

BALEAP Guidelines on English Language Tests for University Entry

BALEAP Guidelines Contents

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BALEAP is a professional organisation whose members are providers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

Its aims are to :

- enhance the quality of English language provision for international students in institutions of higher education and to support professional development of the staff
- provide an accreditation scheme for EAP courses
- promote and disseminate EAP associated research through biennial conferences and one-day professional Issues Meetings (PIMs) and also through publication of research and conference presentations.

Introduction

The purpose of the BALEAP Guidelines on English Language Tests for University Entry is to give stakeholders a richer description of English language tests¹ in a format that facilitates comparison between them. Our aim is to assist staff responsible for reviewing and selecting the tests used by their institutions and setting the related scores/grades. It also aims to assist in the day to day interpretations of scores on the qualifications concerned. This guide was originally compiled by the BALEAP Testing Working Party circa 2007 including: Bruce Howell (University of Reading), Philip Nathan (Durham University), Diane Schmitt (formerly of Nottingham Trent University), Chris Sinclair (University of Southampton), Jenifer Spencer (EAP writer and editor, formerly Heriot-Watt University), John Wrigglesworth (University of Sheffield Hallam, formerly of the University of Portsmouth) and John Slaght (Professor Emeritus University of Reading). They bring together more than 100 years of EAP and English language testing experience. The updated 2020 version has been revised by John Slaght in his role as BALEAP Testing Officer.

Who are these guidelines for?

Relevant stakeholders including all those responsible for setting and using English language entry requirements in Higher Education institutions, including:

- HE institution admissions officers and their supervisors
- International office and marketing staff
- EAP administrators and course leaders
- EAP teachers, especially those involved in creating, administering, marking and analysing Academic English Language tests
- Sponsors, agents and students themselves

It should be noted that these pages are guidelines and not definitive declarations. Institutions need to make their own decisions about admissions policies and it is strongly recommended that admissions supervisors engage with all relevant staff to discuss the issues raised here, as well as to disseminate policy.

At the onset it is essential to distinguish between Secure English Language Tests (SELTs), which can be used for direct entry to Higher Education institutes *and* for joining pre-sessional courses prior to the commencement of further academic study, and other tests such as the Test of English for Educational Purposes (TEEP) which can only be used for direct entry to the institution which created the test, in this case the University of Reading, and entry to other universities who may consider the validity and reliability of the test of sufficient standard and reputation for it to be used for direct entry purposes to their own academic courses. In this latter example, the institution which created the bespoke test and other universities that accept the test for direct entry purposes may be subject to an audit visit from the UK Visa and Immigration Department inspectorate to check the comparability of the said test with the Secure English Language Tests. The auditors will also almost certainly consider to what extent the relevant test is benchmarked to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The SELTs covered in this document are IELTS, Pearson Academic and Trinity ISE. Other tests which are covered are TOEFL, MET, TEEP, Cambridge main suite (CAE and CPE), plus school and vocational tests. Further information about individual institutional tests used for pre-sessional exit and institutional direct entry will be added as more information is provided by the relevant test administrators.

Why is there a need for a guide?

A fundamental aspect of language testing or assessment is the use to which test scores are put. Therefore, the end user of a test score is as important as a test developer or administrator in ensuring that a test is valid and reliable. It is, thus, important that all test users develop a degree of understanding of the relationship between test purpose, format and the meaning of test scores in order to set and apply realistic and fair standards.

For the most part this comes down to knowing what tests can and cannot do and considering how language test¹ scores should be used in conjunction with other evidence to enhance the dependability of admissions decisions. When considering the suitability and grading requirements of any particular test, the task of stakeholders can be facilitated by routinely applying a checklist of questions, such as the one on pages 3, 4 and 5.

¹ the terms 'test' / 'examination' / 'exam' are used interchangeably in this guide

What should we consider when selecting assessments for course entry?

Selecting appropriate qualifications for entry and the relevant minimum grades is highly situation-dependent. Differences between institutions, disciplines and the pedagogies of courses mean that each will make different demands on the students' language ability, study skills and content knowledge. Those responsible for selecting and/or creating tests thus need to be aware of the particular language needs of their own students rather than thinking in terms of a prototypical university student.

Language tests also differ in scope, structure and scoring, so that the range of language that is assessed will differ from test to test. This makes direct test and score comparisons difficult. Adopting an entry requirement from a different type of course or from a different institution is therefore not advisable. Because we rarely know the procedures other

institutions or programmes have followed in selecting tests and related scores or the details of their courses, there is a danger of circularity where the only justification for English entry requirements becomes 'that's what everybody accepts'. We strongly discourage this circular approach.

For these reasons, we recommend that advice on tests and admissions criteria should be taken and applied locally and reviewed annually. We recommend that admissions staff, academic departments and EAP practitioners and language assessment experts work together to monitor and track the results of the decisions that they make in order to reflect on and keep a record of the effects of their policies.

What are the key questions?

