

ITS and Linguaskill prove students are ready for the world of work



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Lavinia Vettore, English teacher and
ITS school coordinator

An Istituto Tecnico Superiore (ITS) is an Italian tertiary educational institution. Founded in 2008 and based on the German education system, it could be considered equivalent to a Higher Technical Institute. ITS Academy Meccatronico Veneto is based in Vicenza and was one of the first ITS schools to be established. It is the key school in the Veneto network, which comprises nine schools in the region. ITS provide post-diploma courses that offer individuals the opportunity to gain work experience in a company whilst also receiving professional training.

Overcoming the challenge of correct placement

ITS courses provide a bridge between the high school system and the world of work. Every school has a different programme based on the specific employment needs of its region. However, all ITS schools offer the same English language programme, which all students take. It is divided into 80 hours over two years, and students are placed in one of two groups according to their level of English.

Placing students correctly can be challenging. Lavinia Vettore, English teacher and coordinator of ITS schools in the Veneto region, says: 'Students on ITS courses come from different types of school and therefore arrive with different levels of language competence, which may be anything from level A1 to C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).' Last year, ITS Vicenza adopted the Cambridge English Placement Test for all students. This is a fast and reliable way to group learners by their English level, which means they can be confidently placed in the right classes.

Linguaskill: a trusted benchmark of English proficiency

Since 2015, ITS Vicenza had also been looking for an appropriate English test. Lavinia's considerable teaching experience has enabled her to share best practice and lead on the teaching of English within the ITS network. She explains: 'What was needed was something that would be trustworthy, and provide a reliable picture of students' speaking, listening, writing and reading skills. Each student does an internship for two years in a local company, and it is very common for the company to offer them a contract once the internship finishes. Many require English of a good standard and need to know the level of the applicants. The kind of English they need is "general English" rather than technical English or English for specific purposes.'

About ITS Academy Meccatronico Veneto

ITS Academy Meccatronico Veneto is based in Vicenza, Italy. A tertiary educational institution founded in 2008, it was one of the very first ITS schools to be established in Italy and is the key school in the Veneto network. Comprising nine schools throughout the Veneto region, it offers a range of courses that provide a bridge between the school system and the world of work. Confindustria, the General Confederation of Italian Industry, is an important stakeholder in the ITS system.

itsmeccatronico.it

About Linguaskill

Linguaskill is a quick and convenient online test to help higher education institutions and employers check the English levels of individuals and groups of candidates. Supported by artificial intelligence technology, it provides fast, accurate results and clear individual and group reports. Results are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the international standard for describing language ability.

cambridgeenglish.org/linguaskill

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ITS have decided to use Linguaskill to measure how much students' level of English have improved over the two year course. Lavinia explains: 'Linguaskill is modular and covers all four language skills. Students are encouraged to work on all skills, and to aim towards taking all three modules, with a view to enhancing their curriculum by demonstrating their English competence across the four skills. The flexibility of being able to decide how many modules each student takes, is another very positive aspect of Linguaskill.' She adds: 'The test is flexible and easy to use, so the students can decide when to do the test. They don't have to register months ahead, which means it's very practical, and that's what is needed in the world of work.'

Proving English language ability with Linguaskill

After the first test session student feedback was positive. Candidates were impressed with the adaptive technology and its user-friendly features. Using the latest artificial intelligence, the test questions become easier or more difficult depending on an individual's previous answer. The students had not been told that the test was adaptive, and Lavinia says, 'once they realised, they were fascinated by the idea that they all had a different test!'

Another advantage of the test is that there is no pass or fail enabling every student, to attain proof of their English language skills. This is important as every student receives recognition of their achievements.

Lavinia concludes: 'It feels like we have found the perfect test for our type of students at last. These are students who need to qualify for a job and English needs to be part of this qualification. Being able to provide potential employers with a realistic picture of the students' level of English is an essential part of the ITS project. Linguaskill is still relatively new in Italy; however, as companies become more familiar with the test, they will appreciate the fact that students from ITS step into the world of work with a reliable assessment of their English provided by the Linguaskill scores on their CV.' She concludes: 'ITS schools, local companies and Linguaskill is the ideal combination to support the ITS English project. It's a wonderful way to collaborate and to acknowledge our students' achievements.'

