

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations

Business English Certificates

Information for Candidates

BEC VANTAGE



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE
ESOL Examinations

English for Speakers of Other Languages

Information for Candidates – BEC Vantage

Why take BEC?

More than ever, you need a good knowledge of English to succeed in international business and commerce. If you can show you have relevant language skills, you'll have a great advantage in the jobs market and more choice if you want to work or study abroad.

The Business English Certificates (BEC) from Cambridge ESOL have been created specifically for individual learners who wish to obtain a business-related English language qualification. By taking an internationally recognised business qualification like BEC, you can show that you have learned English to an appropriate standard and can use it in a professional context.

BEC is available at three levels: BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage and BEC Higher. BEC Vantage is set at Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Why take a Cambridge ESOL exam?

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) offers the world's leading range of qualifications for learners and teachers of English. Around 1.75 million people in over 135 countries take Cambridge ESOL exams every year.

- **Develop effective communication skills**

The Cambridge ESOL examinations cover all four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. They include a range of tasks which assess your ability to use English, so that you develop the full range of skills you need to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

- **Worldwide recognition**

Universities and employers all over the world recognise Cambridge ESOL exams as a measure of your achievement in English. Whether you are hoping to study architecture in Australia or work in IT in Italy, a Cambridge ESOL examination is a valuable stamp in your passport to success.

- **Quality you can trust**

We do extensive research and trialling to make sure that you get the fairest, most accurate assessment of your ability and that our exams are most relevant to the range of uses for which you need English.

Preparing for BEC

If you would like more practice material to help you prepare for BEC Vantage, there are past paper packs available to buy which include an audio CD of the Listening test. You can find more information, prices and details of how to order on our website at:

www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/pastpapers.htm

What does BEC Vantage involve?

This booklet is a brief introduction to BEC Vantage. If you would like to see a full sample paper for BEC Vantage, you can download one from our website at:

www.CambridgeESOL.org/support/dloads/bec_downloads.htm

The table below shows the different parts of BEC Vantage and how long each paper takes.

<i>Name of paper</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Time allowed</i>	<i>Marks (% of total)</i>
Reading	5 parts/45 items	1 hour	25%
Writing	2 tasks	45 minutes	25%
Listening	3 parts/30 items	about 40 minutes including transfer time	25%
Speaking	3 parts	14 minutes (2:2 format*)	25%

* 2 examiners, 2 candidates (2:3 format is used for the last group in a session where necessary)

■ Reading

Time: 1 hour

Reading is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One (7 questions)

This is a matching task. There are four short texts on a related theme or a single text divided into four sections. Although the context of each text will be similar, there will also be information that is particular to each text. There is also a set of seven statements related to the texts. You have to match each statement with the relevant text.

In the example below, you can see four statements (1-4) about the mobile phone industry and four texts which are comments by mobile phone retailers. You have to say which text refers to each statement. In the exam, there are seven statements like those below, so you may have to use each text (A-D) more than once.

- 1 the need for retail staff to stay informed about the mobile phones they are selling
- 2 the belief that the market will not sustain the present number of mobile phone retailers
- 3 the use of mobile phones no longer being restricted to a specific group of people
- 4 the relationship between charges and the number of mobile phone users

A

Market awareness of the mobile telephone has exploded and the retailer who specialises in mobile phones is seeing growth like never before. Admittedly, some customers buy their first mobile phone in the supermarket, but for advice, add-ons and particular services they turn to the specialist. There are a large number of mobile phone retailers and I can't help but feel the market only has room for four players. Undoubtedly, customer service is the factor that differentiates operators and I think this year we will probably see rationalisation in the sector.

B

When I first started in the industry, mobile phones were retailing at a thousand pounds and were as large as box files. Now, prices are constantly being driven down and handsets are considerably more compact. There is intense competition between the network providers, and every time they lower their tariffs, more people come into the market. This will continue, and while retail dealers' profits will be affected dramatically, network providers will have to generate more revenue by offering internet provision and data services to the mobile user.

C

Over a few years, prices have dropped sharply and technological advances have meant products have changed – and are changing. Successful retailers must try to keep on top of these developments and invest in the training of employees so they are able to offer impartial advice to customers. E-commerce is taking off but this won't necessarily replace traditional retail outlets. In order to stand out, you need innovative ideas on customer service. We don't believe in criticising other retailers, but there's nothing particularly exciting out there at present.