Mostly importantly perhaps, will the test be considered sufficiently valid and reliable to satisfy a UKVI audit? This became particularly significant with the introduction of the list of SELTs, which are the only tests allowed for entry to pre-sessional courses. Only SELT scores are considered when Tier 4 visas are being issued for international students.

Another key issue is whether a set of test specifications has been developed which outline who the test is designed for, what the test purpose is, how the test is going to be administered, what the test consists of, how the test is going to be marked, how the scores are going to be reported etc.

Various questions which follow should, in fact, be answered in the test specifications and this list of important questions can be used as a basis for developing an institution's own checklist for adopting any test as suitable evidence of language proficiency for direct entry and/or as a pre-sessional exit test, or indeed for creating their own tests for direct entry or as a pre-sessional exit test.

- What elements of language does the test evaluate? (i.e. the UKVI requires evidence of proficiency in all four skills)
- Is the test valid? Does it actually test what it claims to test? What is the test content and what are the assessment tasks?
- How long is the test? (Most tests for this purpose take approximately three hours. A shorter test will be limited in the amount of information it can provide.)
- Does the score report or certificate tell us what we need to know? (Does it provide a breakdown of scores by skill or simply an overall mark?)
- How long is a score valid? In most cases the maximum length of validity is two years.
- At what range of scores does the test discriminate most reliably, in terms of giving an accurate indication of a student's proficiency? How has this range been established?
- What is the evidence that students accepted at a certain grade on this test have sufficient language proficiency to perform satisfactorily on their further course of study?
- Are the processes for applying to take the test, sitting the test and presenting the score report secure?

- What measures are taken to ensure the consistency and reliability of the setting and marking of individual versions of the test?
- How is the score reported to an institution? Is there a reliable and convenient way of checking the legitimacy of scores?
- Does the relevant pool of applicants have sufficient access to test centres?
- What types of language support are available for international students in my institution?

How do we go about setting a minimum entry score?

This process is called standard setting or setting cut scores. It may be undertaken at an institutional level or on a programme by programme basis. Most importantly, it should be viewed as a local process. Test providers do NOT set entry requirements, although many (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS, PTE, Trinity ISE) do provide guidance on how institutions might go about setting cut scores. For specific guidelines for an individual test contact the test provider directly or go to their website. A cut score will need to be set for each test that you choose to accept for admission. This may involve converting raw scores to a grade and/or the CEFR range. For Higher Education purposes this will be in the B2/C1 range in almost all cases.

The standard setting process normally involves putting together a panel of stakeholders ideally made up of:

- admissions staff who will process applications
- academic staff from programmes that receive international students,
- marketing and international staff who can supply information on recruitment targets and relevant pools of applicants
- English for Academic Purposes staff who can offer guidance on language learning and language support opportunities in the institution, or language testing experts within the institution or through organisations such as BALEAP, BAAL, ILTA, EALTA, LTRF or UKALTA. All of these institutions have testing expertise, run testing workshops, host conferences and professional interest meetings (PIMS) dedicated to language testing and assessment issues in general.

To set standards, the panel must consider what students need to be able to do with language and the minimum level of the language required to carry out these activities. Although all university students will need to speak, write, listen and read to some degree in all programmes, the emphasis may differ considerably from one programme to another or across levels of study. This first step, assessing the target test-takers' needs, should be done independent of any specific test. Note that predictive validity, relating to perceived test-takers' needs, really only works for the first semester or so. After that, too many other variables come into play to determine that success or failure is solely due to language proficiency.

Next, the panel should read or listen to sample student performances on various test tasks. For example, it is essential that stakeholders should fully appreciate exactly what an IELTS score of 6.5 actually represents in terms of the students' current proficiency level. They should select which student performances meet the minimum standards set in step one. They then compare these performances to actual test scores received and use this

information to set a cut score. This second step is normally an iterative process that involves plenty of discussion between panellists until agreement is reached. In their deliberations over where to set cut scores, panellists should also take account of the availability of in-session language and skills support for students across the university or on particular degree courses. However, the availability of in-session support should not be used as justification for setting low entry scores.

After completing steps one and two, the panel may recommend that their institution set one cut score for all applicants or that it set a variety of cut scores according to the profile of skills required by particular programmes. For example, a university might set a high score for speaking for students studying in programmes that require a lot of group work or a work placement and a lower score for speaking for students undertaking research degrees.

Including panellists from across the university, ensures that any discussion and decisions take account of factors relating to language learning, academic requirements and information about the international student market. Setting entry requirements that are too lenient can lead to high drop-out levels and student dissatisfaction, not only from the students who find they have inadequate language skills for the course they are undertaking, but also from peers who feel that this hinders course delivery and their own learning experience. On the other hand, setting the bar too high might result in both students and the institution losing out if an able student is unnecessarily barred from entry.

How should minimum entry scores be applied in practice?

