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People write the history of experiments on those born blind, on wolf-children, or those under hypnosis. But who will write the more general, more fluid, but also more determinant history of the 'examination' – its rituals, its methods, its characters and their roles, its play of questions and answers, its systems of marking and classification? For in this slender technique are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power.

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish*.

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In memory of Nick Barratt
1958–2001

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CPE Revision Document – List of contributors

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Series Editor's note

This volume documents in some detail the most recent revision of the Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) which took place from 1991 to 2002. CPE is the oldest of the Cambridge suite of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) examinations, and was originally introduced in 1913. Since that time it has been regularly revised and updated to bring it into line with current thinking in language teaching, applied linguistics and language testing theory and practice.

For many years, much of the work that took place behind the scenes at UCLES remained fairly obscure to users of Cambridge EFL* examinations around the world. However, in recent years there has been a serious attempt to inform users more effectively about what UCLES does and how it does it. Increased information has come in a variety of ways, including: regular meetings with Local Secretaries (the official in-country providers of Cambridge EFL examinations) all over the world, a comprehensive programme of teacher seminars focusing on test content and candidate performance, regular newsletters such as *Cambridge First* and *Research Notes*, involvement in international language testing groups and associations such as the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), and frequent presentations at local and international conferences. This volume is a further illustration of UCLES' desire to provide users of its EFL examinations with an in-depth understanding of what it does and how it operates by making the thinking, processes and procedures that underpinned the current revision of CPE as explicit as possible. The volume also seeks to provide an honest account of the revision process, the questions and problems faced by the revision teams, the solutions they came up with and the challenges that face UCLES EFL in the future.

The volume is intended to be of interest and relevance to a wide variety of readers. For those interested in a historical perspective, Chapter 1 traces the history of CPE from its first version in 1913 through to the present day and beyond. For those interested in how UCLES works, Chapter 2 documents in some detail the test development and production process used both in relation to the CPE and its revision as well as in a more general sense. Chapters 3–7 provide detailed information for those interested in why the papers look the way they do, what went into designing, piloting and confirming their final characteristics as well as insights into the writing of various materials.

*From October 2002 Cambridge EFL is known as Cambridge ESOL.

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Finally, Chapter 8 looks to the future. The work of an examination board is never done. When one revision finishes, another begins, and so it is with CPE.

The volume is a true team effort, as is so much of the work done by UCLES EFL. The chapters are written by nine different authors and commented on by a number of other individuals. The work reported involves many teachers, candidates, consultants, examiners, subject officers and others. However, the primary authors of the chapters are:

Chapter 1	Cyril J. Weir
Chapter 2	Nick Saville
Chapter 3	Mick Ashton
Chapter 4	Beth Weighill with Stuart Shaw
Chapter 5	Nick Barratt
Chapter 6	Rod Boroughs
Chapter 7	Angela ffrench
Chapter 8	Cyril J. Weir

In addition, Roger Johnson and Anne Gutch were heavily involved in the work on Chapters 3–7 and Neil Jones on Chapter 2. The volume is dedicated to Nick Barratt, an EFL subject officer, who sadly died towards the end of the revision in August 2001.

The CPE revision has taken eleven years to complete. Originally started in 1991, at the same time as the First Certificate in English (FCE) revision, (introduced in 1996), a decision was made in 1995 to delay the introduction of the revised CPE from 1998 to 2002. It was felt that the FCE revision should be fully assimilated by users before they were faced with another significant upheaval. The revision of a major international examination has a considerable impact on the stakeholders it serves and on the organisation responsible for its delivery. Teachers need to be familiarised with a new format and trained to deal with a new examination. Candidates must gear themselves to different challenges. Materials writers have to deliver new books. Publishers have to make these available in a timely manner. Sponsors need to be reassured that the new examination is as good as or better than the previous one. Examiners need to be retrained and standardised. Administrative processes need to be modified and computer systems re-engineered. Supporting documentation needs to be rewritten.

