

National Bilingual Project, Colombia

Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN)

Colombia



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As part of its National Bilingual Project, the Colombian Government used a comprehensive programme of consultancy services from Cambridge Assessment English including benchmarking, tailored assessment, teacher development and capacity building.

The Colombian Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN) wanted to improve English language learning so as to improve the skills of its workforce and increase opportunities for working and studying abroad.

We carried out a preliminary benchmarking exercise involving 3,000 school and university students to establish existing levels of English language.

MEN and the national testing body, Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior (ICFES), used the results to develop standards for national English tests.

We produced the English component of the Colombian state sector exams, the Examen de Estado (national school-leaving examination) and ECAES (higher education) tests to these standards and linked them to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

MEN recognised that to make improvements to language learning sustainable, standards in language teaching needed to be raised. To help bring teachers up to CEFR Level B2, English teacher trainees were sponsored to take B2 First. A scheme to retrain existing state sector teachers using the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) was also launched.

We also undertook local capacity-building to recruit and train a team of item writers to produce the English components of the Examen de Estado and ECAES tests.

Today, Colombia has its own team of item writers building tests to our format and linked to CEFR standards. These tests are delivered to nearly 1 million students annually. The National Bilingual Project continues working towards its goals of 70% of final-year high school students achieving Level B1 in English and 100% of final-year English teacher trainees achieving Level B2 or higher.