



BCIT transforms international student programme with Linguaskill



'What I particularly liked about Linguaskill was how it combined being standards-based and granular with a focus on general English. I was impressed by how much grammar and vocabulary was embedded in all the questions.'



Janet Zlotnik, Project Lead,
Academic Support Planning,
British Columbia Institute
of Technology

As it transformed its international student pathway programme, the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) knew it needed an accurate, objective English placement test to ensure students received the right teaching and support to drive success. By adopting Linguaskill it is able to offer an adaptive test, aligned to international standards, which focuses on the skills that its potential students require. The test can be securely invigilated online and delivers fast, detailed and accurate results.

Providing a pathway to successful study

Given the demanding nature of its programmes, with a high level of team-based work, students at BCIT require strong technical academic English skills.

To assist international students with lower levels of language proficiency, BCIT offers its International Student Entry Program (ISEP), a pathway academic English language programme that prepares students to ensure that they are ready to then enter BCIT courses.

Adopting an objective approach to English testing

While ISEP has been operating successfully for many years, BCIT is revamping the programme to ensure that it is mapped to an international standard and is updated to better meet the needs of today's students and the institution.

'BCIT courses require a proficiency in technical academic English, with much of the learning happening in peer-to-peer teams. Since the teams are cohort-based, if students drop out often they cannot be replaced,' explains Janet Zlotnik, Project Lead, Academic Support Planning, British Columbia Institute of Technology. 'We therefore wanted to create a new pathway programme that was mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to ensure that students were ready for further study and were able to successfully complete the courses of their choice.'

About the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT)

For more than 50 years, the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) has been training the experts, innovators and professionals who shape our economy – across British Columbia (BC) and around the world. With five campuses and over 50,000 students enrolled each year, BCIT is one of BC's largest post-secondary institutes.

bcit.ca

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

About Cambridge Assessment English

Cambridge Assessment English is a not-for-profit department of the University of Cambridge. It produces the world's leading range of qualifications and tests for learners and teachers of English, including Cambridge English Qualifications, Linguaskill and IELTS. Taken by over 5 million people every year, these exams are backed by the work of the largest dedicated research team of any English language test provider.

cambridgeenglish.org

Accurate placement to help students achieve

A key part of entry to ISEP has always been a placement test to ensure that new students are assigned to the correct classes for their language level. However, faculty recognised the need for a more accurate test than what had been in place. ISEP operates on seven-week semesters, and some programmes at BCIT only admit students once per year. Therefore, being able to accurately identify where a student was in precise detail, and how long it would take them to pass ISEP, was vital to keep students motivated, plan capacity accurately and enable them to successfully take up their places at BCIT.

'We knew that understanding a student's current level was central to their learning journey, and thus to their success in ISEP,' continues Janet. 'We had clear requirements for a placement test – it had to be mapped to the CEFR, focused on the language needs of our students and granular enough to fit in with our seven-week semesters to help with scheduling resources.'

After extensive research, BCIT selected Linguaskill. An online, adaptive test, Linguaskill delivers fast, detailed results aligned to the CEFR standard and the Cambridge English Scale for enhanced precision and granularity. Using artificial intelligence, Linguaskill adapts its questions to the individual user's level, improving the experience and delivering swifter testing.

Trialling the test under real-world conditions

Before adopting Linguaskill, BCIT completed an extensive trial of the test with approximately 200 of its existing students. This enabled the institution to compare the results to rankings provided by instructors and to assess the student experience of taking a Linguaskill test.

'The rankings provided by the Linguaskill results were remarkable – at no point did any instructor say that students should have been ranked higher or lower,' adds Janet. 'That was a strong sell for Linguaskill – and we were also impressed with student feedback. They found it harder but more interesting than our previous test. They also liked the adaptive approach plus the fact that they got an exact grade that showed what they needed to do to move forward.'

Online invigilation to ensure international reach

Covid-19 has had a major impact on higher education, particularly when it comes to international study, and Linguaskill is helping BCIT to overcome its challenges when it comes to placement tests. 'Obviously Linguaskill is online, which makes it simpler to run remotely, but most importantly it includes an online invigilation service, which means international students can take the test without needing to travel, and we can be sure of the accuracy and reliability of the results,' adds Janet.

Moving forward as the new ISEP programme begins, BCIT is looking to track three key metrics – reducing the number of failing students, increasing the number who complete the programme and join the BCIT course of their choice, and finally graduate successfully.

'External factors can always impact international student numbers, but with Linguaskill and the new ISEP we now have a detailed assessment, mapped to a global standard, combined with content-based learning matched to the requirements of our courses,' concludes Janet. 'With this in place we are confident for the future at BCIT.'