

English Skills for a World Class Workforce
20 October 2015, The Park, New Delhi

Report

Objective of the workshop

The objective of the workshop was to identify job roles and sectors where English language skills, benchmarked against international standards, are essential for employability and mobility and to provide a platform for creating new commercially sustainable partnerships that can produce the certificates, trainers and content needed to reach these standards.

Format

This highly interactive workshop was facilitated by ELT and skills professionals from the British Council's global and India teams and was designed in collaboration with the National Skills Development Corporation.

The workshop was attended by a total of 70 participants representing Indian SSCs, UK ELT providers, Government representatives; FCO, BCD representatives; and other relevant stakeholders.



Opening address at the workshop

The opening address of the workshop was provided by Michael King, Managing Director, British Council English and Examinations Services India, Pvt Ltd

Michael King highlighted that the Prime Minister of India had launched the Skill India campaign, which has a remarkable target of skilling 400 million people by 2022. In line with this was the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015 which included specific provisions on international collaborations. The policy emphasised that global partnerships should be established so as to leverage best practices from across the world and enrich domestic training programmes by enhancing their quality through learning's from successful international models of vocational education. It also stated that the National Skills Qualifications Framework will be aligned to globally recognized qualification frameworks for ensuring quality and uniformity. Consequently, transnational standards will be created for sectors where there is an opportunity for international workforce mobility.

The importance of such global partnerships is also echoed in the recently launched Sustainable Development Goals as part of Goal 8 which aimed to 'promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' and goal 17 which highlights the need to 'enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation'

The English Skills for Employability think tank was established in September 2013 as a way to engage stakeholders in India and the UK to identify how they could work together in partnership to address priorities in the English and Skills sector.

The Think Tank meetings had been attended by representatives of government bodies, Sector Skills Councils, private and public organisations and academic institutions with a role to play in the development of the English Skills for Employability sector and had met four times over the last couple of years. A number of recommendations emerged; one was around developing a new entry level within the context of the Common European Reference Framework that recognises achievement pre level A1. The group felt that this was necessary for a number of sectors, such as healthcare and construction, and would act as an important motivator for students to acquire language skills in the vocational context in India.



Michael King, Managing Director, British Council English and Examinations Services India, Pvt Ltd

Second, to conduct action research with three Sector Skills Councils to develop a white paper on how the linguistic levels of the CEFR could be best integrated into vocational qualifications developed under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). There was also interest in holding joint awareness raising events around the NSQF and the CEFR.

A research project was agreed, co-funded by the British Council, Manipal City and Guilds and Trinity, and supported by the National Skills Development Agency which culminated in a research report called English Skills for Employability: Setting Common Standards which was launched in April this year.

This report recommended that the Common Indian Framework of Reference (CIFR) covering all Indian languages and English could be developed as complementary to the NSQF by building on the work of various international research projects for language references. To support this, the NSQF level descriptors could be reviewed to distinguish and remove references to linguistic skills, so that only references to 'soft or communication skills' remain in the level descriptors. It also recommended that language competence, in both English and other Indian languages, in QPs should be separately leveled according to the CIFR, allowing for distinctions between geographical and other work-related contexts in India. In the short term, the Common European Framework of Reference could be used to benchmark requirements.

As a continuation of the think tank series, Michael concluded, the British Council along with NSDC has organized the workshop titled English Skills for a World Class Workforce to further explore how stakeholders can work together, tapping into each other's' knowledge and expertise, to identify solutions.

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Anant P Pandey, PS to Chairman, National Skill Development Agency during his address highlighted statistics like most of the population in India is below 25 years and 65% of population is between 25-29 years and 10% population is above 30 years. He stated that India has a demographic advantage, but which comes with a lot of challenges. In India, the formally skilled population is just 2% as compared to the other countries. Another challenging aspect is that majority of the labour force is in the informal sector.

Against these challenges, the Government started reforms at the institutional and policy level. At the institutional level, NSDC was created and three other bodies were formed i.e. National Skill Development Council Board, PM Advisory council on Skill Development and office of advisor to PM which were under operation till 2008-09 to provide the necessary impetus to the focus on skill development. These bodies were subsequently subsumed under National Skill Development

Agency, which was formed in June, 2013. In policy reform, a National Skill

Development Policy was formulated in 2009 which recognized the need for development of national qualification framework that would stimulate and support reforms in skill development space. This framework would transcend both general education and vocational education and training.

