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978-0-521-73672-5 - Examining FCE and CAE: Key Issues and Recurring Themes in
Developing the First Certificate in English and Certificate in Advanced English Exams
Roger Hawkey

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Examining FCE and CAE

Key issues and recurring themes in
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Acknowledgements

This history of the Lower Certificate in English, First Certificate in English and Certificate in Advanced English examinations could not have been completed without the help of many people, in various capacities, to whom I am sincerely grateful.

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This volume documents the modification and updating of the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) and Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) examinations. Roger Hawkey traces the history of both examinations in a well written and interesting account that takes us back to Cambridge in the 1930s when what was to become the FCE was conceptualised and first launched as the Lower Certificate in English (LCE). Hawkey's careful study of the Cambridge ESOL archives helps the reader understand the thinking that went into the first FCE which came out in 1939; in that respect this volume complements an earlier title in the *Studies in Language Testing* (SiLT) series, which was published in 2003 and documents the revision of the Certificate of Proficiency in English, the first Cambridge ESOL examination launched in 1913 (*Continuity and Innovation: Revising the Cambridge Proficiency in English Examination 1913–2002*). Both volumes represent a considered effort on the part of the editors of this series to ensure that the development of English language examinations at Cambridge is not only fully documented but also explained. Volumes now cover the Cambridge approach to language in the workplace (SiLT 17 – *Issues in Testing Business English: The revision of the Cambridge Business English Certificates*), the development of academic English (SiLT 23 – *Assessing Academic English: Testing English proficiency 1950–1989 – the IELTS solution*), and the rise of the Communicative Language Testing movement and Cambridge examinations (SiLT 16 – *A Modular Approach to Testing English Language Skills: The development of the Certificates in English Language Skills (CELS) examinations*). All these volumes situate the Cambridge approach in an historical context but then look carefully at the development of thinking in relation to validation in general and construct validation in particular.

In addition, a number of volumes in the series are defining the Cambridge approach to the assessment of language skills. A volume on writing (SiLT 26 – *Examining Writing: Research and practice in assessing second language writing*) appeared in 2007 and further volumes on reading, speaking and listening are being written. They outline how Weir's socio-cognitive model is both relevant and applied to the ongoing development and validation of Cambridge English examinations. The depth and breadth of this approach sets Cambridge examinations apart from all other similar examinations and systems offered in the international context.

CAE was introduced in 1991 and FCE last significantly revised in 1996.

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These examinations form part of the level system developed by Cambridge over many years which derives from the requirements of examination users. When CPE was introduced in 1913, it is unlikely that the developers conceived of it as anything other than what it was, a high level language test aimed principally at English language teachers. When the Lower Certificate in English (LCE) was introduced in 1939 it was not done so with a view to establishing the five level system that eventually emerged. Indeed, when it was renamed the First Certificate in 1975 we can see clear evidence that the developers were not inclined to certificate levels of English below this 'first' level. The Preliminary English Test (PET) did not merit the status of an examination, as the name suggests, when it was introduced in 1980. However, by this time we see the emergence of an understanding that there were a number of levels of proficiency in English that were important, distinct and useful to certificate. PET was the first Cambridge examination to make reference to a European Level. *Threshold* had emerged in 1980 and its content was used in the development of PET. By the late eighties the gap between FCE and CPE was seen to be troublesome in the world of language learning, teaching and certification. Users of Cambridge ESOL examinations were beginning to recognise and value the concept of progression via a number of well articulated steps as represented by the three Cambridge examinations now available – PET, FCE and CPE. It is in this context that CAE was introduced in 1991, followed in 1994 by the Key English Test (KET). Thus by 1994, the Cambridge five level system had been developed and was being deployed, further enhanced in 1997 by the addition of a series of Young Learners English (YLE) tests at and below the level of KET. FCE and CAE need to be seen in the context of this level system – one of the first such systems to emerge and probably still the most comprehensive one available.

