



Report summary

Developing the GSE Job Profiles

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Introduction

As a result of economic globalization and a post-pandemic increase in remote working, more and more companies are seeing the benefits of recruiting from a global rather than a local pool of talent. Therefore, they require an assessment of applicants' readiness to use English in a professional context.

Customer feedback collected by Pearson has highlighted two key facts:

- Evaluating applicants' English knowledge is a complex process for companies that are hiring globally, sometimes leading to inaccurate assessment of staff language skills.
- Professional development and job satisfaction have become top priorities for younger employees. English knowledge has therefore become a gatekeeper, limiting professional opportunities for growth.

What level of English is needed to successfully perform tasks in a particular role? To answer this, Pearson has developed the Global Scale of English (GSE) Job Profiles, a model of language proficiency for job roles.

The occupational ontology for GSE Job Profiles was created by combining two existing data sources:

- O*NET: sponsored by the U.S Department of Labor, containing around 1000 occupations.
- Pearson Workforce's ontology: containing data and analytics on around 1,400 occupations.

In GSE Job Profiles, English requirements were set, for each occupation, against the Global Scale of English (GSE). The GSE is a 10–90 proficiency scale aligned to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2009) which defines, by means of GSE Learning Objectives (more commonly known as Can Do statements), what learners are expected to know at increasing complexity.

More information about the GSE resources is available [here](#).

“GSE Job Profiles describes English language requirements for speakers of English as a foreign, second, or additional language who need to use English for work, across almost 1,400 occupations.”

Methodology to develop GSE Job Profiles

Two key steps were followed to build GSE Job Profiles:

- Identifying baseline occupational requirements.
- Setting GSE level ranges.

STEP 1: Identifying baseline occupational requirements

As a first step, language competencies and associated scores were extracted from the Pearson Workforce Ontology and O*NET databases and converted to a single scale from 0–1. For example, Foreign Affairs Policy Officers have a score of 0.62 on the competence 'Written Expression', whereas Telecommunications Policy Officers have a score of 0.49.

Where multiple scores were available that could be linked to one of the four communicative skills (writing, speaking, reading and listening), the highest score was taken as minimum requirement. For example, the role of Foreign Affairs Policy Officer has two scores associated with the communicative skill of writing ('writing' – 0.54 and 'written expression' – 0.62) so the higher score was used.

In order to obtain one overall occupational score, the highest scores available for each of the four communicative skills were averaged to one single value from 0 to 1.

STEP 2: Setting GSE level ranges

The overall score was then rescaled and converted into a GSE level ranging from 20 to 80. The bottom and top ranges of the GSE scale (10 to 19 and 81 to 90) were taken out of the equation because most employees whose first language is not English would not be expected to have English proficiency at either extreme of the scale. However, some occupations were identified as having additional non-linguistic requirements. In these cases, the scale was adjusted as follows:

- **Communicative requirements:** For occupations that required either specific interactive skills, such as 'Using the telephone'; or, more general interactive skills, such as 'Deal with external customers', the scale was expanded up to 85.
- **Seniority requirements:** For occupations corresponding to managerial and leadership roles, based on the general assumption that more senior roles would require better language skills than their reporting roles, the scale was expanded up to 90.
- **Regulatory requirements:** For military occupations whose minimum English requirements are enforced by NATO STANAG 6001 regulations, the scale had a minimum of 43 and a maximum of 85.

Following an expert qualitative review, 33 occupations were removed from the database. For example, Sommeliers were flagged for having a low GSE level of 30–38 (equivalent to Food Preparation Workers), although they generally work in prestigious establishments, and therefore require higher language skills. This type of consideration is not captured in the O*NET competence data, which is based on survey responses.

The final GSE level ranges were set according to the seniority scores.

Occupations were grouped into four levels:

- **L1:** Intern/Junior
- **L2:** Associate/Mid
- **L3:** Senior
- **L4:** Principal/Expert

Looking across each occupation, there was, on average, a four-point difference between each seniority level; from junior to mid, mid to senior, and senior to expert.

Therefore, four points were added on either side of the mid-seniority GSE levels to represent the variability expected in a role between junior and senior levels.

Providing a GSE range, rather than a single value, also represents differences in experiences and circumstances, for example, the country and the company where the occupation is being carried out.



