4 An Experiment in 'Co-Certification'

Abstract In chapter 4 we report on a 'co-certification', a project developed jointly by the University of Ca' Foscari Venice and one of the best-known examining boards operating in Italy, Trinity College London. The rationale behind the project (which still today appears to be unique in its genre) was to adapt part of an existing international certification, *Integrated Skills in English* (levels B2 and C1) to suit the needs of a local institution: in this case, by introducing writing tasks which were more appropriate for Italian university students than the generic, 'politically correct' tasks for the international market. The project, which continued in its original form from 2004 until 2014, was doubly attractive to candidates, not only for reasons of content validity, but because of its dual function, since it could be used both as an external certification, but also to replace in-house university exams.

4.1 Background: the Growth of Certification in the New Millennium

With hindsight, the turn of the millennium seems to have ushered in a new era of language teaching, learning and assessment in Europe, and sanctioned English as the default foreign language to be taught in schools. The coming of age of a communicative approach to language teaching, the publication of the Common European Framework, and the introduction of foreign languages in primary schools, all played their part in this phenomenon. That the choice of foreign language usually fell on English reflected the fact not only that English had become the world's preferred lingua franca in virtually every domain of human activity, ranging from sport to academia, but also that in Europe it had resoundingly taken over from French as the main working language in the EU.

In Italy, it was also the moment when language certifications began to make their presence felt in schools and universities. Protocols signed by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) and the examining boards made it possible for certifications to be used in the public sector,[1] while projects such as *Progetto Lingue 2000* (for schools) and *Campus One* (for higher education) provided the organisational frameworks. Schools were able to

1 For an updated list of recognized examining boards see http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/dg-personale-scolastico/enti-certificatori-lingue-straniere (2017-11-01).

obtain European funding through the *Programma Operativo Nazionale*[2] to prepare pupils for language certification, and many schools and universities became exam centres for certifications, a role which had previously been the exclusive domain of private language schools. Cambridge ESOL and Trinity College London quickly established themselves as the main providers of certifications to the secondary sector, with Cambridge PET (B1) and FCE (B2) the preferred tests for upper secondary level, and the Trinity GESE suite (a test of spoken English) at lower secondary level.

In the universities the arrival of language certifications can be seen as an offshoot of the 1999 reform[3] which introduced, among other things, the three year first degree, known as the *laurea triennale* or *laurea breve,* the two year second level *laurea specialistica* (later renamed *laurea magistrale*), and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Certifications, especially those linked to the CEFR, came to be used for gate-keeping functions such as providing proof of a minimum entrance level to specific degree courses. This soon settled down, in the second half of the first decade of the new millennium, to a nationwide requirement of B1 to access first level degree courses, and more recently, B2 to access second level degree courses. We shall discuss the reasons behind these choices in chapter 6.

Certification could also be used to substitute existing in-house exams, or part of them. This was an attractive possibility in faculties (such as science and economics) where language courses were compulsory components of degree programmes, but were not seen as core to the curriculum. To replace an English language exam with a certification, for those students who could afford to pay for it – certification could only be used as an option to an existing exam – brought benefits to test takers and test users alike. In one fell swoop, the student passed a university exam and gained an internationally recognized certification, while the university saved on the costs of administering its own exam.

4.2 The Generic Nature of Global Certification

In the language faculties, however, it was a different story. For a degree in modern languages, with its special emphasis on literature, linguistics and translation, the scope for certification was more limited; after all, given that teaching and assessment is at the heart of any university degree course, why should language specialists relinquish the assessment of student progress in their own discipline? At most, certification, with

2 For the rationale behind the PON see http://www.istruzione.it/pon/ilpon.html#sec_pro (2017-02-02).

3 http://www.miur.it/0006Menu_C/0012Docume/0098Normat/2088Regola.htm (2017-10-26).

its newly found Framework-related parameters, could perhaps be used to substitute the generic components of language courses.

