



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE  
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## **Research Notes**

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# Research Notes

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## Editorial Notes

Welcome to issue 40 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters related to research, test development and validation within Cambridge ESOL.

This issue focuses on governmental projects which go across the educational spectrum from primary level to higher education. In the opening article Susan Randall, Director of Business Management, discusses the way in which Cambridge ESOL has played an increasingly important role in educational reform initiatives to the benefit of a range of national and local initiatives.

The next three articles are presented within a European context. The first, by Kerstin Grossmann describes the adoption of ESOL General English examinations within the German context. Anthony Harvey, Andrew Balch and Angeliki Salamoura then explain the development of the Cambridge English Certificate (CEC) that was designed specifically for the French national education system. The third article, by José Blanco and Desmond Nicholson, provides a comprehensive overview of regional networks that operate within Spain, and how Cambridge ESOL tests have contributed to regional demand.

We then move on to Asia and Cambridge ESOL's continuing work in China and Thailand. Chen Xueling, He Meizi and Hugh Bateman discuss the rapid growth of business English in Chinese higher education, and how Business English Certificate (BEC) examinations have contributed to this growth. Andrew Nye then describes a teacher training course designed for the Thai state school sector, delivered by Cambridge ESOL in partnership with Bell International.

The next two articles focus on Latin America. Ignacio Gómez Montes, Julián Mariño, Nigel Pike and Hugh Moss examine the launch of Colombia's National Bilingual Program and the role of Cambridge ESOL in contributing towards new test design and training. Staying on the Latin American continent, Hanan Khalifa, Martin Robinson and Sharon Harvey report on the different phases of a collaborative project carried out with the Chilean Ministry of Education, Cambridge ESOL and Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura to implement the English Diagnostic Test.

We finish the issue with our standard news section. In this issue, we report on IELTS test taker figures for 2009; we announce a call for submissions under the IELTS (Joint-funded) Research Program 2010 and provide an ALTE update for the first quarter of 2010.

The editors would like to thank Dr Angeliki Salamoura for her support in this issue.

# Cambridge ESOL's growing impact on English language teaching and learning in national education projects

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## Introduction

Over the last decade Cambridge ESOL has expanded its activities in line with its educational mission. While previously a large part of its candidature came from the chains and individual private language schools, it has shifted its focus to the teaching, learning and assessment of the English language across the different levels of national education from Primary to Higher Education, in a variety of projects and a large number of its main global markets. There are several reasons for this, the main one being the growing recognition by governments that the acquisition of English is a basic skill which will be essential for the future employability of its citizens. This has led to a lowering of the age at which English is learned in many countries, such as Spain, Italy and Mexico, where Cambridge ESOL is currently working far more extensively in the school sector than previously.

## Language reform in Europe

At a political level there has been some influence from the Barcelona process with the European Council in 2002 calling for the 'improvement of the mastery of basic skills in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age', part of the objective of making the European educative and training systems a world quality reference by 2010. While implementation has taken place at differing speeds among the member countries, language learning is increasingly becoming a political issue, with governments seeking to show conformance, as seen in the increasing introduction of English as a medium of instruction working towards a bilingual model within the school sector, where gradually some other subjects in the curriculum are taught in English. While the aim to give an impetus to the acquisition of English through greater exposure to the language is valid, the growing use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) does itself raise many issues, not least the resourcing of a sufficient number of teachers themselves trained and able to deliver their subject content in English effectively, often to classes of pupils who are far from bilingual, with levels of English at the lower levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

However, this should not detract from the excellent work taking place in specific countries, often as part of the policy of groups of schools, where the aim of improving levels of English is being reflected in ambitious projects including teacher training and the introduction of internationally benchmarked language assessment. Examples include several projects with school associations in Spain (see

Blanco and Nicholson in this issue) and the integration of ESOL exams into chains of private schools in Turkey, where there is also growing interest from the state sector.

A further factor is that of the Bologna Declaration of June 1999, which is a pledge by 29 countries to reform the structures of their higher education systems in a convergent way. One of the goals of the agreement is 'to create a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of its citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education', with a target date of 2010. Given that one of the outcomes of the agreement should be greater mobility, the need for students to exit with internationally benchmarked language qualifications, particularly English, is being seen with increasing take up of Cambridge ESOL qualifications. This can be illustrated in Spain, France and Italy, with the growing recognition of the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE), First Certificate in English (FCE) and the Preliminary English Test (PET) in the university sector and increasing numbers of students of all disciplines being required to attain at least B1, i.e. PET level.

## National projects across the world

This trend in Higher Education is also reflected outside Europe, for example in Asia, where in both China and India the introduction of ESOL qualifications in the context of business English, is growing and providing aspiring graduates with the required proof of their ability to cope with tasks in English at B1 or B2, which gives their curriculum vitae a real advantage in the face of growing competition for jobs (see Xueling, Meizi and Bateman in this issue).

In the series of articles which follow, there are examples from Europe, Latin America and Asia which illustrate the way in which Cambridge ESOL has responded to the challenge and worked in some cases directly with national education ministries, in others with federal or local authorities to ensure that its expertise in language assessment can be applied positively to assist in national reform projects, including in teacher training (see Nye, this issue). In some cases this has involved a benchmarking exercise to provide educational authorities with a starting point for its long-term projects, such as the Chile English Opens Doors initiative (see Khalifa, Robinson and Harvey, this issue); in others this has meant a longer relationship with a ministry and a national Awarding Body, such as in the Colombia national bilingual project (see Gómez Montes, Mariño, Pike and Moss 2010, this issue), where a multi-faceted project has included transfer of skills and facilitated a transition to a reformed

range of national English language exams at different levels measuring against the CEFR.

Over the years Cambridge ESOL has had a range of its standard assessment products accepted as a valued addition to national qualifications, usually taken as a voluntary 'extra'. For the pupils, the attainment of an internationally recognised certificate represents improved career prospects and a key, therefore, to mobility. For those involved in introducing or teaching the exams, the important aspects are: the examinations' quality, the fact that the examinations are aligned to the CEFR, and the comprehensive teacher-support programme provided by Cambridge ESOL. This is a growing phenomenon for example in Germany (see Grossmann, this issue) and is now seen also in Asia and Latin America. In Argentina and Uruguay, for example, Cambridge ESOL has been working with certain private schools to provide increasing support to teachers for the introduction of its exams and in China there are signs that the introduction of PET and KET for Schools may lead to formal adoptions in the future.

### Cambridge ESOL's growing support for national education projects

The commitment of Cambridge ESOL to this area can be seen in the creation of a special Schools' Unit within the Business Development Group in 2006, which has been instrumental in assisting staff in ESOL's overseas offices to take forward projects within the schools sector. For all the projects involving customised assessment, such as a specific exam produced for the French Ministry of Education (see Harvey, Balch and Salamoura, this issue), staff in the Assessment and Operations Group and Research and Validation Group have worked closely with development managers in-country to ensure that the products and services provided are of the highest calibre.

The spread of the articles in this issue both in terms of geography and type of project illustrate how far Cambridge ESOL has come since it first became involved with the introduction of its exams into the school sectors, from

which period two projects stand out: the Progetto Lingue 2000 initiated by the Italian Government to raise the level of language learning across primary and secondary schools in Italy and the initial pilot in Switzerland in 1994 to integrate ESOL's B2 exam (FCE) within the Swiss Curriculum as part of the Berufsmatura in a number of schools in Basel.

In the case of Italy there are now around 95,000 pupils taking Cambridge ESOL exams annually, a total of 600,000 since the project began. Exams are taken from Young Learners English (YLE) to FCE, at primary and secondary level, with a noticeable increase in the last few years of pupils attaining FCE showing a rise in the standards of English attained – a demonstrable outcome of the positive impact of the introduction of ESOL exams. In Switzerland, in particular in the German speaking region, the pilot led to an agreement in 1998, whereby Cambridge ESOL certificates could be formally integrated at B2 level for the Berufsmatura, which led to increased numbers of pupils taking both FCE and Business English Certificate (BEC) Vantage, and in 2003 BEC Preliminary was formally accredited as an approved qualification for the exit exam in the basic training programme in vocational schools. Today there are annually around 14,000 students who see the benefit in acquiring an internationally Cambridge ESOL recognised certificate across the different sections of the Swiss educational system.

### Conclusion

The success of the introduction of Cambridge ESOL exams in these early projects has laid the ground work for the development and extension of ESOL's contribution to global educational reform as exemplified in the selection of case studies presented in this issue. This is an area of work that has become a major strategy for Cambridge ESOL, one which combines the educational mission of the organisation with its unique expertise in assessment. It is anticipated that its contribution to the reform of language learning globally will grow at a greater pace in the decade to come.

## General English examinations – the case of Germany

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### Introduction

During the last decade Cambridge ESOL examinations in Germany have increasingly been taken by candidates who are still in compulsory education. This article will outline the developments, relate them to the changes in the German education system and show how Cambridge ESOL supports school projects as part of its educational mission.

The testing culture in Germany differs significantly from assessment cultures in other countries, where standardised testing is an integral part of the educational system.

In Germany assessment has always been closely linked to teaching, with teachers setting and evaluating their pupils' examinations, not only as part of the day-to-day teaching, but also for high-stakes school leaving examinations. However, the acceptance of and knowledge about the concepts of internationally recognised standardised testing have been limited. For this reason in the past candidates for Cambridge ESOL exams were generally limited to those coming from adult education institutions. It is only since 2001 that these exams began to be taken in the state

secondary school sector and the subsequent increase in interest can be ascribed to several factors.

Firstly, Cambridge ESOL experiences in supporting school projects (e.g. in the vocational sector in Switzerland or in Progetto Lingue 2000 in Italy, see Hawkey 2004) grew and it started to focus on the specific requirements of schools, teachers and educational authorities by developing sector-specific support. Secondly, Germany embarked on a series of extensive educational reforms which raised the awareness and acceptance of standardised testing. Thirdly, the global trend towards more student-centred teaching and testing and the benchmarking of language skills in schools influenced German stakeholders as well. In order to appreciate the significance of these developments, it is important to understand some background to the German education system.

## The German education system

The German education system is characterised by a high degree of autonomy for each of the 16 German states, with each state responsible for its own school system, curriculum and examinations system. In order to ensure mobility and a degree of conformity within Germany and in order to initiate reforms, some co-ordination is required. This is ensured by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (German: Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK), in which each state is represented. The KMK also assumed a leading role in educational reforms and in providing the framework for changes in assessment.

### Assessment in German schools

Traditionally examinations in Germany are constructed and assessed by teachers. Standardised and validated tests were never part of the school system and numerous German educationalists still disapprove of standardised testing, arguing that standardised tests refer to the lowest common denominator, that they promote 'teaching to the test' and restrict creativity and flexibility. In the 1990s, which were dominated by these views, Cambridge ESOL examinations were hardly considered in schools at all. There were a few projects in the federal states of Bremen and Saxony in the 1990s, which did not arouse wider interest outside the boundaries of these two states. It was only in 2001 that the federal state of Baden-Württemberg became interested in the Preliminary English Test (PET) for pupils in grade 9. PET was seen as fitting well into the curriculum and as providing additional motivation for pupils as well as giving them a valuable additional qualification, which supplements the German school leaving exam. This was in particular relevant as the target group was about to leave school and apply for apprenticeships.

Attitudes towards standardised testing only changed in the early years of this century, which can be related to the unsatisfactory performance of German pupils in international comparisons of student achievement such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

### Educational reform in Germany

The results of PISA 2000, in which German pupils scored below the OECD average, came as a shock for the general public, for the educational community and for political stakeholders. As a result, a comprehensive analysis of the issues started, resulting in educational reforms co-ordinated at federal level by the KMK. A number of these reforms, which have not been undisputed, represent a change in the German educational system. Amongst many others they include the development of national educational standards for several subjects defining learning targets for students at certain stages of their studies, with the aim of replacing in-put oriented curricula-led teaching with out-put oriented (national) target competencies (Kultusministerkonferenz 2004b). With the implementation of these standards, performance can for the first time be measured against nationally agreed learning targets. At the same time the aim is to give individual schools and teachers more freedom in how they achieve these targets, by reducing the detailed prescriptive curricula with leaner core curricula. During the development process the KMK consulted a number of specialists, including Cambridge ESOL, which gave permission to quote from examination handbooks for the Key English Test (KET) for the A2 level standards (Kultusministerkonferenz 2004a) and from the PET handbook for the standards at B1 level (Kultusministerkonferenz 2003).

Closely connected with the standards is the question of how to assess whether pupils reach the standards throughout Germany, the integration of testing into teaching and increasingly the introduction of centralised examinations. An important step was the foundation of the Institute for Educational Progress (German: Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen, IQB) in 2004, the core mandate of which is to establish national performance scales based on the newly developed educational standards and to develop the standards further. At the same time the first national achievement study in Germany for which subject-related tests were designed at a national level for analysing the development of language competencies (Deutsch-Englisch-Schülerleistungen-International – DESI) was carried out by a consortium of academic researchers. The establishment of the IQB and the DESI study highlight the changes in attitude towards standardised testing in Germany and helped to raise awareness of standardised testing amongst a larger community of teachers and political stakeholders.

### External certification in German schools: Cambridge ESOL

As a result of the above developments educational ministries in several federal states became more interested in contacts with examination boards, be it for co-operation, consultation or for offering additional qualifications for students, which would allow benchmarking against international standards. One of these boards was Cambridge ESOL, which offered wide-ranging support services including a comprehensive teacher training programme and distribution of printed materials. It could

assist educationalists, provide evaluation of results of candidates taking Cambridge ESOL exams as part of school projects, and gave access to its own materials and past examination papers. This support was deemed extremely helpful at times of major change and opened the door to a more widespread use of Cambridge ESOL's exams as an external measurement of achievement.

### Curriculum mappings

Following the increased interest in external certification, Cambridge ESOL and related test centres researched the compatibility of its exams with selected German school curricula. The studies showed that in general the language and skills tested in Cambridge exams reflect closely the language and skills taught in German schools. Studies revealed that there is an appropriate Cambridge ESOL exam for each of the levels which should be reached by German school pupils at different stages of their studies.

### PET in Baden-Württemberg

As mentioned before, the first large-scale school project was introduced in 2001 in Baden-Württemberg where PET was offered in Realschulen (schools leading to the general school leaving certificate after grade 10). School teachers were recruited, trained and monitored as Oral Examiners (OEs) under the strict Cambridge ESOL Team Leader system. The candidates passed with high success. Cambridge evaluated the results and the performance of the pupils in a report, which provided valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the pupils (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate 2001). There has been a year on year increase in candidature since 2001 as PET is seen as a valuable additional qualification which school leavers can add to their portfolio when applying for apprenticeships. The Ministry sees the good results as an external confirmation of the quality of their education system and for students and teachers alike the good results are extremely motivating. Information about the project and the evaluation report were distributed to all other educational ministries.

