

English Assessment and School Education

Raising international English language
standards across the world





Client: Tokyo Metropolitan Government

Test takers: Year 1, 2 and 3 Junior High School students

Purpose of the test: Assessment of speaking skills

Country: Japan

Accurately assessing the speaking communication skills of secondary students at scale remains a challenge for many public education systems, with ministries choosing instead to rely on multiple-choice examinations. As a consequence, teachers may not offer sufficient opportunities for students to adequately develop this essential employability skill because there are no performance measures and incentives in place.

In 2024, the British Council partnered with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) to deliver speaking assessments for 240,000 junior high school students across Tokyo. This initiative ensured that students in Years 1, 2 and 3 had their speaking skills assessed in a fair, reliable, transparent and efficient manner. The test was designed to align with both the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and CEFR-J, Japan's own adapted framework for language proficiency.

This large-scale assessment project reflects TMG's commitment to enhancing communicative English skills among students, equipping them with the language proficiency needed for future education and employment opportunities. By leveraging innovative testing methodologies, the British Council provided a scalable and cost-effective solution that ensures fairness, accessibility and transparency.

The challenge: Enhancing Speaking Assessment in Schools

As part of a series of education reforms, TMG has been working to improve how English is taught and assessed in state secondary schools. Recognising that speaking skills are essential for real-world communication, TMG introduced structured assessments at key points in junior high school. However, delivering a fair and consistent speaking test for such a large student population posed significant challenges, including:

- **logistical complexity** – ensuring 80,000 Year 3 students could take the test on the same day, across two sessions, while assessing 240,000 students across the academic year
- **technical feasibility** – developing a secure, scalable and efficient method
- to capture and assess spoken responses
- **academic alignment** – ensuring the assessment reflected the national curriculum and provided a meaningful evaluation of students' communicative abilities.

After a competitive selection process, TMG awarded the contract to the British Council, leveraging its global expertise in language assessment to deliver a high-quality solution.



Solving the Problem of Assessing Speaking Skills in Secondary Education



Strengthening ELT Through Assessment and Professional Development

Malaysia | Ministry of Education



Client: Malaysian Ministry of Education

Test takers: English teachers

Purpose of the test: Benchmarking and professional development

Country: Malaysia

In 2012, the British Council and the Malaysian Ministry of Education launched Pro-ELT: Professional Development Programme for English Teachers in Malaysia. This project aimed to enhance the English proficiency of over 5,000 Malaysian English language teachers.

To support this initiative to meet the need of the Ministry of Education, the British Council developed a specialized version of the Aptis test differentiate between CEFR C1 and C2 levels, providing a more precise assessment of teachers' language skills. Teachers scoring within the B band of the CEFR were required to complete a 12-month professional development course, after which they retook the Aptis test to measure their progress.

Results/impact:

The program proved highly effective, with the first cohort demonstrating an improvement of over 75% in their language proficiency. Aptis quickly became a critical assessment tool for English language teachers in Malaysia, with significant financial incentives offered to those achieving a C band score.

Encouraged by this success, the program was expanded to include 9,000 additional teachers, further embedding Aptis as the standard for English language benchmarking. The project's success has also inspired other organizations, including teacher training institutions, to adopt Aptis as their preferred assessment tool for evaluating their staff's English language skills.

"We have a very interesting programme to up skill and upgrade our English teachers."

- Tengku Nurul Azian Shahrman, Director Education National Key Results Area, Performance Management & Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), Prime Minister's Office

© British Council 2025 The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide.
A registered charity: 209131 (England and Wales) SC037733 (Scotland).

For more information, please contact:
Keren.Leumi@britishcouncil.org.il