

UCLES Business English Certificates (BEC)

UCLES EFL certificates have been well-known in Switzerland for many years, but recognition of the BEC (Business English Certificates) is growing rapidly as these are now being used by an increasing number of companies as a focus for in-company training courses, and are also being used in schools and universities as a business-related language qualification.

The Revised BEC

This revised examination was introduced in March 2002, as a result of a review begun in 1999, in line with UCLES EFL's policy of reviewing all its tests at regular intervals. The three levels are: **Preliminary** (equivalent to ALTE level 2/PET), **Vantage** (equivalent to ALTE level 3/FCE) and **Higher** (equivalent to ALTE level 4/CAE). At all three BEC levels, the 'business' aspect of the examination affects the vocabulary, the types of texts selected and the situations presented in the texts. The format of the three tests is similar, with task-types, vocabulary and assessment criteria graded according to the level.

The Four Skills

The BEC examinations cover the four language skills: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Each skill represents 25% of the total marks available. In BEC Preliminary, the tests of Reading and Writing are combined on one paper, whereas in BEC Vantage and BEC Higher, these papers are separate.

Reading

The emphasis in the Reading papers is on testing different reading skills, such as reading for gist and global mean-

ing, reading for specific information and testing understanding of discourse features, vocabulary and structure. The texts are based on real world material: notices, graphs, advertisements, articles, reports, and other authentic business-related material, depending on the level. Cloze, proof-reading and editing exercises are also included in this paper.

Writing

In the Writing papers at all three levels, candidates have to produce two pieces of writing, usually an internal company communication, such as a memo, and a longer piece of business correspondence, such as a letter, report or proposal. These vary in length and complexity, and involve different input material: rubrics, graphics or texts, such as advertisements, depending on the level.

Listening

The Listening paper also tests different skills, such as listening for specific information, identifying topic, function, context and attitude, with various test types, such as gap-filling, multiple matching, and multiple choice.

Speaking

The Speaking test is always taken in pairs with two examiners (except where an uneven number of candidates necessitates a group of three). At all three levels, the test consists of three parts. The first part is a conversation between the interlocutor and each candidate, based on personal information and opinions. In the second part each candidate gives a mini-presentation on a business theme, based on written prompts. In the third part

there is a discussion between the two candidates on a business-related topic, supported by written or visual prompts, which is then extended by the interlocutor joining the conversation with further verbal prompts.

Grading and Results

At BEC Preliminary, results are reported as two passing grades (Pass with Merit and Pass) and two failing grades (Narrow Fail and Fail). For BEC Vantage and BEC Higher, results are reported as three passing grades (A,B and C) and two failing grades (D and E). For all three levels, candidates receive a graphical profile of their performance in each skill. The overall grade is based on the total score gained in all papers. It is not necessary to achieve a satisfactory

level in each paper in order to pass the exam.

Further Information

Schools and teachers who would like further information on these examinations should visit the UCLES website at www.cambridge-eft.org, which gives information on all the examinations. It also lists the names and addresses of the Local Secretaries in Switzerland, who can supply handbooks, examination dates and any further information required.

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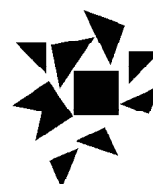
MA, PGCE, DTEFLA teaches Cambridge courses from PET to PROFICIENCY, including the BEC exams, to adults and apprentices at the Berufsbildungszentrum Wil.

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