### PET and CAE in Bavaria

In 2003 the Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs in Bavaria decided to implement a similar project to the one in Baden-Württemberg. PET was offered to pupils at Realschulen (lower secondary schools) in grade 9 throughout the state of Bavaria. School teachers were trained as Oral Examiners and the exams were held in schools, administered by school teachers. The results in Bavaria were excellent (see University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations evaluation report 2003). As in the case of Baden-Württemberg, the Ministry continues to recommend that pupils take the PET test in grade 9 as the positive results are seen as an external and objective means of measuring the quality of language teaching. Following the success of the PET project, the ministry decided to extend the provision of external examinations to other school types and levels and decided to recommend CAE (Certificate in Advanced English) to advanced Gymnasium (grammar school) pupils in grade 12 and 13, again with teachers

trained as OEs. As in Baden-Württemberg the training of school teachers as OEs was a major benefit for the Ministry, which introduced Speaking tests as part of the testing in schools. By training OEs according to the Cambridge system the Bavarian education system itself benefited from Cambridge ESOL's long standing expertise in the field. By 2008/09 there was a considerable rise in the number of school students taking appropriate Cambridge ESOL exams across Bavaria, reflecting the value seen in these by educators, parents and pupils.

### PET, FCE and CAE in Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW)

The schools Ministry in NRW is extremely supportive of external certification as it views external exams as a valuable and motivating qualification for pupils, supplementing German school leaving examinations. Schools are therefore encouraged to offer external language certificates in a variety of languages. In 2004/05 PET and FCE were introduced to school students of all school types in NRW and since 2005/06 CAE has been successfully offered (see University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations evaluation reports 2005 and 2006). The interest in the examinations is considerable, which can be attributed to the fact that pupils and their parents see the benefits of an additional qualification, which can improve their chances when applying for jobs or for a place in Higher Education.

### PET in Berlin and Saxony

In 2008 the 'Kooperationsvereinbarung zur Cambridge-Aktion an Realschulen in Berlin' (Memorandum of Agreement concerning the Cambridge Project at lower secondary schools in Berlin) between the Educational Ministry of the federal state of Berlin, the Cambridge ESOL test centre and Cambridge ESOL Germany, was signed. The partners committed to make PET available to pupils at Realschulen (lower secondary schools) in Berlin and in 2009 Cambridge ESOL, its test centre and the cultural Ministry signed the 'Kooperationsvereinbarung zum Schulprojekt "Preliminary English Test – PET" (Cambridge ESOL) an Mittelschulen in Sachsen' (Memorandum of Agreement concerning the school project "Preliminary English Test – PET" (Cambridge ESOL) at middle schools in Saxony), which will enable middle school pupils to be prepared for the PET exam in extra workshops taught by their English teachers.

### Support provided as part of school projects

Cambridge ESOL's large-scale school projects started at a time of major educational reform, one aspect of which was a new focus on assessment. One of the reasons for considering Cambridge ESOL examinations apart from the high recognition was the long-standing experience in a number of areas related to educational reforms and the professional support which could be provided.

Cambridge ESOL has offered a variety of seminars and other support on topics of particular interest since 2001. Overall the seminar programme increased from five seminars to approximately 50 seminars per year. For that purpose a team of seminar presenters was established in country. The presenters were briefed on developments in

the German educational system and adapted Cambridge ESOL's standard materials to suit the needs of German teachers. The series on 'Assessing Speaking Skills in the Classroom' in regions where Speaking tests were newly introduced as part of the internal assessment of pupils, is just one example. In a number of federal states Cambridge ESOL's seminars are recognised officially as teacher training, which shows the high value educational bodies attach to the seminars. The teacher training seminars are extremely popular and there is consensus that they have a positive impact on classroom teaching, from which all pupils (and not only those taking a Cambridge ESOL examination) benefit. Centrally developed resources such as the teaching resources on the internet, Speaking test packs, examination handbooks and a German electronic monthly newsletter are also highly appreciated as an additional resource for teachers. In addition to direct support for teachers teaching towards Cambridge ESOL examinations, Cambridge ESOL has also provided support for ministries developing their own internal assessment tools.

### Cambridge ESOL's support for ministries

Part of the educational reform in Germany is the introduction of periodical standard tests to assess whether pupils reach the learning targets. When the process started ministries and other institutions such as the IQB sought advice from examining boards, and Cambridge ESOL was approached in several instances as well and provided past examination papers or parts of them.

In Berlin past papers were used to assess 10,000 pupils in grade 10 across all school types. These tests were in preparation for the introduction of the new Mittlerer Schulabschluss (general school leaving certificate gained after grade 10). Although the exams did not include the Speaking test, and were marked by school teachers, who had not been trained as Cambridge assessors, the results gave some indication about the language competence level of school pupils at that grade. Cambridge ESOL provided teacher training and materials such as handbooks, and Speaking test videos were used for training purposes.

In NRW Cambridge ESOL gave permission to use parts of past papers (PET Reading) as part of the standard test in grade 10 and in Lower Saxony the ministry was able to use KET and PET Listening papers as part of their test in grade 10. In both cases the papers were marked by school teachers.

It was made clear that the question papers themselves are only part of the assessment process and that they only provide an accurate assessment if used with the full grading and standardisation process that Cambridge ESOL applies to each exam. Tasks extracted from KET and PET could only be used for indicative purposes for linking to B1 and A2 levels, and not as evidence of KET and PET performance. The usage of past papers was therefore limited to one-off projects, but it helped with the first tests and at the same time familiarised pupils and teachers further with Cambridge ESOL's approach to testing and with the test format.

## The situation in 2010

Since 2001 more than 70,000 pupils throughout Germany have taken a Cambridge ESOL examination. Many

educational ministries see the benefit of additional external qualifications and publicise information about Cambridge ESOL's exams and events on their websites and in their communication with schools.

The most popular exam is PET as it corresponds to the level of the Mittlerer Schulabschluss (general school leaving certificate gained after grade 10) (Kultusministerkonferenz 2003). For the upper secondary level FCE and CAE are of particular interest, with CAE being the chosen option for strong students who are planning to proceed to Higher Education, where the exam is increasingly recognised as an academic examination. The Business English Certificates (BEC) are taken mainly, but not exclusively, in a number of Berufsschulen (vocational schools). For younger children Young Learners English (YLE) tests are increasingly offered as a motivating and a non-threatening introduction to standardised testing. In Gymnasien (grammar schools) KET is sometimes used as a stepping stone towards PET and as a first experience of international examinations in grade 8. In Hauptschulen (lower secondary schools), which are attended by large numbers of students from educationally disadvantaged families, A2 is the stipulated exit level (Kultusministerkonferenz 2004a). Reaching A2 is a challenge, but in Hauptschulen the motivation and additional qualification are of particular importance. A number of small pilot projects in Bavarian Hauptschulen indicate that KET integrates well into normal classroom teaching, that it is achievable (all the candidates passed) and that it stimulates students and teachers.

The motivation and the positive washback effect of offering Cambridge ESOL examinations in schools are substantial. Ministries see the chance of benchmarking against international standards and find the good results of German pupils encouraging. The synergies between offering Cambridge ESOL exams and the internal developments in teaching and testing methods (e.g. the introduction of Speaking tests in Bavaria, where Cambridge ESOL trained school teachers as OEs) are considerable. Teachers see the benefits of either integrating Cambridge ESOL preparation into their normal classroom teaching as it supplements the teaching well or to offer separate workshops with groups of motivated students. At a time of reform the materials provided by Cambridge ESOL helped to bridge some of the gaps and provided assurance for teachers. Cambridge ESOL Germany is often told about the inspiration teachers receive from working with Cambridge. At certificate ceremonies this is confirmed by the pride and the sense of achievement which pupils, parents and teachers show.

Parents recognise that an additional language certificate may increase the chances of their children in a competitive labour market. As schools are increasingly competing with each other they need to develop a specific profile and teaching towards Cambridge ESOL examinations is often perceived as a valuable offer.

The positive experiences of teachers, the high motivation of German pupils and their good results show that Cambridge ESOL examinations integrate well into the German school system, without replacing domestic examinations or diminishing the wider educational mission of schools. Cambridge ESOL's aim is to supplement classroom teaching, to share its long-standing experience

with teachers and to provide additional motivation. The praise Cambridge ESOL receives from teachers about the support provided and about the examinations, confirms that this aim is reached.

## Conclusion and outlook

The German education system has changed and Cambridge ESOL was able to provide some support in this process as Cambridge ESOL's expertise in assessment fitted well into some of the major educational trends of the last 10 years as German educationalists changed the ways in which pupils were assessed. In the process of educational reform German educators and pupils have become more familiar with the concept of standards and standardised testing and as a consequence external standardised exams are less seen as a threat, but rather as a valuable supplement, which motivates and provides additional qualifications. It is therefore likely that the interest in external certification will further increase as the benefits are clear and as reservations against external certification are diminishing. Cambridge ESOL in the UK and in Germany will support this further by developing additional services for teachers by expanding teacher support (Nye and Barns 2009), by sharing expertise, and by facilitating the exchange of knowledge. In addition, contributions to projects in Germany continue where appropriate in order to help improve the teaching and learning experiences and we are looking forward to further opportunities and challenges.

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# The adoption of international certification in the French state school sector

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## Introduction and background to the project

### The value of international certification

For some years, the *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale* (French Ministry of Education) had been reflecting on the principle of international certification of foreign languages in state secondary schools. The Ministry appeared to see advantages in such an approach, notably that such

certification would favour cross-border mobility by equipping students with a qualification of another country, would provide an external, impartial, expert assessment and would, in particular, enable the objective evaluation of oral and written production. There was perhaps a perception that language learning in French schools had relied too heavily on receptive skills, to the detriment especially of speaking, although this is quickly changing.

### Positive evaluation

A long-standing French tradition in language assessment was what may be described as ‘negative evaluation’: for example, in a ‘dictée’ (dictation) students start with 20 points and one mark is subtracted for each error. This resulted in too much concentration on grammatical accuracy and not enough on communicative effectiveness. A child could go home with –5 as a reward for the day’s English learning experience. This tradition is fast changing and the notion of subtraction is disappearing. Reinforcing the notion of positive evaluation in state schools was, however, another motivation for introducing international certification.

### The Franco-German origins of the scheme

Following a political agreement between the former President of France, m. Jacques Chirac and the former Chancellor of Germany, Herr Gerhard Schroeder, an agreement was signed according to which German school children at the age of 16 would take a French test and French pupils would take a German one. These tests were voluntary and free to the student. The French *Centre International d’Etudes Pédagogiques* (CIEP), a member of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), was chosen to provide the French assessment and to train German teachers to administer and mark it. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (German: Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK) was chosen to produce the German test, with the *Goethe-Institut*, another ALTE partner, providing the training. Cambridge ESOL was invited to participate in training sessions and provide the principles of performance testing.

The Franco-German scheme proved very successful and led to an increasing interest in German as a foreign language in France, and in French as a foreign language in Germany.

### Extending the scheme to other languages

Because of this success, in 2007 the Ministry decided to launch a call for tender to certifying bodies with a view to introducing similar tests in Spanish and English.

Cambridge ESOL and its partner in ALTE, the *Instituto Cervantes*, were chosen from the various organisations that submitted tenders to provide the certification in English and Spanish respectively. Both contracts were for a duration of three years, covering sessions in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

### The students involved

The test was offered free of charge to first-year students of lycées (high schools) with European sections. Schools with these sections have more hours per week dedicated to the study of the language concerned and also teach other subjects in the language, typically History and Geography. The students tend therefore to be ahead of their fellows in other schools, especially in the oral/aural skills, because they are used to listening to the teacher talking in that language and to asking questions in the language too. First-year students were chosen because most of them are 16 years old, the last year of obligatory schooling, which is considered a good moment to measure and compare.

In 2008, the first year of the project, 18,500 students

took the voluntary test. This represented 74% of those eligible. In 2009, this number increased to 23,000 (86%). In 2010, the number is expected to increase to over 27,000. The test has therefore proved popular among teachers, parents and pupils.

### Development of the English test

The aim for such students is that they reach the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages of the Council of Europe, a framework which is now officially integrated into all levels of the French state and private education system. Any test used, therefore, would have to be demonstrably and effectively aligned to the CEFR and this was a *sine qua non* for the French Ministry.

Cambridge ESOL’s Preliminary English Test (PET) would have been an obvious tool to use since it is well-established, well-recognised and closely aligned to the CEFR. However, the French Ministry wanted two features that PET (at the time) did not incorporate. Firstly, the Ministry wanted ‘downward certification’, allowing candidates who demonstrated A2-level performance to receive a certificate to that effect. Secondly, the Ministry desired what it called an ‘élément culturel’ (cultural element). This did not mean the testing of knowledge of British or other Anglophone life and culture as such but rather that input material (texts and images) should be predominantly set in such a context. As an example, it would be acceptable to have a reading text about Stonehenge but not about the Colloseum.

As a result, Cambridge ESOL created a new test, called the Cambridge English Certificate (CEC), incorporating these elements but with the same duration and format as PET (see Table 1).

As we can see from Table 1, the four main skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are recognised, and each of these is assessed in a test component of the same name. Each skill carries equal weight and the final mark a candidate receives is an aggregate of the four marks.

Reading and listening are multi-dimensional skills involving the interaction of the reader/listener’s mental processing capacities with their language and content knowledge. Further interaction takes place between the reader/listener and the external features of the text and task. Purpose and context for reading/listening shape these interactions and this is reflected in the CEC Reading and Listening components through the use of different text and task types which link to a relevant real-world context.

Writing ability is also regarded as a linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural phenomenon that takes place in a specific context and for a particular purpose. Like Reading and Listening, CEC Writing involves a series of interactions between the task and the writers, who are required to draw on different aspects of their knowledge and experience to produce a written performance for evaluation.

Like writing, speaking involves multiple competencies including vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, phonological control, knowledge of discourse, and pragmatic awareness, which are particularly distinct from their equivalents in the written language. Since speaking generally involves reciprocal oral interaction with others, it

Table 1: Test format

Paper	Timing	Content	Test focus
<b>Reading/ Writing</b>	1 hour 30 minutes	<b>Reading:</b> Five parts including a variety of texts ranging from very short notices to longer continuous texts.	Assessment of candidates' ability to understand the meaning of written English at word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and whole text level.
		<b>Writing:</b> Three parts in which candidates produce variations on simple sentences and write a short communicative message and a longer piece of continuous writing.	Assessment of candidates' ability to control and understand a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures and communicate specific information to the target reader.
<b>Listening</b>	30 minutes (approx.)	Four parts ranging from short exchanges to longer dialogues and monologues.	Assessment of candidates' ability to understand dialogues and monologues in both informal and neutral settings on a range of everyday topics.
<b>Speaking</b>	10–12 minutes per pair of candidates	Four parts. In Part 1, candidates interact with a marker; in Parts 2 and 4 they interact with another candidate. In Part 3, they have an extended individual long turn.	Assessment of candidates' ability to express themselves in order to carry out functions at B1 and A2 level; to ask and to understand questions and make appropriate responses; to talk freely on matters of personal interest.

is assessed directly in the CEC, through a face-to-face encounter between candidates and markers. Each of the four skills tested in the CEC provides a unique contribution to a profile of overall communicative language ability that defines what a candidate can do at this level.

