answers.

Unit Speaking Tests

These tests are available for each unit (we recommend they are taken at the end of the unit). They test the pronunciation that has been focused on in the unit and also test the learner's fluency in talking about the topic of the unit.

Developed with Carnegie Speech – software specialist for assessing spoken language skills – the tests use voice-recognition software that assesses to what extent the learner's pronunciation matches the required pronunciation. The software also assesses the learner's fluency:

- There are three tasks in each test, using a range of the following task types:
    - ❖ Phonemes
    - ❖ Number of syllables
    - ❖ Word stress
    - ❖ Read aloud
    - ❖ Fluency
- Within the time limit of the test, the learner is able to listen to themselves again and re-record their answer as many times as they like. In this way, the tests provide both self-assessment and practice. The learner can see how they have scored for each individual task.

We recommend that learners take the Unit Speaking Test when the unit has been completed so that they have covered the pronunciation points and have had as much opportunity as possible to practise speaking on the topics in the unit.

Learners have one attempt at the Unit Speaking Test. There are no time restrictions and these tests offer ample opportunity for learners to listen to a model, then record, listen and re-record their own answers before submitting.

Competency Tests

There are two Competency Tests: learners should take the Mid-course Competency Test halfway through the course, either at the end of Unit 5 for levels A1, A2 and B1, or at the end of Unit 6 for levels B1+, B2 and C1. Learners should take the End-of-course Competency Test at the end of the course. There are four sections to each Competency Test focussing on the four skills: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. These Tests are completed online, apart from the Competency Speaking Test, which is conducted by the teacher.

The purpose of the Competency Test is to give as accurate a measure as possible of a learner's performance relative to the target *CEFR* level. There is, therefore, just one attempt and no review mode for the Competency Tests.

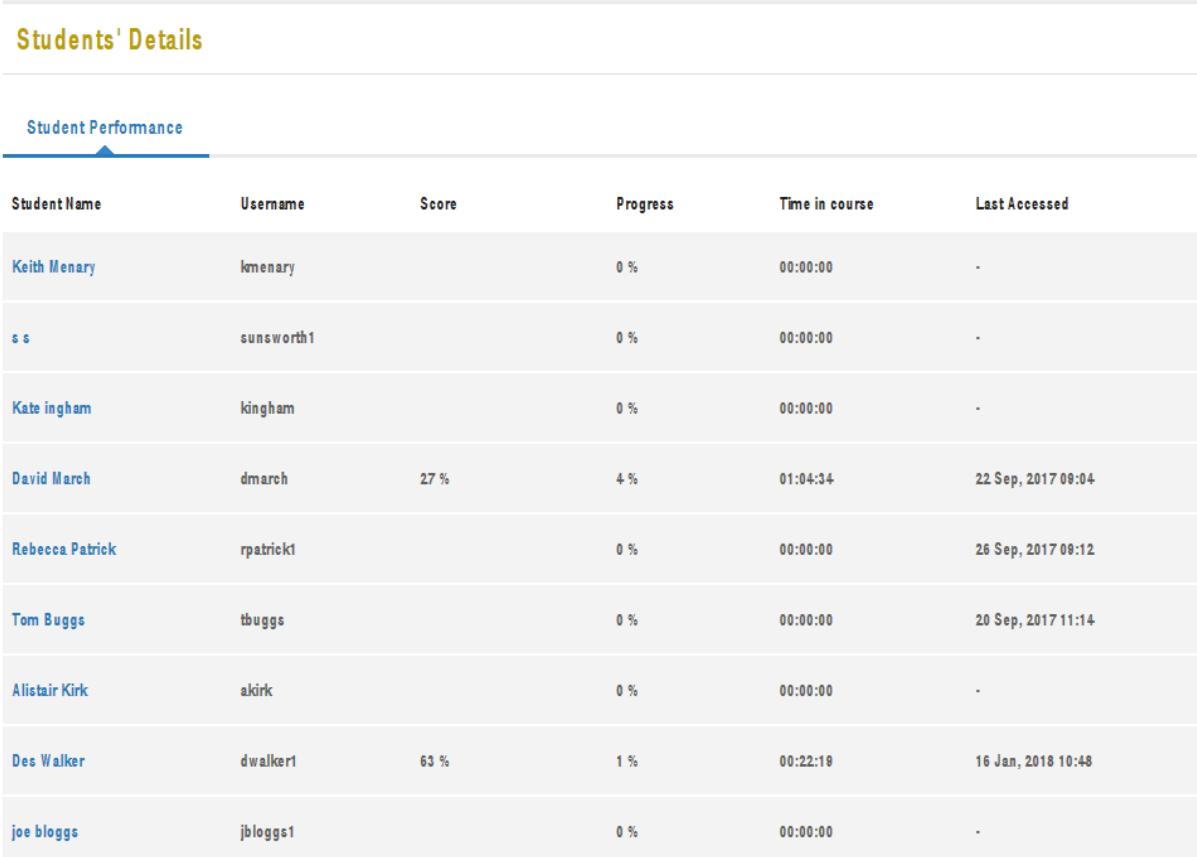## 2) How are the Competency Tests scored?