When using cut scores, it is important to keep in mind that language test scores have been characterised as exhibiting “inevitable uncertainty” because a range of factors (e.g. tiredness, stress, lack of familiarity with the test format and construct or purpose) prevent any test from being truly precise in its measurement of any person’s language proficiency. Thus, a test score can only give us an approximation of any test taker’s “true” proficiency level. In recognition of this, test providers normally calculate and report a statistic called the Standard Error of Measurement (SEM). The SEM represents the level of confidence that a score user should have in an individual test score. The smaller the SEM in relation to the length of the scale the more reliable the test. A test with a large SEM means that score users can have less confidence in how to interpret any individual score.

The following example illustrates how an admissions office might use the SEM in the process of making an admissions decision. The SEM for an overall score on the iBT TOEFL is +/- 5 points. If a university has set a minimum entry score of 87 and receives an otherwise excellent application from a student with an iBT TOEFL score of 84, a strict interpretation of the cut score would require that the student be rejected. A score interpretation that takes account of the SEM for iBT TOEFL (in this case treating the minimum score as a range between 82-92) alongside all of the other evidence supporting this student’s application may lead to a recommendation that the student be accepted. In line with the advice from most testing organisations, we advise that score users always interpret test scores alongside other admissions evidence and with the SEM in mind.

What is the CEFR?

A revised version of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was issued by the Council of Europe in February 2018 with the added sub-title *Companion Volume with new Descriptors*. This volume includes an updating of the 2001 scales and every EAP department responsible for the development of Academic English language tests are advised to refer to this updated volume as appropriate.

In general, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CEFR) is a document which sets out to describe what learners have to be able to do to use language at various proficiency levels and in various contexts. One aim of the CEFR is to provide a profile of language users' abilities across different types of language use, e.g. reception, interaction and production. As each of these types of language use can be assessed in a variety of ways by different exams, a further aim of the CEFR is to facilitate mutual recognition of language qualifications across Europe in terms of language learning objectives and language learner achievement. Thus, when an examination or test is linked to the CEFR, the test provider uses the common language of the CEFR performance descriptors to provide an indication of what test takers with particular scores can do. The CEFR descriptors do not, however, provide information about any given test's original purpose or the types of tasks used by any test to assess learner language.

This common approach to describing language tests in no way implies that all tests that are linked to the CEFR serve the same purpose or provide the same amount or quality of information about a language learner's ability to perform in a particular language use domain. Stakeholders must refer to documentation (specifications) provided by testing organisations about the purpose, content, validity and reliability of their tests. Only when CEFR descriptors are used alongside information about specific exams and language use contexts do the descriptors become truly meaningful.

The UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) body has set English language entry requirements that they feel are necessary to achieve the goals of immigration policy. Your university needs to set English language entry requirements that match its own goals for international recruitment and international student success. Standards for success at university should be set in relation to the requirements of your own institutional standards and requirements.

The UKVI use of the CEFR levels enables them to refer to language proficiency levels independent of any single test. As long as entry requirements are equal to or higher than those set by the UKVI, universities remain free to set their own English language direct entry standards subject to an audit from the UKVI. In most cases, the level of English required for success at university will exceed the minimum requirements set by the UKVI for immigration purposes. Please refer to the most up to date UKVI Tier 4 of the PBS Policy Guidance for information on the CEFR levels required by the UKVI for immigration purposes by visiting www.gov.uk. Available Information, last updated in February 2020, includes guidance on approved English language tests required when applying for a UK visa. There is also a list of the SELTs and test centres approved by the UKVI

How do UKVI requirements affect the exams or types of assessments of English language that we can accept?

The UKVI has prepared a list of approved English language tests called Secure English Language Tests (SELT). This list was compiled for use with all of the different immigration tiers. Therefore, not all of the tests are suitable for all immigration purposes. For example, some of the tests are not able to provide reliable scores for immigrants needing only low levels of English proficiency, while others do not include content which enables assessment of an applicant's readiness to study at university through the medium of English. Each test on the list should be considered in relation to its purpose and evidence which demonstrates its validity for that purpose.

At present, universities are not limited to using SELT as evidence of applicants' English language proficiency for **direct entry** to further academic studies. However, this is not the case for entry to pre-sessional courses. For direct entry to academic study, universities can use any assessment of their choice provided applicants are assessed on all four skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking and have achieved CEFR B2 level proficiency. It is the responsibility of the university to ensure that the assessment used provides a valid and reliable assessment of prospective students' language proficiency and that there is demonstrable evidence of how the test has been linked to the CEFR. Universities who have their own in-house assessment are encouraged to use the same procedures as those used in these guidelines to ensure that their own assessments are fit for purpose. Again it is important to be aware that all institutions in the UK are subject to a UKVI audit to ensure that their assessment measures meet strict criteria appropriate to the needs of international students, whose first language is not English.

If students require a pre-sessional programme, how do we determine how long it should be?

Unfortunately, this is an area where practice is led more by market forces and anecdotal evidence rather than research. It is extremely difficult to state categorically that X number of teaching hours will lead to a specific score gain on a particular test because of individual differences between learners and differences in learning conditions. It is also dependent on the linguistic challenges posed by different academic disciplines. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that publicised estimates of the number of hours required to move from one level of proficiency to another are not necessarily supported by research evidence.