#### Marker training and monitoring

A further specificity of the project is that all test components are marked by French state school teachers (though teachers are not permitted to mark the work of their own students). Each Académie (regional education authority) nominates a number of its teachers or inspectors to attend one of a number of 3-day training sessions. During these sessions, participants are introduced both to the general testing approach of positive evaluation and to the specifics of marking the Cambridge English Certificate.

Prominence is given to the Writing and Speaking components. For the Writing component, training consists of exercises based on nearly 70 candidate scripts displaying every element that a marker may need to take into account and at all levels of performance, whereas for the Speaking component, it is based on a selection of video-recorded Speaking tests showing candidates at all levels of the CEC Speaking test scales. Following the training session, a large number of the participants train

other colleagues using the same materials (i.e., a cascade). A research exercise was also carried out to compare the marks awarded by a random sample of newly trained examiners during the 2008 test session against marks awarded on the same scripts by experienced Cambridge ESOL examiners. This exercise confirmed that the training had been successful, and that the markers were marking to the expected standard.

#### Conclusion and future developments

As the current project has been deemed a success, the Ministry issued, in December 2009, a call for tender both for a continuation of Spanish and English tests at CEFR levels B1 and A2 and for the possible introduction, from 2013 onwards, of similar tests at C1 and B2. At the time of this issue of *Research Notes* going to press, the outcome of this call for tender had not yet been announced. Of particular note is that the success of the CEC in recent years contributed to Cambridge ESOL's decision to introduce downward certification into its own Key English Test (KET) and PET tests. The principle fits well with the concept of positive evaluation. The KET and PET, however, remain 'culturally neutral' and make no attempt to frame tasks in an Anglophone context.

## Cambridge ESOL and Spanish school networks

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### Introduction

In Spain, Cambridge ESOL has worked with schools in the compulsory education sector directly and indirectly through its extensive centre network for many years. The teaching of English in the compulsory education sector is being introduced at an earlier age alongside bilingual programmes in many of the autonomous regions in the country. This has presented individual schools and networks of schools with new challenges in order to meet their ambitious goals. Many schools in Spain, especially the

state-funded independently run schools, are members of associations or networks of schools which work together in order to achieve their common goals. Cambridge ESOL has been working with some of these networks by providing external assessment in English language through its range of exams and tests and by providing advice and training to the schools on introducing external assessments and its benefits. With the exception of the university entrance exam there has traditionally been no culture or experience in Spain of external assessment and it has been important for Cambridge ESOL to work closely with the schools in order to

increase the confidence of the schools, teachers and students in this respect.

This article will describe the work Cambridge ESOL is doing with some of these school networks in Spain, in particular two networks in Madrid and the Basque Country and the support being provided to the compulsory education sector across the country. The article will highlight the work of the schools as an example of good practice in English language teaching and the role of external assessment in assisting the schools in achieving their goals.

## The Spanish school system in context

As background it is necessary to have some understanding of the different types of school in the Spanish educational system and within this the different regional approaches adopted to rising above the challenges. The Spanish school system can be divided into four levels as shown in Table 1. Numbers of students are as follows: Primary: 2,479,631; Secondary: 1,871,430; Post secondary: 1,566,013; Total: 5,917,074.

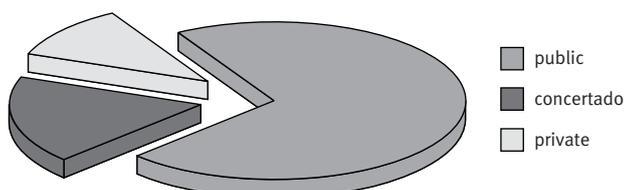
**Table 1: Spanish school system**

Age	Year	Stage	Cycle
1	1	Infant Education	1st cycle
2	2		
3	3		
4	4		2nd cycle
5	5		
6	6		
7	1	Primary Education	1st cycle
8	2		2nd cycle
9	2		
10	4		3rd cycle
11	5		
12	6		
13	1	Secondary Education (obligatory)	1st cycle
14	2		2nd cycle
15	3		
16	4		
17	1	Bachillerato	
18	2		

Within compulsory education there are also three different types of school:

- *colegios públicos* (state/public schools);
- *colegios concertados* (state funded privately-run schools);
- *Colegios privados* (private schools).

The breakdown of the school system is broad as shown in Figure 1, though regional variations exist.



**Figure 1: Breakdown of Spanish school system**

Spanish legislation requires the teaching of a foreign language from the beginning of the 2nd cycle of primary education at the age of 8. Though the requirement does not specify which language to teach, in the vast majority of cases this is English (Real Decreto 1513/2006, 7 December 2006). In Spain competencies for education are devolved to the autonomous regions. As a result there are differences across the country in the introduction of English with some autonomous regions introducing English at the age of 3 in infant education.

Regional variations also exist when considering the language in which the core curriculum is taught. In her paper *CLIL implementation in Spain: An approach to different models*, Frigols Martín (2006) describes four different scenarios for the teaching of the curriculum in Spain:

- teaching the curriculum in Spanish;
- teaching the curriculum in Spanish and another official language of Spain (Galician, Basque, Catalan/ Valenciano)
- teaching the curriculum in Spanish and a foreign language (English)
- teaching the curriculum in Spanish, another official language and a foreign language.

The regions with a joint official language (Galicia, Basque Country, Navarre, Catalonia, Valencia and Balearic Islands) have many years of experience in bilingual education through the teaching of the curriculum in Spanish, and the joint official language to varying degrees across the regions. With the need to learn a foreign language, especially English, becoming more important, some of these regions are moving towards trilingual education. Cambridge ESOL is concerned with the teaching, learning and assessment of English and has worked closely with a number of school networks across Spain in supporting their bilingual programmes.

## Bilingual education in Spain

Spain is arguably one of the leaders in Europe when introducing bilingual and in some cases trilingual education into the compulsory education system. The learning of English has been recognised as important by Spanish parents for over 20 years, illustrated by the large number of *academias* or private language schools which have become an integral part of most major Spanish cities and towns. Parents have long recognised the need for their children to have command of English and have been willing to pay for extra classes after school in order to ensure that their offspring had the best possible opportunities. Children attending English classes at the private language schools have been predominately teenagers in secondary education though increasingly children as young as five have been having extra English classes. There are numerous reasons why parents decided to send their children to learn English in private language schools, not least of which was their belief that the standard of English language teaching in both public and private schools did not meet their increasingly high expectations. However, this scenario is changing and there has been much support by education

authorities across Spain for an improvement in the quality of foreign language teaching, noticeably English and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) or bilingual or trilingual programmes. Within the compulsory education sector Spain is moving towards not only improving the teaching of English as a foreign language but the teaching of curricula subjects through English with the introduction of CLIL or bilingual programmes. In 2008 the Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, promised that all students in Spain would speak English within 10 years. This is a very ambitious goal and one which education authorities across the country have been working towards for a number of years. Cambridge ESOL has been actively working with a number of education authorities in order to support them in their ambitions to have their students leaving compulsory education with a demonstrably good level of English.

The first major move in Spain towards bilingual education was in 1996 when the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) launched the 'Bilingual and Bicultural Project' in partnership with the British Council. The project set out to improve learning of English language and British culture as well as encouraging exchange programmes between Spain and the UK. The project began with just 44 participating schools and now has over 170 schools nationwide taking part in the programme. The last two years have also seen some of the schools in the project working with University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) with students sitting IGCSEs. In addition to this national project a number of Autonomous Regions, *concertado* schools (state funded privately run schools) and private schools have established their own bilingual programmes and Cambridge ESOL has been supporting some of these initiatives at different levels.

## Cambridge ESOL: partner in the provision of professional support and international certification

### FERE Madrid – Bilingual English Development and Assessment

FERE Madrid (The federation of Spanish religious schools – Madrid) was the third major religious organisation to sign an agreement with Cambridge ESOL and this took place at the end of 2007. They launched their BEDA (Bilingual English Development and Assessment) programme in 2008. The programme sets out as its overall aim the implementation and improvement of efficiency in language education within their schools. The programme, which echoes the Autonomous Community of Madrid bilingual project, covers three main areas: developing quality and quantity in English education, programming specific teacher training, and student external evaluation. It is in the area of external assessment where Cambridge ESOL works closely with FERE Madrid.

Over 300 schools are members of FERE Madrid. All schools are eligible to apply to join the bilingual programme. In order to be included in the programme, schools must present a proposal for their school which includes a plan on the implementation of the teaching of English in the school, a plan for continuous teacher training and the establishment of an assessment plan alongside Cambridge ESOL for

external assessment of teachers, students and other members of the school. Schools can apply to join one of three possible models which have been designed to encourage the inclusion of as many schools as possible.

#### *Model I: Reinforcement of English*

Schools wishing to participate in the programme under this model are required to include in their project proposal a teacher training plan, external assessment of the teachers (KET) and students at the appropriate level, and to generate a bilingual atmosphere in the school by creating amongst other things an 'English Corner' and English language section in the library. Schools are also encouraged to increase extra curricular activities in English and participate in the Europe Cell programme. Teachers taking part in the bilingual programme are encouraged to apply innovative methodology to the teaching of English.

#### *Model II: Bilingual Model*

Schools are required to maintain a bilingual atmosphere in the school through the establishment of an 'English Corner' and English section in the library and the establishment of a specific BEDA department, a teacher training programme, external assessment of the teachers' language level using PET and the assessment of teachers' knowledge of teaching English by using the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT). Students are to be externally assessed depending on their level (KET for Schools or PET for Schools). In addition to this schools must comply with the Autonomous Government of Madrid's requirements as a bilingual centre and integrate English language assistants for conversation.

#### *Model III: Bilingual Excellence Model*

In addition to requirements set out in Model II above, schools are required to include in their proposal a teacher training programme to incorporate the majority of teachers at the school. Students are to be assessed externally up to B2 (PET for Schools). The schools should also arrange exchanges with students or teachers from other European schools.

The first year of the programme has been extremely successful with 52 schools taking part in the programme, and a total 4,900 teachers and students have sat a Cambridge ESOL exam. External assessment carried out by Cambridge ESOL is seen as a vital cornerstone to the project. External assessment is administered in the participating schools by Cambridge ESOL's existing centre network in Madrid.

Emilio Diaz, President of FERE Madrid says:

'The BEDA programme's success is a result of the hard work on the part of the officials, head teachers and teachers of the schools taking part in reinforcing and promoting the teaching of English to the students. This hard work is centred on the expansion and improvement of teaching in this area by providing both the best and improved resources available. It is also necessary to develop teacher training by different means which help to improve knowledge of both English language and the subject areas and methodology.'

However, this effort would be insufficient if it did not include a final external assessment carried out by an independent institution such as Cambridge ESOL.

Cambridge ESOL's involvement by using its validated exams allows us to verify the evolution of each school and the appropriacy of the programme as a whole. This would be known in Spain as the 'icing on the cake'.

#### **Kristau Eskola (Federation of Catholic Schools of the Basque Country)**

Cambridge ESOL has been working with Kristau Eskola for many years, and they were the first to sign an agreement to offer external assessment in their schools. In 2006 they joined Cambridge ESOL's centre network as an internal centre offering external assessment to students studying at any of their 155 schools across the Basque Country. Kristau Eskola prides itself on being at the forefront of education within the Basque Country and has set ambitious targets in the learning of English. The Basque Country is one of the six Autonomous Regions in Spain with a joint official language (*Euskera*/Basque) and as such has established a trilingual programme. In this programme, children at the end of primary (11 to 12 years old) must attain at least a CEFR A2 level in English (Cambridge ESOL YLE Flyers or KET for Schools) and children at the end of obligatory secondary education (16 years of age) a CEFR B1 level (PET for Schools).

Kristau Eskola has recently renewed a collaborative agreement with Cambridge ESOL to offer the benchmarking exercise in their schools. The benchmarking was carried out through the administration of a bespoke test, the English Benchmarking Test, created by Cambridge ESOL specifically for the needs of the Kristau Eskola students. This project involves the assessment of students at primary and secondary level. This is an annual project and participation is open to all schools within Kristau Eskola on a voluntary basis. In 2009, 22 schools took part. The purpose of the project is to evaluate the levels of the students to check their alignment with the forthcoming requirements of the Basque Trilingual Programme. The results provide a clear indication of the language proficiency of individual candidates. Where a random sample of students in a particular school year has been used conclusions can be drawn as to the likely language proficiency of all students within that school year. The results also give an indication as to which skill areas students are performing well in, and which areas need more work. This allows individual schools to set achievable targets and develop English language programmes accordingly. In breaking down the results by skill, schools can see which areas they need to focus on in the future.

The theoretical basis for the design of the English Benchmarking Test corresponds closely to a student-centred approach to learning English, without neglecting the need for clarity and accuracy. In real life, language is used in context, and the forms of language vary according to that context. The assessment aims of the English Benchmarking Test were designed to ensure that the test would reflect the use of language in real life. The question types and formats were devised with the purpose of fulfilling these aims.

The English Benchmarking Test was designed for use by students in the Kristau Eskola schools. The task types and format, the test content and the timing of the test were designed to reflect the fact that the candidate students were primary and secondary school students. All items were

selected from the Cambridge ESOL item banking system and all the tasks were of the type that appear in Cambridge ESOL KET for Schools and PET for Schools examinations which are familiar to both teachers and students. The results of the 2009 study are very encouraging and show that overall, students' levels are moving towards the expected targets. The primary school students are more than half way towards their target level of A2. Fifty-six per cent of the primary school students have already reached or exceeded the A2 level. Similarly, 60% of the secondary school students have already reached their target level of B1.

Aitor Bilbao, director of Kristau Eskola (personal communication) explains the value and importance of this exercise and their long-term objectives:

'Kristau Eskola's main objective for the implementation and standardization of the English language assessment evaluations of our students is that of establishing the culture of continuous assessment as a means of improving the quality of our education system. To achieve this, we are relying on an institution of renowned prestige as is Cambridge ESOL. We firmly believe that this way, students, as well as teachers, headmasters and the families of our students will be able to actively contribute to the progressive normalisation of the English language in our schools, as this is one of the main aims of our linguistic framework requirements.'