Accordingly, Ministry of Labour and Employment and Ministry of HRD developed NVQF and NVEQF respectively. Subsequently, the need was felt for having a unified framework which led to the foundation of National Skills Qualification Framework after wide consultations with stakeholders. With the formation of National Skill Development Agency, the mandate of operationalization and implementation of NSQF was transferred to the Agency. The framework talks about a stringent implementation schedule of aligning all centrally sponsored qualifications till 2016 and the qualifications under state government and other stakeholders by 2018. Till date we have covered 1450+ qualifications brought out by SSCs and NCVT. He informed that NSDA is in consultations with state governments to align their qualifications to NSQF.

NSQF is a quality assurance framework; it focuses on bringing together multiple stakeholders including central government, state government, industry, trainees, and trainers. It talks about how to move horizontally and vertically from one qualification to another, how Indian qualifications can be referred to the framework of other countries, the recognition of Indian qualifications at an international forum. It also sets a stringent assessment criterion so that it builds up trust and confidence about the credibility of the qualifications. A robust evaluation process is followed while scrutinizing these qualifications at NSDA. Anant also talked about the qualification register which is being designed at NSDA that will serve as a platform for all the stakeholders to get the required information in the skill space.

Recognition of Prior Learning is another very important concept that he talked about. This framework, he said, will give recognition to all those candidates who have gathered experience through informal or non formal means of learning through an assessment. NSDA is working towards bringing a national policy on RPL. NSDA has also worked closely with NSDC in defining guidelines for RPL under PMKVY scheme and by March, 2016 it is expected to get lot of insights from this scheme. NSDA is also working towards development of National Quality Assurance Framework in consultations with all the stakeholders.

Towards the end of the speech, Anant reiterated the fact that English has played a very critical role in many sectors like BPO, IT/ITeS, etc. The NSQF levels 1 to 4 are mostly related to blue collar jobs, where the language skill is becoming increasingly essential. He congratulated the British Council for



At the podium: Anant P Pandey, PS to Chairman, National Skill Development Agency; Also seen are Alison Barrett, Director English for Education Systems, South Asia; and Michael King

coming up with a useful document i.e. the research report on English Skills for Employability. Finally, with the hope of working together with British Council in this context in the near future, he concluded the speech.

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Session 1: The Demand for English Language Partnerships in Skills

The session was facilitated by Leighton Ernsberger, Assistant Director- Skills, British Council-India

Some of the expectations of the participants of the workshop that were elicited during the session have been listed below:

- Construction: How do we integrate English into QPs so we can facilitate mobility overseas? How much English is needed?
- How much English is required for different job roles?
- Do we need a national or sector wide common assessment framework?
- How can we implement language improvement programmes in short period of time (speed to market)?
- What kind of training materials do we need? Should they be bilingual training materials?
- Should we separate English language skills from generic communication skills?
- Can we set a basic minimum for each level?
- Trainer training – how can we build trainers’ capacity in language skills training? They are subject experts but not language trainers – how to train the trainer?
- How do the NSQF levels map across to the CEFR and how can we implement solutions jointly, particularly around certification?
- Front and back office roles – both need some language skills. How much?
- Should we consider A2 as the primary level for all job roles?
- Functional workplace English vs social English – do we need to equip people with minimum or enable people to use English in both situations?
- Local language integration – challenge for CEFR – Level 0?
- Certification requirement dependent on destination working



At the podium: Leighton Ernsberger, Assistant Director- Skills, British Council-India

market-domestic / national / international? How do

you build geography into certification strategy?

- Addressing the CEFR as a compliment to the Job Role has its problems – starting young for certification and separate integrated strategy for adults?

One of the suggestions that came out during the discussions was to have a guidance matrix based on:

- Customer Facing / Back Office / Technical (Mandatory to varying degrees)
- NSQF Level (relevant?)
- Geographical market (becomes optional)

It was also suggested that a bottom up approach could be used where you start with mapping language levels in individual job roles, and then sample the outcomes. Other suggestions included:

- Minimum standards: for all students (A2) or teachers (B2)
- National / Sector Assessment Strategy for English
- English integrated (sector specialist teach English?) / separate (dedicated trainer?)
- Dedicated English Teachers in Vocational space
- Scale: online assessment or train the trainer on assessment (joint cert for trainers also)

One of the points that emerged for reflection was: do the stakeholders want the CEFR adapted and customized for all 124 different job roles? Or was there any other strategy for doing this?