As mentioned above, this volume is intended to provide readers with an insight into how UCLES EFL operates. However, it should be noted that much has happened to UCLES EFL since the mid-1980s and the last time the CPE was revised. Following a British Council consultancy in the mid-1980s, the EFL Division was formally established in 1988 under its first Director, Dr Peter Hargreaves, who set about the task of structuring the Division and its work and preparing it for the challenges of the future. From offering a small number of examinations in 1988, principally FCE and CPE, to about 180,000

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candidates, UCLES EFL in 2002 provides the most comprehensive range of EFL examinations and teacher qualifications to over one million candidates.

Traditionally UCLES has operated in three distinct areas, providing examinations to schools in the UK, schools in the international context and EFL around the world. The 1980s and 1990s saw significant changes in the provision of school examinations in the UK and UCLES was obliged to evolve internally to deal with these changes. While British government policy was a key driver affecting the provision of UCLES examinations to schools in the UK it also inevitably affected how the organisation was structured, most significantly in 1998 when UCLES was formally divided into three semi-independent streams. UK school and vocational examinations were managed by a newly-formed partnership called Oxford, Cambridge, RSA (OCR). International examinations, both school and vocational, were separated out internally and managed by Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), while EFL examinations became the exclusive domain of UCLES EFL.

A consequence of this formalisation of roles was that each stream took much greater responsibility for managing most aspects of its work both within UCLES and beyond. For EFL this made a significant difference. Whereas in 1988 there were no more than 10 staff dedicated to EFL examinations, by 1998 this number had risen to 65, and following the 1998 changes there are about 170 dedicated EFL staff at UCLES.

Many of the staff are engaged in the administrative and support activities that inevitably accompany the delivery of important internationally recognised examinations through more than 1,000 centres in over 130 countries. About 10,000 examiners both in the UK and overseas are managed, trained and supervised. The proactive administration helps to ensure that both centres and candidates receive the highest level of service, and it is constantly seeking ways to improve. There is a comprehensive programme of teacher support seminars offered throughout the world and extensive attendance at conferences aimed at providing additional support to users.

A significant number of people work on managing the development of testing materials that UCLES EFL produces. Over 30 subject officers and their 20 or so administrative assistants co-ordinate about 160 item writers, all of whom are highly qualified and experienced in the preparation of examination materials. New item writers are recruited and trained on an on-going basis. The materials developed go through a rigorous quality assurance programme, which involves both expert scrutiny and significant trialling where appropriate. The Pre-testing Unit, which manages the trialling of materials, administers over 40,000 pre-tests a year through its extensive network of participating centres. Materials are checked for quality, analysed statistically, calibrated and entered into the UCLES EFL item bank, which contains over 100,000 items and feeds over 100 fixed date examination

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sessions and literally thousands of on-demand sessions for Young Learners awards and the Business Language Testing Service.

As part of its on-going commitment to quality, UCLES EFL also has a dedicated Research and Validation Department employing about 20 staff. This group is responsible for three main areas of activity:

- **Routine Operational Analysis** concerning the administration cycle of all examinations, i.e. examination production, conduct, marking/grading and post-examination evaluation.
- **Instrumental Research** concerning projects which are designed to inform the operational activities but which could not normally be addressed as part of the routine work. This might involve work related to bias, the most appropriate ways of anchoring material to the common scale, investigating the relationship between examination performance and what candidates can actually do in real-life contexts, or developing new selection algorithms for computer-mediated assessments.
- The management of the professional aspects of **Performance Testing**, which is one of the key distinguishing characteristics of UCLES EFL. Some aspects of this work are reported in Chapter 7.

The provision of a high-quality set of examinations is thus a team effort involving a wide range of administrative, communication, language teaching, testing and research skills, and it is hoped that the reader will understand this better on reading this volume.