This reluctance to engage with certification in language faculties was compounded by the generic nature of certification. TOEFL, IELTS, and PTE, as we have seen, are intended for university access in English speaking countries for students from anywhere in the world, and as such have to take steps to avoid culture-related bias, for example in the choice of texts used. As a result, texts which might have a specifically European cultural context, and which could be of interest to students in European universities, are not used. In contrast, Framework-related certification in Europe, such as the suites developed by Cambridge ESOL and Trinity College London, seemed in their target language and task types to be aimed at younger learners, in the 16 to 18 age group, rather than at university students, reflecting the large numbers of test takers in schools.

Some of the doubts that test users may feel towards certifications in a university context are listed by Balboni (2012a, 115). They range from theoretical (is it really possible to certify a 'level'?) to methodological (certifications encourage teaching to a generic test, instead of testing the unique curriculum of an institution), from ethical (how valid are the validation processes?) to sociological (certifications are big businesses which often operate in near monopolies). But the same author also acknowledges the importance of certification in a "recognition-based society" (Balboni 2012a, 115), and even sees ways of formally harnessing them to university entrance requirements, such as offering discounts on registration fees to applicants who have certification, and who thereby absolve universities from having to make their own (costly) initial assessments (Balboni 2012b, 121).

4.3 Co-Certification Conceived

At the Faculty of Languages at the University of Ca' Foscari Venice the advent of certification was viewed with interest. At the time, Ca' Foscari had the largest modern language faculty in Italy, offering degree courses in 42 languages, with the biggest concentrations of students in oriental languages (especially Chinese and Japanese) and the major European languages.[4] The English language teaching programme had undergone a considerable overhaul, with the introduction of a new, Framework-related, syllabus, integrated across the three years of the new *laurea breve*. In addition, the exam was no longer harnessed to a literature syllabus, which may have fuzzed the language learning objectives in the exam in the old, pre-reform, four year degree course now known as the *vecchio ordinamento*.

4 With the Gelmini law of 2010, university faculties were replaced by departments.

The new syllabus had been partly informed by a student survey of final year *vecchio ordinamento* students,[5] in which a resounding majority of respondents said they believed that a new syllabus should be linked to specified internationally recognized levels. They also believed that speaking and writing should be the primary focus of language teaching, followed by reading, listening, grammar and phonology (in that order). The syllabus thus took up many of the *can do* statements in the Framework, adapted some of them slightly, and articulated them as year by year attainment targets. These targets were set at B2 (for the end of the first year), and presumed that the second year would be a year of consolidation or maintenance at around B2+/C1-, with students required to have reached C1 at the end of the third year, when they graduated. The new syllabus inevitably took a skills-based approach, with writing featuring prominently and speaking targets also listed; astonishingly, speaking had not previously been formally assessed as an independent skill.

In this context of major change, newly developed CEFR-related certification was seen as a potential ally. It took a direct approach to testing skills, and there was a substantial convergence of content with new university programmes. But it was too generic, aimed at younger learners, and not sufficiently academic to be considered equivalent to a university exam. If, however, (went the reasoning in the Faculty of Languages), a local version of an international certification could be created, responding to the needs and profiles of Italian university students, then (judging by the feedback from the student questionnaire) it would have positive washback and it would reinforce the new syllabus as an alternative, but equivalent, means of assessment.

It was with this possible scenario in mind that in 2004 the Dean of the Faculty approached Trinity College London with a proposal to adapt their new *Integrated Skills in English* ISE3 exam, set at level C1 of the CEFR, so that it could be used as an in-house university exam, equivalent to the general language part of the final year exam in English language, while retaining its value as an external certification. The choice fell on the ISE suite for a variety of reasons. In the first place, it was the first exam suite to have been linked from the outset to the newly published CEFR, rather than to have tweaked its existing exams to the level descriptions of the Framework (as was the case with Cambridge ESOL certification). Secondly, Trinity had a performance-based, whole-skills approach to language assessment which seemed to sit well with the focus on productive skills of writing and speaking in the new syllabus. Furthermore, Trinity College already had a strong presence in Italy, especially through its Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE) which were popular in schools,

5 Reported in Newbold 2004.

and this could provide a guarantee of local support and assistance. The rationale behind this choice is described in detail in Newbold (2009).

