



Cambridge English Advanced

Certificate in Advanced English (CAE)

Methodology used for benchmarking Cambridge English: Advanced to IELTS

For institutions that already accept *IELTS*, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) has benchmarked *Cambridge English: Advanced's* scores to the *IELTS* band scores. In this document we outline the methodology and analysis involved in producing a comparison of the results of these two exams. Cambridge ESOL, as the owner and developer of *IELTS*, is the organisation best placed to align tests to *IELTS* and most able to carry out comparability studies based on detailed insight into the difficulty level of *IELTS* test items.

Our benchmarking of *Cambridge English: Advanced* to *IELTS* is based on three key methods:

- item banking for Reading and Listening papers
- Common Scales for Writing and Speaking papers
- post-test score comparisons.

Specialist staff at Cambridge ESOL work on the production and validation of a range of Cambridge exams, including *IELTS*, and are familiar with the measurement characteristics of both *IELTS* and *Cambridge English: Advanced*. This understanding is informed by the analysis of the responses of several million candidates who have taken *Cambridge English: Advanced*, *IELTS Academic* and *IELTS General Training* tests since the mid-1990s.

This analysis has involved the application of 'Item Response Theory', a method used to assess the relative difficulty of individual Reading and Listening items, allowing the creation of a Common Scale on which all Reading or Listening questions for all Cambridge exams including *IELTS* and *Cambridge English: Advanced* can be placed, regardless of the test for which they are intended. All items are stored in a secure 'Item Banking System' database, together with information about their measurement characteristics. It is this that permits the creation of multiple test versions to specific target levels and ranges of difficulty. This in turn allows comparable standards to be applied in both *IELTS* and *Cambridge English: Advanced* exams – the two are aligned as they are constructed.

Common Scales have also been published for Writing and Speaking, based on qualitative analysis of the features of these performance skills at different levels. This allows the application of comparable mark schemes in each exam, enabling the alignment of marks awarded for Writing and Speaking tests in both *IELTS* and *Cambridge English: Advanced*.

The combination of item banking and Common Scales facilitates the comparison of levels of performance achieved between *IELTS* and *Cambridge English: Advanced* as the tests are produced and marked.

Additional studies have been undertaken to confirm further the overall comparability of scores obtained on *Cambridge English: Advanced* with scores obtained on *IELTS*. Candidates registered for *Cambridge English: Advanced* were invited to take *IELTS* and vice versa. Counterbalancing the study in this way ensures that any order, motivation or preparation effects are accounted for. Scores were linked using a method which identifies comparable scores on the two exams based on the same percentage of test takers achieving each score on each test. The alignment of standardised scores on *Cambridge English: Advanced* with *IELTS* band scores draws on our Common Scales and these studies.

Note:

Cambridge ESOL jointly owns *IELTS* with British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia. Cambridge ESOL is responsible for developing and producing the test, which goes through the same systems and processes used to develop and produce *Cambridge English: Advanced*.

British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia are responsible for delivering *IELTS* through their global network of test centres.

Cambridge English: Advanced is delivered by Cambridge ESOL through its own separate test centre network.