

## Relating the Trinity College London GESE and ISE examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference – project summary

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe, 2001), known as the CEFR, provides a common basis for the description of language courses, syllabuses and qualifications. Following the publication of the CEFR it became apparent that language tests had a common reference point, that is, the set of six levels (A1 to C2). Therefore, language tests could be compared with each other. In order to do so, test providers need to adopt specific methodology for relating their tests to the CEFR, thus promoting transparency among language qualifications and validation of claimed equivalences to the CEFR.

In 2003 the Council of Europe published a pilot version of the *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe, 2003) along with a Reference Supplement. After the publication of the manual, the Council of Europe invited exam providers to pilot it and provide feedback on the linking process, aiming at the revision of the manual, the production of calibrated samples to the CEFR and the publication of a case studies book. Trinity College London is among the examination boards participating in the pilot. A CEFR linking project was commissioned in 2005 and was carried out by an external language assessment expert from Lancaster University, UK and a team of 12 Trinity participants. A full report on the project was prepared in 2007. More details can be found on the Trinity website: [www.trinitycollege.co.uk](http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk)

### Aims of the project and outline of methodology

The Trinity CEFR calibration project was designed to relate the Graded Examinations in Spoken English and Integrated Skills in English suites of examinations to the CEFR. The manual for relating exams to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2003) describes the methodology for the linking process that was followed in the project. The linking process entailed four sets of interrelated activities:

**1. Familiarisation.** This stage was imperative in order to ensure that the members of the linking panel were familiar with the content of the CEFR and its scales. Familiarisation tasks suggested by the manual were used. The tasks were repeated at the start of each phase to ensure standardisation.

**2. Specification.** This stage involved the description of the content of the test to be related to the CEFR: first in its own right and then in relation to the levels and categories of the CEFR. Forms for test content description are in the manual. The outcome of this stage was a claim regarding the content of the test in relation to the CEFR.

**3. Standardisation.** The outcome of this stage was the reinforcement of the previous claim. Standardisation involved achieving a common understanding of the CEFR levels illustrated by examples of actual learners' performances. Standardisation techniques are listed in the manual.

**4. Empirical validation.** There are two categories of empirical validation in the manual. Internal validation aims at establishing the quality of the test in its own right. External validation aims at the independent corroboration of the standards set by either using an anchor test already calibrated to the CEFR, or by using judgements of teachers well trained in the CEFR. The outcome of this stage is the confirmation or not of the claims in the two previous stages by using analysed test data. Both internal and external validations of the Trinity suites were conducted during the CEFR project in 2005 and 2006.

### Significance of the CEFR project

The results of this project are of interest to several parties. First, the Council of Europe can obtain feedback on the piloting of the manual and build on it for the next version, which will follow the preliminary draft one, currently available. Second, test users, such as candidates, parents, teachers, employers and educational institutions, will also benefit from the results of the project since the intention was to clarify what a particular level of a Trinity examination means in CEFR terminology. The above is

directly relevant to the comparability and transparency aims of the Council of Europe and the manual, of which a primary objective is awareness-raising of good testing practice and quality of the tests claiming calibration to the CEFR.

### Action taken by Trinity College London

Following the results of the calibration project Trinity College London amended the syllabus for the Graded Examinations in Spoken English for 2007-2010 to reflect the newly mapped GESE grades. (See the table below.) Where necessary minor alterations have been made to ensure closer correspondence to the relevant CEFR descriptors. For instance at Grade 7 candidates are now required to *highlight advantages and disadvantages*.

There were no changes made to the Integrated Skills in English levels.

Further information about the changes to the 2007-2010 GESE syllabus can be found on the Trinity website.

## Common European Framework of Reference and Trinity College London examinations

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)	Integrated Skills in English examinations (ISE)	Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)
n/a		Grade 1
A1		Grade 2
A2	ISE 0	Grade 3
		Grade 4
B1	ISE I	Grade 5
		Grade 6
B2	ISE II	Grade 7
		Grade 8
		Grade 9
C1	ISE III	Grade 10
		Grade 11
C2		Grade 12

### References

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. (2003). *Relating language examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment: Manual, Preliminary Pilot Version*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.