The proposal found an interested interlocutor, and after a series of meetings to discuss financial, theoretical, and especially operational aspects of the project, an agreement was reached to produce a "co-certification", to be developed and administered jointly by Ca' Foscari and by Trinity College. In retrospect this seems to have been quite an unusual arrangement. As far as we are aware, there are no other examples of co-certifications involving a major examining board and a local institution to produce a tailor-made version of a certification for local consumption. But much as the idea might appeal, there are a number of reasons, especially involving the need for a clear definition of roles, why embarking on a co-certification may prove difficult, as we shall see.

In principle, any form of collaboration which brings test developer and test user together is likely to work in the interests of fairness, as Kunnan (2000) points out, since, while the test developer has the duty to produce materials which do not discriminate, the test user has a monitoring function. But whereas the examining boards, as we saw in chapter 3, provide extensive information about tests to test users as well as to test takers and teachers, there seem to be no official channels (such as forums on the boards' websites) for test users to provide test developers with feedback. Test development is more research-led than user-informed.

It thus came as something of a surprise to find a major examining board to be a willing partner in this small-scale project. The first, crucial, hurdle to overcome was the establishment of roles. A three page contract was drawn up, premised on "the common interest of both parties to organize English language exams for students of the University", and asserting that "the organization of such exams is compatible with the institutional aims of both parties". The collaboration which was envisaged involved the pooling of specific resources and competences, and was tersely expressed as follows:

> Trinity College [...] agrees to make available its specific competence in the field of language testing, administering English language exams for students of the University through its own specially selected experts.
>
> The University of Venice [...] agrees to make available its specific educational and cultural competence in the preparation of the exams.[6]

This provided the basis for a working partnership in which the University would make suggestions to adapt the international version of the exam,

6 Agreement dated 2004-09-16.

while Trinity College would remain responsible for the entire assessment process. The project would be financed through the fees paid by students (which would not be higher than fees for the international version), and made visible by the logo of both institutions on the certificate awarded to successful candidates.

4.4 A Construct for the Co-Certification

The ISE exam which the University proposed to adopt and to adapt was noteworthy for its portfolio component. In addition to a controlled written exam, and an oral exam, part of the final mark was reserved for a portfolio of three short texts which candidates wrote in their own time, and which they then discussed with the examiner during the oral. This was a new departure for high-stakes certification, since the portfolio texts, by definition, could not be secure in the way that the products of an invigilated exam normally would be. In short, there was nothing to guarantee that the portfolio texts were entirely the candidates' own work. This presumably was why it counted for only twenty per cent of the final mark, while the controlled written exam was more heavily weighted, at thirty per cent.

The interest for portfolios as an alternative form of assessment was undoubtedly linked to the appearance of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) at the same time as the Framework, and which had "a documentation and reporting function, as well as a pedagogic function" (Lenz 2004, 24), designed to promote learner autonomy and self-assessment. This approach to assessment as an ongoing, dynamic process involving the learner had clearly been attractive to test developers at Trinity College and it was also of interest to the University, where it was felt that few students would be tempted to cheat, and where there were checks in place, through feedback forms filled in by teachers who read draft copies of the texts, to ensure where possible that the work was their students' own.

However, there were doubts about the contents of portfolio texts. Although the first two tasks, "correspondence" and "factual writing" both seemed appropriate within the context of the new university syllabus, the third task, "creative writing", was not. Examples of creative writing from previous ISE exams suggested they would appeal to younger learners, and reflect a genre which was a long way from the academic writing which the new syllabus intended to foster. Here, it was felt, there was a need for a university-specific writing task, which we would call 'critical writing'. Recent research, such as Hyland (2002) on rhetorical options open to writers, and Stapleton (2005) on critical writing and interpreting websites as pre-requisites for critical writing, was illuminating, as was Swales' less recent (1990) but well-established excursion into genre studies.

