



Home Office

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT FOR TIER 4 STUDENTS AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Q&A

MAY 2015

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

### DO STUDENTS NEED TO PASS A SELT TEST TO MEET THE HOME OFFICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS?

If you are a Higher Education Institution (HEI) and the applicant wishes to study at degree level or above, you can use your own methods to assess the applicant's English language ability. The applicant does not need to have passed a SELT test in order for you to assess the applicant as having met the English language requirements.

Regardless of whether or not you are an HEI, if your applicant wishes to study at below degree level then they must have passed a recent SELT, under the new or transitional arrangements, to meet the English language requirements.

There are also exceptions to the English language requirement. Sponsors do not have to confirm English language competence for:

- Tier 4 (Child) students;
- applicants who have successfully completed a course as a Tier 4 (Child) student which was at least six months in length and ended within the past two years;
- applicants from 'majority English-speaking' countries; and
- applicants who have previously completed an academic qualification equivalent to a UK degree which was taught in a 'majority English-speaking' country.

### WHAT LEVEL OF ENGLISH DO THEY NEED TO BE ASSIGNED A CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE FOR STUDIES?

Applicants wishing to study at degree level and above must be proficient in English language at B2 level on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for languages) in all four components (speaking, listening, reading and writing), unless they are exempt from being proficient in a component because of a disability.

Applicants wishing to study at below degree level must be competent in English language at a minimum B1 level of the CEFR in all four components, unless they are exempt from being proficient in a component because of a disability. This requirement also applies to applicants who are:

- undertaking foundation degrees;
- taking pre-sessional courses which are below QCF or NQF 6 (unless they have been issued a single CAS for both a pre-sessional course and main degree course); or
- studying English as a foreign language under Tier 4 at CEFR level B2 or above.

### HOW DO APPLICANTS DEMONSTRATE THEIR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY?

If you are not an HEI and the applicant wishes to study at degree level or above, you must ask the applicant to demonstrate their proficiency in English language at B2 level on the CEFR by providing a recent SELT from one of the providers on the approved list.

If you are an HEI, and the applicant wishes to study at degree level or above, they must be proficient in English at B2 level and you are allowed to use your own methods to assess this. Your assessment might include, but is not restricted to, interviews (face to face or by telephone/video link), English language tests from other test providers, overseas qualifications, or evidence of previous courses completed in the UK.

If the applicant wishes to study below degree level you must ask the applicant to demonstrate their English language ability at B1 level on the CEFR by providing a recent SELT from one of the providers on the approved list, regardless of whether you are an HEI.

## **DO I NEED TO SEE A SELT BEFORE ASSIGNING A SINGLE CAS TO COVER A PRE-SESSIONAL AND A MAIN COURSE OF STUDY?**

If you are an HEI, you can issue a CAS to cover both a pre-session course and a place on a main course of study at degree level or above (which has been offered unconditionally), provided:

- the pre-session is no more than three months long, and ends no more than one month before the main degree course; and
- is taken with the same HEI or with a teaching partner named on the HEI's licence.

In these circumstances, you can choose your own method of checking the applicant's English language ability is at CEFR level B2.

There is also a specific concession for applicants who do not yet meet the B2 level requirement. If you are an HEI and you are satisfied that the applicant will reach the B2 level requirement following a short pre-session English language course, you can issue a single CAS to cover the pre-session course and the main degree course of study. In these circumstances, you must require the applicant to provide a recent SELT from one of the providers on the approved list to demonstrate they are proficient in English at B1 level before issuing the CAS. The pre-session must be no more than three months long, end no more than one month before the main degree course, and be taken with the same HEI or with a teaching partner named on the HEI's licence.

## **HOW DO I COMPLETE THE 'ENGLISH LANGUAGE QUALIFICATION' SECTION ON THE CAS?**

Where you are assigning a CAS for a course at degree level or above, and you are an HEI choosing your own method to assess English language ability, then you must select the 'Not required' radio button against the 'Is SELT required' question and then select 'Higher Education Institution (HEI) sponsor has made the assessment' from the drop down list of reasons.

You do not need to complete the fields asking for the level attained or scores in the four components. You do not need to provide details of how you made the assessment here, but you must retain the details, which may be inspected by UK Visas and Immigration. (If you do enter the scores after selecting 'HEI sponsor has made the assessment' and attempt to progress in the CAS, you will receive an error message stating 'You do not need to enter more information'. You will need to remove the data in the score field before the system will allow you to progress.)

Where you are assigning a CAS for a course at below degree level you must select the 'required' radio button against the 'Is SELT required' question and go on to complete the level attained field, the scores against each facet and the name of the test provider.

## **WILL THE HOME OFFICE ACCEPT ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTS THAT ARE NOT ON THE APPROVED LIST OF SECURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTS?**

Where a SELT is required, we will only accept a test that is on the published list. For tests taken on or after 6 April, we will only accept tests as SELTs for the purpose of UK immigration which have been provided by:

- IELTS SELT Consortium (for visa customers applying outside the UK); or
- Trinity College London or IELTS SELT Consortium (for customers applying in the UK).

We will continue to accept relevant test certificates from City & Guilds, Pearson, Cambridge and Trinity College London until 5 November 2015, provided the test was taken on or before 5 April 2015.

Where you are an HEI and a SELT is not required, you can choose your own method of assessing the applicant's English language ability. You may choose to use any of the following, as long as the language has been assessed properly and to the required level in all four components:

- A test from a provider that is not on the list of approved tests
- A test from any of the current approved providers taken at a non approved centre
- A test from any of the four previous providers
- A test from the current approved list taken at an approved centre

## **WILL YOU ACCEPT ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTS THAT ARE ON THE APPROVED LIST, BUT NOT SAT AT AN APPROVED CENTRE?**

From 6 April 2015, where an applicant requires a SELT, we will only accept English language tests taken on or after 6 April if they appear on the approved list and have been taken at an approved test centre.