Those responsible for designing and setting entry requirements for pre-sessional language courses, should take account of the wide variability between learners and should not foster expectations of rapid progress in short periods of time no matter how intensive the provision may be. An essential tool in making sure that the language levels set are realistic and effective is to have formal tracking procedures. This involves following a number of students (the more the better, and from a variety of backgrounds) from arrival through to graduation. Data collection should include English language test scores, marks on degree assignment and rate of progress through the degree. This quantitative data should be supplemented with interviews with tutors and the students themselves. An appraisal of the student's ability to cope or succeed on their course can then be related back to their original

language qualifications and generalisations for future students can be made. For further advice on conducting tracking studies please go to the BALEAP website. Also reference to the BALEAP Can Do statements may prove useful for the same reason. These statements were compiled by team of language and assessment experts from the universities of Glasgow, Manchester, Nottingham Trent and Reading after extensive primary research with academics representing a range academic disciplines from each of these institutions.

Test Digests

The next section provides digests for a range of tests frequently presented as evidence of English proficiency for university entry. Some of these tests have been specifically developed to assess the language proficiency of applicants applying for direct university entry e.g. IELTS, TOEFL, PTE Academic, Trinity ISE, MET and TEEP. Others were originally developed for other purposes, but are now marketed by the testing organisation as suitable for assessing readiness to study at university. There is also a section with comments on the use of some professional or vocational exams and school examinations, both domestic UK examinations and overseas school examinations which may be presented as evidence of language proficiency.

Digest format and contents

To help readers to make more informed decisions about the uses to which each test can be put, we have summarized key information in categories. These cover the test length, structure and content including the language, and skills tested. Each digest is followed by a critique based around the following sets of questions:

Validity: Does the test content (in terms of topics, language and skills) assess what the exam claims to test? Is the test content relevant to the academic context in which students will operate? For example, does the writing task require examinees to synthesize information from texts they have read or listened to, thus reflecting an academic assignment, or is the writing based only on examinee's personal opinions?

Reliability: This relates to the procedures used to ensure that the *construction, delivery, and marking of an exam produces consistent results, and includes a review of the training and monitoring of examiners and markers*. Test providers should carry out on-going empirical research into candidate performance across different administrations and with different test taker populations and produce publicly available reports on their findings.

Test security: Fraud among test takers is well-documented whether it be cases of the impersonation of examinees by substitutes or the presentation of counterfeit certificates. We have therefore included information on test providers' security measures at the point of test administration (e.g. the use of photo ID, finger printing and iris identification) and also in providing results in a way that can be independently verified, directly from the testing organisation. Security is also considerably enhanced if there are a number of versions of the test. Ideally each test will only be administered once but realistically only the major test providers (IELTS, Pearson, Trinity) will have the resources for this. Individual institutions should build a bank of tests which can be rotated for assessment purposes. Once a

particular version of a test has been administered on a number of occasions spread over quite a number of academic years, it should be removed from the bank and be used on only for test practice in the future. In the interests of security, under no circumstances should test-takers be allowed to leave the exam centres with copies of the exam paper and every effort must be made to ensure that candidates have not attempted to photograph or record any part of a test; this can only be ensured through rigorous invigilation procedures. Such procedures should be clearly outlined in the relevant test specifications and must be strictly adhered to.

Overall Evaluation: These guidelines aim to make clear that English proficiency tests cannot be directly compared with each other. When deciding on entry requirements those involved in admissions decisions need to weigh carefully the strengths and weaknesses of each test and its appropriacy as an entry requirement for a particular course of study. Obviously language requirements vary, depending on the subject matter. However, it is important not to underestimate the demands on language even for more mathematical, STEM and practical subjects. The evaluative comments on each test are based on the principles developed by the BALEAP working party on testing based on our collective experience and research.

Guidelines and advice on evaluating additional tests which may be offered as proof of English proficiency

We hope that the format of the test digests will provide a helpful template when evaluating other tests. We advise that admissions departments should contact test providers to request information on similar lines to that provided in these digests. It should be clear that any test whose providers cannot supply verifiable evidence (e.g. copies of the relevant reports) of reliability and security should not be considered appropriate for high stakes direct entry purposes.

When assessing the validity of a test for academic purposes, thought needs to be given to the suitability of the exam content, context and even length. Tests which rely on sentence level exercises and multiple choice items are unlikely to adequately assess a student's preparedness for writing extended academic assignments. A one-hour test is unlikely to provide satisfactory evidence of the student's range of skills. However, different considerations may be appropriate when judging such exams for indirect entry to 'pathway' courses such as pre-sessionals. *Again it is important to stress that having access to detailed exam specifications, marking descriptors and information about marking standardisation procedures is essential before a reasonable decision can be made about the validity, reliability and administrative rigour of any relevant exam.*

The International English Language Testing System

The IELTS test is developed and administered by The British Council, IDP Australia and Cambridge ESOL, and is by far the most frequently submitted English language test for entry to higher education in the UK and Australia. There are two IELTS tests, the Academic and the General Training test, but only the academic test is intended to be suitable as a measure of English proficiency for entry to Further and Higher Education academic programmes.

