

Aptis: British Council Setting The Standards Of English



A new innovative English assessment tool created by the British Council, specifically

designed for organisations, not only determines an individual’s level of English but also homes in areas that require improvement.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara **Photographs** Damith Wickramasinghe

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In simple terms, APTIS is a holistic English language skills assessment tool encompassing reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities. However, its benefits and uses are far reaching due to the test’s versatility in application and credibility. An organisation can avail of the tool to determine the English language skills of its staff or potential candidates. Consequently it can be used as a development tool for language learning as it helps to identify a particular area of weakness.

“This tool is very cost-effective due to its modular nature and identifies where a particular skill is lacking and training is required,” states Harriet Gardner, Country Examinations Manager/Assistant Director – British Council. For instance Human Resource personnel of a company may utilise the application to gauge areas of weakness of each staff member and accordingly take necessary measures of support and improvement based on the results. Consequently APTIS may also be used as a placement tool to appropriately allocate staff members with various levels of English competency.

As a recruitment tool, an organisation may set a criterion for English language that can be assessed through the application of APTIS on prospective candidates. “Many of us think we know English and that a level of English can be understood through a conversation, but this test is developed by testing experts and based on the latest research in assessment,” says Gardner on how the test is superior to a one-on-one interview. Furthermore, she notes that the years of experience British Council has earned in English testing have led to creating a sound testing application that is accurate and valid.

The test can also be customised where a job requires aptitude in a certain area of English. For instance in recruiting for call centre positions, candidates with strong listening and speaking skills would be required. The organisation may accordingly

only use the application’s listening and speaking tests to determine the aptitude accurately and in turn circumvent the cost of a complete test. APTIS thus allows the modules to be broken up or combined in 15 different ways, as deemed fit by the user.

“The test is solely for organisations and they can administer it themselves. The results retrieved from the tests are for the reference of the company and not for the individual,” explains Gardner on how APTIS differs from other tests in the market. In addition the test is faster than most in the market. While reading and listening tests render immediate results, the writing and speaking tests, which are conducted through Computer Based Testing are assessed by examiners who have a thorough understanding of the complexity of communication. These examiners are based around the world to meet demand across all time zones.

“While there are computer generated marking systems for speaking and writing, we at British Council believe a trained and qualified examiner can deliver more accurate results for such tests,” adds Gardner.

Companies can run tests whenever they choose. Once they have signed up for a desired number of tests or combinations of modules, the candidate information is forwarded to British Council to schedule tests. Key codes are generated to access the APTIS client software, already installed in the computer with the necessary system requirements. Once scheduled the key codes allow the correct candidate to access the relevant test.

“Benchmarking: Our Consultants Literally Sit With Individuals And Interview Them To Understand Their Job, Shadowing What They Do To Identify The Required Language Level”

Another feature of APTIS is that the evaluation of candidates is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)-an assessment carried out by the Council of Europe over many years. This assessment entails segregating the English language into different levels starting with A1 and A2 that represent the basic English user. B1 and B2 describe the independent user and C is a proficient user. This framework of reference makes it easy for organisations to set required

criteria and for candidates to convey their levels of English with greater ease. In addition, British Council conducts benchmarking. “This process defines the level of English, based on the CEFR, required by specific job roles across various industries. APTIS can be used to assess whether individuals meet these standards,” explains Gardner.

This innovative assessment tool has so far been used in a number of countries in the world. In Sri Lanka the test has already gained much recognition with tests sought by a multinational IT solutions company, a faculty of a state university, and an international school that is using ‘Aptis for Teachers’-designed for use in educational contexts. “I believe the users respond very well to how the application runs and its appearance which are both appealing and user friendly,” states Gardner adding that “what we find is that many people want more than just APTIS. In addition, they request English language development. This means companies can benefit from the British Council’s expertise in English; from libraries and teaching to assessment and professional training.”