#### **Fundació Escola Cristiana de Catalunya**

In Catalonia Cambridge ESOL is working with the Foundation of Catholic Schools to provide external assessment to students at their schools. Unlike the agreement in the Basque Country, exams are delivered by one of Cambridge ESOL's centres in the region. However, there are a number of similarities as Catalonia also has a local official language which is taught alongside Spanish. This was the second agreement signed by Cambridge ESOL and involves more than 430 schools throughout the four provinces of Catalonia. The Cambridge ESOL centre has a dedicated school visitor who is responsible for organising teacher training seminars and co-ordinating with the schools. Last year, 1,800 took a Cambridge ESOL exam.

#### **ATTENDIS (Andalusia)**

A new agreement was signed last year with a group of 16 private schools throughout Andalusia to consolidate an earlier one in which children sit YLE examinations before going on to take KET and PET. In this agreement, English language assessment becomes an integral part of the curriculum, and exam fees are paid at the beginning of the school year as part of annual fees. The group acts as an internal centre in its own right, but is assisted in oral exams by other Cambridge ESOL examination centres.

#### **Castilla-Leon**

One of Cambridge ESOL's centres has supplied English language classes and support to state school teachers who then sat PET.

#### **CAM Bilingual Project (Comunidad de Madrid)**

The CAM bilingual project was set up in 2006 with just 26 schools. This has now grown to over 206 schools and children have now reached the end of primary education

(see Table 1). This project is different from many of the above as it is aimed at state schools, like the Ministry of Education and Culture/British Council project, and follows a CLIL approach. English language immersion varies from 30% to 50% depending on resources. Thanks to a new agreement with Cambridge ESOL, children from the first schools will sit KET for Schools or PET for Schools in summer 2010 before going on to secondary education. Careful planning and selection has taken place to ensure that children are ready for an external four-skill examination.

## Teacher seminars and workshops

Cambridge ESOL continues to work closely with other regions in Spain in providing support for their English language and bilingual programmes. Cambridge ESOL has an extensive teacher seminar and workshop programme which has been expanding and growing over the years; reaching over 11,500 teachers in the last five years as shown in Table 2. The seminars provide teachers with useful information to help prepare their students for Cambridge

**Table 2: Cambridge ESOL teacher seminar and workshop programme in Spain**

Year	Number of seminars	Number of teachers attending
2005–2006	59	1,800
2006–2007	51	2,000
2007–2008	90	2,700
2008–2009	88	3,200
2009–2010 (to Dec 09)	55	2,000
<b>Total 2005–2010</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>11,700</b>

ESOL exams and in recent years have been aimed more specifically at non-native English teachers working in compulsory education. Seminars and workshops designed with these teachers in mind include: Use of L1 by teachers and students in the classroom; Strategies for supporting learners in large classes; Classroom management and successful lesson planning.

## Conclusion

The different Autonomous Regions, Ministry of Education and Culture, and independent school networks in Spain have been working tirelessly over the last few years in improving the access to and quality of both English language education and the teaching of curricula subjects through English. The ability to communicate in English is seen as vital for the success of future generations. Increasingly the various stakeholders including ministries, schools, teachers and parents are requesting and calling for independent external assessment as a way of validating the bilingual programmes in place and providing the schools and students participating in these programmes with deserved recognition. Cambridge ESOL is working with a number of regions and schools throughout the country in order to provide external assessment along with the necessary support and training for teachers new to external assessment.

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# The use of BEC as a measurement instrument in Higher Education in China

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## Introduction

The Business English Certificates (BEC) – BEC Preliminary, BEC Vantage and BEC Higher – are examinations of English language in a business context, aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) at level B1 (BEC

Preliminary), level B2 (BEC Vantage) and level C1 (BEC Higher). Candidates are assessed on their performance in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Although the exams are available worldwide, they were developed to meet a specific need in China, and were first introduced in that country in 1993. BEC is now the second largest overseas exam in the China market (after IELTS), and continues to enjoy rapid growth. Growth in candidature has averaged approximately 20% per year over the last five years. The majority of candidates are undergraduate university students.

This article explores the background to the development

of BEC, and the contribution that the exams have made to Business English teaching in China.

## The development of BEC

The development, introduction and continued success of BEC is closely linked to China's drive over the last 20 years to improve its communicative competence in English.

The early 1990s witnessed a revolution in English language teaching and learning in China. The first steps towards English language learning on a large scale had already taken place in the early 1980s, when millions of people tuned in to the 'Follow me' English course on TV, which was made by the BBC and represented an early operationalisation of the Council of Europe's Threshold level. However, the 1981 national syllabus encouraged teachers to focus on grammar and language knowledge rather than communicative competence. Then, in 1992, the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) introduced a functional syllabus for English language teaching, which set out to make communicative language teaching (CLT) the predominant methodology throughout China. Since CLT aims at communicative competence, this fitted well with the aim of having large numbers of competent users of English in the workforce; an important element in China's strategy of modernisation and opening up to the outside world.

The need was also identified for an appropriate instrument to assess the communicative competence of students who wanted to work in international companies and Sino-foreign joint ventures in China, where English would be needed. Although the National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) already administered TOEFL, it was recognised that the test that was required would need to assess all four skills, have a positive impact on learning, be at an obtainable level, and cover the domain of English for the workplace. It was also important that the test should result in a certificate for successful candidates, with the potential for international currency and recognition. Since there was no international test available that met these requirements, in 1992 Cambridge ESOL was asked to design one. NEEA was pleased that the prototype which Cambridge ESOL produced represented a suitable design, and the partners therefore agreed to develop the test as a joint venture. The result was BEC 1, which measured at CEFR levels A2 and B1, and went 'live' in autumn 1993. The delivery model was an innovative collaboration between Cambridge ESOL and NEEA, whereby the tests were produced in the UK by Cambridge ESOL, but printed in China by NEEA. NEEA was also responsible for all aspects of test administration and centre support, including the distribution of results and certificates following data analysis and grading in the UK.

Even before the introduction of BEC 1, it was agreed that the test would be supplemented with a similar test at a higher level. BEC 2, which measured at CEFR level B2, went live in 1994, followed by BEC 3 (level C1) in 1996. BEC was made available worldwide in 1998, and the names of the tests changed to 'BEC Preliminary', 'BEC Vantage' and 'BEC Higher' in 2002. BEC is currently recognised by more than 2,500 educational organisations, employers, ministries,

government bodies and professional organisations throughout the world as a suitable qualification for business use.

## English language teaching in Chinese universities

Several years before the introduction of BEC, the late 1980s saw the introduction of the nationwide College English Test (CET) Band 4, followed by CET Band 6. These tests have played a dominant role in the testing of English language proficiency in Chinese universities since. However, neither the initial CET syllabus, nor its revised edition of 1999, was related to business. In 2004, however, an entirely new version of the College English Curriculum Requirements was introduced. The new version states that:

'The objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future work and social interactions they will be able to exchange information effectively through both spoken and written channels, and at the same time they will be able to enhance their ability to study independently and improve their cultural quality' (Ministry of Education 2004:24).

In addition to a reference wordlist, the 'English Competence' appendix to the Curriculum Requirements contains a Self-Assessment/Peer Assessment Form for use by students. In contrast to the traditional grammatical, functional, notional items, this form lists many items intended to indicate competence in business communication. In Reading, for example, students are required to assess whether they can understand everyday forms (registrations, applications, and questionnaires), directions, manuals, advertisements, posters, invitations and business letters on general subjects. In Writing, they are required to assess whether they can fill in everyday forms, write simple directions, advertisements and résumés, and reply to greeting cards, invitations, notes, messages, notices, business letters, emails and faxes (ibid:43–44).

## The impact of BEC on Business English teaching

The fact that this revolution in 'College English' teaching in China has been accompanied by strong growth in the BEC candidature since 2004 is not a surprise. The communicative principles underpinning the new curriculum also underpin the design of BEC. This has enabled BEC to impact positively on College English teaching. For years, the conception of Business English in Chinese had been the kind of English used in the specific domain of importing and exporting goods. The increasing popularity of BEC in China contributed to a growing perception that in fact Business English is the English necessary for professional purposes required to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges.

University students are mainly 'pre-experience' students, i.e. students with no previous experience of working in a business environment (Ellis and Johnson 2000). When making provision for this type of student, syllabus planners and teachers have to weigh up the relative demands of

English for study and academic purposes and English for future occupational purposes, and to identify the Business English skills and knowledge that will be needed to cater for all the students on such courses. A Business English course should be designed to bring the real world of international business into the language teaching classroom and to ensure the maximum range and authenticity of business content (Barrall 2004). BEC has played an important role in this respect.

Another important effect that BEC has had on the teaching of Business English in China relates to the boom in Business English as a major orientation for undergraduate students in universities. For decades, English has been a major programme at universities, with a focus on language and literature. Since BEC was introduced in 1993, the majority of candidates have been university students whose major was English. Many found the communicative features of BEC a great challenge, as their English learning had focused on the traditional areas of language knowledge and vocabulary. For teachers and course designers, this also aroused great interest in revolutionising English language teaching. More than 700 universities have had their English major programmes (at undergraduate or even graduate level) related to Business English. In the last few years there has been a growing interest in the possibility of setting up BA Programmes in Business English to complement the traditional English BA Programme (in reference to linguistic, literary and cultural studies) under the discipline of English Language Education (Chen and Wang 2009). In 2007, in order to meet the country's economic and social development needs, the Ministry of Education of China approved the establishment of Business English BA Programmes for the first time.

## The impact of BEC on candidates

In a difficult economic climate, the competition for jobs has intensified considerably, especially for recent graduates. Increasing numbers of undergraduates take BEC, with a view to gaining an advantage in the labour market and preparing for a career in business. In September 2009, BEC was selected as the most useful overseas certificate for college students in job hunting, according to the most recent research carried out by the media in China (Sina.com 2009). The following testimonial to the value of a BEC certificate in the Chinese labour market comes from a BEC candidate who passed computer-based BEC Vantage in

2009, and was subsequently offered the chance to work as an intern in a well known international media corporation, and then a permanent job with the accounting firm Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu: 'My BEC certificate, which is highly valued by employers, really lit up my resumé; without the preparation for the BEC examination, I could not have gained the confidence, the horizon and the proper manner which helped me a lot during those interviews.'

## Conclusion

BEC was developed in the early 1990s to meet the need for a test of communicative competence among students aiming to work in international companies and Sino-foreign joint ventures in China. Its rapid growth in the Higher Education sector is closely linked to China's continued drive to improve communicative competence in English and, more recently, its competence in business communication. The communicative principles underpinning the 2004 *College English Curriculum Requirements* also underpin the design of BEC, and have further fuelled the exam's growth and positive impact on College English teaching. As a result, BEC is increasingly regarded as having high surrender value in the graduate jobs market.

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# Cambridge ESOL trains Thai teachers

ANDREW NYE STAKEHOLDER UNIT, CAMBRIDGE ESOL

## Introduction

In 2008, working in partnership with Bell International, Cambridge ESOL ran a teacher training course for 30 teachers from Thailand, giving them a unique opportunity to enhance their teaching skills. The course was so successful

it was repeated in 2009. Working closely with the Ministry of Education in Thailand, Cambridge ESOL and Bell International delivered the training to help delegates develop their knowledge of teacher training methodologies and improve their overall skills as practising teachers. The

course equipped the teachers with the necessary skills to design and develop their own English language tests.

## Background

On arrival each group had a high level of understanding of issues surrounding testing, principally because they had done both TKT modules 1 and 2. This was part of a major project that the Thai Ministry of Education had invested in to improve the methodology skills of teachers of English in state schools throughout Thailand. A key component of this project was the use of TKT as a benchmark qualification for the teachers.

Initial training in TKT was given to a group of about 50 senior teachers from regional English language support centres located all around Thailand. The training materials were developed by the Ministry in partnership with the British Council in Bangkok. The format of training was part face-to-face and part self-study. The senior teachers cascaded the training to secondary school teachers in their regions. Those teachers with a high enough proficiency in English took TKT Module 1. At later dates, other groups of teachers (including some from primary schools) also took Module 1, while those that had previously achieved Band 3 or 4 took Module 2 or 3. In total, more than 20,000 teachers in Thailand have taken TKT. Teachers who achieved the highest band score were offered the opportunity to further develop their professional skills in overseas courses, and in particular the courses run by Cambridge ESOL, together with Bell International, in Cambridge.

## Role of Cambridge ESOL

The Cambridge ESOL courses began by cementing the theory that the teachers had learned whilst studying TKT. This was then followed by sessions on testing which put the theory clearly into practical use for the participants, and gave them a deeper understanding of the issues involved. This practical work consisted of ongoing project work for the participants to produce their own test items. At the end of the course, participants presented these projects to the whole group and received feedback, making the projects useful and meaningful for them all. The participants reported that they found it invaluable to have time to prepare these project presentations and to get support from the tutors. This resulted in some really worthwhile ideas that participants could take back, share with other teachers and use in their schools. For future course projects, the challenge of the work could be raised by asking participants to select their own texts to write exam tasks for. Texts were provided by tutors in the past, but with access to materials at the Bell School, participants could do this for themselves.

In 2009 Cambridge ESOL undertook a survey of the teachers involved in the TKT project in Thailand to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. Specific objectives were:

- to find out how useful teachers found the preparation they did for taking TKT
- to find out how relevant the content of TKT is for their work
- to identify the impact that preparing for and taking TKT has had on their teaching and on their students' learning
- to identify what additional training and professional development teachers feel they need.

Five hundred teachers took part in the survey and the results clearly show that the training for TKT and the use of TKT as a benchmark for the teachers has had a very positive impact on teaching in Thailand. The overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) found the experience of preparing for and taking TKT to be a useful or very useful experience, while 82% stated that TKT had motivated them to continue to develop as a teacher. TKT has helped them to develop a better understanding of teaching theory (83%) and to improve their teaching skills (79%). They now feel more confident in their teaching (80%) and enjoy their work more (76%).

## Conclusions

The completed end-of-course questionnaires showed that participants found the course extremely useful and enjoyable, particularly the practical sessions. Yuwadee Yoosabai, the course co-ordinator in 2009 commented: 'The course has been extremely useful. Cambridge ESOL and Bell International worked perfectly together to give us a mix of theory and practical experience. They took time to find out in what areas of teaching we were experiencing difficulties, in order to ensure that the training was tailor made to our needs. We have all learnt so much in regard to the different types of test available and feel much more confident about how to extract the best from our students.'

Dr Michael Milanovic, CEO for Cambridge ESOL commented: 'Providing teachers from all over the world, with all of the necessary support and guidance when educating and assessing students who are learning a foreign language is a key objective for us. Our long established partnership with both the Thai Ministry of Education and Bell International enabled us to give these delegates a unique insight into the tools and techniques needed. We will certainly keep in touch with the delegates to learn how their new found knowledge and expertise has helped them move forward and address some of the challenges they face in their daily roles in Thailand.'