IELTS Academic Test Characteristics

Reading

Candidates are challenged to read quickly and efficiently (expeditiously) , and manage their time appropriately. There are three different passages with related questions in the IELTS Reading test. The content of the Reading test is different for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training tests.

The IELTS Reading test is designed to assess a wide range of reading skills, including

- reading for the general sense of a passage
- reading for the main ideas
- reading for detail
- understanding inferences and implied meaning
- recognising a writer's opinions, attitudes and purpose
- following the development of an argument

Academic Reading

Format	Three long texts which range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical. These are taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers. They have been selected for a non-specialist audience but are appropriate for people entering university courses or seeking professional registration.
Timing	60 minutes including the transfer time
Number of Questions	40 questions
Task Types	Fill gaps in a passage of written text or in a table, match headings to written text to diagrams or charts, complete sentences, give short answers to open questions, answer multiple choice questions

Marks	Each correct answer receives one mark. Scores out of 40 are converted to the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported in whole and half bands.
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Listening:

The IELTS Listening test is designed to assess a wide range of listening skills, including how well the candidate: understands main ideas and specific factual information, recognises the opinions, attitudes and purpose of a speaker and follows the development of an argument

Academic Listening

Format	<p>Candidates listen to four recordings of native English speakers and then write their answers to a series of questions.</p> <p>Recording 1: a conversation between two people set in an everyday social context.</p> <p>Recording 2: a monologue set in an everyday social context, e.g. a speech about local facilities</p> <p>Recording 3: a conversation between up to four people set in an educational or training context, e.g. a university tutor and a student discussing an assignment.</p> <p>Recording 4: a monologue on an academic subject, e.g. a university lecture</p>
Timing	The IELTS Listening test takes approximately 30 minutes, and there are an extra 10 minutes to transfer answers from the question booklet to the answer sheet.
Number of Questions	40 questions

Task Types	A variety of question types are used, chosen from the following: multiple choice, matching, plan/map/diagram labelling, form/note/table/flow-chart/summary completion, sentence completion.
Marks	Each correct answer receives one mark. Scores out of 40 are converted to the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported in whole and half bands.

Writing:

The IELTS Writing test is designed to assess a wide range of writing skills, including how well candidates write a response appropriately, organise ideas and use a range of vocabulary and grammar accurately.

Academic Writing

Format	Write in a formal style in the IELTS Academic Writing test. In Task 1 candidates are presented with a graph, table, chart or diagram. Candidates are asked to describe, summarise or explain the information in your own words. This might involve describing and explaining data, describing the stages of a process or how something works, or describing an object or event. In Task 2 candidates are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. The selected issues are intended to be interesting and easy to understand.
Timing	The IELTS Writing test takes 60 minutes. Candidates are advised to spend 20 minutes on Task 1, and 40 minutes on Task 2.
Number of Questions	2 questions
Task Types	Two tasks: Task 1 and Task 2. Candidates are expected to write at least 150 words for Task 1 and at least 250 words for Task 2
Marks	The Writing tests are marked by a certificated IELTS examiner. Task 2 is worth twice as much as Task 1 in the IELTS Writing test. Scores are reported in whole and half bands

Speaking:

You will talk to a certified examiner in the IELTS Speaking test. The test is interactive and as close to a real-life situation as a test can get. A variety of accents may be used, and the test will be recorded.

The content of the IELTS Speaking test is the same for both the IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training tests. The test is designed to assess a wide range of skills. The examiner will want to see how well the candidate can: communicate opinions and information on everyday topics and common experiences; to do this you will need to answer a range of questions, speak at length on a given topic using appropriate language, organise ideas coherently, express and justify their opinions and analyse, discuss and speculate about issues.

Format	<p>Part 1: The examiner will introduce him or herself and ask the candidate to introduce themselves and confirm their identity. The examiner asks general questions on familiar topics, e.g. home, family, work, studies and interests. This section is intended to help candidates relax and talk naturally.</p> <p>Part 2: Candidates are given a task card which asks them to talk about a particular topic, including points to include in their talk. Candidates are given one minute to prepare and make notes. They then talk for 1-2 minutes on the topic. They are not interrupted during this time. Candidates are then asked one or two questions on the same topic.</p> <p>Part 3: The examiner asks further questions which are connected to the topic of Part 2. These questions are designed to provide an opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas.</p>
Timing	11-14 minutes
Marks	Candidates are assessed on their performance throughout the test by certificated IELTS examiners. Marks are allocated on the four criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation. Scores are reported in whole and half bands.

The Speaking test is taken on the same day or up to seven days before or after the main test.

Integration of skills: Candidates are not required to integrate the different skills in any tasks.