D

The mobile phone business is behaving like the internet industry in take-up and the pace of innovation, and it's important not to be left behind. We must continue to innovate in delivering the product to the customer. In terms of service provision, you can draw comparisons between us and our closest rival, but clearly all the main mobile phone retailers have succeeded in taking the industry forward. Growth has accelerated rapidly and the mobile telephone has changed from simply being a business tool, to being a means of communication for everyone.

Part Two (5 questions)

This is a matching task. There is a text which has had six sentences removed from it and a set of seven sentences. You have to match each gap with the sentence which you think fits in terms of meaning and structure. The first gap is always given as an example so that you have five gaps left to complete. Remember that only one sentence fits each gap. When you have finished this part, there will be one sentence which you have not used.

The texts for this part have a clear line of thought or argument which you can still understand without all the sentences. Read through the gapped text and the list of sentences first, in order to get an idea of what it is about.

When you choose the correct sentence for a gap, you should read before and after the text to check that it fits well. Finally, read through the entire text inserting the sentences as you go along to check that the information makes sense.

In the example below there is an article about a survey of businesswomen staying in hotels. Six sentences have been removed. Read the sentences after the text and decide which sentence belongs in which gap. In the exam you mark the correct answer (A–G) for each gap (8–12) on your Answer Sheet. You can only use each letter once.

Hotels Failing Businesswomen

Hoteliers should take note because they are facing serious criticism! Women account for more than half of all business travellers, but hotels are not doing enough for them. **(0)** These show that the number of complaints made about the way women guests are treated is increasing.

The Bartonsfield Hotel in London also conducted a recent survey of UK businesswomen, which reveals that 70% feel they receive an inferior service. **(8)** The attitude of hotel staff made them feel out of place in public areas; for example, 62% chose to eat in their rooms because they were made to feel uncomfortable by staff when dining alone. **(9)** Four years ago, for example, a similar survey had revealed that a significant number of women travelling alone and wishing to use the hotel restaurant were actually turned away.

Many of the suggestions for improved services put forward by the Business Travel Association are relatively simple. **(10)** Placing tables in restaurants in a way that allows the head waiter to introduce guests to one another, so they can

choose to sit together over a meal, was a further suggestion. Guests in the dining room would then have the opportunity to meet up with others who might, for example, be attending the same conference, or have the same business interests.

Wendy Manning, executive manager of the Bartonsfield Hotel, agreed with the Business Travel Association that hotel star ratings should be influenced by the level of service they offer to female business guests. **(11)** 'Our survey highlighted the unwillingness of many women to air their views if they are treated badly,' Wendy Manning pointed out.

A group of influential businesswomen recently met to discuss the results of the Business Travel Association questionnaire. They suggested that businesswomen should not hesitate to make it clear if they have a problem. **(12)** Once clients have gone, it is all too easy for the issue to be ignored by hotel managers, and it will also be forgotten by the overworked business executives themselves.

- A** The hotel staff assumed they should be booked into the same room.
- B** But there is clear evidence that things are slowly improving.
- C** This would enable women to make an informed choice about a hotel, and they would not be placed in the uncomfortable position of having to complain about poor service.
- D** It is advisable for them to do this during their stay rather than waiting until they check out.
- E** Making sure that facilities in guest bedrooms cater equally for the needs of male and female guests is one such idea.
- F** Most of the women, when questioned further, thought that the reason for this was that they were female and travelling alone.
- G** This is evident from the results of a questionnaire distributed to hotel guests by the Business Travel Association.

Part Three (6 questions)

This task consists of a text and six comprehension questions. Each one has four possible answers (A, B, C or D).

The example below is an article about product life cycles. Read it and try to answer the questions (13–15) which follow. You have to choose A, B, C or D for each question. There are three more questions like the ones below in the exam.

Product Life Cycles and Sales Strategy

One of the most important concepts in sales management and marketing is that of the product life cycle. This is a historical record of the life of a product, showing the stage in its life the product has reached at a particular time. By identifying the stage that a product is in or may be heading towards, companies can formulate better marketing plans. All products have 'lives' in as much as they are created, sell with varying profitability over a period of time, and then become obsolete and are replaced or simply no longer produced. A product's sales position and profitability can be expected to fluctuate over time and so, at each successive stage in the product's cycle, it is necessary to adopt different tactics.