Findings and discussion

Overall, the relative order of English language proficiency reflects what would commonly be expected across different occupational categories. The legal, scientific, and medical sectors have the highest requirements on average.

Construction and mining had the lowest requirements on average, as a result of a large number of more manual occupations being leveled around GSE 30 and despite having some specialist occupations that require GSE 70+.

The occupations in each sector also follow a relative order that would be expected (Figure 1). For example, in the administration sector, Order Fillers have a range of GSE 35–43, whereas Switchboard Operators and Human Resources Assistants fall between 44–52, and Foreign Affairs Policy Officers are ranked higher with GSE levels from 62–70.

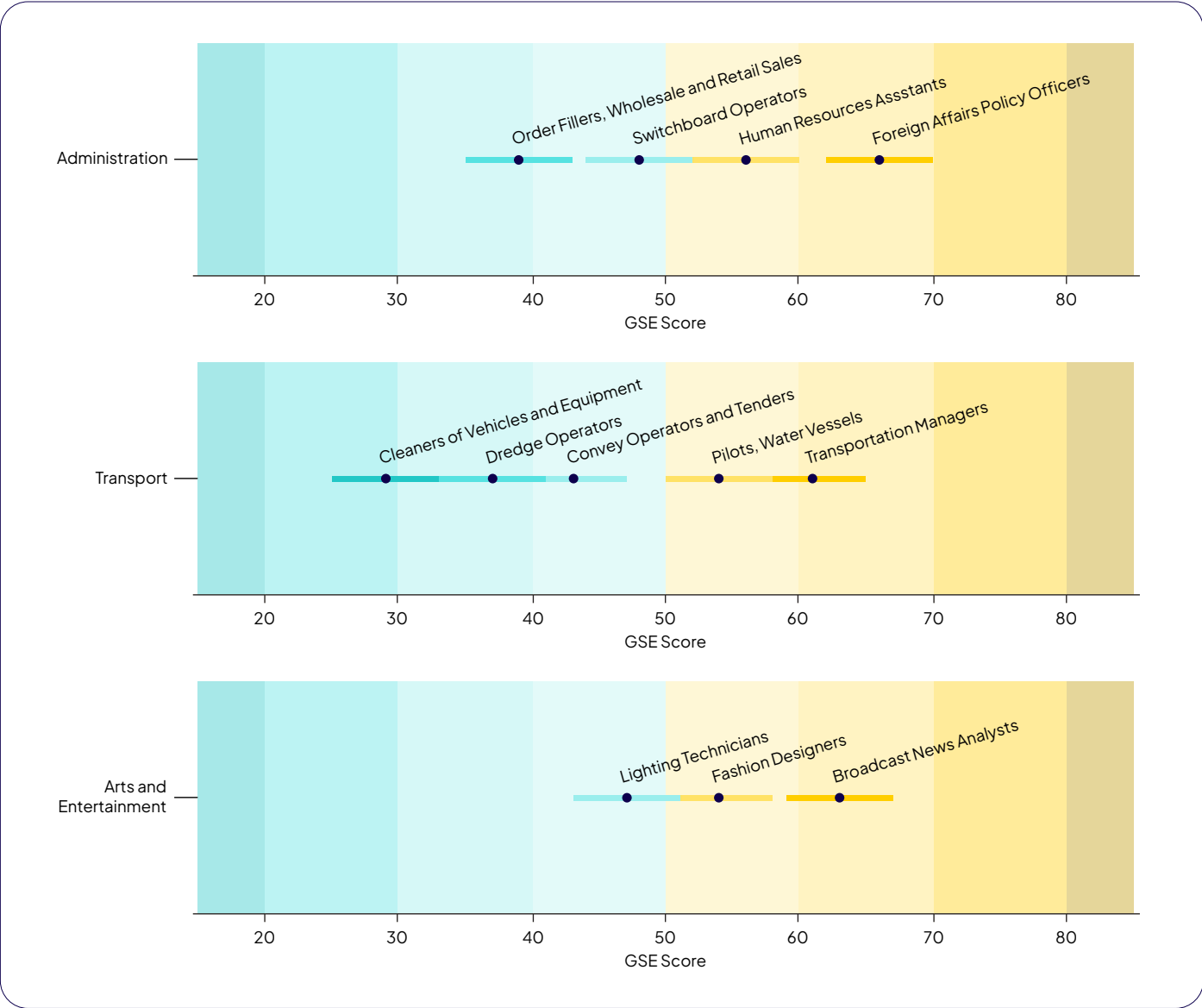


Figure 1: Examples of occupations falling within each GSE band. The dot indicates the average GSE level for the occupation.