The cyclical and iterative approach to the validation of ESOL examinations ensures that changes to the examinations are made on an ongoing basis. However, the 2008 release of FCE and CAE represents a more significant set of changes than could be accommodated through the normal processes. Hawkey describes these in some detail in the volume and provides a clear indication of the thinking that has led to the modifications incorporated.

One of the fundamentals of the Cambridge approach is the consultation with and communication to stakeholders. It is important to note that the exams modification process has been accompanied by a number of surveys and focus groups involving thousands of teachers and candidates as well as a regular set of bulletins, appearing every few months, in order to ensure that the community of FCE and CAE users is kept up to date with the changes that are being proposed and has an opportunity to comment. As the process drew to a close, Cambridge ESOL published handbooks for teachers and sample examination materials to ensure that both candidates and teachers

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would have access to documentation to help them in their preparation and work. This documentation was accompanied by guidelines for teachers on the Cambridge ESOL website and a large number of seminars and training events. SiLT 24 (*Impact Theory and Practice: Studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue 2000*), published in 2006, clarifies the concept of impact and related terms, such as washback, evaluation, monitoring and validation, and focuses on the impact of language tests and language programmes on a broad and diverse range of stakeholders, including test takers, teachers, textbook writers, testers and institutions.

Clearly, examinations are situated in a broad social, educational and political environment and in the case of FCE and CAE this context has changed significantly over the years not least since CAE was introduced in 1991 and since FCE was revised in 1996. Europe has grown considerably, the internet has become an essential element in our lives, political and social systems around the world have evolved dramatically in China, India, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The role of English has continued to evolve rapidly and is now present in most school curricula and in many countries this extends to primary level. Technology now plays a much greater role in learning and assessment and is set to play an even more important role in the future. People are moving about the world more freely now than at any time in the past and English is one of the key languages that can be used in almost all contexts. All of these developments have made the last 15 years a time of unprecedented change and mean that the role of FCE and CAE has evolved significantly over that period. As we look into the future we will see these examinations become more accessible in paper form as well as on computers. They will be used even more widely than they are today and will play a still more significant role not only in the context of international mobility but also within the countries where they have played such an important role for so many years.

One of the most significant developments in the socio-political and educational context is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for teaching, learning and assessment. Although such a framework was mooted by John Trim, David Wilkins and others in the 1970s, and proposed at the Council of Europe conference in Rüschtikon in the early nineties, it did not really come into its own till the beginning of this millennium. The CEFR has provided an environment and context for discussions about language learning, teaching and assessment to take place and we are now seeing the level system being realised with specific reference to particular languages. This is happening for Spanish, German, Italian, French and English to name but a few and it is in the context of English that we have seen over the last few years the emergence of the English Profile movement.

English Profile is a long term, collaborative programme of interdisciplinary research, designed to enhance the learning, teaching and assessment of

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English worldwide. Led by various Cambridge entities (Cambridge ESOL, Cambridge University Press, the Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics and the computer labs at the University of Cambridge), the University of Bedfordshire, the British Council and English UK, and in collaboration with academics, teachers and education authorities worldwide, English Profile is exploring the way learners of English progress through the levels of the CEFR. Building on existing resources such as the CEFR itself, the *Breakthrough*, *Waystage*, *Threshold* and *Vantage* specifications, and the Cambridge Learner Corpus, a multi-disciplinary team is working to produce Reference Level Descriptors for English. These will provide a uniquely detailed and objective analysis of what levels of achievement in language learning actually mean in terms of the grammar, vocabulary and discourse features that learners can be expected to have mastered at each level. The Profile is set to have an impact on the certification of English and we are likely to see Cambridge ESOL examinations move towards a system of reporting more formally linked to the CEFR Levels. An important element in the 2008 modification of the FCE and CAE has been to ensure that both examinations follow the approach laid down by the Council of Europe in its recent *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference*. The Manual aims to contribute to competence building in the area of linking assessments to the CEFR, to encourage increased transparency on the part of examination providers and to support the development of both formal and informal national and international networks of institutions and experts. In Cambridge it is felt to be vital that examination boards strive to provide solid evidence in support of all the claims that they make about their examinations; evidence concerning level is an important dimension that has been facilitated by the introduction of the CEFR and its related materials.