A non-exhaustive list of underlying constructs, or language functions,

was drawn up, which it was felt would contribute to the target language domain of critical writing:

- evaluating
- exemplifying
- contrasting and conceding
- effective organization
- making comparisons
- using persuasion
- using a formal register
- coming to an effective conclusion

This was then articulated in a Framework-like descriptor for critical writing. Starting with the overall description of written production at C1 level in the CEFR:

> Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlying the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.

the *can do* statement for C1 critical writing for the proposed co-certification eventually emerged, after some fine tuning, as:

> Can write a critical appraisal of a work of art, such as a novel, a film, or a collection of poetry, *or present a critical overview of a cultural phenomenon, such as an institution or a lifestyle, or of an economic, historical or linguistic issue*, isolating and developing the main thrust of the argument with some assurance, identifying supporting themes *or typical features*, and evaluating the work appropriately against the background to which it belongs.

The italicized additions were made to ensure that students from backgrounds other than literature and the humanities would not be excluded; the co-certification was to be open to all students enrolled at the University.

The introduction of the critical writing task was the only change made to the international version of the exam. However, since the controlled written exam replicated some of the writing functions of the portfolio, including the creative writing element, here, too, creative writing was replaced by a critical writing task. Moreover, the fact that the student would speak to the examiner about the portfolio ensured that the 'university element' of the co-certification would be maintained across the three parts of the assessment process. Some of the portfolio questions deliberately had a local European or Italian dimension, which it was felt would make them more accessible, but also more interesting, to students at the University. Here is

a typical list of portfolio critical writing tasks (students choose one only):

1. "Who does the English Language belong to? Its native speakers or anyone who uses it?" Write an essay evaluating both sides of this debate and concluding with your own opinion from your perspective as a learner.
2. Write a critical review of the writer, who in your opinion, best captures the fragmented, globalized dimension of the world in which we live.
3. 'Italian design' is appreciated around the world, but what is it and what characteristics does it display? Write an overview investigating the phenomenon, referring to different examples.
4. Italy has been described as a country where reforms do not happen, although everyone agrees that they should. Write an essay commenting on this paradox. Try to identify the root of the problem and support your views with relevant examples.
5. Too much money is spent by local municipalities on cultural events which are of no great significance or utility to local communities. Discuss this statement indicating how far you consider it to be true, referring to a local context you know well.

The first version of the co-certification was held in 2004, for which there were 38 enrolments, and 33 passes. After this, it was held on a yearly basis, settling down to an average of nearly fifty candidates per year. From 2007 a B2 level of the co-certification was also introduced, with a simplified critical writing construct. The descriptor reads:

> Can write a clear and detailed description and evaluation of a work of art (such as a film or a novel) or a cultural phenomenon (especially with regard to current lifestyles in the society in which one lives), by synthesizing information and comparing and contrasting different viewpoints, using appropriate exemplification and showing evidence of effective structuring.

Seventy five students took the first edition of the new B2 level. As with the C1 level, Trinity College provided the university with numerical values for each part of the test, which made it easy to convert results to the Italian system of a mark out of 30, in which 18 is a pass and 30 the highest score obtainable. Although when asked for feedback in a survey (see 4.6 below) most students said that they were interested in the certification for its external value, a large majority of students used the certification, with the converted mark out of thirty, to replace a university exam. For them, the fact that they had also acquired an internationally valid certification was an added bonus; the immediate objective was to pass a university exam. The certificate itself, however, only displayed the grade ("pass", "merit" or

"distinction") which is typical of international certification, as well as the double logo, of the University, and of Trinity College. A separate list of converted scores for internal use was drawn up and published by the University.