After the Reading and Listening Competency Tests, teachers will be able to see in 'review mode' which questions their learners have answered correctly. The student's score for the test is shown in the gradebook as a percentage which is calculated from the total number of marks available in the individual test.

In addition to the score in the gradebook, learners and teachers can access a *CEFR* report. **The *CEFR* report is the key thing for teachers and learners to note in determining how the student has performed, as the report shows whether the student has reached the appropriate *CEFR* level and how far below or above the level they are.**

3) What does my CT gradebook score mean?

The percentages in the gradebook reflect the actual raw score for the individual test. In the teacher view, the teacher can get an overview of the performance of the students in their class. The figure in the 'score' column is based on the average score of the tests taken at that point in time. It is not necessary to take tests for all skills in order to get an overall score – the overall score is worked out from what tests the student has completed at the time of viewing. Figure 1 shows details of the Gradebook screen:

Students' Details

Student Performance

Student Name	Username	Score	Progress	Time in course	Last Accessed
Keith Menary	kmenary		0 %	00:00:00	-
s s	sunsworth1		0 %	00:00:00	-
Kate ingham	kingham		0 %	00:00:00	-
David March	dmarch	27 %	4 %	01:04:34	22 Sep, 2017 09:04
Rebecca Patrick	rpatrick1		0 %	00:00:00	26 Sep, 2017 09:12
Tom Buggs	tbuggs		0 %	00:00:00	20 Sep, 2017 11:14
Alistair Kirk	akirk		0 %	00:00:00	-
Des Walker	dwalker1	63 %	1 %	00:22:19	16 Jan, 2018 10:48
joe bloggs	jbloggs1		0 %	00:00:00	-

Figure 1: An overview of the Students' Details screen in the Gradebook

4) What does my Learner Profile information mean?

In the teacher view, the Learner Profile gives an overview of the students in the class and how they have performed in each skill test, in relation to the CEFR level of the course. This screen is shown in Figure 2, below:

Figure 2: The Learner Profile screen

By clicking on the icon in the 'View Learner Profile' column, the teacher is able to view the individual performance of the student, expressed in terms how close the performance is to the desired CEFR level of the course. This individual Learner Profile view is seen in Figure 3, (page 9).