Session 2: Identifying standards for English in Skills

The session was facilitated by Gwendydd Caudwell, Aptis Product Development Manager for the British Council based in Dubai.

Objective of the session was to familiarize the audience with the CEFR/CIFR through a series of interactive mapping tasks using recommended job roles under three themes:

- customer facing roles
- back office roles
- technical roles

The workshop session helped

participants identify speaking and listening skills relevant to particular

job roles. The participants were asked to sit in groups of 10 and list down the English language requirements based on the job roles assigned to each group.

Outcomes:

- Participants became familiar with identifying the what level of English (in reading, writing and speaking) are required in specific job roles
- The participants were able to map their language requirements to the levels in CEFR and also specify the levels from the CEFR which would be suitable to the job roles



Gwendydd Caudwell, Aptis Product Development Manager, British Council-Dubai facilitating the workshop

Session 3: Finding the right partnership approach and model

The aim of the session was to showcase existing partnership case studies from different international contexts so that it could be considered to be replicated in India. The presentations were made by:

- Angela Ffrench, Director of Operations (South Asia), Cambridge English Language Assessment
- Susan Jones, Lead Academic - English Language (Asia), Trinity College London

Angela highlighted some of the areas where partnerships could be developed. These included Public Private Partnerships (PPP), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and direct participation/funding.

For the **public private partnership model**, one of the projects that was highlighted was the SCOPE project, where the government of Gujarat created the Society for the Creation of Opportunities through Proficiency in English (SCOPE) which aimed at improving the language skills of students and the workforce in view of the increasing demand for English communication skills. Learning centres were set up across the state to provide specially developed English courses. Cambridge English Language Assessment produced the Gujarat English Language Test to assess ability at pre-A1 Level to Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). More able candidates were offered Cambridge English Language Assessment's Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) or the Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) which assessed up to Level C2 . Linking the SCOPE programme tests to the CEFR allowed learners to approach employers with a language qualification linked to an internationally recognised standard for describing language ability.



Angela Ffrench, Director of Operations (South Asia), Cambridge English Language Assessment; and Susan Jones, Lead Academic - English Language (Asia), Trinity College London

To elaborate on the CSR model, Angela highlighted that Cambridge English Language Assessment, together with the Tech Mahindra Foundation and Cambridge University Press, are working with the Corporation of Chennai on a professional development programme for the city's English language teachers. The professional development programme is funded by the Tech Mahindra Foundation, established by the multinational conglomerate Mahindra Group in order to support its CSR (corporate social responsibility) initiatives. The aim is to increase the linguistic and pedagogical competence of primary and secondary school English language teachers, and to identify those teachers with the potential to become master trainers, thereby enabling Chennai's teaching profession to become self-reliant in training and development.

SENATI: In this model, the Cambridge English Language Assessment is helping a major Peruvian training body to improve the language skills of thousands of apprentices every year. SENATI is a professional training organization providing services to the Peruvian manufacturing industry. In 2010, recognising the value of English language skills to the industry, SENATI adopted BULATS (Business Language Testing Service) as a means of improving the real-life communication skills of its apprentices. SENATI used BULATS Online, an on-demand, adaptive test which assesses reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. SENATI actively encourages its apprentices to reach an English language level of A2–B1 in the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference).

Susan Jones highlighted the English in Action (EiA) project with the Open University of Bangladesh which is funded by the UK Department for International Development. In this, the Bangladesh government wanted to bring about improvement in the competence in English language for 25,000,000 school pupils, teachers and adult learners. Involving 50,000,000GBP, the Trinity College London was majorly involved in the 9 year project involving government agencies, NGOs, schools, media, and training providers.

She also highlighted that in Spain, EU has taken up initiatives to increase multilingualism of populations. Andalucia wanted to improve the language skills of both teachers and students in the state education system and introduced exams to ensure school leavers reach the required B1 level – CLIL teachers must have B2 level.