# Colombia national bilingual project

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## Introduction

The Colombian educational authorities value the mastery of a second language as an indispensable tool to succeed in today's world. The Government's educational policy regards learning foreign languages as a way of opening, internationalising and creating a positive foreign investment climate. The 'Plan Colombia Bilingüe' and the National Standards for English constitute outstanding efforts in this regard. Bilingualism is acknowledged as key for academic and labour mobility and for setting the basis for capacity building and competitiveness. While traditionally, Colombia's bilingual education has been the privilege of the higher social classes, the Government of Colombia has sought to change this situation by implementing an ambitious education and language policy. The issuance of the General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994) and the launching of a National Bilingual Program, provided the grounds for Colombia's aspiration for a bilingual education for all of the population. The following article contains a description of the collaboration between the Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN – the Ministry of Education), the Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación (ICFES – the national awarding body), Cambridge ESOL and British Council, Colombia. This was a 4-year project covering the following areas:

- initial benchmarking of student and teacher levels
- new test development and deployment
- transfer of knowledge
- developing local capabilities and quality assurance.

The project successfully delivered new English language examinations in Colombia; specifically for 11th graders at the end of the State secondary education (the State exam, 'Examen de Estado') and for last-year university students (ECAES).

Cambridge ESOL designed and produced the first version of the new English component of the Colombian State exams. Thereafter, the project has involved transfer of skills and localisation to improve the country's capacity to produce its own English tests through ICFES. As a result of important efforts from the Colombian educational authorities, currently hundreds of thousands of students in Colombia are taking these mandatory English tests annually. Training provided by Cambridge ESOL allowed ICFES to form a team of new item writers who have already produced English test items used in the latest 2008 and 2009 versions of the State exams and ECAES. The success of this initiative has allowed Colombia to both raise its standards for English as a second language, and accurately measure progress attained against international standards.

## Background

Up until 2000, the examination of foreign languages had been optional in state exams. However after that year, with less than 2% of the population opting for the language tests, ICFES implemented a mandatory language component for State exams. In general, schools did not have much experience in teaching and testing foreign languages, consequently, a 2-year adjustment period was granted. ICFES began publishing the general results of language exams in 2003. But after a couple of years, unsatisfactory results provoked a strong response from the Colombian educational authorities. With only 1% of the country's population estimated to perform in English as a second language at an adequate level, the educational authorities started promoting bilingualism as an important component of the broader educational reform project.

### The broader educational reform context

Colombia has established four strategies to improve the quality of education:

1. Strengthening the education quality assurance system at all levels.
2. Providing professional development for teachers and school directors.
3. Implementing programs to develop competencies.
4. Fostering policy and programme evaluation (see World Bank 2004).

Around the same time, in 2006, the Colombian Government proposed long-term goals on educational policy in the document *Vision 2019 Educación*. This policy document called for the improvement of English language skills for the whole population as a means to improve the country's competitiveness in the global market.

Furthermore, Colombia has engaged its people in the development of a 10-year plan to address these and other issues critical to education, through its *Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación* or National Decennial Education Plan. To galvanise support for its reforms, the Ministry of Education has used the decennial plan as a means of engaging the public in setting the nation's education priorities for the 10-year periods of 1996–2005 and 2006–2016.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of its educational policy, Colombia has been strengthening its quality assurance system by developing

<sup>1</sup> The National Decennial Education Plan is a social pact around a democratic planning exercise, in which the general public determines the main features and guidelines of educational policy for the next decade. It consists of a set of proposals, actions, and goals expressing the will of the people regarding education in the country.

basic competency standards; monitoring, analysing and using evaluation data for student and teacher performance; fostering school quality through the use of self-evaluation, improvement plans and a certification process; and strengthening sub-national agencies to support schools' improvement efforts, especially schools that are low-achieving. Furthermore, Colombia has been working to increase the relevance of its education system from pre-primary to higher education and to increase access at the higher levels, so as to build the human capital required to increase general productivity and competitiveness.

## The National Bilingual Program

As a result of the need to improve foreign language teaching skills and student competencies, educational institutions started including English language courses in their syllabus. Bilingualism became one criterion for accreditation of higher education programmes, while the Ministry of Education made important efforts to examine last-year high-school students. In 2004, the Ministry of Education presented the National Bilingual Program 2004–2019, an ambitious and unprecedented language policy. The programme was very influential, not only amongst schools and universities, but also outside the formal education system, and completely changed the way the education community perceives foreign language teaching and learning in the country.

The programme consists of five targeted areas for implementation, which include:

1. Developing standards for English teaching and learning.
2. Continuously evaluating communicative competence in students, as well as in-service and pre-service teachers, within and outside the formal school system.
3. Providing professional development programmes for teachers in order to develop their pedagogical knowledge as well as communicative competence in English.
4. Supporting the use of new information and communication technologies for the teaching of English.
5. Consolidating bilingual and trilingual models in ethnic communities around the country.

### Goals and objectives

The project's objectives of providing a range of English language assessment services included the definition of student performance levels linked to international benchmarks. While the main objective was to improve the level of English of students and teachers, it required that ICFES provided a good delivery infrastructure and improved English language assessment.

Colombia's educational authorities sought to evaluate and certify competencies by initiating periodic English language evaluations, to determine the level of competence of students and teachers. Such a certification process for in-service and pre-service teachers provided for accreditation of teachers' competence at the various levels of language and language-teaching skills. This certification was to be issued by fully accredited teaching institutions, and to be closely aligned with international standards. The

main goal was to attain a minimum CEFR B2 level for all teachers which required outstanding teacher training efforts at basic and intermediate levels.

The ultimate goals behind adopting new international standards for foreign-language learning was targeted at achieving English language skills at CEFR level B1 for school leavers, level B2 for university graduates, and at least C1 for all English language teachers. These levels correspond to the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Initial objectives were programmed to be completed by 2010, aiming at full achievement (100% of the goal) by 2019. By then, the country's educational authorities expect to have achieved a level of at least B2 for 100% of the English teachers in the country and all last-year university students; and at least B1 for 100% of final year high-school students. The targeted improvement over time is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: English language competence development goals for Colombia**

	2005	2010	2015	2019
Percentage of 11th grade students, state school sector in basic level	6.4%	30%	75%	100%
Percentage of public and private school last-year high-school students attaining level B1 of competence in ICFES State exam	8%	40%	70.40%	100%
Percentage of English teachers in basic and intermediate levels, up to level B2 of competence	6.8%	35% (50%)	75%	100%
Percentage of last-year university students attaining level B2 of competence (ECAES general)	28% at B1	70% at B1 30% at B2	100% at B1 70% at B2	100% at B2
Percentage of last-year English teacher trainees in basic and intermediate levels attaining level C1 of competence	58% at B2 0% at C1	75% at B2 25% at C1	100% at B2 50% at C1	100% at C1
Percentage of programmes accredited by English language institutes	0%	60%	75%	100%

## The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages

The levels for language skills defined for Colombia correspond to internationally accepted standards defined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages. The CEFR consists of a series of descriptions of abilities which can be applied to any language and can be used to set clear targets for achievements within language learning, and has been invaluable to the project. The new international standards of testing English skills in the Colombian State exam were based on the Cambridge ESOL Preliminary English Test, which stands at level B1 of the CEFR. Colombia's efforts to obtain training and support from Cambridge ESOL were aimed at improving Colombia's capacity to produce its own tests linked to the CEFR.

## Language educational policy actions

ICFES has designed and implemented certain strategies to meet the objectives of a bilingual education policy. The main one was the adoption of standards in English

language as the common basis for fixing goals, designing curricula and evaluating competences, as well as certifying a person's level of competence. English language standards adopted by the Ministry of Education, based on the CEFR, determined the competences that students are expected to develop, in order to attain a level of English that allows them to understand and be understood in that language.

After launching the National Bilingual Program, the Government issued legislation to regulate the new policy. With Decree 3870 of 28 October 2005, the Colombian Government formally adopted the CEFR for languages; regulated the organisation and functioning of foreign language programmes; provided for accreditation of language programmes in universities; and eliminated the certification requirement for programmes offered by international co-operation organisations.

The adoption of Cambridge ESOL exams was fundamental for policy advancement. Between 2005 and 2009, the National Bilingual Program made important progress with a large-scale collaboration between ICFES, Cambridge ESOL, British Council and the Colombian academic community. The partnership with Cambridge ESOL was aimed at developing an internationally benchmarked English language assessment in the State school-leaving exams and university ECAES exams in Colombia, and made up part of the Ministry's efforts to equip the population of Colombia with English skills for work and higher study. It consisted of a comprehensive programme designed by Cambridge ESOL, which involved benchmarking specific student populations to establish existing levels of language ability, subsequent design of new tests for two test populations, building local capacity by training a Colombian team to write tests in line with international standards, and collaborating on statistical analysis techniques and the development of a measurement scale in order to tie student performance to CEFR levels. This was a 4-phase project implemented in the following phases:

1. Benchmarking of student and teacher levels (Nov 05–Feb 06).
2. Test development and deployment (Mar 06–Dec 06).
3. Transfer of knowledge (May 07–Dec 09).
4. Localisation and quality assurance (Jan 08–Dec 09).

#### **Phase 1: Benchmarking of student and teacher levels with Cambridge tests**

In November 2005, the first pilot for the new language tests was carried out in various territorial entities around the country. To provide a benchmark by which to plot progress of the National Bilingual Program, a sample population of 3,759 students in 8th and 10th grades in public schools in 11 departments, and 3,422 teachers, was selected to take part in a benchmarking activity designed by Cambridge ESOL. This exercise showed that only 6.4% of the students in the year prior to leaving school were at B1 level in English, while only 10.5% of the teachers had the necessary level of English to teach at this standard. A second study tested pedagogical and content knowledge of 243 teachers by using the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) administered by Cambridge ESOL; while a third study tested 2,467 students in public schools and 1,293 in private schools, not including bilingual schools.

The TKT study showed satisfactory results regarding teachers' pedagogical knowledge. However, only 1.8% of the teachers were at an advanced level in English language ability, 32.8% at intermediate level, and 65.4% attained only a basic level.

Additionally, the First Certificate in English exam was applied to a sample of 300 final-year trainee English language teachers, fully sponsored by the Ministry of Education. This survey showed that over 50% of trainee English teachers were below B2 level.

In total, this illustrates that Colombia's ambitious policy for bilingualism has a lack of qualified English teachers, with an estimated 40,000 extra at the appropriate language level still needed. This is one of the largest challenges faced today by the country's educational system.

#### **Phase 2: Strategic alliances for Cambridge ESOL test development and deployment**

Cambridge ESOL presented new test designs for the English component of the State school-leaving exam and for the English test for final year university students. These designs were accepted by ICFES and MEN. The first of these tests was administered between July and September 2006. Cambridge ESOL also processed and delivered the results in this period. These tests contained items from Pre-A1 level up to B2 level in order to measure performance up to B2 on the CEFR.

#### *Cambridge ESOL Colombia Test Structure*

The new foreign language tests designed to replace the old elective tests focused on evaluating students' communicative competences. The exam relied on a distinction between different levels of competence, where the knowledge of grammatical rules and semantic aspects of the language are only meaningful when used in specific contexts.

In terms of overall general ability, the English exam developed by Cambridge ESOL and implemented by ICFES evaluates skills in the following areas:

- can understand straightforward instructions or public messages
- can understand dictionary-style definitions for common objects
- can understand routine information
- can follow routine interactions covering a wide range of functional language
- can understand factual articles in newspapers, books and letters
- can understand the general meaning of non-routine articles, including writer purpose, overall intention and writer opinion
- can appreciate cohesion in a written passage and select appropriate vocabulary from options.

The English language exams implemented in the annual tests for last-year high-school and university students, consist of 45 multiple-choice items (the previous language exams used to have 24 items). The test has been developed

to assess across several levels of proficiency (from Pre-A1 to 'B1 or Above' on the CEFR). All 45 items are distributed amongst seven parts or sections of increasing difficulty. The basic and independent user levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages define the assessment levels.

A simultaneous alliance between ICFES and British Council worked to promote the basic standards for English competences. As a result in 2006, the Government introduced the *Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés*, a set of basic standards that English teachers should follow to guarantee the levels of proficiency the CEFR presents for Europe. The Minister of Education, Cecilia María Velez White, in an open letter introducing the standards (2006) made the following statement:

'The National Government has the fundamental commitment to create the conditions for Colombians to develop communicative competences in another language. Having a good proficiency level in English facilitates the access to job and education opportunities that help ensure quality of life. To be competent in another language is essential in a globalized world, which demands better communication, to open frontiers, to understand other contexts, to make knowledge your own and make it circulate, to understand and make yourself understood, to enrich your being and play a decisive role in the development of the country. Being bilingual broadens the opportunities to be more competent and competitive.'

### Phase 3: Local capacity-building

The new English language tests that were developed under the ICFES–Cambridge ESOL alliance made possible the application of national English exams to more than 800,000 students a year, in line with new international standards.

The first step in enabling test production to take place locally was for Cambridge ESOL and ICFES to recruit and train a team of locally based item writers to produce their own materials for the English components of the State exam and ECAES test. The British Council played an important role by facilitating and mediating this process, which commenced with the appointment of two Team Leaders, responsible for training and managing teams of locally based item writers, as well as other duties including the production of item writer guidelines.

Having agreed upon a detailed schedule for local capacity building covering a period of two years, the first activity in May 2007 was for the Team Leaders to attend an intensive 5-day training course specifically designed by Cambridge ESOL and held at its offices. The training was delivered by staff from Assessment and Operations, Research and Validation, and one of its leading external consultants. The purpose of the training was to provide the Team Leaders with all the necessary knowledge and skills they would require to perform their role, and covered the following aspects: familiarisation with the levels of the newly designed Examen de Estado (State exam) and ECAES tests and how they are related to the CEFR; a detailed consideration of the test parts and issues involved in producing successful test materials; the aims of editing and pretest review meetings; and how to effectively train and support item writers.

Immediately after returning to Colombia, the Team

Leaders drafted a set of item writer guidelines for the Examen de Estado and ECAES tests detailing the test specifications and providing advice on producing the test items. Once the guidelines had been drafted with support from Cambridge ESOL, the Team Leaders went on to devise a training session for the newly recruited team of 15 item writers (eight from Bogotá and seven from other cities). The content of the session largely mirrored the content of the Team Leader training, except there was less focus on the Team Leader's role. The training was delivered at the British Council in Bogotá, and attended by the Cambridge ESOL consultant who had previously trained the Team Leaders. The alliance with Cambridge ESOL was a key factor in enabling test production to take place locally. Furthermore, to support these efforts, British Council, the Ministry of Education, ICFES, Cambridge ESOL and other educational authorities were involved in devising teacher training programmes for in-service teachers, to strengthen the provision of English language teaching for students.

### Phase 4: Localisation and quality assurance

This stage focused on quality assurance, with the aim of ensuring that ICFES and the new Colombian item writing team were supported by Cambridge ESOL so that the locally produced tests continued to measure candidates' English language ability according to the new Colombian Standards and the CEFR.