Validating GSE Job Profiles

As the O*NET data underlying the competence scores had been collected from surveys in the USA and presumably reflected the language requirements for first language speakers of English, it was necessary to conduct an additional external industry validation study to ensure that GSE Job Profiles was:

- a) applicable to speakers of English as a second language in a variety of countries and contexts; and
- b) in line with the expectations and existing practices of industry experts.

Panel selection and familiarization

First, international industry panels were set up consisting of 6 to 11 experts from three industries (Hospitality, Finance, and Customer Service). They took part in an online familiarization session, to ensure a common understanding of their evaluation task, consistency in applying rating criteria, as well as clarity on the roles being evaluated.

Rating exercise

Panelists were asked to read or listen to test-takers' responses selected from the **Versant by Pearson** Writing Test (VWT) and Versant by Pearson English Test (VET), with known scores on the GSE. Each panel rated two jobs within their industry.

They were asked to answer the question “*Does this test-taker demonstrate the minimum standard of English expected for this role?*”.

Statistical analysis

After the rating task, the reliability of the data was analyzed and misfitting data points were removed. An optimal cut score (i.e., the minimum level of English required) was found for each job role. Overall, raters for the two job roles in Hospitality showed little variation in their ratings, whereas raters for the job roles in Finance demonstrated greater variability in their judgments. Ratings from Customer Service industry experts were hard to evaluate due to the smaller number of panelists participating in the study. The agreement rate between the cut score and industry panel judgment ranged from 89% to 96% in all job roles and skills. This suggests that cut scores identified for each role accurately represent the raters' perceptions of required English ability.

Linking to GSE Job Profiles

In a final step, the cut scores were converted to GSE levels and compared with the GSE ranges established for the same roles within GSE Job Profiles (Table 1). Overall, the panelists' scores were a good match, with 9 out of 12 cut scores falling within or very close to GSE Job Profiles ranges. The panelists reviewed the 3 outlier cut scores and agreed:

- A Cafeteria Attendant does not need a high level of writing; 22–31 is acceptable;
- A Lodging Manager needs a higher level of spoken English to manage staff and deal with customer complaints; 53–61 is acceptable;
- An Insurance Claim Clerk would use a lot of templated correspondence; therefore, 44–52 is acceptable.



Role	Skill	Cut score on the GSE (CEFR in brackets)	GSE Job Profiles level (CEFR in brackets)
Cafeteria Attendant	Speaking	35 (A2)	28–36 (A2)
	Writing	40 (A2+)	23–31 (A1)
Lodging Manager	Speaking	48 (B1)	53–61 (B1+)
	Writing	62 (B2)	59–67 (B2)
Insurance Claim Clerk	Speaking	48 (B1)	44–52 (B1)
	Writing	62 (B2)	44–52 (B1)
Actuarial Manager	Speaking	59 (B2)	59–67 (B2)
	Writing	62/66 (B2)	61–69 (B2)
Customer Service Agent	Speaking	45–46 (B1)	47–55 (B1/B1+)
	Writing	56–62 (B1+/B2)	47–55 (B1/B1+)
Helpdesk Manager	Speaking	49–53 (B1/B1+)	46–54 (B1/B1+)
	Writing	56–58 (B1+)	57–65 (B2)

Table 1: Comparing validation panel results to GSE Job Profiles.

Conclusions

The good alignment between Versant by Pearson GSE levels and GSE Job Profiles scores suggests the validity of the methodology employed to assign the recommended English proficiency level at which an employee could perform most tasks in each occupation. Such recommended proficiency level is presented as a range on the GSE for the same occupation, reflecting the fact that there will be differences

in levels of seniority, experiences, and circumstances between different roles for the same job. The ranges serve as guidelines around which companies can set their own benchmarks depending on the local context and requirements.

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