

Language testing for UK Visas and Immigration – FAQs

The UK government has confirmed new requirements for secure English language testing for visa and immigration purposes. These requirements reduce the number of tests on the list of Secure English Language Tests (SELT) which are required for many categories of visa, and bring in additional requirements for the way the tests are administered.

This affects Cambridge English and other English language exam providers.

Applicants who need to prove their level of English to support an application for any category of UK visa will be able to use *IELTS* scores, at Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level B1 (*IELTS* score 4.0) and above.

A new *IELTS Life Skills* test will also be introduced, specifically designed for applicants who need to prove their speaking and listening skills at CEFR levels A1 and B1.

Cambridge English produces *IELTS*, which is jointly owned by British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment.

These changes come into effect from 6 April 2015.

1. Which Cambridge English exams are on UKVI's list of Secure English language tests (often referred to as SELT)?

For visa and immigration applications to the UK, you may need to take an English language qualification which is included on the Home Office's list of Secure English Language Tests (often referred to as SELT tests).

The UK government has announced new requirements for secure English language testing for visa and immigration purposes. These requirements reduce the number of tests on the SELT list.

IELTS and our new test *IELTS Life Skills* are both included on this revised list.

IELTS and *IELTS Life Skills* are ideal tests for UK Visas and Immigration purposes. They are designed to ensure that candidates have the skills they need for success in an English speaking environment, and that they can use the language effectively in a wide range of different contexts.

Cambridge English produces *IELTS*, which is jointly owned by British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. *IELTS* has been in operation for over 25 years. Over 9,000 recognising organisations around the world accept *IELTS* as a reliable indicator of language ability.

IELTS Life Skills is for candidates who only need to demonstrate Speaking and Listening skills, at levels A1 or B1 of the CEFR.

2. What categories of visa are affected? Do I need to take an exam on the SELT list?

These changes affect a number of visa and immigration categories.

To find out whether you need to take an approved test (SELT), what level you need to achieve, and which exam you can use, you should contact UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), or the British Embassy or High Commission in your country. There is also a wealth of information on UKVI's website

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

As a guide, you can use the following table:

Visa description	Minimum CEFR level required	Skills	IELTS test and minimum score required overall and in each skill ¹
Tier 1 (General) visa	C1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 7.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) visa	B1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 4.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 1 (Entrepreneur) visa	B1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 4.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa	B1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 4.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 2 (General) visa	B1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 4.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 2 (Sportsperson) visa ²	A1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 4.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 2 (Minister of Religion) visa	B2	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 5.5 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 4 (General) student visa - below degree level	B1	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 4.0 overall, and in each of the four skills
Tier 4 (General) student visa - degree level and above and including some pre-sessional courses ³	B2	Reading, Writing Speaking, and Listening	IELTS - 5.5 overall, and in each of the four skills

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'Family of a settled person' visa	A1	Speaking and Listening	IELTS Life Skills at A1 – Pass ⁴ IELTS – 4.0 in Speaking and Listening
Indefinite leave to remain (to settle) or citizenship ⁵	B1	Speaking and Listening	IELTS Life Skills at B1 – Pass IELTS – 4.0 in Speaking and Listening

¹ Both General and Academic Training modules are accepted. The CEFR requirement for each skill must be met.

² IELTS is accepted by UKVI at band scores 4.0 and above, equivalent to CEFR level B1.

³ Universities on UKVI's list of [Tier 4 Sponsors](#) decide which exams to accept when a SELT is not required, and these may include *Cambridge English: Advanced* and *Proficiency*.

⁴ IELTS can be used where IELTS Life Skills is used; candidates would need to get 4.0 or above in Speaking and Listening (scores for Reading and Writing will be ignored).

⁵ Currently, UKVI will also accept an Ofqual regulated test for this category. The test must cover Speaking and Listening at B1 level. Ofqual regulated tests include *Cambridge English: Preliminary, First* and *ESOL Skills for Life* entry 3.

Please note that these changes do not affect the use of Cambridge English exams by people from the European Union, European Economic Area, Switzerland and 'majority English speaking countries' as defined by the UK Home Office (<https://www.gov.uk/english-language>).

3. When do the new arrangements come into effect?

These new arrangements will come into effect on 6 April 2015.

We will be announcing test dates for *IELTS* and *IELTS Life Skills* in March.

26 March – registration for *IELTS* and *IELTS Life Skills* for UK visa and immigration purposes opens

5 April – last date exams on the existing SELT list can be taken for UK visa and immigration purposes

5 November – the last day you can apply for a visa with an exam taken up to and including 5 April

Exams valid for UK visa and immigration purposes until 5 November, if taken up to and including 5 April:

- *Cambridge English: Key*
- *Cambridge English: Preliminary*
- *Cambridge English: First*
- *Cambridge English: Advanced*
- *Cambridge English: Proficiency*
- *Cambridge English: Business Certificates*
- *Cambridge English: Legal*
- *Cambridge English: Financial*
- *Cambridge English: ESOL Skills for Life*

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This does not apply to applicants for Tier 4 student visas who are applying to study at degree level (or higher) at most UK universities and colleges.

This also does not apply for applicants from the European Union, European Economic Area, Switzerland or 'majority English speaking countries' as defined by the UK Home Office (<https://www.gov.uk/english-language>).

4. Can I still use my Cambridge English exam for UK university and visa applications?

If you are applying for a Tier 4 student visa please note that you will still be able to use your Cambridge English certificate under the following conditions:

- For levels of study at degree level and higher, Higher Education Institutions who are on UKVI's Register of Sponsors can decide which exams to accept as proof of English language ability.

This means you can continue to use Cambridge English exams, including *Cambridge English: Advanced* and *Proficiency*, taken at any authorised exam centre, to apply to universities for degree courses (or higher), where the exams are accepted.

- If you are from the European Union, European Economic Area or Switzerland – a Tier 4 student visa is not required. You can therefore continue to use Cambridge English exams as proof of English language proficiency for entry to foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate courses, at universities which accept the exams.

5. I've already taken a Cambridge English exam, how long can I use it to apply for a visa?

As long as you took your exam up to and including 5 April 2015, you will be able to use your result to support your visa application up to and including 5 November 2015.