The two main features of the product life cycle are unit sales and unit profit. The unit sales figures usually jump on introduction, as a response to heavy advertising and promotion, as customers buy the product experimentally. This is generally followed by a levelling off while it is evaluated – the length of this period depending on the use to which the product is put. Then, unit sales rise steadily through the growth phase to the maturity phase, when the product is widely accepted, and so on to saturation level. By this time, competitors will have entered the market with their own version and, from this point, the sales team will have to work even harder to win all additional sales. Eventually, the product's sales decline as better versions enter the market and competition becomes too strong.

In retrospect, most firms know what happened to their products from launch to

withdrawal. They can compile this information from the records of unit sales.

Unfortunately, unit sales are not the complete story as it is unit profit that is the decisive factor, although this is not always recorded accurately. It is this figure that sales management has to monitor, though, to ensure an effective marketing strategy and to produce effective profits.

At launch, the product is costed accurately on the basis of production costs plus selling costs. Initially these remain fairly stable, but, when the product is proving successful, competitors will bring out their own 'copy-cat' products. With a competitor in the field, the original firm has to respond in order to maintain its market position. It can run special sales promotions, improve deliveries, make more frequent sales calls and so on. Often the extra expenditure is not accurately charged to the product and the result is that, long before unit sales are noticeably falling, the unit profit has already fallen.

The product life cycle, then, presents a picture of what happened in the product's 'lifetime', so how can this be used as an ongoing aid to management decision-making? Every sales manager has a chart on which the progress of sales is plotted and this can be used as a guide to the stage of development each product is currently in. An essential management skill is being able to interpret sales results and draw in the stages as they occur. Deciding where each stage begins and ends can be a random exercise, though usually the stages are based on where the rate of sales growth or decline becomes pronounced.

13 According to the text, the end of a product's life cycle is marked by

- A a sharp rise in production costs.
- B the product becoming outdated.
- C an increase in customer complaints.
- D less support from sales management.

14 What does the writer say about sales management in the first paragraph?

- A Companies should spend more time on their sales planning.
- B There are many managers who need to improve their sales performance.
- C Most sales managers fail to recognise which stage a product has reached.
- D The sales approach should change with each phase of the product life cycle.

15 According to the text, a greater sales effort is required for a product when

- A it is particularly innovative.
- B the advertising budget has been cut.
- C rival companies start to produce something similar.
- D consumer interest switches to a new product category.

Part Four (15 questions)

In this part you have a text with fifteen gaps. You have to decide which word belongs in each gap.

The example below is some advice about the use of technology in presentations. You have to choose a word (A, B, C or D) to fill each of the gaps in the text (19–23). We only show five questions below. In the exam, there are ten more questions like these.

Guidelines for giving Presentations

Most presentations today depend on the use of some sort of technology, such as a laptop computer linked to a projector. While this technology can help to **(19)** presentations better, it also has a **(20)** of getting in the way. As a general **(21)**, it is better to **(22)** on the content of a presentation as a means of **(23)** your audience's attention, rather than relying on sophisticated equipment.

Bear in mind that when an organisation invites **(24)** for a contract, they may **(25)** four or five presentations from different companies on the same day. Each of these companies will probably be using the same computer graphics **(26)** and the same equipment. The chances are the presentations will be similar too.

That's why the content and **(27)** of what you say are important. Think about what you want to say and how to say it as clearly as possible. As a first step, you need to **(28)** the main points you want to get across. Audiences are easily bored and **(29)** to remember only the most entertaining, exciting or unusual ideas.

Next create your materials, choosing the images for your presentation carefully. Remember you do not want to stop your audience from listening to you, nor do you want to **(30)** them.

Finally, make all the necessary **(31)** for the equipment you need. If technology is to be an important **(32)** of your presentation, make sure you know how to use it **(33)** and test it out beforehand.

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| 19 | A produce | B make | C construct | D build |
| 20 | A behaviour | B habit | C practice | D routine |
| 21 | A method | B law | C rule | D course |
| 22 | A focus | B define | C target | D direct |
| 23 | A gaining | B acquiring | C collecting | D taking |

Part Five (12 questions)

This task is similar to something you may have to do at work if you sometimes have to check business documents to make sure that there are no mistakes before the final version is sent out.