The role of technology over the last decade or so has allowed for a more systematic approach to be applied to the English language assessment offered by Cambridge. Item banking is a fundamental of the current Cambridge approach but has really only come into its own in the last 10 years. In the Series Editor's note to SiLT 1 (*An Investigation into the Comparability of Two Tests of English as a Foreign Language: The Cambridge TOEFL Comparability Study*) which appeared in 1995, we reviewed the reasons for the comparability study and identified a range of actions that would derive from it. The pretesting and calibration of all ESOL materials and a fully developed approach to item banking were some of the outcomes that were anticipated and the decade since the publication of that volume has seen the implementation of a comprehensive pretesting and calibration programme and sophisticated item banking software. Both of these developments form the essential underpinning to the linking of Cambridge examinations in general and FCE and CAE in particular to a consistent

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underlying ability continuum based initially on the Cambridge level system, then the ALTE levels and most recently the CEFRL.

This approach is an essential requirement for frequent session examinations given that the consistency of the underlying measurement scale is a necessary and important building block in this context. We have seen the rise of IELTS over the last decade which is administered on 48 fixed dates in the year and now taken by well over a million candidates annually. Without a solid approach to pretesting, calibration and item banking it would be difficult if not impossible to maintain consistency with such frequent administrations. As FCE and CAE are offered more frequently and as they take full advantage of the ever growing network of Cambridge computer-based testing centres, item banking technology and what it represents is an essential building block.

Advances in technology over the last decade have also caused a major shift in the way that organisations are able to interact with their stakeholders. The internet is now an integral part of day to day life in most countries of the world and for the first time Cambridge ESOL has the scope to communicate directly and quickly with a full range of stakeholders. Examination entries are made online, results are issued online, most examination related documentation is now available from various Cambridge ESOL customer oriented websites; indeed the term 'customer' itself is both better understood and more widely used than it was even five years ago. None of these elements were present when CAE was introduced in 1991 or indeed when FCE was last revised in 1996.

But technology is also set to play a much more significant role in various aspects of examination administration and quality assurance. Oral Examiners working with FCE and CAE are now supported by a Professional Support Network that allows for the co-ordination and standardisation of speaking examinations to take place online through the deployment of a learning management system. With this round of modifications the emphasis on face-to-face tests of speaking has not been reduced but the capacity to monitor quality has been enhanced. Similarly, in the assessment of writing Cambridge ESOL is to make use of systems that allow for the electronic distribution of scripts with both CAE and FCE. This will further enhance its capacity to assure quality and improve validation.

The way in which Cambridge interacts with the outside world has also changed dramatically in the decade since the last revision of FCE. The number of examination centres has grown significantly over that period as has the number of candidates. In 1996 fewer than half a million candidates took Cambridge ESOL examinations. In 2008 that number will be over two and a half million. In 1996 Cambridge had no representations in other countries, while in 2008 there are formal Cambridge ESOL offices in 20 countries. The number of staff working on the examinations has also grown. Compared

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to 65 dedicated staff in 1997 there are now more than 300 working in Cambridge and nearly a hundred employed around the world.

There has been much change in the years since the FCE and CAE were last formally modified in the 1990s. Socially, politically and from the perspective of technology one might say that the changes to the external environment have been more significant than at any time since the introduction of Cambridge ESOL examinations towards the beginning of the 20th century. In this volume, Hawkey has reflected changing times, conditions and expectations well and has managed to capture not only where FCE and CAE have come from, including many significant interviews with individuals who played key roles, but also where we can expect them to go in future years. He has highlighted the great emphasis that Cambridge ESOL places on providing evidence to demonstrate the quality of its examinations, not only from the perspective of sound administration and good educational impact but also from the perspective of construct validity and the research that needs to be conducted around this area.