Learner Profile

Student Name: Des Walker
Username: dwalker1

Unit Progress Test score   **CEFR report**

Average score includes completed parts of the test only.   Mid course report
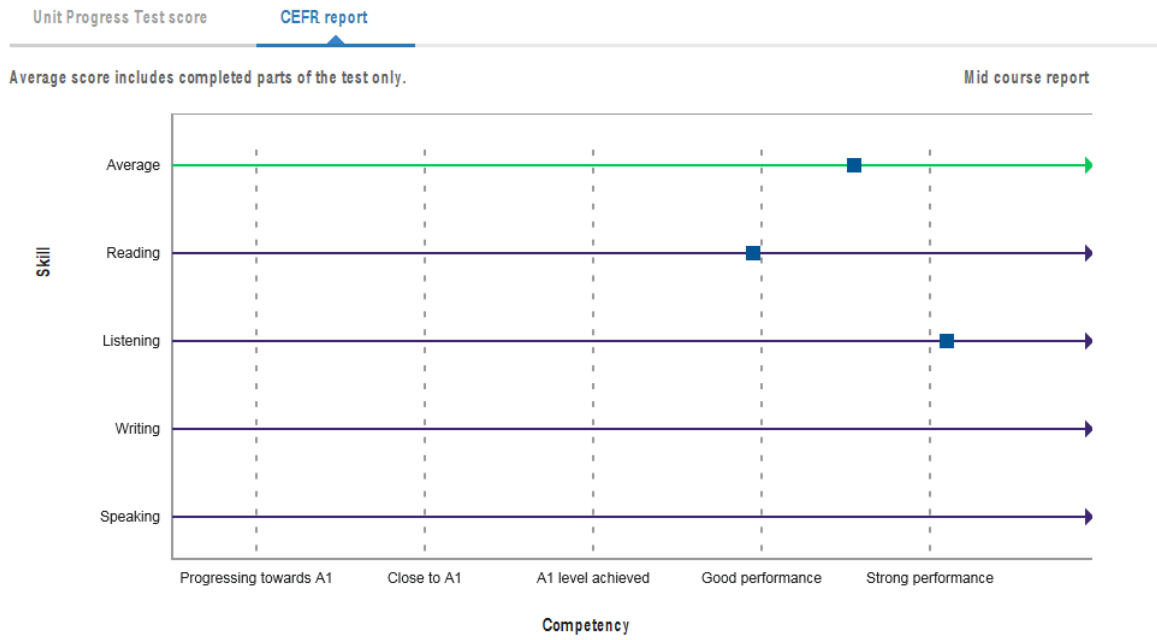

Figure 3: The Learner Profile for an individual student

5) What is the *CEFR*?

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* is a standard used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. It was put together by the Council of Europe and its main aim is to provide a method of learning, teaching and assessing which applies to all languages in Europe. In November 2001, a European Union Council Resolution recommended using the *CEFR* to set up systems of validation of language ability. The six reference levels from A1 to C2 are now widely accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency.

In terms of Empower, all of our tests are mapped to the *CEFR*, so at the mid-course and end of course point, learners get feedback on whether they have reached the relevant *CEFR* level for that assessment. If they have performed beyond what is required for that particular *CEFR* level, they will receive feedback such as a 'Good Performance' or a 'Strong Performance'.

6) How do I know if a student has 'passed' the test'?

Empower was put together with a learning-oriented assessment approach, which means in practice that each assessment is part of a cycle based on learning, assessment and feedback: each assessment provides feedback for the next stage of learning. Rather than view the tests as summative pass/fail tests, Empower assessments should enable learners to progress through the *CEFR* levels in lockstep with the learning materials presented in the coursebook.

If a pass mark is required, it is up to institutions to decide on the appropriate pass mark, as this will vary depending on the test purpose and needs of the institution. **However, in order to decide if learners have reached the end of course level, teachers should look at their *CEFR* report, and if their overall level is 'Level achieved' then this means that overall they are at the target level. Institutions may decide this constitutes a 'pass'. It is important to note that this overall score is an average of the other skills tests that have been taken by the learner so this score only gives information on their performance in the skills/tests they have taken. There are two courses leading to achievement at B1 level: B1 and B1 Higher. Therefore institutions may decide that at B1 level 'Close to B1' constitutes a 'pass'.**

This information is available to teachers in an exportable format.