The example below is an article about a training company. In most of the lines 34–45, there is one extra word. It is either grammatically incorrect or does not fit in with the meaning of the text. If you can find the extra word, you have to write it in CAPITAL LETTERS on your Answer Sheet. Some lines are, however, correct and you should write CORRECT on your Answer Sheet. There are two examples at the beginning of the text, (0) and (00). In line 0 the extra/wrong word is 'so' and line 00 is correct.

Training Provision

0 There is little doubt that training has become so an accepted part of business but it is
00 equally true that companies take a much less scientific approach than they should. A
34 recent study suggested us that, while UK organisations spend nearly £10bn a year on
35 training, 37% of them have never evaluated that expenditure in strict terms of business
36 impact. Yet if training activities that are run along the same lines as other business
37 operations, in ways that maximise with opportunities, it becomes easier for training
38 organisations to help companies meet strategic goals. One organisation showing an
39 awareness of what this principle is CT Solutions, a training business that has its own
40 premises in South London. The need for more training has combined it with cutbacks in
41 office accommodation to create plenty of business for those hiring out space, particularly
42 upper-end hotels. But while CT Solutions detected that many organisations were not
43 satisfied with hotels because they do not always provide a good service. CT Solutions is
44 totally dedicated to providing of space for business, mostly for training, but also for
45 conferences and AGMs. Clearly, since the business has been grown in size, it is an
approach that works.

■ Writing

Time: 45 minutes

For BEC Vantage, you have to produce two pieces of writing:

- a communication with a colleague or colleagues within the company on a business-related matter. It may be a note, message, memo or e-mail;

and one of the following:

- a piece of correspondence with somebody outside the company (e.g. a customer or supplier) on a business-related matter. It may be a letter, fax or e-mail
- a report; this means the presentation of information in relation to a specific issue or event. The report will contain an introduction, main body of findings and conclusion; it may be a memo or an e-mail
- a proposal; this has a similar format to a report, but remember that a proposal is about the future and includes recommendations for discussion; it may be a memo or an e-mail.

The Writing paper is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One

In this part the task rubric explains who you are and who you are writing to. You may have to write a note, message, memo or e-mail and you have to write 40 to 50 words. The instructions include bullet points which tell you the pieces of information that you must use in your answer. If you have to write a memo or an e-mail, it is not necessary to include to/from/date/subject details.

The example below is a typical task for Part One of the Writing section.

PART ONE

- You are a regional sales manager for an international company. You have been asked to go to a meeting at your company's head office. You cannot go, so somebody else will go in your place.
- Write an **e-mail** to Erica Young, who is organising the meeting:
 - apologising for not being able to go to the meeting
 - explaining why you cannot go
 - saying who will go.
- **Write 40 – 50 words.**
- Write on the opposite page.

In the exam, you write your answer on the opposite page of the question paper.

Part Two

In the second Writing task, you have to write 120 to 140 words in the form of business correspondence, a short report or proposal. There is an explanation of the task and one or more texts as input material. These texts may contain visual or graphic material and have 'handwritten' notes on them.

The format for proposals and reports is very similar. At this level, reports must be clearly organised and should not contain letter features. If you have to write a letter, it is not necessary to include postal addresses in your answer. If you have to write a fax, you don't have to include 'fax header' details, and if you have to write a memo or an e-mail, you don't have to include to/from/date/subject details.

In the example below, you work for BusinessSpace plc, a company which rents fully serviced offices to other businesses. You have just received the fax below.

RENVER ESTATES **FAX**

TO: BusinessSpace
FROM: Reinhard Mieter
SUBJECT: Renting Office Space

Further to our discussion last week we have now decided to rent office space from you for the next twelve months:

