

Benchmarking English skills to improve national curricula

Nationaal Expertisecentrum Leerplanontwikkeling (SLO)

The Netherlands



Cambridge Assessment English worked with the Netherlands institute for curriculum development (Nationaal Expertisecentrum Leerplanontwikkeling – SLO) to deliver and administer a speaking test in schools across the country. Test results enabled SLO to benchmark spoken English ability within the secondary school system, the first time English speaking skills had been formally assessed in this way.

SLO was tasked with delivering new and improved English language curricula for the national secondary education system in the Netherlands, for students in vocational or general streams, and at pre-university level. The aim was to improve the quality of learning outcomes, and therefore raise proficiency levels, by aligning national curricula with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). To achieve this goal, SLO first had to establish the performance levels attained by current students, determine whether these levels met existing targets, and then map current performance against the CEFR. A key part of this benchmarking project was the assessment of English speaking ability – the first time

this specific skill had been formally tested in secondary education in the Netherlands. Cambridge Assessment English was asked to deliver this part of the project as it could offer a high-quality, face-to-face speaking test for all the ability levels defined by the SLO.

The Cambridge Assessment English speaking test was used to map student ability against every CEFR level, from A1 to C2. A sample of 1,732 students, in 40 schools, took the speaking test, with Cambridge Assessment English also sourcing, training and managing the team of experienced examiners required to deliver this complex testing programme.

When testing was completed, Cambridge English produced a detailed report in which results were analysed in terms of CEFR level, and in the contexts of gender, province, first language and educational stream. The report also included a series of recommendations for SLO, which were used to inform the next stage of the curriculum planning process.

Cambridge Assessment English could offer a multi-level test focused on speaking skills.