4.5 Coping with Crisis and Redefining Roles

A collaborative project such as the co-certification we are describing is based on trust, but also flexibility. The University had relinquished any part in the assessment process, and relied on the examining board not only to provide a fair assessment, but also to report the results rapidly so that they could be used to substitute in-house exams. Trinity College had accepted the idea that the content input for the critical writing questions in the portfolio was the exclusive concern of the University. The initial agreement was that the University would supply ten portfolio tasks, of which Trinity College would choose five, perhaps on the basis of the language that the tasks might be supposed to generate. Trinity also reserved the right to tweak the questions slightly, for example if they did not fit the house style. The controlled written exam, however, was to be produced entirely by Trinity College, which meant that they would provide their own critical writing task, following the style of the portfolio questions, but without such a markedly 'local' character.

This arrangement worked for the first few years, during which time the co-certification settled down as regular yearly event with around fifty candidates for the higher ISE3 (C1) level and slightly smaller numbers for the ISE2 version. In 2009, however, six of the ten suggested questions for ISE2 were rejected by Trinity, together with five of the titles at ISE3, while the wording of three of the remaining questions was called into question. The reasons given were:

- the wording did not follow the house style
- some topics were too similar to those of the previous year
- some titles did not appear to elicit the required level for the language
- some topics were not appropriate

Although the first point was not controversial, and could be easily rectified by Trinity, the remaining objections were more so. The fact that similar topics (such as university reforms and cinema) recurred in successive years might simply reflect that they were central to the test takers' experience as university students; so long as they focused on different aspects, it was felt, they were not problematic. In contrast, the fact that some titles were considered to be unlikely to elicit language at the required levels was a harder issue to address, and required clarification. Although much has been written about eliciting spoken language through a range of different formats (see May 2010 for a comparison of formats chosen by different

examining boards), there is a dearth of research connecting free-standing essay titles with language elicited.

The most controversial point, however, was the notion that the items writers at the University had chosen topics which were not appropriate for their students. It called into question the initial agreement on which the co-certification was based, namely, that the topics for essay titles should be chosen by the University, and that, therefore, by implication, the University could judge whether or not a topic was 'appropriate'. One question at ISE3 level, for example, required students to reflect on the way in which, in the space of a single generation, Italy had changed "from a country of emigrants to a country of immigrants". Why was this considered to be inappropriate?

All examining boards need to be sensitive to controversial or potentially offensive topics, and as a consequence issue guidelines to their own item writers and examiners. This includes the need to avoid bias in areas such as:

Gender and sexual orientation
Race
Class
Culture
Religion
Nationality

Since they operate in a global market, the net needs to be cast wide; what is not offensive in one culture might be considered to be so in another. For many test developers and item writers, this warning is interpreted as a taboo; better to avoid a text, or an essay title, which explores these areas than to risk offence. The topic of immigration, which might overlap with issues of race, culture, and nationality, had been weeded out as 'inappropriate'.

However, in a local context perspectives change. For the University team, to engage with the topic of immigration into Italy in a critical writing task seemed not only appropriate but also stimulating and linguistically challenging. Indeed, the culture-specific setting of the co-certification meant that there were very few areas from the list which were likely to cause offence *a priori*; offence could lie in a biased or stereotyped approach to the topic, but not as an inherent feature of the topic. The 'added value' of the co-certification, it was felt, lay precisely in the possibility of offering themes which might not be available in the more anodyne international version, and which could be sensitively explored by test developers and test takers alike.

Another problem which arose at about the same time was of a completely different nature. The controlled written question, we said, was provided by Trinity along the lines of the portfolio questions. Unlike the portfolio questions, however, for which candidates had a choice, and which could be written at home, using a variety of resources such as dictionaries and the Internet, the controlled written exam offered no choice and no resources.