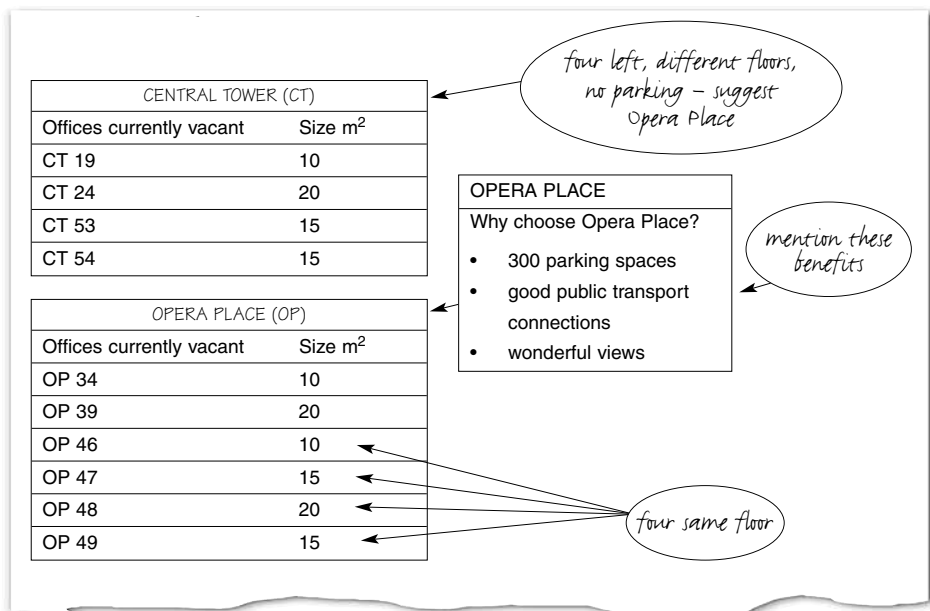
Requirements

- one office of 10 m², two of 15 m², one of 20 m²
- must be on same floor
- 40 parking spaces

Please confirm if this office space is vacant in Central Tower.

offer 10% discount for 18-month booking

To write your answer, you need to read this fax from Reinhard Mieter and the other information given on the next page. As you can see, you have already made some handwritten notes. You have to write a fax in reply to Reinhard Mieter and it is important to include the information from all your handwritten notes. In the exam you write your answers in pen in your question paper booklet.



■ Listening

Time: approx. 40 minutes including 10 minutes' transfer time.

The Listening paper is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One (12 questions)

In this part there are three conversations or answering machine messages, with a gapped text to go with each. Each text provides a very clear context and has four spaces which you have to fill with one or two words or a number. The texts may be forms, diary excerpts, invoices, message pads, etc. You will hear each conversation or message twice. As you listen, you have to complete the empty spaces.

In this part of the Listening test you have to listen carefully using the prompts on your question paper in order to find the missing information. Remember that the correct answer may not be the first possible answer you hear and you may have to work out what the answer is from the information given.

In the example below, a woman is telephoning a conference centre office. You have to listen carefully to the conversation and write one or two words or a number in each of the numbered spaces. In the exam, there are two more conversations like this one.

NOTES ABOUT SEMINAR	
Date:	21st February
Title:	(1)
Time:	10 am - 4 pm.
Venue:	(2)
Topic of extra workshop:	(3)
Amount payable in advance:	(4) £..... per person

Part Two (10 questions)

This part is divided into two sections. Each section has the same format: you will hear five short monologues and have to match each monologue to a set of items A–H. In each section, the eight options all belong to the overall theme or topic which will be clearly stated in the task rubric. The two sections will always test different areas and so if the first section focuses on, say, topics, the second section will focus on something else, such as functions (e.g. agreeing/disagreeing, expressing preferences).

In the example below, five people are talking about a problem. For each recording, you have to decide what the speaker is talking about. You should write one letter (A–H) next to the number of the recording. You can only use each letter once. You will hear the five recordings twice. There is a second section like this one in the exam.

13	A losing a business card
14	B taking the wrong equipment
15	C arriving late for a meeting
16	D forgetting an address
17	E misunderstanding a message
	F missing a presentation
	G forgetting to make a phone call
	H taking the wrong documents

Part Three (8 questions)

This is a longer recording, usually lasting approximately 4 minutes. It will typically be an interview, conversation or discussion with two or more speakers, or possibly a presentation or report with one speaker. There are eight questions that focus on details and main ideas in the text. There may be questions on opinions and feelings, but these will be relatively simple. You will not have to remember long or complex pieces of information. You will hear the recording twice.

In the example below, you will hear a radio interview with José Martínez, the Director of Pizza Rapida, a pizza delivery chain. For each question (23–25), you have to choose A, B or C. In the exam, there are five more questions like these.

23 José Martínez became successful by

- A** taking over a well-known competitor.
- B** establishing an innovative retail business.
- C** gaining a reputation for high quality.

