Cambridge English Language Assessment and the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science have launched an ambitious project designed to help secondary school pupils reach international standards in English by using Cambridge English qualifications.

“Cambridge English Key for Schools qualification is now acting as a mandatory diagnostic assessment of students in basic education (diploma do ensino básico).”

Launched in 2014, the joint venture is a direct response to Portugal’s relatively poor performance (in terms of English skills) in the EU’s first European Survey on Language Competences. Following the Survey, the Ministry of Education and Science asked Cambridge English Language Assessment to work with IAVE, the Instituto de Avaliação Educacional (Office of Educational Assessment) to introduce the Cambridge English: Key (KET) for Schools qualification as a mandatory exam for Grade 9 students across the country. Cambridge English: Key for Schools is a basic level qualification that shows a student has made a good start in learning English and can use the language to communicate in simple situations.

On 30 April 2014 we ran the largest-ever session for a standard Cambridge English exam, with around 120,000 Portuguese pupils taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools, all on one day.

A similar number of students across Portugal will take the exam in future academic years.

The project has also demanded the recruitment of in-country examiners and trainers, and the development of a marking and administration strategy capable of handling the large numbers of students taking the Cambridge English: Key for Schools exam.

IAVE is also offering teachers the opportunity to take the Cambridge English Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT).

As part of the project, Cambridge English has launched a study to examine the impact of Cambridge English: Key for Schools on Portuguese schools and other stakeholders. A three-year project (from 2014 to 2016), the study comprises three phases, and will investigate candidate performance, motivation and stakeholder attitudes at both the micro-level (learning and teaching) and at the macro-level, encompassing schools, parents and carers, and other stakeholders.

The first phase of the study comprises questionnaires, focus groups, surveys and analyses of test data in order to identify areas for improvement, generate guidelines for success, and make recommendations for the next two phases.

“The Portuguese education system is the first in the world to use a Cambridge English qualification as a mandatory exam”