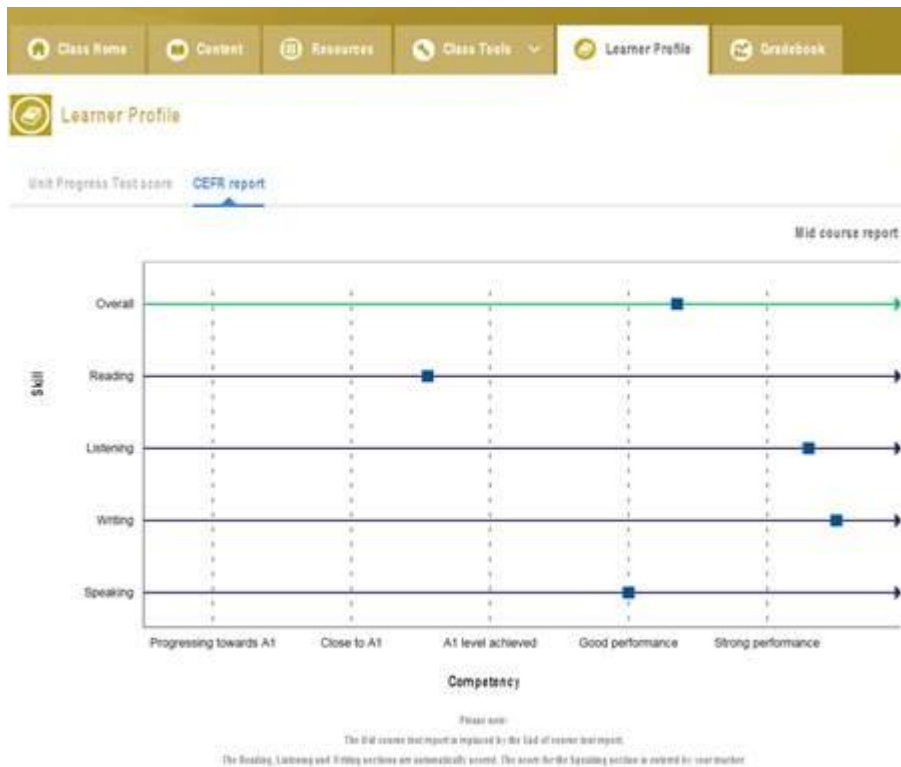# 7) What do the CEFR report labels mean?

Fig (1) Example CEFR Report

The *CEFR* report (see Fig 1) contains the key information in understanding how learners have performed in Empower Competency Tests. The overall/average mark on the *CEFR* report tells you if they have also achieved the level across all skills taken. There are some key identifying labels:
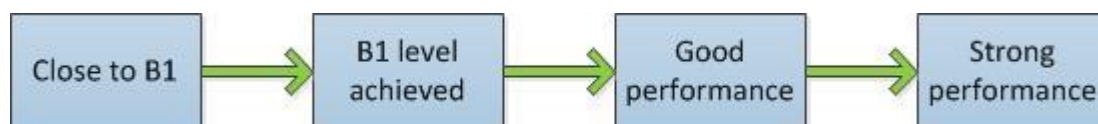
At A1, A2, B2 and C1 level, these are:

At B1 level these are:
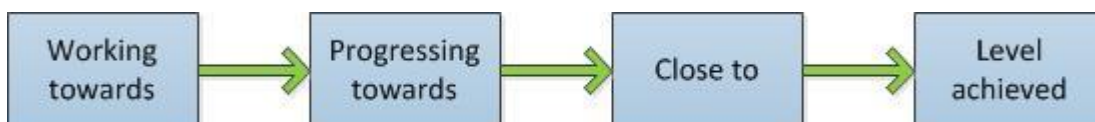
At B1 Higher, these are:

Working towards

The performance is significantly short of the target level of that skill/test.

Progressing towards

The performance is short of the target level of that skill/test.

Close to

The performance is almost at the target level of the skill/test in question, but the learner is not yet at that target level.

Level achieved

The performance has met the required standard of the target *CEFR* level.

Good performance

The performance is good and is above the required standard for the target *CEFR level.*

Strong performance

The performance is very good and is well above the required standard for the target *CEFR* level.

8) What does the feedback message on the CEFR report mean?

The message on the *CEFR* report 'You are now at the level to prepare for…' recommends a Cambridge English Examination at that level for students to prepare for and take if they wish to gain an internationally recognised qualification at that level.

More information on Cambridge English qualifications can be found at http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/