24 Before José Martínez set up his pizza delivery service, he

- A** tested samples on potential clients.
- B** handed out product questionnaires.
- C** assessed demand in different areas.

25 According to José Martínez, the Spanish fast food business

- A** is different from that of the U.S.
- B** has slowed slightly in its rate of growth.
- C** employs an increasing number of women.

■ Speaking

Time: 14 minutes

The Speaking test is conducted by two external examiners and you will be tested in pairs of candidates. At centres with an uneven number of candidates, the last single candidate is examined with the last pair in a group of three. The Speaking test is worth 25% of the total marks.

Part One

In the first part of the test, one of the examiners addresses each of you in turn and asks first general, then more business-related questions. The purpose of this is to test your ability to talk briefly about yourself, to provide concise information on your home, interests and jobs, and to show that you can agree/disagree, express preferences, etc.

Part Two

The second part of the test is a 'mini-presentation'. In this part, the examiner will give each of you a choice of three topics (A, B or C) and you have 1 minute to prepare a speech lasting approximately 1 minute. After each of you has spoken, the examiner invites your partner to ask a question about what you have said.

A: WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN...?	B: WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN...?	C: WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN...?
Selecting applicants for a job	Choosing a new supplier	Aiming to improve production quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work Experience• Personal Qualities••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prices and Discounts• Reputation••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up-to-date equipment• Staff Training••

Part Three

The third part of the test is a conversation between both of you. The examiner gives you a topic to discuss and you have to speak with your partner for about 3 minutes. The examiner will support the conversation if appropriate and then ask further questions related to the main theme.

Foreign Business Trip

Your company is attending a trade fair in a foreign country for the first time. You have been asked to help with the preparations for the trip.

Discuss the situation together, and decide:

- what travel and accommodation arrangements you will need to make before the trip
- which kinds of business customs in the foreign country it would be useful to know about, and how to find out about these before the trip

Next steps

We wish you every success in taking BEC Vantage and we hope that you will take other Cambridge ESOL exams in future. BEC Higher is the next level of the BEC suite of business-oriented exams (see www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/bec.htm) or, if you prefer a general English qualification, you should consider the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) as the next step. You can find out more information about CAE on our website at: www.CambridgeESOL.org/exams/cae.htm

What people have said about BEC

BEC has helped develop cross-cultural communication skills and overall development of the students. It has had an impact on confidence levels through international certification.

Laura Cirello, Head of Learning and Development, JP Morgan Treasury and Security Services

At our school we prepare our students for BEC Preliminary because it is a realistic goal for a 3-year course. We encourage them to attend the BEC Vantage course on a voluntary basis. ... It is a good opportunity for them to get in addition an international language certificate during their commercial training.

Margrit Walter-Wettstein, Berufsbildungszentrum Weinfelden, Switzerland

In order for our students to pick up a successful professional career we felt that they must hone their skill in communication and the Cambridge BEC programme seemed to us to offer an excellent opportunity for our students.

Dr Ashoke R Thakur, Vice Chancellor, West Bengal University of Technology, Kolkata

Companies who recognise Cambridge ESOL exams

3M	Deutsche Bank	Nestlé
Adidas	DHL	Nokia
Agfa-Gevaert	Disney	PepsiCo
AstraZeneca	DuPont	Philips
AT&T	Ericsson	PriceWaterhouseCoopers
Barclays Bank	Estée Lauder	Procter & Gamble
BASF	General Motors	Rank Xerox
Bayer	Gillette	Roche
BP	GlaxoSmithKline	Rolls-Royce
British Airways	Goodyear	Shell
Cable & Wireless	Hertz	Siemens
Carrefour	Hewlett-Packard	Sony
Citibank	HSBC	Sun Microsystems
Coca-Cola	IBM	Texaco
Colgate-Palmolive	Johnson & Johnson	Toyota
Credit Suisse	KPMG	Unilever
DaimlerChrysler	Microsoft	Vodafone
Dell	Mobil Oil	World Bank

Recognition of BEC is increasing rapidly as a growing number of companies are using the examination as a focus for in-company training courses. You can find a list of companies that use the BEC examinations for a variety of purposes including recruitment at:

www.CambridgeESOL.org/recognition/search.php

www.CambridgeESOL.org/BEC

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