Scores: A global score between 1 and 9 is awarded, with scores also recorded as a profile, on the same scale, for each module of the test. Scores are reported in full and half bands, e.g. IELTS 6.0 or 6.5. Scores are available within two weeks of the candidate taking the test and are seen as valid for no longer than two years. There are no restrictions on the number of times a candidate can retake the test.

Scores & scoring procedures Reliability scores for reading and listening (the objectively marked modules) are produced annually. Reliability for the writing and speaking are ensured through explicit criteria, benchmarking and examiner evaluation training, Research on the IELTS is available under the Research tab on the IELTS website.

Test security Procedures to ensure candidate identity including photographing candidates. Online verification of results available (TRF).

Availability & accessibility 6,000+ centres worldwide. Offered four times per month in 250 countries. Fees are collected in local currency and are set locally.

Contact details: www.ielts.org

Evaluation & Comment

Although IELTS is the most widely recognized and used and test for direct entry to UK Higher Education, care must be taken in using the test appropriately. The test is seen as most discriminating between Bands 5 and 7; thus, it is best used for discriminating between students who are ready for pre-sessional entry courses and those who may be ready for direct entry. The relationship between IELTS and the CEFR is not entirely clear. The test providers point out that “As IELTS preceded the CEFR, IELTS band scores have never aligned exactly with the CEFR transition points”. On these grounds, they currently suggest that institutions should set a requirement of Band 7 rather than Band 6.5, if they require a high degree of confidence that the applicant is at C1. Further information about IELTS and the CEFR is available at http://www.ielts.org/researchers/common_european_framework.aspx

The main criticism of the IELTS construct is the lack of integration between the skills i.e. reading/listening into writing and/or speaking. Thus the lack of an authentic reading or listening purpose.

Test preparation and test practice resources: Practice papers for students and sample lessons for teachers can be downloaded from the website. Also a catalogue of official published materials including Handbooks for teachers, Official IELTS Practice Materials, Past Paper Packs and research information. There are also a wide variety of commercially produced IELTS preparation books.

Some concerns which have been raised about the test format may be the authenticity of some tasks, in terms of an academic context. For example, Writing Task 1, in which students

are only asked to describe a visual representation, but not asked to give any suggestions or explanations about the data. Task 2 is also the type of essay based purely on opinion that would be less common in academic contexts. The reading texts are realistic in length, but the lack of integration of skills means that the tasks do not generally require the type of authentic responses which might be needed in an academic context.

TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language

TOEFL is developed and administered by ETS, Educational Testing Service, a US-based non-profit organisation. TOEFL is the most frequently submitted English language test for entry to higher education in North America, and is also accepted at many academic institutions worldwide. N.B. It is not currently (February 2020) accepted as a SELT by the UKVI.

Academic Test Characteristics

Skills tested

Exam length: approximately 4 hours

Mode: Entire exam is computer based. Paper-delivered testing is offered only in locations where testing via the internet is not available. The test is closely aligned with the TOEFL iBT® test, but it does not include a Speaking section because of the technology required to capture spoken responses.

Reading:

Time: 60- 90 minutes

3-5 passages 700 words long each

The passages are excerpts from introductory sections of college-level textbooks

12-14 questions for each passage, including prose summary completion, table completion and multiple choice.

Listening:

Time:60-90 minutes

4- 6 excerpts from lectures, some with classroom discussion, 3-5 minutes long with six questions

2- 3 conversations from an informal academic context - each 3 minutes long. Five questions each. Answers are in the form of chart completion and multiple choice.

Writing:

Time: 50 minutes.

Task 1: Time: 20 minutes; integrated task involving Reading/Listening/Writing.

There is a short academic listening and a short reading passage on the same topic. The students have to describe how the two texts relate - one usually involves some sort of critique of the other. Students can access the reading passage during writing.

Task 2: Time: 30 minutes; essay response to a question which invites comment based on personal experience or opinion.

Speaking:

Time: 20 minutes

Two independent questions about familiar topics, where responses are based on opinion or personal experience, integrated questions, where candidates read a short passage, listen to a short related text and then integrate the information in their own words. The content is drawn from academic and campus-based material. This set consists of two Reading/Listening/ Speaking questions and two Listening/Speaking questions with responses based on what was read and heard. Response times allowed are from 45 to 60 seconds for each response. Students listen to conversations or lectures via headset, see text and context-setting visuals on their computer screen and speak into a microphone. There is brief preparation time, depending on the type of question, and then they speak for approximately one minute. Responses are encrypted and then sent electronically to ETS for scoring.

Integration of skills: Some texts or lecture sources are used as a basis for one of the academic writing and 4 of the academic speaking tasks. The listening and reading sections assess these skills with “stand alone” tasks. Brief additional reading and listening texts on a common topic and having a critical relationship with each other provide the input on which one of the two writing questions is based.