As mentioned above, the CPE revision started at the same time as the FCE revision in 1991 and owes a great deal to the enormous amount of work done for that. It also signals an important shift in policy at UCLES. Prior to the FCE revision, most if not all revision and new examination development management was outsourced to a very large extent. Thus, the development of IELTS was managed by Charles Alderson of Lancaster University in the 1980s and the development of the Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) in the late 1980s and early 1990s was headed by Richard West of Manchester University. With the establishment of the EFL Division at UCLES in 1988, the organisation gained for the first time the capacity to manage revisions and new developments itself. It was also in a position to develop a methodology to do so which is illustrated in some detail in Chapter 2. This development did not lead to a lessening of UCLES' desire to draw on relevant expertise in the field but it did allow for a more inclusive development process, particularly in relation to the administration and support systems that are so important to any international examination offering.

The FCE and CPE revisions began with an extensive consultation exercise on a scale not previously attempted by a British Examination board. Questionnaires were devised and sent out to:

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- 1,200 oral examiners (550 in the UK and 650 overseas) receiving a 40% return;
- 5,000 teachers (2,000 in the UK and 3,000 overseas) receiving a 12% return;
- 25,000 students (10,000 in the UK and 15,000 overseas) receiving an 11% return;
- 120 UK Higher Education institutions receiving a 50% return.

The questionnaires were comprehensive and sought views on administration matters, test specifications, item types, interactions with the pedagogic processes, surrender value and implementation. They were followed by detailed analysis of the responses and targeted focus groups. The CPE revision went further than the FCE revision since more time was available. The CPE team were able to engage in a significant number of consultation seminars where detailed test specifications and potential sample papers were presented to teachers in a number of key countries. This allowed for very direct and relevant feedback. The process is described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

As part of the FCE revision a number of key pieces of research were commissioned which focused on an extensive review of administration service levels, examination processing systems, definitions of test construct, detailed level descriptions and tools for the description of test content. Care was taken with both revisions to keep the constituency fully informed of progress, which involved the publication of over 20 bulletins. Tools were developed for routine use that would allow UCLES EFL to determine the characteristics of the FCE and CPE test-taking populations in some detail and use this information to target examination content as relevantly as possible.

Both revisions were influenced from the outset by developments in the field of language teaching and learning. Account was taken of work in describing language competence and developing models of communicative language ability. The test developers sought to gain a better understanding of the ways in which skills and strategies are deployed by language learners and to incorporate this understanding in the development of test materials. Consideration was given to the notion of the independent learner and the strategies they employed. There was also a concern with the development of our understanding of the concept of authenticity in both the situational and interactive sense.

Both revisions also placed significant emphasis on measurement issues. The study reported in volume 1 of this series, SILT Vol. 1 (Bachman *et al.* 1995), drew UCLES' attention to a number of areas of concern. Materials for the FCE revision, for example, were trialled on over 11,000 candidates in 37 countries. Clear targets for the statistical performance of materials were set and far more extensive pre-testing was introduced as mandatory for the

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revised examination. The notion of the common scale was introduced and all objectively rated materials anchored to that scale following pre-testing. Great care was taken, through an empirical approach, to ensure that the level of the revised examinations at both FCE and CPE levels were equivalent to their predecessors. New procedures were introduced to monitor the reliability of examiners and paired assessment was brought in in both FCE and CPE oral examinations. These issues and others receive more attention later in the volume.

However, the revision process never ends; it is both cyclical and iterative. The revision of the CPE was but one of many such projects undertaken by UCLES and the teams of people that work with UCLES so closely. Unfortunately, work in public examinations has tended to be ephemeral, and few accurate or comprehensive records are easily accessible. It is hoped that this volume will begin to reverse that trend and it is to be followed soon by three further volumes, each documenting a revision process and providing a historical context for the examinations in question.

The Certificates in English Language Skills were launched in May 2002. In a forthcoming volume, Roger Hawkey, working with a team of UCLES EFL Subject Officers, traces the history of several examinations that were withdrawn with the introduction of CELS but which have played an important part in its evolution. Barry O'Sullivan, also working with UCLES staff, documents the revision of the Business English Certificates in another forthcoming volume. And Alan Davies is working on tracing the evolution of tests of academic English with particular reference to the development of IELTS.

Michael Milanovic
Cambridge
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