Cambridge ESOL supported ICFES in achieving this aim by enabling them to calibrate tasks and by providing anchor items for inclusion in pretests and live tests. The development of a successful pretesting system was crucial to ensure that test items were at the right level for the live tests, and this was another area in which Cambridge ESOL gave significant support and advice to ICFES, besides providing feedback and editing comments on locally produced test materials via videoconference, teleconference and email. In addition to this, analysis of live results was undertaken by Cambridge ESOL Research and Validation Group to help ICFES with grading and to help refine the mapping of test items to the CEFR.

Via this means and by developing a network of item writers, ICFES has continued to build up its bank of test materials and was able to anchor test items to previous tests, and this was seen as the turning point for the Ministry of Education in guaranteeing the country's own capacity to implement locally produced English language tests. The first tests produced locally were piloted in November 2007. Currently the State exam is a pre-requisite for the admission of 11th grade students to enter into higher education.

### Test anchoring and comparison

Anchor items are a set of common items that a certain test shares with another in order to enable comparison of test results on a common scale of measurement. Anchor items are also used in the creation and expansion of an item bank; the known properties of anchor items inform the analysis of new items and enable their calibration to a common scale. Both of these types of anchoring have been

employed to ensure that the ICFCES tests are aligned to an international standard – in this case the CEFR – and to build a psychometrically sound item bank.

Cambridge ESOL provided ICFCES with a set of anchor tasks which had been calibrated to the CEFR. These anchor tasks were incorporated in pretesting and live administrations of the new ICFCES tests and were used (i) to calibrate new ICFCES test items during pretesting and thus build an item bank, and (ii) to analyse results from the live tests in order to provide grading information based on the CEFR levels.

In 2009, ICFCES decided to analyse together the results of its 2007, 2008 and 2009 English tests. In order to achieve this, ICFCES, with the support of Cambridge ESOL, identified suitable anchoring items among the tests that linked the 2007–2009 tests to the English Benchmarking Test administered in 2005. Working together Cambridge ESOL and ICFCES also established a set of guidelines for the selection of anchor items and/or tasks for future ICFCES tests that will ensure the successful linking of new test versions to the existing ones.

### Findings from the new ICFCES tests administered from 2007 to 2009

Figures 1 and 2 below display CEFR performance in ECAES and Examen de Estado examinations from 2007 to 2008. In the ECAES exam, the percentage of candidates at A1 level is higher than at pre-A1 level in ECAES 2008–1 in comparison to the ECAES 2007–1 or 2007–2. The same is true at B1 and B2 or above CEFR levels – on average the percentage of candidates falling at these two levels increases in the later administrations of the test (with the exception of 2007–2 and 2008–1 at B1). These first results indicate a tentative improvement of proficiency for the ECAES cohort in the lower (pre-A1, A1) and higher (B1, B2 or above) CEFR spectrum of the exam. The Examen de Estado results present a steady picture across all three administrations of the exam in 2007 and 2008. It should be noted here that these results are preliminary and more longitudinal data is needed in order to better monitor progress.

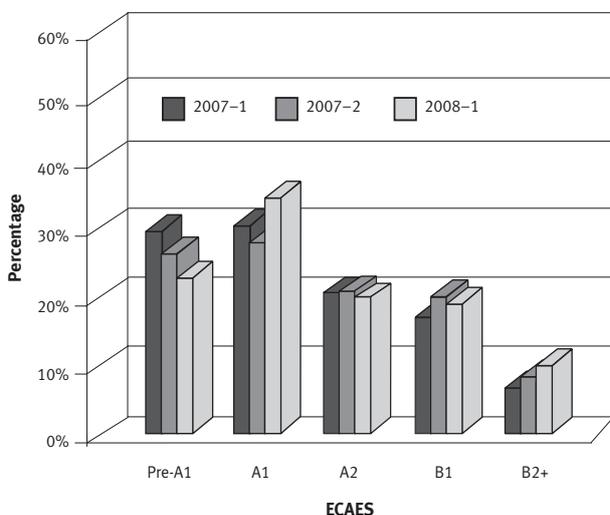


Figure 1: English test result comparisons between ECAES 2007 and 2008

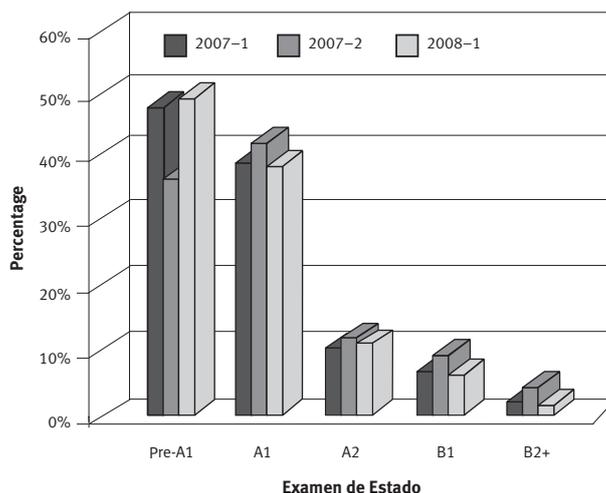


Figure 2: English test result comparisons between State exams 2007 and 2008

### Measuring teachers’ English skills

Throughout the 4-phase project, over 13,000 state English teachers were tested and 6,500 teachers at different levels participated in development programmes. The same English test used for ECAES was implemented for measuring teachers’ language ability. Four different forms of the test for teachers were produced based on the ECAES test for 2008 (EK2008–1 and EK2008–2). The following are the results obtained for each of the forms applied:

Table 2: Teacher language level baseline by form applied

Level	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4
Pre -A	5.4	4.8	6.7	2.8
A1	6	9.5	8.3	9.5
A2	16.6	15.1	11.3	15.1
B1	46.3	43	47.5	46.7
B1+	25.7	27.6	26.2	25.9

Table 3: Overall Teacher Language Level Baseline

Level	Number of teachers	%
A1	3.288	24%
A2	3.911	30%
B1	4.069	31%
B2+	1.966	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.234</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Conclusion

The first pilot tests of English as foreign language in Colombia, aligned to the CEFR, were taken in November 2005 and February 2006 involving more than 5,000 students. Cambridge ESOL conducted the analysis of performance and the results have been used by MEN and

ICFES to inform on standards, to benchmark the performance of foreign language education against international standards and to adapt policy so as to progress towards the achievement of those standards. In 2007, new national English examinations were introduced in Colombia in line with the new CEFR standard. Cambridge ESOL designed the English component of the Colombian state sector exams and developed the early test versions. These are now produced locally following capacity-building in Colombia. Today, Colombia has its own capacity and know-how with a team of Colombian item writers to build its own tests, under the Cambridge ESOL format, totally linked to the CEFR standards. These tests are delivered to approaching a million students annually.

This case study illustrates a highly successful collaboration with mutual benefits for ICFES and Cambridge ESOL. Both organisations view the 4-year project as a major learning and development opportunity that has spanned a wide area of activity, enabling ICFES to produce tests with results linked to the CEFR, and Cambridge ESOL to further develop expertise that can be utilised for other state projects into the future.

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## Working together: the case of the English Diagnostic Test and the Chilean Ministry of Education

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### Introduction

In 1990 the Chilean Ministry of Education launched a policy aimed at encouraging public support for the improvement of quality and equity in the education system. In its *Guidelines for an Educational Policy 2003–2006* (*Orientaciones de la Política Educativa 2003–2006*), the Ministry stated that a key requirement for Chile's educational system was the raising of the level of the population's general skills competences, one of which was the acquisition of a foreign language.

Leading on from this educational policy, in 2003 the Chilean Ministry of Education launched a national English project, 'El Inglés Abre Puertas' (*English Opens Doors*), with the aim that all state school students reach a level equivalent to KET (Key English Test), i.e., CEFR A2 level by the end of primary school and a level equivalent to PET (Preliminary English Test), i.e., CEFR B1 level by the end of

high school. Evaluating the existing English competence of school students was an important first step in this strategy, and Cambridge ESOL was chosen to design a test to diagnose students' listening and reading comprehension at two points in time:

1. In 2004 to collect baseline data on students' levels in English reading and listening at the end of primary education (8th grade) and high-school education (12th grade); to express the results of students' performance in categories aligned to international classification standards; to obtain and compare information about the results from different types of schools according to how they are financed.
2. In 2008 to examine the language progression of the 8th grade cohort over a 4-year period; to examine the extent to which the standard of the 12th grade students has risen from 2004 to 2008.

Accordingly, Cambridge ESOL developed a test tailored to the Ministry's requirements, henceforward referred to as the English Diagnostic Test. Several quality control measures were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the designed instrument. These included a pilot study, provision of a practice test, a site evaluation questionnaire and administration manuals to ensure standard procedures were applied for the administration of the test in all schools. The detailed administration procedures used for the English Diagnostic Test were developed by the Ministry, Cambridge ESOL and Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura, whose role was to ensure that the test was taken throughout the country under appropriate conditions and strict supervision.

We report here on the different phases of this collaborative project but first we start with a description of the test.

## Description of the English Diagnostic Test

In line with Cambridge ESOL's student-centred approach towards assessment, the theoretical basis for the design of the English Diagnostic Test corresponds closely to an active and communicative approach to learning English. The assessment aims of the English Diagnostic Test were designed to ensure that the test would reflect the authentic and interactive nature of language use, and the question types and formats were devised with the purpose of fulfilling these aims.

All items used in the English Diagnostic test were selected from the Cambridge ESOL item bank. In producing examination material for this bank, Cambridge ESOL follows strict guidelines for writing and editing which ensure that all materials conform to test specifications. All items undergo an extensive pretesting programme to ensure that only questions and materials with known measurement characteristics are banked. The Cambridge ESOL pretesting network includes schools and centres throughout Latin America and the items used in the construction of the English Diagnostic Test would have appeared in pretests or live examinations administered to students from either Chile or neighbouring countries. The anchoring system used in the construction of test materials ensures that all items are linked to the Cambridge ESOL Common Scale of difficulty and in turn to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages. In other words, the diagnostic test was calibrated to the Council of Europe's (CoE) CEFR. The CEFR levels covered by the English Diagnostic Test were (from higher to lower): Threshold (B1), Waystage (A2) and Breakthrough (A1). In response to the Ministry's expectation that the majority of the students taking part in the English Diagnostic Test were at or below Breakthrough level (A1), further classification of levels below Breakthrough level were made and referred to in this project as 'Lower Breakthrough' and 'Pre-Breakthrough', with a description of what a typical student can do in terms of language at these lower levels.

The following descriptions provide an outline of the content and test focus of the task types used in the various parts of the Reading and Listening tests.

Part 1 was the Reading section. Making use of the limited structural and lexical resources at their disposal, candidates

were required to understand the main message and some detail, and to infer meaning and intention, from a variety of short factual reading texts: for example, signs, notices, instructions, personal correspondence and informative articles from newspapers and magazines. They also needed to have strategies for dealing with unfamiliar structures and vocabulary. There were four different task types.

Part 2 was the Listening section. Candidates were required to understand and respond to dialogues and monologues, including telephone conversations and recorded messages, in both formal and neutral settings on a range of everyday topics. The texts were delivered at a pace which was slow but not unnaturally so. Candidates had to be able to extract relevant factual information from what they heard and demonstrate understanding of general comprehension, gist, intention, etc.

The task types and format, the test content and the timing of the test were designed to reflect the fact that many of the students were young and had little experience of learning English. For the same reasons, items were arranged, where possible, in order of difficulty so that students would encounter the easier items first. The targeted sample also included some students who were both older and more experienced. The test, therefore, had to be applicable to students ranging in age from 13 to 18 and in level from beginner to intermediate. In all aspects of test design, and in collaboration with the Ministry, care was taken to avoid any possible test bias towards the students in this particular cohort.

## Phase 1: Piloting

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the English Diagnostic Test had local validity, i.e. that it was suitable for this particular population. The pilot study was administered to a sample of the target population selected by the Ministry. The Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura, on behalf of Cambridge ESOL, administered the pilot study in May 2004 in 12 schools, eight of which were located in the Metropolitan Region, three in the Fifth Region and one in the Sixth Region.

The pilot study sample consisted of 13 classes: six of them corresponding to 8th grade and seven corresponding to 12th grade. To allow for the fact that certain items may not work with a particular cohort even after careful trialling on mixed populations, the test for the pilot study was constructed with 50% more items than required.

As a result of the piloting phase, the items that performed least well and appeared least appropriate for the students were excluded. Analysis of the results and extensive consultation with the testing experts at the Ministry showed that the resulting 60-item English Diagnostic Test was appropriate for this particular cohort of students.

The piloting phase also allowed for the development, in collaboration with the Ministry and the Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura, of all other associated project materials: questionnaires, databases, coding systems, administration instructions, site evaluation questionnaires, and student tracking forms.

The pilot study proved to be informative in terms of confirming the English Diagnostic Test's local validity,

ensuring a more representative sample for the test, and ironing out any practical constraints for administration and despatch.

## Phase 2: Implementing

### Test taker characteristics

In 2004, the English Diagnostic Test was administered to a total of 12,000 students, representing 8th grade (13–14 year olds) and 12th grade (17–18 year olds) school students from 300 schools all over the country. The candidature was classified as follows:

Grade	57% of the test population were 8th grade students 43% were 12th grade students
Location	89% were in urban areas 11% were in rural areas
School level	32% were from primary schools 21% were from secondary schools 47% were from schools providing both primary and secondary education
Funding	36% receive municipal funding 51% were privately subsidised 13% were privately paid for
School type	46% provide general education 17% provide vocational education 5% provide both types of education (schools providing only primary education were not included in this category)
Socio-economic level	13% of students were from a low socio-economic background 27% from medium to low 22% from medium 26% from medium to high 12% of students were from a high socio-economic background

Since the sample was not proportional, the Ministry provided weightings to enable the description of national characteristics.

### Practice test

To enhance validity and ensure that all students were familiar with the type of questions being asked on the tests, Cambridge ESOL provided a practice test. The practice test contained the same rubrics, examples and layout as the English Diagnostic Test, with extra practice examples of all the task types used in both the Reading and the Listening tests. The practice test was provided for the Ministry with the intention that all students participating in both the pilot study and English Diagnostic Test would have the opportunity to practise and discuss the example task types with their teachers in advance of the actual tests and with the intention that the tasks in the Diagnostic test could be incorporated in classroom learning and assessment activities.

### Student and teacher questionnaires

In addition to the English Diagnostic Test, all students in the study completed a Student Questionnaire, designed to provide demographic and socio-economic information. Similarly, a questionnaire was administered to all the

English teachers from the classes involved in this project. The Teacher Questionnaire was intended to provide information regarding the English learning contexts in schools, as well as classroom practice, teacher training, etc.

The questionnaires were written, designed and analysed by the Ministry, with Cambridge ESOL responsible for the layout, printing and data entry, and the Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura responsible for administration.