Thus, when students found themselves asked, in the controlled exam, to describe and reflect on a painting they knew well, many found themselves in difficulty. A question which could have been used for the portfolio – students would have been able to look at the picture as they wrote – turned out to pose major problems for anyone without photographic recall. The protocol for high stakes test administration (and this included the co-certification, which followed the standard procedure for the international version) forbids feedback from invigilators about the exam questions. Students were thus left to their own devices to cope with the question and somehow produce a coherent answer. The best solution was probably found by those students who mentally conceived an imaginary painting and described it, thereby paradoxically turning the question into a creative writing task, of the kind which the co-certification had been developed to replace.

With the spirit of collaboration strained by incidents such as these, the University sought a crisis meeting with the examining board to clarify and if necessary re-define the roles, if the co-certification was to survive (reported in Newbold 2012b). The importance attached to the meeting by Trinity was indicated by the presence of their CEO, as well as all the team who had been working with the University on the project. This, it was felt at the University, was a sensitive response to local needs in a project which may have offered Trinity College some research insights into testing in an academic context, but certainly no great financial rewards. It ended with a reassertion of the previously agreed roles, and a number of resolutions:

- The University team would be more attentive to house style in item writing;
- Trinity College would arrange an item writing training day with one of their senior item writers;
- The University would double the number of item writers (from two to four) and provide twenty portfolio titles per level each year from which Trinity would make a selection of five;
- Trinity College would show the University their chosen question for the controlled written exam, and the university could change or modify it if necessary.

4.6 Working for Washback

Swain (1985) concludes her well-known list of guiding principles for a good communicative test with the advice “work for washback”. In the first chapter of this volume we identified washback as a ‘local’ manifestation of the wider phenomenon of impact, and suggested that examining boards, by nature of their international role, are primarily interested in impact, and the connection between their certifications and language policies worldwide, and how certifications impact on life beyond the classroom, prompting a number

of commissioned impact studies, such as Wall (2008) on changes in teaching practices across central and eastern Europe in the light of structural changes to TOEFL, and Gribble et al. (2016) on the way in which IELTS interfaces with language skills required in the workplace in Australia.

Washback, in the definition of Alderson and Wall (1993), is confined to "the way that tests are perceived to influence classroom practices, and syllabus and curriculum planning" (117). In Venice, as explained above, the co-certification was introduced at a time of syllabus change in the light of a major reform to the Italian university system, and specifically the degree structure. The co-certification, with its focus on the productive skills, mapped well onto the new Framework-inspired syllabus, so that, although the in-house exam structure was quite different from that of the co-certification, students preparing for the co-certification would be refining those language skills prescribed for the syllabus. Over time, the co-certification, especially because of its 'whole text' approach to writing, began to shape teaching and in-house tests; the most recent (2016) revision of the in-house test of English at B2 level has seen the abandonment of an objective part (sentence correction and multiple choice testing of listening and reading) for a test of listening, reading and writing through paraphrase, summary, and a free-standing critical writing activity.

Although most students majoring in English in the language department (for whom the co-certification was originally devised) continued to do the in-house test, which had no cost for them, around thirty percent chose the comparatively expensive option of the co-certification. From the beginning they were asked why; 21 out of 39 candidates replied that "it is an opportunity to get an internationally recognized certificate in English". Only six said they chose it primarily as an alternative to the in-house exam. In fact, the pass rate (nearly 90% the first year, 81% over the first twelve years) was consistently higher than the in-house exam, which, rather than indicating that the co-certification was easier, may reflect the motivational levels of students. The exam was seen as an investment, and students prepared for it accordingly; whereas the in-house exam, which has no cost, and can be done up to three times during the same academic year, is often taken by students just to 'get an idea' of the level.

In addition, the exam itself was seen as a motivating experience. Ahead of its time, the co-certification introduced short presentations on subjects chosen by candidates as part of the oral exam. For the co-certification sometimes, although not always, candidates would choose topics which were related in some way to their university experience. The co-certification also gave the opportunity to talk about their chosen subject to an unknown but benevolent native speaker. Today, this performance-based approach to learning and assessment has become commonplace in Italian universities, especially in second level courses where class numbers are smaller, and is usually appreciated by students.

