The Eng(lish) Up Project

Viviane Grisez, Directrice du Centre de Langues Vivantes

From interactive English Bachelor’s classes to specialist Master’s courses in English, from general to academic English, lots of effort is being put into turning a basic user of English into a proficient user of the language through the Faculty of Engineering’s Eng(lish) Up Project.

English is generally considered to be the *lingua franca* of the scientific community. For example, roughly 80% of all the journals indexed in *Scopus* are published in English. The adoption of English as the universal language of science is due in part to historical, political and economic factors which favoured English over other potential candidate languages, such as Chinese, French, German, Russian, or Spanish.

English is consequently the language *par excellence* for Engineers and has become part of their daily life as a student, teacher, researcher or manager. The Faculty of Engineering has recently launched a number of initiatives in order to improve the students’ level of English in general, and to encourage international mobility for both students and teachers.

Both Bachelor’s and Master’s students deal with Shakespeare’s language from their first steps at the university to their ultimate *moment de gloire* when defending their Master’s or Doctoral thesis in English.

**REACHING B2-LEVEL IN COMPREHENSION AND PRODUCTION SKILLS: THE CHALLENGE IN BACHELOR**

Over the Bachelor’s years more than 130 hours are devoted to face-to-face, interactive English classes. Students are divided into small, homogeneous groups in order to help them reach the same course objectives by the end of the first year. Remedial workshops are set up and extra material is available on the Moodle learning platform.

After the first year, which is meant to be a sort of refresher, the focus is on oral presentations and animated discussions and debates in scientifically-oriented subjects (English for Specific Purposes). The students prepare scientific presentations, write abstracts and learn how to write a decent bibliography in English.

In Block 3 of the Bachelor’s degree course (BAB3), many activities are aimed at providing students with the necessary skills to be well-prepared for the specialist Master’s courses taught in English. These activities include attending video-lectures, taking notes, participating very actively in debates about authentic situations, doing bibliographic work on a specific scientific subject, describing graphs, etc. (English for Academic purposes).

Below is the corresponding level descriptor of the global scale, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), European Council, 2001:

- B1+ – Can understandHallidays the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed texts on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and independent disadvantages of various options.

**IELTS, THE INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST SYSTEM AS AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT TOOL**

IELTS is the high-stakes English test for study, migration and work. IELTS is available in two test formats – Academic or General – and provides a valid and accurate assessment of the four language skills. A score is given from 1 to 9 for each part of the test – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The average produces the overall band score.

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<tr>
<th>Band score</th>
<th>Skill level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BAND 9</strong></td>
<td>Expert user</td>
<td>You have a fully operational command of the language. Your use of English is appropriate, accurate and fluent, and you show complete understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BAND 8</strong></td>
<td>Very good user</td>
<td>You have a fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriate usage. You may misunderstand some things in unfamiliar situations. You handle complex detailed argumentation well.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BAND 7</strong></td>
<td>Good user</td>
<td>You have an operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally you handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BAND 6</strong></td>
<td>Competent user</td>
<td>Generally you have an effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. You can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BAND 5</strong></td>
<td>Modest user</td>
<td>You have a partial command of the language, and cope with overall meaning in most situations, although you are likely to make many mistakes. You should be able to handle basic communication in your own field.</td>
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Band scores for the International English Language Test System

At the FPMs, the academic version of this test will be taken by more than 100 students at the end of BAB3. A score of 6.0 is required, which corresponds to a B2-level (CEFR). All this brings us to say that this new Eng(lish) Up project at the FPMs will progressively prepare Bachelor’s students for the Master’s CLIL courses, and will be an open gateway to the rest of the world.

**ENGINEERS-TO-BE, A NEW MULTILINGUAL GENERATION?**

As a conclusion, one could just wonder how good prospective Engineers should be at English. We know that French *Grandes Ecoles* are imposing very high standards of knowledge in terms of foreign language acquisition. Also, the AEDES, *Agence pour l’Évaluation de la Qualité de l’Enseignement Supérieur* in the French-speaking community of Belgium strongly encourages multilingualism as a way to promote the internationalisation of course programmes and teacher and student mobility. No doubt that this refreshing programme will open the minds of both students and staff to a world of experience and knowledge sharing.

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