### Findings: Level Descriptors

The Ministry of Education specifically requested that the results of students' performance levels were expressed in categories aligned with an international standard (N.B. results appeared on [www.mineduc.cl](http://www.mineduc.cl) and in the national press at the time). The standard agreed upon was that of the CEFR and Cambridge ESOL Main Suite examinations. The CEFR levels are described by a series of 'Can-Do' statements, which make it easier for users to understand what each level means by defining levels of ability in terms of what language users can typically do at each level of the framework. These 'Can-Do' statements are readily available for the six levels of the framework (A1–C2), but there are no CoE endorsed 'Can-Do' statements below Breakthrough level (CEFR level A1), i.e., for the Lower Breakthrough and Pre-breakthrough levels.

Since the majority of the students taking part in the English Diagnostic Test were expected to be of a lower ability level, the Ministry requested a detailed breakdown of scores, especially those below Breakthrough level. This led to a classification of scores that fell below Breakthrough level referred to in this project as 'Lower Breakthrough' and 'Pre-breakthrough'. At the Ministry's request, therefore, Cambridge ESOL also provided a working description of what a typical student can do in terms of language at these lower levels.

The descriptions for Pre-breakthrough, Lower Breakthrough and Breakthrough were drawn up using expert input and methods used by the CoE in deriving the *Waystage* (CEFR level A2) specification from the *Threshold* (CEFR level B1) specification. The authors of the CoE documents *Waystage* and *Threshold* explain that 'The specification of *Waystage* is a selection from that of *Threshold* ... (we) took *Threshold* level and extracted what were considered to be the most basic categories within each of its parameters' (van Ek and Trim 1991b). Cambridge ESOL employed the same methodology in extracting first Breakthrough from *Waystage*, and then Lower Breakthrough and Pre-breakthrough from the proposed Breakthrough specification. It should be noted that student performance categorised as Pre-breakthrough goes down to complete beginner level.

The English Diagnostic Test was able to distinguish between students at the five requested levels, from Pre-breakthrough to *Threshold*. As expected, the majority of students were at Lower Breakthrough level (52%) and Breakthrough level (30%), with fewer students at the lower and higher ends of the scale. In addition, the test had a reported reliability figure of 0.89. Analysis showed that the test was uni-dimensional, measuring general language proficiency, as demonstrated by principal component analysis.

Differential item functioning (DIF) analysis showed that overall the listening items were relatively free of any DIF. The case for the reading items was slightly different. Gender analysis showed a number of items demonstrating DIF. However, this might have been due to the fact that a majority of students appear to be guessing the answers. However, we believe that the presence of DIF was not very informative for the English Diagnostic Test, as the socio-economic levels and the school location were not language related and cannot logically interact with item difficulty.

As expected, the 12th grade population appeared to perform significantly better than the 8th grade population on the English Diagnostic Test, irrespective of the skill being measured.

With regard to school performances at the national level, students in schools providing only primary level education that are not bilingual appear to be mainly at Lower Breakthrough level; students in schools providing only secondary level education that are not bilingual appear to be mainly at Lower Breakthrough level and to a lesser extent at Breakthrough level; students in schools providing both primary and secondary education that are not bilingual and have consistent results on national assessments appear to cluster around Breakthrough level and Lower Breakthrough level; students in schools providing both primary and secondary education that are not bilingual and have inconsistent results on national assessments appear to be mainly at Lower Breakthrough level and to a lesser extent at Breakthrough level; and students in bilingual schools appear to be mainly at Threshold level.

The findings of this phase were used to inform on the prevailing standards required to make necessary adjustments to curricula, teacher development, and future English language assessment in Chile.

### Phase 3: Monitoring

In 2008, an equivalent version of the English Diagnostic test (referred to as EDT 2) was administered to a sample from the 12th grade in order to examine (i) the language progression of the 8th grade cohort from 2004 to 2008 and (ii) the extent to which the standard of 12th grade students had risen from 2004 to 2008.

The results of English Diagnostic Test 2 (like those of the English Diagnostic Test 1) were aligned to the international classification standards of the Council of Europe, i.e., the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Analysis of EDT 2 showed it to be fit for purpose. Items throughout the entire test discriminated well, and there was a high internal test consistency rating, with an alpha of 0.89. The test items were able to distinguish between students at the five requested levels, from Pre-breakthrough through to Threshold level.

The 2008 sample, provided by the Ministry, included urban-based schools only and comprised 1,554 12th graders (taking both the Reading and the Listening tests). Although the size of this sample is smaller than the size of the population which took the first English Diagnostic Test in 2004, a power analysis confirmed that a 1,500 sample is numerically adequate for statistical comparisons with the larger 2004 population. As the 2008 test population is

exclusively urban-based, the most accurate and appropriate comparison is with the urban-based sample for both 8th and 12th grades in 2004, which numbered 5,376 and 4,403 respectively.

The major findings are as follows.

1. Overall, the majority of students who took the English Diagnostic Test 2 were at Breakthrough level (45%) and Lower Breakthrough level (32.5%), with fewer students at the higher and lower ends of the scale (13.7% at Waystage (A2), 6% at Threshold (B1) and less than 3% at Pre-Breakthrough level).
2. There was considerable improvement in comparison to the CEFR levels of the 8th grade students of the English Diagnostic Test 1 (administered in 2004). 8th grade students were, on average, at Lower Breakthrough level in 2004 whereas 12th grade students appeared to be at Breakthrough in 2008. More specifically, the percentage of students at the three higher levels, Breakthrough (A1), Waystage (A2) and Threshold (B1), was considerably higher in the 12th grade in 2008 than in the 8th grade in 2004, and vice versa at the two lower levels, Pre-breakthrough and Lower Breakthrough. This indicated that there was a clear progression of English language proficiency.
3. Looking at the performance between the 12th grade students of Test 1 and 2, we find that generally there was a slight improvement of English language proficiency from 2004 to 2008. Although 12th grade students of both EDT 1 and 2 were, on average, at Breakthrough level (A1), the percentage of students at Breakthrough in 2008 was higher (45%) than in 2004 (38.5%). Overall, there was a small increase in the number of students at Breakthrough level (A1) or above (with the exception of Threshold where there was a slight decrease) from the 2004 to the 2008 test administration, and conversely, there was a small decrease in the number of students at Lower Breakthrough or below from 2004 to 2008.

To sum up, the educational interventions implemented appear to be successful given the above improvements.

### Limitations

As mentioned above, the 2008 cohort came from urban-based schools only. Urban school students formed a subgroup of the 2004 cohort (89% of the overall population; 85% of the 8th grade population; and 94% of the 12th grade population). Thus, any conclusions and comparisons of the 2008 data with the 2004 cohort are restricted to urban-based students and cannot be generalised to the overall school population. Information about the students' socio-economic level, school location, level, funding and type were not available for the 2008 data and therefore analysis of results in terms of these variables was not possible.

Since the CoE has not yet defined levels below Breakthrough (A1), and because of the nature of the English Diagnostic Tests 1 and 2 – their purpose and overall length in terms of number and type of items – the distinction between these lower levels should be interpreted with

caution. It must be stressed that the definitions of these levels provided by Cambridge ESOL are working definitions only. They are based on initial investigations and require extensive validation.

## Conclusion

The English Diagnostic Test appeared to have met the objectives it was designed for, i.e., to allow diagnosis of student performance levels in English reading and listening comprehension; to align the results of student performance levels to international classification standards; and to allow the comparison of information about the results from different types of schools, according to how they are financed and administered. Data gathered through the test, the questionnaires, and the student tracking forms, along with the major findings from these, enabled the Ministry to implement and reshape plans and/or actions in relation to its national English programme 'English Opens Doors'.

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# IELTS test taker performance 2009

## Introduction

Each year the Research and Validation Group provides a comprehensive overview of IELTS test taker performance for both the Academic and General Training (GT) modules. The information provided below distinguishes Academic and GT candidature in terms of gender, reasons for taking the test, place of origin, and first language.

## Band score information

IELTS is assessed on a 9-band scale and reports scores both overall and by individual skill. Overall band scores for Academic and General Training candidates in 2009 are shown here together with scores for individual skills according to a variety of classifications. These figures are broadly in line with statistics for previous years.

Note that for place of origin and first language, the tables show the top 40 places and languages, listed alphabetically, not in order of the size of the candidature.

## Academic and General Training candidates

The following table shows the split between the Academic and General Training candidature in 2009.

### IELTS test taker performance 2009 Academic and General Training candidates

	2009
Academic	72.3%
General Training	27.7%

## Gender

These figures show the mean overall and individual band scores achieved by 2009 Academic and General Training candidates according to their gender.

Mean band scores for female candidates					
	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Academic	6.03	5.92	5.51	5.82	5.88
General Training	6.21	5.78	5.85	6.21	6.08

Mean band scores for male candidates					
	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Academic	5.84	5.71	5.34	5.65	5.70
General Training	6.08	5.65	5.69	6.13	5.95

## Reason for taking the test

These tables show the percentage of 2009 Academic and General Training candidates who achieved each overall band score according to their reason for taking the test.

**Table 1: Mean overall band score for each reason code (Academic)**

Academic	Below 4	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9
For employment	1%	1%	3%	7%	13%	20%	23%	18%	10%	4%	1%	0%
For higher education extended course (three months or more)	2%	4%	10%	17%	20%	19%	13%	8%	4%	2%	1%	0%
For higher education short course (three months or less)	3%	6%	12%	18%	18%	16%	11%	8%	4%	2%	1%	0%
For immigration	1%	1%	3%	8%	13%	18%	18%	15%	11%	7%	3%	1%
For other education purposes	3%	5%	10%	17%	21%	18%	13%	8%	4%	2%	0%	0%
For personal reasons	3%	4%	9%	15%	19%	19%	15%	8%	5%	2%	0%	0%
For professional registration (NOT medical)	2%	2%	4%	7%	9%	15%	19%	19%	12%	7%	3%	0%
For registration as a dentist	0%	0%	1%	3%	7%	14%	25%	22%	15%	9%	3%	0%
For registration as a doctor	0%	0%	1%	3%	5%	12%	21%	23%	18%	11%	4%	0%
For registration as a nurse (including CGFNS)	0%	0%	1%	4%	9%	19%	24%	21%	11%	6%	3%	1%
Other	2%	4%	9%	13%	16%	18%	16%	12%	7%	3%	1%	0%

**Table 2: Mean overall band score for each reason code (General Training)**

General Training	Below 4	4	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9
For employment	7%	5%	9%	12%	15%	17%	15%	10%	6%	3%	1%	0%
For higher education extended course (three months or more)	5%	6%	11%	15%	19%	18%	14%	8%	4%	1%	0%	0%
For higher education short course (three months or less)	4%	5%	9%	13%	19%	20%	15%	9%	3%	1%	0%	0%
For immigration	2%	2%	5%	10%	16%	20%	18%	13%	8%	4%	2%	0%
For other education purposes	5%	9%	16%	18%	16%	16%	11%	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%
For personal reasons	3%	3%	7%	12%	17%	20%	17%	11%	6%	2%	1%	0%
For professional registration (NOT medical)	2%	2%	5%	9%	17%	19%	20%	13%	8%	3%	2%	0%
For registration as a dentist	3%	1%	7%	9%	16%	25%	17%	7%	8%	8%	0%	0%
For registration as a doctor	3%	3%	6%	9%	15%	19%	15%	13%	9%	6%	2%	0%
For registration as a nurse (including CGFNS)	1%	1%	4%	10%	19%	19%	16%	11%	8%	6%	4%	1%
Other	4%	4%	8%	14%	20%	21%	15%	8%	4%	2%	1%	0%

## Place of origin

These figures show the mean overall and individual band scores achieved by 2009 Academic and General Training candidates from the top 40 places of origin.

**Table 3: Mean band score for the most frequent countries or regions of origin (Academic)**

Academic	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Bangladesh	5.76	5.36	5.48	5.81	5.67
Brazil	6.80	6.87	6.18	6.83	6.73
China (People's Republic)	5.59	5.74	5.11	5.18	5.47
Colombia	6.35	6.53	5.78	6.45	6.34
Cyprus	6.35	5.84	5.60	6.23	6.07
Egypt	6.15	5.96	5.76	6.24	6.09
Ethiopia	4.68	5.62	5.64	6.11	5.58
France	6.70	7.00	6.02	6.43	6.60
Germany	7.46	7.22	6.60	7.23	7.19
Greece	7.05	6.74	5.99	6.43	6.61
Hong Kong	6.76	6.72	5.77	5.94	6.36
India	6.01	5.54	5.46	5.72	5.75
Indonesia	6.28	6.37	5.56	5.92	6.10
Iran	5.88	5.68	5.81	6.44	6.01
Iraq	5.73	5.50	5.39	6.22	5.77
Italy	6.25	6.77	5.78	6.19	6.31
Japan	6.02	5.98	5.40	5.76	5.85
Jordan	5.65	5.44	5.23	5.93	5.63
Kazakhstan	5.95	5.83	5.67	6.01	5.93
Korea, South	6.00	5.98	5.27	5.46	5.74
Kuwait	5.36	4.95	4.84	5.55	5.24
Libya	5.08	4.97	5.08	5.67	5.26
Malaysia	7.10	7.00	6.17	6.51	6.76
Mexico	6.63	6.88	5.92	6.53	6.55
Myanmar	6.14	6.14	5.64	5.85	6.00
Nepal	5.89	5.40	5.42	5.49	5.62
Nigeria	6.11	6.07	6.21	7.06	6.42
Oman	5.14	4.98	4.99	5.65	5.25
Pakistan	6.00	5.62	5.69	6.04	5.90
Philippines	7.05	6.60	6.21	6.81	6.73
Poland	7.01	6.76	6.15	6.92	6.77
Qatar	4.64	4.47	4.39	5.12	4.72
Russia	6.64	6.61	5.95	6.61	6.51
Saudi Arabia	4.97	4.79	4.69	5.67	5.10
Sri Lanka	6.48	5.98	5.90	6.38	6.25
Taiwan	5.78	5.81	5.32	5.73	5.72
Thailand	5.96	5.87	5.34	5.72	5.78
Turkey	6.00	5.85	5.46	5.96	5.88
United Arab Emirates	4.86	4.69	4.69	5.36	4.97
Vietnam	5.83	6.04	5.56	5.68	5.84

**Table 4: Mean band score for the most frequent countries or regions of origin (General Training)**

General Training	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Bangladesh	5.76	5.17	5.52	6.01	5.68
Brazil	6.28	6.13	5.93	6.49	6.28
China (People's Republic)	6.15	5.99	5.62	5.79	5.95
Colombia	5.79	5.77	5.65	6.11	5.89
Egypt	5.95	5.56	5.69	6.19	5.91
France	6.88	6.83	6.37	6.90	6.80
Germany	6.90	6.57	6.44	7.15	6.82
Hong Kong	6.50	6.20	5.83	6.13	6.23
India	6.29	5.59	5.76	6.20	6.03
Indonesia	6.61	6.24	5.87	6.24	6.30
Iran	5.68	5.38	5.88	6.43	5.91
Iraq	5.63	5.25	5.49	6.30	5.73
Italy	6.03	6.09	5.76	6.34	6.12
Japan	5.91	5.55	5.37	5.80	5.72
Jordan	5.78	5.37	5.48	6.22	5.78
Korea, South	5.59	5.34	5.15	5.26	5.40
Lebanon	6.26	5.81	5.88	6.59	6.20
Malaysia	7.19	6.82	6.49	6.93	6.92
Mauritius	6.53	6.00	6.29	6.73	6.44
Mexico	6.33	6.42	6.02	6.56	6.39
Nepal	6.21	5.54	5.80	6.06	5.97
Nigeria	5.84	5.88	6.44	7.10	6.38
Pakistan	6.15	5.61	5.97	6.45	6.11
Palestine	5.68	5.27	5.50	6.18	5.72
Philippines	6.12	5.58	5.92	6.27	6.03
Russia	6.30	6.25	5.92	6.32	6.26
Saudi Arabia	4.65	4.21	4.53	5.20	4.71
Singapore	7.60	7.18	6.94	7.46	7.36
South Africa	7.42	6.98	7.24	8.37	7.56
Sri Lanka	6.23	5.66	5.85	6.34	6.08
Syria	5.74	5.40	5.53	6.23	5.78
Taiwan	5.92	5.65	5.56	6.01	5.85
Thailand	5.52	5.18	5.20	5.56	5.43
Turkey	5.75	5.52	5.46	5.84	5.70
Ukraine	5.97	5.85	5.74	6.09	5.97
United Arab Emirates	4.30	3.72	4.37	4.96	4.4
United Kingdom	8.10	7.69	7.93	8.80	8.20
Venezuela	5.98	6.23	5.99	6.36	6.20
Vietnam	5.46	5.35	5.39	5.51	5.49
Zimbabwe	6.87	6.48	7.01	7.72	7.09

## First language

These figures show the mean overall and individual band scores achieved by 2009 Academic and General Training candidates from the top 40 first language backgrounds.

