The New Mondiale-Testing Online Technical English Test
A Five-Star Approach to Language Proficiency Qualifications

With more and more people in or seeking employment having to demonstrate effective language and communication skills for the workplace, the need for vocationally-oriented language courses and qualifications has greatly increased over the last decade or two. And the signs are that this trend will definitely continue in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, a further development can be found. Language courses and course materials are becoming more and more specialized. No longer do we simply find courses and course books for Business English or Technical English. As can be seen by quick reference to the catalogues sent out by the major international publishing houses, these more generic terms are being slowly replaced or complemented by more specific names such as English for Human Resources, English for Marketing, English for Engineering or English for Science. This obviously reflects the higher degree of specialization required at many of today's workplaces.

And yet this significant development does not yet seemed to have been reflected in the area of language qualifications, particularly in the technical field. The few tests available internationally are still offered as Technical English examinations. And approximately two years ago **IATET** gave the basic impulse regarding the development of a new Technical English Test. As was written in an internal paper on this subject:

> "…… the general and professional English exams currently available
>   do not always test technical English skills effectively. "

One of the reasons for this problem is certainly the fact that there are many possible definitions of technical English and technical English skills. Indeed, any look at Technical English qualifications needs to take into account the immediate needs of the workplace and the demands placed on the people at that workplace, because tests that do not allow candidates to demonstrate their workplace skills will in no way be effective.

So, the question is: What are these needs and what are the demands? Above all: who is the so-called target group, the end user, the stake-holder? All these questions were the starting point for the following ideas and thoughts on the specific nature of Technical English teaching and, above all, testing.

Firstly: The question Who? Who uses and needs English in technical contexts? What kind of workplace do they have? What status might they have in the company? And basically, there are five ways to look at and to describe the end-user:

a) The area of technology the people are engaged in:
Technical English workplaces are found over a wide spectrum of specialized industries ranging from mechanical or electrical engineering, civil engineering, logistics, the pharmaceutical industry, IT, chemicals, oil and petroleum, etc. etc.

b) The actual workplace
Are the people out in the field on construction sites, troubleshooting on customer premises – or are they back office, research and development, sales engineers, etc.?

c) Work experience:
Are they in employment? Seeking employment? Are they still in full-time education or training?

d) If in employment, their status
Are they high level managerial staff, middle management of administrative staff or low level production works or on-site technicians?

e) The reasons for needing English
Are they seeking a first-time job? Are they seeking to maintain their current job? Are they seeking to climb the career ladder? Do they simply want to be able to cope more easily with the duties and responsibilities they have at present?

f) The job description

Regardless of the workplace, one of the major features of people who use and need technical English is the need to get the job done. There is a clear action-based attitude to language learning that requires the same action-based approach in teaching and testing, in order to achieve the degree of face validity required to satisfy all stake-holders, i.e. not only the end-user, but also the employer and the industry in general.

At the same time – depending on the level of proficiency, e.g. as from B2 upwards – the candidate must demonstrate her/his quality of language. For example a high-calibre technical presentation must also reveal a high degree of accuracy in order to be effective.

The above enumeration of the various features of the technical English target group shows both how difficult and at the same time how important it is to provide a qualification that is flexible enough to meet the individual and personal needs of the stake-holders. For example:

Level: What is the appropriate level for such a qualification? B1, B2, C1? There is no one answer, since the level needs to be linked to the tasks that have to be dealt with and the audience that the candidate will be communicating with.

The consequence is: Either provide three technical English examinations at three levels, or – perhaps a more appropriate and more viable solution – a multi-level examination.

Profile: Does the candidate really need a qualification in all four skills? Given the variety of workplaces and the wide spectrum of possible tasks and responsibilities, it may well be that it is unnecessary to, for example to demonstrate proficiency in both speaking and writing.

Does the candidate need the same level of competence and proficiency in all four skills, of does the workplace only require specific skills to be at the higher level? Or, to put the question a different way: Does the candidate need a one-level qualification, e.g. B2 across all four skills, or is it more useful to have a profile e.g. C1 in speaking, B1 in writing, B2 in reading and B2 in listening, especially if the candidate needs to demonstrate that he/she has same language qualification profile as defined by the company for his/her present or future workplace.

The consequence is: Develop a one multi-level examination that allows candidates to demonstrate their language and communication strengths to meet the profile demands of the workplace.

Content: Does the candidate need/wish to demonstrate her/his language and communication skills across a wide range of areas of technology, or is it more relevant to have her/his language qualification in the specific area in which he is (or hopes soon to be) working? This will perhaps be of particular importance with regard to the productive skills of speaking and writing.

The consequence is: Candidates should be given a choice of various content options in for example the productive skills part of the examination to meet the direct needs of the workplace.

Work Experience: The range of potential candidates for a technical English examination covers both people in training and thus without work experience all the way up to experienced members of staff who have spent a number of years "on the job",

The consequence is: Offer a degree of differentiated tasks to meet all levels of experience in order not to avoid bias.

Test methods: There is a need for the candidate to be able to demonstrate the ability to work with an action-based approach at the workplace and with the level of accuracy expected at the given level of proficiency.

The consequence is: The test should enable candidates to show both their language and their communication competence: i.e. the ability to fulfil tasks with the necessary level of accuracy, and should incorporate the corresponding evaluation criteria.

These five features, which clearly demonstrate the high-level of flexibility that a testing system must provide in order to offer individualized, tailor-made qualifications, are the basis for the new and innovative online Technical English test at present being developed by Mondiale-Testing GmbH and due to go on stream late spring 2012.

The innovations can be summed up as follows:

On registration, candidates can choose their specific area of technology from a wide range of options. At the present moment, these are: mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, civil engineering, IT, logistics, automotive engineering, chemical engineering, pharmaceutics, with more to follow. This choice determines the specific area that the tasks in the two productive skill tests are taken from.

The test comprises a General Technical English Module (GTEM) with fifty multiple-choice items covering lexical repertoire and grammatical accuracy plus ten listening and ten reading comprehension items. In addition there is a Writing Test and a Speaking Test.

The GTEM and the Writing Test are taken online, the Speaking Test is either per Skype or per telephone.

Of the three parts of the test, the GTEM is mandatory, as is at least one productive skill test, candidates having the option of taking the Speaking Test and/or the Writing Test according to their needs.

Candidates can choose from a variety of optional tasks in the Writing Test and from different sub-topic areas in the Speaking Test.

All tasks in the Speaking Test and the Writing Test are task-based.

In all parts of the test, the candidates receive an assessment along the B1.1 – B1.2 – B2.1 – B2.2 – C1 scale according to the performance they produce.

The test can be taken locally at all accredited centres on the network to be established on an international basis. The timing of the test can be chosen by the candidate in coordination with the accredited centre. The Speaking Test is arranged with the Mondiale-Testing central office.

Further details are available from Mondiale-Testing GmbH. Contact beck@mondiale.de or tranter@mondiale.de)

Candidates can choose their own specialist area.

Candidates receive tasks to meet their own personal level of experience.

Candidates receive their personal language profile B1 – B2 – C1

Candidates can choose from a variety of skill-based options

Flexible organization in terms of venue and test date