We will continue to accept relevant test certificates from City & Guilds, Pearson, Cambridge and Trinity College London until 5 November 2015, provided the test was taken on or before 5 April 2015.

Where you are an HEI and a SELT is not required, you can choose your own method of assessing the applicant's English language ability. You may choose to use any of the following, as long as the language has been assessed properly and to the required level in all four components:

- A test from a provider that is not on the list of approved tests
- A test from any of the current approved providers taken at a non approved centre
- A test from any of the 4 previous providers
- A test from the current approved list taken at an approved centre

## **THE HOME OFFICE ONLY NEEDS TO BE PROVIDED WITH THE SELT UNIQUE REFERENCE NUMBER ON THE APPLICATION FORM. IS IT OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THEIR SELT CERTIFICATE?**

You must retain evidence of the method you have used to assess whether the applicant meets the English language requirements. If the applicant is required to have passed an approved SELT and has provided you with a certificate then you must keep a copy. If you have used your own method to assess English Language ability then you must retain evidence of that method.

## **WHAT WILL THE HOME OFFICE CHECK DURING SPONSOR COMPLIANCE VISITS TO SEE IF WE HAVE PROPERLY ASSESSED ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY?**

If you assessed your applicant's English language ability using a SELT from an approved provider, then we may wish to see the certificate or unique SELT reference number.

If you are an HEI and you have used your own method to assess the applicant's English language ability then we will check that you have made robust efforts to satisfy yourself that the applicant is proficient in English at level B2 on the CEFR.

## **WHY HAS THE HOME OFFICE MADE CHANGES TO THE TESTS THAT WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR UK VISA PURPOSES?**

The changes will improve standards and provide clearer timeframes for test bookings and results. The testing process will be more secure with measures such as CCTV in centres, more frequent audits and mystery shopping in place to improve the integrity of test results. Pop-up testing will be introduced for the first time in places where there is lower demand and where testing may not have previously existed.

## **HOW AND FROM WHEN CAN TESTS BE BOOKED WITH THE NEW PROVIDERS?**

Candidates who require a SELT under the new arrangements can book via these links from the dates shown below.

Trinity College London [www.trinitycollege.com/SELT](http://www.trinitycollege.com/SELT) - Booking opened on 16 February 2015  
IELTS SELT Consortium [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org) - Booking opened on 26 March 2015

## **ARE TEST RESULTS FROM ONE OF THE FOUR PREVIOUS PROVIDERS STILL ACCEPTABLE?**

We will continue to accept relevant test certificates until 5 November 2015 from City & Guilds, Pearson, Cambridge and Trinity College London, provided the test was taken on or before 5 April 2015.

Only tests taken on or after 6 April 2015, which have been provided by IELTS SELT Consortium (for visa customers applying outside the UK) or by Trinity College London or IELTS SELT Consortium (for customers applying in the UK) as Secure English Language Tests for the purpose of UK immigration will be accepted thereafter.

## **IS THERE A NEW PROCESS FOR TAKING A SELT TEST?**

From 6 April 2015, SELTs can be booked online at

Trinity College London [www.trinitycollege.com/SELT](http://www.trinitycollege.com/SELT)  
IELTS SELT Consortium [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

In the majority of locations, tests will be available within 28 days - often more frequently. Customers will be required to take specified identification on the test day and the test centre will check and record their identity. Candidates who cannot pass the identity checks will not be able to take a test that day. Customers will be provided with an electronic reference number which, if they pass the test, must be used for their UK immigration application.

## **WHY IS THE HOME OFFICE REDUCING THE NUMBER OF TESTS AVAILABLE?**

We have consolidated the tests available in order to simplify the English language requirements for customers and to enable us to monitor and be assured of the security measures in place.

## **WHY HAS THE TEST CENTRE NETWORK REDUCED IN SIZE?**

The provision of approved SELT test centres has been planned to ensure there is adequate global and UK coverage to meet anticipated customer demand. We have introduced “pop-up” test centres in locations where demand has historically been low or seasonal, to make sure customers continue to have easy access to a test centres wherever they are. We have also introduced the ability for providers to open additional permanent centres where there is evidence of high demand.

## **THERE IS NO LONGER A TEST CENTRE WITHIN REASONABLE TRAVELLING DISTANCE – WHAT DO YOU ADVISE?**

The new SELT test centres are spread throughout the UK and the rest of the world. Applicants should go online [[SELT pages of GOV.UK](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-applying-for-uk-visa-approved-english-language-tests)] to find out where their nearest test centre is located.

## **WILL THERE BE SUFFICIENT CAPACITY AT THE REDUCED NUMBER OF NEW TEST PROVIDERS/CENTRES?**

The new arrangements allow visa applicants to have their English language ability tested securely for all immigration categories where a SELT is required. The selected providers have consolidated their tests to ensure customers know which tests they can rely on when applying for a UK visa. Tests will need to be taken at an approved test centre.

We have planned the provision of test centres to give adequate global and UK coverage to meet anticipated customer demand but will work with providers to monitor and manage demand.

## **WHERE CAN I GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?**

Information on SELTs for immigration purposes is available on GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-applying-for-uk-visa-approved-english-language-tests>

The Tier 4 Guidance for Sponsors is available on GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsor-a-tier-4-student-guidance-for-educators>