4.7 Reform

In 2014 Trinity embarked on a major overhaul of their ISE exams suite. This may have been prompted in part by concerns of reliability and fairness connected to the take-home portfolio (see chapter 1); but the changes also reflected a desire to integrate reading and writing more closely in the controlled written exam, and to separate interactive listening from independent listening, by introducing a free-standing listening task, in the oral exam. Thus, in the written exam, a "long reading" for comprehension was to be followed by four short texts on a related topic, but representing different genres (one of which contained graphic material), the contents of which were to be synthesized in a summary. The final, free-standing writing task was to remain. In the oral exam, listening would continue to be assessed as part of the "spoken interaction" construct, but the exam was to conclude with candidates listening to a recorded passage (such as an extract from a lecture) which the live examiner activated, and then asked the candidate questions about.

These features brought the ISE suite more into line with overtly academic certifications such as TOEFL and IELTS, which include similar reading-to-writing tasks and pre-recorded listenings. The free standing writing task, no longer "creative writing", but renamed "extended writing", covers a range of possible output genres, not just essays, but also reports, reviews, and correspondence. However, all three sample papers posted on the Trinity College website[7] require an argumentative type of essay for the new ISE 3, suggesting that this is the default writing task at this level. Similarly, the free standing or independent listening task, we are told in the specifications for the new exam, will contain content "generally of a discursive nature", such as might be found in "lectures, complex discussions, debates, podcasts, radio programmes and documentaries".[8]

These changes are reflected in the declared objectives of the revised certification, the first of which is to certify that candidates are suitably qualified for "entrance to university where a specified level of English is required for study", followed by "progression to a higher level of English study" and "preparation for further or higher education, where English-medium teaching or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology may be in use". This latter objective reflects the huge rise in English medium instruction in universities in Europe and elsewhere over the last decade, and we shall return to it in the next chapter.

7 http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=3196 (2017-03-27).

8 Taken from ISE specifications document ("Speaking and Listening"), 47. URL http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=3196 (2017-03-27).

The new Integrated Skills exams, at both B2 and C1 levels, were thus more academic, and more university-oriented, and in this sense closer to the kind of content required for the co-certification. However, if the co-certification was to survive as a local version of the new exam, it would have to adopt the same structure, and a meeting with Trinity management and the Head of Research was held to redefine what this would mean. The main contribution to the co-certification, as we have seen, had been the portfolio questions for "critical writing", and the portfolio had now disappeared.[9] Was there anything left in the new version of the exam which could be usefully changed for a co-certified version? Was there any reason not to accept the new international version as suitable for the needs of the University of Venice? After all, the co-certification was a niche product, costly and demanding to organize. Perhaps it was time to bring the project to an end?

However, ten years after the appearance of the first co-certification, a lot had happened in the way in which English was being used in the universities. The original co-certification was intended to cater for specialists in English; but over the years it had attracted an increasing number of candidates from other departments, such as economics, science, and oriental languages. The needs and profiles of potential candidates had changed, too. The co-certification was being used to access courses, as well as to exit them, and a growing number of courses delivered through the medium of English meant that it was not only students majoring in English who might be interested in focused, high level certification. In the space of a decade, language certification had come of age in the universities, and had permeated across disciplines and courses.

In the end an agreement was reached that the University would take time out, to consider if it would be possible to adapt the new exam in any significant and useful way, or whether there would be any point in slightly tweaking an exam which already had an academic slant. The last exam of the original co-certification was thus administered in 2014, and there was no exam in 2015. A new co-certification was eventually implemented in 2016 and is described in chapter 6. First, however, we shall look closely at the changed circumstances in the use of English in European universities which made an update to the co-certification not only possible, but desirable; and which could, in the long run, have implications for all international English language certification.

9 However, Trinity College proposes a "Portfolio toolkit for teachers", downloadable from the website, as part of a process-oriented approach to preparing students for the written exam.