English benchmarking for economic growth

Confederation of Indian Industry	India

Cambridge Assessment English used its Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) tests to provide the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) with an English language benchmarking tool.

CII had identified English language ability as a key skill for Indian economic development, particularly in the retail, and travel and tourism sectors. Here, poor English skills were proving a barrier to communication, and thereby affecting economic growth. Line managers in both sectors also valued English skills, given the frequent use of English in formal communication within companies, and with clients and partners. In 2009, CII set up a programme designed to address this issue; a reliable and trusted assessment tool was required to launch the programme, and BULATS was identified as the ideal solution.

BULATS is a set of workplace language assessment, training and benchmarking tools. In the CII programme, standard BULATS tests were used to establish existing language ability levels among a sample of 600 workers. An additional survey was also deployed, designed to identify individuals' perceived language ability and the frequency with which they used English in the workplace. The survey was also able to reveal any disparities between workers' perceived experience and their line managers' expectations.

Together, BULATS tests and survey results showed that workers within both sectors tended to overestimate their English language skills, with the result that a more realistic – and more challenging – benchmark was set for workers entering the sector, linked to Level B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Following the benchmarking exercise, Cambridge English was then asked to provide additional advice on the setting of future language-level requirements for entry-level staff in both sectors, and on the best way to implement these requirements.

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