**Table 5: Mean band scores for the most common first languages (Academic)**

Academic	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Amharic	4.78	5.64	5.62	6.11	5.60
Arabic	5.14	4.96	4.89	5.65	5.23
Bengali	5.85	5.44	5.54	5.87	5.74
Burmese	6.14	6.14	5.64	5.85	6.00
Chinese	5.72	5.85	5.19	5.28	5.57
Dutch	7.95	7.79	6.79	7.60	7.60
English*	7.41	6.96	6.68	7.53	7.21
Farsi	5.88	5.68	5.81	6.44	6.02
French	6.55	6.80	5.99	6.44	6.51
German	7.48	7.22	6.61	7.23	7.20
Greek	6.78	6.40	5.85	6.40	6.42
Gujarati	5.83	5.35	5.31	5.52	5.57
Hindi	6.34	5.80	5.67	6.03	6.02
Indonesian	6.28	6.37	5.56	5.92	6.10
Italian	6.24	6.77	5.78	6.18	6.30
Japanese	6.02	5.97	5.39	5.76	5.85
Kannada	7.09	6.52	6.28	6.79	6.74
Kazakh	5.86	5.72	5.61	5.93	5.84
Korean	6.00	5.97	5.27	5.46	5.74
Lithuanian	6.96	6.72	5.95	6.39	6.57
Malay	6.88	6.76	6.01	6.37	6.57
Malayalam	6.66	6.18	5.99	6.33	6.35
Marathi	6.89	6.29	6.15	6.50	6.52
Nepali	5.90	5.40	5.42	5.50	5.62
Other	6.27	6.05	6.12	6.73	6.36
Pashto	5.59	5.32	5.53	5.89	5.65
Polish	7.00	6.75	6.15	6.91	6.77
Portuguese	6.74	6.78	6.11	6.77	6.66
Punjabi	5.37	5.01	5.02	5.15	5.20
Romanian	7.29	7.13	6.31	6.92	6.97
Russian	6.56	6.51	5.92	6.54	6.45
Singhalese	6.53	6.02	5.94	6.41	6.29
Spanish	6.50	6.71	5.92	6.53	6.48
Tagalog	7.05	6.60	6.21	6.80	6.73
Tamil	6.72	6.20	5.93	6.38	6.38
Telugu	6.31	5.70	5.64	5.96	5.97
Thai	5.96	5.87	5.34	5.71	5.78
Turkish	6.04	5.84	5.46	5.93	5.88
Urdu	6.07	5.65	5.70	6.06	5.93
Vietnamese	5.83	6.04	5.56	5.68	5.84

\* This is the first language chosen by candidates from a range of Commonwealth countries

**Table 6: Mean band scores for the most common first languages (General Training)**

General Training	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Afrikaans	7.14	6.77	6.93	8.09	7.29
Arabic	5.33	4.89	5.19	5.83	5.37
Bengali	5.82	5.24	5.57	6.06	5.74
Chinese	6.20	6.02	5.66	5.86	6.00
Creole	6.41	5.87	6.21	6.64	6.34
English*	7.41	6.92	7.05	7.76	7.35
Farsi	5.67	5.38	5.88	6.43	5.91
French	6.61	6.40	6.26	6.76	6.57
German	6.88	6.52	6.39	7.05	6.77
Gujarati	6.18	5.51	5.60	6.02	5.89
Hindi	6.48	5.78	5.92	6.46	6.22
Hungarian	6.21	5.89	5.77	6.21	6.10
Indonesian	6.61	6.24	5.86	6.24	6.30
Italian	6.01	6.07	5.73	6.32	6.10
Japanese	5.90	5.55	5.37	5.79	5.71
Kannada	6.63	5.97	6.17	6.61	6.40
Korean	5.59	5.34	5.15	5.26	5.40
Malay	7.14	6.70	6.47	6.99	6.89
Malayalam	6.36	5.84	6.01	6.32	6.20
Marathi	6.67	6.05	6.19	6.61	6.45
Nepali	6.22	5.54	5.80	6.06	5.97
Other	6.28	5.84	6.27	6.84	6.37
Pashto	5.88	5.35	5.89	6.45	5.95
Polish	6.32	6.02	5.88	6.56	6.26
Portuguese	6.25	6.09	5.89	6.48	6.24
Punjabi	6.01	5.26	5.53	5.91	5.74
Romanian	6.18	5.96	5.76	6.16	6.08
Russian	6.23	6.18	5.91	6.28	6.22
Shona	6.76	6.41	6.95	7.56	6.99
Sindhi	6.22	5.62	5.99	6.48	6.15
Singhalese	6.23	5.65	5.85	6.33	6.08
Spanish	5.94	6.01	5.83	6.25	6.07
Tagalog	6.12	5.57	5.91	6.26	6.03
Tamil	6.33	5.74	5.84	6.27	6.11
Telugu	6.48	5.72	5.84	6.32	6.16
Thai	5.52	5.17	5.19	5.55	5.42
Turkish	5.75	5.52	5.46	5.84	5.71
Ukrainian	5.75	5.60	5.52	5.97	5.77
Urdu	6.21	5.64	5.96	6.46	6.13
Vietnamese	5.46	5.35	5.38	5.51	5.49

\* This is the first language chosen by candidates from a range of Commonwealth countries

# IELTS Joint-funded research program 2010/2011

All IELTS-related research activities are co-ordinated as part of a coherent framework for research and validation. Activities are divided into areas which are the direct responsibility of Cambridge ESOL, and work is funded and supported by IELTS Australia and the British Council. As part of their ongoing commitment to IELTS-related validation and research, IELTS Australia and the British Council are once again making available funding for research projects in 2010/2011. For a number of years now the two partners have issued a joint call for research proposals that reflect current concerns and issues relating to the IELTS test in the international context. For a full list of research studies which have received grant funding since 1995 go to <http://www.ielts.org/researchers/research.aspx>. Such research makes an important contribution to the monitoring and test development process for IELTS; it also helps IELTS stakeholders (e.g. English language professionals and teachers) to develop a greater understanding of the test.

All IELTS research is managed by a Joint Research Committee which agrees on research priorities and oversees the tendering process. When determining the quality of the proposals and the research carried out, the Committee may call on a panel of external reviewers. The Committee also oversees the publication and/or presentation of research findings.

## What areas of interest have been identified?

This year the IELTS Joint Research Committee would like to encourage applications for research studies which fit within these three broad areas.

### 1. Test development and validation issues

- studies investigating the IELTS General Training Reading test, particularly stakeholder reactions to the revised section two
- investigation of the cognitive processes of IELTS test takers
- investigation of the process of writing IELTS test items
- investigation of Writing and Speaking features that distinguish IELTS proficiency levels

### 2. Issues relating to contexts of test use

- studies to establish appropriate IELTS score levels in specific contexts (for access to a university department or vocational training course)
- use of IELTS for professional registration purposes, or for purposes of migration, citizenship or employment
- studies investigating the use of IELTS and IELTS scores in local contexts, especially in-depth case studies focusing on individuals or small groups

- investigation of IELTS usefulness compared to other tests in similar contexts

### 3. Issues of test impact

- investigations of the role of interactive communication in the IELTS Speaking or Writing tests and the impact of this on candidates' preparedness for interactive communication in study or training contexts
- investigations of attitudes towards IELTS among users of test scores including admissions and academic subject staff in receiving institutions
- investigations of perceptions towards IELTS among test takers, teachers, learners and others engaged in preparing for IELTS (particularly in countries where there has been little or no previous IELTS related research)
- test impact relating case studies in local contexts (e.g., teachers' experiences of working with IELTS)
- case studies on English language progression among overseas students in undergraduate or postgraduate contexts
- case studies on in-session English programmes at English-speaking universities, particularly with consideration of the relationship between hours of study and typical score gains

Consideration will also be given to other issues of current interest in relation to IELTS.

## Is access to IELTS test materials or score data possible?

Access to IELTS test materials or score data is often not possible for a variety of reasons, e.g. test security, data confidentiality. However, a limited amount of retired material (e.g. Writing test prompts) may be made available for research purposes, and *IELTS Official Practice Materials*, *IELTS Scores Explained* DVD and other published practice tests can often be used as research tools. Cambridge ESOL may be able to supply writing scripts and Speaking test recordings for the purposes of analysis, and a set of instruments and procedures for investigating the impact of IELTS on materials and on the teaching/learning context has also been developed in recent years; these are available for use by researchers following consultation with Cambridge ESOL (and subject to an appropriate research agreement). More details can be found at <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/what-we-do/research/requests.html>

## Who can submit proposals?

As part of the IELTS policy of stimulating test-related research among its stakeholders, it is hoped that many of

the research proposals submitted this year will come from researchers and organisations around the world who have a direct and ongoing connection with IELTS (e.g. consultants, examiners, IELTS administration centres and centres which have assisted in trialling IELTS). There is, however, no objection to proposals being submitted by other groups/centres/individuals.

### What is the level and duration of funding available?

The IELTS partners are making available grant funding to a total value of around £120,000 (AUS\$195,000) for IELTS-related research projects to be conducted during 2011. The maximum amount of funding which will be made available for any one proposal is £15,000/AUS\$25,000 (including institutional overheads/taxes). This upper limit may be reviewed in exceptional circumstances. Please note that applications for extensive travel or large items of equipment are not encouraged.

### Who will evaluate the proposals?

All research proposals will be evaluated by the IELTS Joint Research Committee comprising representatives of the three IELTS partners as well as other academic research experts in the field of applied linguistics and language testing.

### What criteria will be used to evaluate proposals?

The following factors will be taken into consideration when evaluating proposals:

- relevance and benefit of outcomes to IELTS
- clarity and coherence of proposal's rationale, objectives and methodology
- feasibility of outcomes, timelines and budget (including ability to keep to deadlines)
- qualifications and experience of proposed project staff
- potential of the project to be reported in a form which would be both useful to IELTS and of interest to an international audience.

### What is the timescale for the submission and evaluation of proposals?

The following timescale will apply:

<b>April 2010</b>	Call for proposals
<b>30 June 2010</b>	Deadline for submission of proposals
<b>July/August 2010</b>	Preliminary review of proposals by IELTS partners
<b>September 2010</b>	Meeting of Joint Research Committee to evaluate and select successful proposals
<b>October 2010</b>	Applicants notified of the Committee's decision

### Where and how to send application forms and proposals

Applicants should submit application forms and project proposals in both electronic form and hard copy to either the British Council or IDP: IELTS Australia who are equal funding bodies for the IELTS Joint-funded Research Programme. Details can be found at [http://www.ielts.org/researchers/grants\\_and\\_awards.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/researchers/grants_and_awards.aspx)

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## Forthcoming ALTE events

ALTE's next meeting and conference will take place at the French Cultural Centre in Rome from 12 to 14 May 2010. As at previous meetings, the first two days will include a number of Special Interest Group meetings, and workshops for ALTE members and affiliates, and the third day will be an open conference day for anyone with an interest in language testing. The theme of the conference is 'Reference Level Descriptions and Assessment' and the speakers will include Dr John Trim, Dr Luna Filipovic and Dr Manuela Glaboniat.

Prior to the meeting and conference, on Tuesday 11 May, CVCL, the Centre for Evaluation from the University for Foreigners in Perugia, the ALTE member for Italian, will host a 1-day event on language assessment for migration entitled 'Language Assessment for Integration in the Italian Context: international perspectives and the CVCL experience'. Featured speakers will include Professor Antony Kunnan and Professor Elana Shohamy. Dr Nick Saville will co-ordinate the discussions.

Looking ahead to later in the year, the ALTE summer testing courses will take place in Bilbao from 20 to 24 September, and from 27 September to 01 October 2010, and will be hosted by the Basque Government. The first week will be an introductory course in Language Testing and

the second week will be an introduction to Testing Reading. The November meeting and conference will take place at the Charles University in Prague from 10 to 12 November and the theme of the conference will be 'Fairness in Language Testing'. The conference will be followed by a 2-day course on Structural Equation Modelling, which will launch ALTE's Tier 3 professional development courses.

Another date for your diary is July 2011, when the ALTE 4th International Conference will take place from 7 to 9 July in Kraków, Poland. The conference will coincide with the beginning of the Polish Presidency of the European Union, and will be hosted by the Jagiellonian University at its modern conference centre, the Auditorium Maximum. The theme of the conference will be 'The Impact of Language Frameworks on Assessment, Learning and Teaching viewed from the perspectives of policies, procedures and challenges', and the plenary speakers will be Professor Lyle Bachman, Professor Giuliana Grego Bolli, Dr Neil Jones, Dr Waldemar Martyniuk, Dr Michaela Perlmann-Balme and Professor Elana Shohamy. The call for papers will run until end of January 2011.

For further information about these events and other ALTE activities, please visit the ALTE website – [www.alte.org](http://www.alte.org)