Scores and scoring procedures: Each section is scored on a scale of 0-30, giving a total score scale of 0-120. Section scores and total scores are reported in one-point increments to allow for finer distinctions of ability, according to ETS. Reading and listening are scored directly on a 0-30 scale, but Writing and Speaking are scored as bands 1-6 and then converted to a 0-30 scale. ETS recommends that scores are valid for two years.

Students are given a test report with their total score out of 120 and a score out of 30 in each paper. There is also a guidance sheet, interpreting the meaning of their scores in terms of the sub-skills that have been tested and advice for improvement.

Test security: Candidates are photographed and photographs appear on score reports. Students receive a copy of their score report. ETS also sends official score reports with a photograph directly to up to 4 institutions designated by the student, on copy-evident paper or as encrypted electronic files. ETS advises that institutions should never accept score reports provided directly by students as final proof of an applicant’s TOEFL score. On payment, students may designate additional institutions to access score reports, via a verification line, for up to two years after the test is taken, via a password protected account.

Availability and accessibility: The TOEFL Internet-based test (iBT) has been administered worldwide since September 2006. The TOEFL iBT test is offered 30 – 40 times a year at over 4,500 authorized test centres throughout the world. It is available in England and Wales and the Republic of Ireland but not in Northern Ireland or Scotland.

The Paper-based (PBT) test is offered six times a year in areas where internet-based testing is not available. The Computer-based (CBT) ended September 2006 and is longer valid.

Contact details: <http://www.ets.org/toefl> has sections targeted at test takers, institutional users and English teachers. Designated contact email addresses are provided to contact service teams for test-takers, institutions and language teaching providers, respectively.

Test preparation and test practice resources: TOEFL iBT sample questions are available for practice on the TOEFL webpages. ETS/ McGraw Hill publish The Official Guide to the TOEFL Text and a number of major publishers also have test preparation materials available for sale.

Evaluation and Comment

TOEFL is a test with good standards of reliability and security. The marking and test- setting procedures and personnel are vetted and monitored continuously. The test content aims at an academic context through academic related content and the inclusion of integrated skills testing. Extensive research reports and monographs commissioned by ETS on aspects of validity, reliability, impact, institutional and test taker needs can be accessed directly through the Research Link on the TOEFL website. <http://www.ets.org/toefl/research>. Test and data score data summaries are also published on the website.

The very short response times in the speaking test and the lack of opportunity for extended monologue or interaction make this part of the test a questionable indicator of performance. The rubrics used to assess these responses seem to draw rather wide inferences from such restricted speaking opportunities. However, some teachers would argue that these do assess fluency and that when preparing students for TOEFL the short response times encourage teachers to focus on getting students to respond quickly rather than encouraging the lengthy wait times allowed in EFL settings. Quick responses are required if students hope to participate in seminar discussions or group work. The US cultural contexts of the speaking, listening and writing may cause some difficulties for teachers and students unfamiliar with these contexts.

The use of single point scales in the scoring of all the tests and in the total score may imply more accuracy of discrimination in a test taker's performance than is really possible. Recent research sponsored by ETS⁴ to establish correspondence between TOEFL scores and CEFR levels suggests that the test is likely to discriminate users in the ranges B1 to C1, but would lack discrimination above or below this level. The researchers point out that the TOEFL test was not designed to test CEFR levels, but to assess language use in an academic context. These findings emphasise that care must be taken in using the test appropriately as it is best used for discriminating between students who are ready for pre-sessional entry courses and those who may be ready for direct entry.

⁴Tannenbaum, R.J. and Wylie, E.C., Linking English-Language Test Scores on to the Common European Framework of Reference: An Application of Standard-Setting Methodology
TOEFL iBT Research Report TOEFLiBT-06June 2008. ETS, Princeton, NJ: accessed 12.Oct 2010 at <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-08-34.pdf>

TOEFL and U.K. Visas

The TOEFL test continues to be accepted for admissions by many universities and other institutions in the U.K for direct entry only. Each institution sets its own admissions requirements. Before registering for the TOEFL test, applicants should contact the institution(s) where they plan to apply to find out if they accept TOEFL scores and what their specific requirements are.

The **TOEFL iBT®** test is also accepted for Tier 4 student visas under certain conditions, even though it is no longer recognized by the U.K. Home Office as a Secure English Language Test (SELT). .

Applicants for Tier 4 Student Visas: TOEFL iBT® scores can still be used for Tier 4 student visas. A process established by the Home Office allows each university to choose how to assess applicants' English-language abilities. Under this provision, a university may issue a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) for students with scores from English tests that are not on the SELT list, including the TOEFL iBT® test. In order to use TOEFL scores in this way, the following conditions need to be met:

The chosen U.K. university accepts the TOEFL iBT® test for admission purposes. Potential applicants should check the university website, or contact the admissions department directly, to confirm that they accept TOEFL iBT® scores.

The course of study will be at degree level or higher. The test cannot be used for pre-sessional or foundation courses, or foundation degrees.

If an applicant meets the TOEFL iBT® score requirement for university entry and their course of study, they should check the university website for TOEFL iBT® score requirements as each university has different course requirements.