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Session 4: Pilot partnership discussions and reviewing materials

The session was facilitated by Susan Jones, Lead Academic - English Language (Asia), Trinity College London; and Rajat Khawas, Head – Services, Manipal City and Guilds

During this session, the participants were asked to engage in group discussions (with each group having proportionate representation from SSCs and UK English Training providers). The SSCs were asked to discuss their English language requirements in terms of what their needs were, who their partners were and what were the resources required by them.

Some of the needs that emerged out of the discussions included:

- Additional support for training of trainers, with a need for specific refresher trainings that would add value, as also provide certification to the trainers
- A pre-apptis assessment test
- Lack of adequate funding for skill development programmes and for ToT
- Lack of trained trainers
- Customised and localized teaching aids
- Lack of a systematic career growth and pathway for trainers to move forward.

Some of the suggestions that emerged during the discussions were:

- ASAP Kerala has adopted a model of using graduates as trainers, which has worked successfully and can help address the problem of shortage of trainers (if successfully replicated in other states.)
- CEFR should be used as a reference guide and can be customized and adapted to local situations.
- Since communication skills (not just in English, but all languages) are a requirement across sectors, the CEFR levels can be used for other language proficiency too.
- Some solutions for funding of potential partnerships through UKIERI and NSDC were highlighted during the session:

- **UK India Education Research Initiative (UKIERI):**

UKIERI is a multi-stakeholder partnership programme supported by Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Council, Department for Science and Technology, Department for Employment and Learning, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and University Grants Commission.

One of the aims of UKIERI is to support the development of the training capacity of Indian vocational education institutions by providing opportunities for UK institutions to form partnerships. It will do this by providing grants to UK FE colleges or support organisations to enable them to work in partnership with vocational education institutions. Phase 2 of UKIERI is currently winding up and phase 3 will begin in 2016.

More details can be found at www.ukieri.org



Partnership discussions and review of material in process

- **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)**

NSDC solicits and funds proposals that have sustainable business models over a 10 year period and beyond. The proposals submitted should be robust with scalable and sustainable business models catering to sectors with huge unmet needs. Ideally, the business models should be serving high growth sectors, unorganized sectors, or training in developing the skill ecosystem. Proposals must be outcome oriented and should focus on employability through placement in industry and/ or self-employment opportunities.

A minimum of 50,000 people need to be trained over 10 years. NSDC will not fund the creation of physical infrastructure and/ or any immovable assets such as land, building. The funding sought from NSDC should be channelized towards core skill development activities such as training, development of industry utilities such as training the trainers, content development, technology, IP, training equipment and machinery. Out of this a significant proportion should be devoted to training and development of skilled human resource. More details can be found at www.nsdccindia.org

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Way forward

Final reflections of the workshop were summarized by Michael King, Managing Director, British Council English and Examinations Services India, Pvt Ltd.

Michael outlined that the workshop had been envisaged with the aim of helping SSCs bring out their requirements, and connect them to providers from the UK who can help them bridge the gap. He hoped to carry the learnings forward and receive positive feedback and outcomes from the participants.



Michael King giving the concluding remarks

Feedback:

- Health care SSC would like to have UK expertise in development of training programmes for trainers and assessors according to their job roles; If online programmes could have audio and video elements, it will be useful.
 - Indian Plumbing Skills Council : Training material should be bi-lingual as it will be useful for tradesmen and craftsmen.
 - Construction Skill Development Council: They would consider the CEFR as soon as they start developing something on languages for their sector.
 - Electronics Sector Skills Council: They have used CEFR only for some levels. However, they feel that if it is adapted to the Indian context, then it will be very useful and will help workers to migrate; They are open to partnering with UK ELT providers
 - The NASSCOMM IT and ITeS SSC have stated that they are planning to adopt the QPs and assessments. They also state that if a feasible proposal is identified, they would like to collaborate for ToT, content and assessment of language skills contextualized to their job roles.
 - NSDC – Collaborate in creation of vocational English training material
 - ASAP, Kerala : More investment from British council is expected in content creation and training of trainers.
 - More case studies from across the globe could be included in the workshop
 - Basic minimum CEFR levels would perhaps work considering the number of unorganized sector workforce across sectors. It would contribute to the learners' aspirations
 - Macmillan – We would like to partner in dispensing the training programmes
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