Michael Milanovic and Cyril J Weir
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Abbreviations

ACE	Advanced Certificate in English
AE	Assistant Examiner
ALTE	Association of Language Testers in Europe
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
AOG	Assessment and Operations Group
ARELS	Association of Recognised English Language Schools
BALEAP	British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes
BASCELT	British Association of State Colleges in English Language Teaching
BBNFI	Bentler-Bonett Normal Fit Index
BBNNFI	Bentler-Bonett Nonnormal Fit Index
BEC	Business English Certificates
BULATS	Business Language Testing Service
CAE	Certificate in Advanced English
CB PET	Computer-based Preliminary English Test
CBT	Computer-based testing
CCSE	Certificates in Communicative Skills in English
CEELT	Cambridge Examination in English for Language Teachers
CEFL	Certificate in English as a Foreign Language
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CEIC	Certificate in English for International Communication
CELS	Certificates in English Language Skills
CELTYL	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Young Learners
CFET	Certificate in Further Education Teaching
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CIE	Cambridge International Examinations
CIS	Candidate Information Sheet
CLA	Communicative Language Ability
CLC	Cambridge Learner Corpus
C(A)LT	Communicative Approach to Language Teaching
C(A)LT _e	Communicative Approach to Language Testing
COTE	Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English
CPE	Certificate of Proficiency in English
CRELLA	Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment

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CRUI	Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities
CSW	Common Scale for Writing
CT	Correlated Trait
CTEFLA	Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults
CUEFL	Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language
DELTA	Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults
DES	Diploma of English Studies
DF	Degrees of Freedom
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIALANG	Diagnostic Language (Assessment)
DIF	Differential Item Functioning
DOTÉ	Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English
DTEFLA	Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EAQUALS	European Association for Quality Language Schools
EBAFLS	European Bank of Anchor Items for Foreign Language Skills
EC	Executive Committee (for the Syndicate's Examinations in English for Foreign Students)
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EL	English Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ELTS	English Language Testing Service
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
EP	English Profile
EPS	Examinations Processing System
ESM	Electronic Script Management
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ESU	English Speaking Union
ETS	Educational Testing Service
FCE	First Certificate in English
FELCO	Federation of English Language Course Organisers
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GESG	General English Steering Group
GIG	Grading and Interpretation Group
GIMS	General Impression Mark Scheme
GISG	Grading and Interpretation Steering Group

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IATEFL	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
ICELT	In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching
ICFE	International Certificate in Financial English
ICR	Intelligent Character Recognition
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILEC	International Legal English Certificate
ILTA	International Language Testing Association
IM	Information Management
IRT	Item Response Theory
IT	Information Technology
IVACS	Inter-Varietal Applied Corpus Studies
IW	Item Writer
IWG	Item Writer Guidelines
JC	Joint Committee (of the British Council and the Syndicate)
KET	Key English Test
LCE	Lower Certificate in English
LIBS	Local Item Banking System
LTF	Language Testing Forum
LTRC	Language Testing Research Colloquium
MEG	Midlands Examining Group
MESO	Modifications to Examinations Subject Officers
MEWG	Modifications to Examinations Working Group
MFR	Multi-faceted Rasch
MPR	Minimum Professional Requirements
MS	Main Suite
MSM	Main Suite Modifications
OCEAC	Oxford and Cambridge Examinations Assessment Council
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
OCR	Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts
OMR	Optical Mark Reader
PE	Principal Examiner
PET	Preliminary English Test
PIG	Project Implementation Group
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QMS	Quality Management System
QPP	Question Paper Production
RITCME	Recruitment, Induction, Training, Co-ordination, Monitoring, Evaluation
RSA	Royal Society for the (Encouragement of) Arts
SEM	Standard Error of Measurement
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SiLT	Studies in Language Testing

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SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SO	Subject Officer
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TKT	Teaching Knowledge Test
TL	Target Language
TL	Team Leader
TLS	Team Leader System
TLU	Target Language Use
TOEFL®	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEFL®iBT	TOEFL® Internet-based Test
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
UCLES	University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate
UMS	Upper Main Suite
UODLE	University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations
UoE	Use of English
VRIP	Validity, Reliability, Impact, Practicality
YLE	Young Learners English tests