Citizens of European Union (EU) Member Countries

A Tier 4 student visa is not required for students from European Union member countries. EU students may continue to use TOEFL scores at universities in the U.K. that accept the TOEFL test. It is currently not clear to what extent the impact of BREXIT will have on the status of EU students post February 2020.

TOEFL iBT® Test Content

The TOEFL iBT® test is given in English and administered via the internet. It takes about 3 hours total for the 4 sections of the test (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing).

The length of the TOEFL iBT® was shortened in August 2019. There is still a 10-minute break following the Listening section. The Writing section remains the same, with 2 tasks taking a total of 50 minutes. The test is still scored on a 0–30 scale for each section, and 0–120 for the total score.

Combining All 4 Skills: Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing

- Read, listen and then speak in response to a question
- Listen and then speak in response to a question
- Read, listen and then write in response to a question

TOEFL iBT Test Sections

Section	Time Limit	Questions	Tasks
Reading	54–72 minutes	30–40 questions	Read 3 or 4 passages from academic texts and answer questions.
Listening	41–57 minutes	28–39 questions	Listen to lectures, classroom discussions and conversations, then answer questions.
Break	10 minutes	—	—
Speaking	17 minutes	4 tasks	Express an opinion on a familiar topic; speak based on reading and listening tasks.
Writing	50 minutes	2 tasks	Write essay responses based on reading and listening tasks; support an opinion in writing.

Three of the 4 tasks of the Speaking test are integrated.

Reports

Scores are posted online approximately 6 days after the test date. The PDF version of the score report is available to download within 8 days after the test. Score reports are also mailed (if a paper copy is requested) and sent to the selected institutions or agencies within 11 days after the test date.

Practice tests

A TOEFL iBT free practice tests are available. It features a full test with all 4 sections and real past test questions. Answers are provided in the Reading and Listening sections, and sample Speaking responses are provided, plus sample Writing responses.

Security

The evidence suggests that stringent efforts are enforced to ensure security at the test centres.

Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic)

Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) is a computer-based international English language test developed and administered by Pearson Education. The test aims to measure the test takers' academic English language competency in Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing.

Skills tested

Exam length: Approximately 3 hours

Mode: On-line (optional 10 minute break between part 2 reading and part 3 writing).

Speaking and Writing:

Total time for both skills: 77-93 minutes

Speaking consists of free speaking in the form of a personal introduction, (not scored but sent to institutions with score report). Scored tasks are: describing an image, such as a map or diagram; integrated speaking tasks: reading aloud a short passage (up to 60 words), repeating a heard sentence, re-telling a lecture (of about 90 seconds) and answering a short question with a single word or a few words.

Writing:

Task 1: Summary: reading and summarising in one sentence an academic style of text of up to 300 words.

Task 2: Time: 20 minutes: Essay: Prompt 2-3 written sentences. Write a 200–300 word essay on a given topic.

Reading:

Time: 32-41 minutes

5 texts in an academic style, from between 80- 300 words. The tasks consist of multiple choice questions on content and tone of two texts, reordering paragraphs, filling in gaps.

Listening:

Time:45-47 minutes

There are a variety of audio prompts, in academic contexts and/or styles lasting from 3-5 seconds for the dictation to 90 seconds for the mini lectures. Each is heard only once. Tasks include: writing a 50-70 word summary after listening to a recording (10 minutes), multiple-choice question on the content or tone of the recording by selecting one or more responses, select the missing word from a list of options, selecting the paragraph that best summarizes the recording, highlighting incorrect words in the transcript of a recording, typing a sentence that has been heard.

Integration of skills: The integration of skills is used widely in the test and although the sections are flagged according to the predominant skills focus, individual items are flagged according to the skills involved: e.g. listening and writing, listening and speaking.

Scores and scoring procedures: The score report provides three types of scores: Overall Score, (range 10-90 points); scores for Communicative Skills (i.e. Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing), which are based on all items that assess these skills, thus making use of information from the items requiring integration of skills. The range for each skill is 0-90 points. Scores of 0-90 points are also awarded for Enabling skills (i.e. Grammar, Oral Fluency, Pronunciation, Spelling, Vocabulary and Written Discourse).

PTE Academic scores are delivered online to test takers, within five business days, via personal login to their on-line account and to registered institutions via their secure login. Test takers can make their scores available to an unlimited number of institutions of their choice. Scores are displayed both numerically and graphically.

Test security: Measures include video and audio monitoring in test centres and biometrics, including digital photographs and palm vein scanning. Institutions can also access the unscored personal introduction in the speaking section which provides an additional check. Pearson claim to replenish questions continually and randomize test forms to minimize fraud and inappropriate preparation methods. Score reports are only available online through secure logins, as explained above.

Availability and accessibility: The test is available in 186 test centres, including China, India, USA, Japan, South Korea, Australia, the UK, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Canada. Although there are forms available for students requiring scribes or practical assistance there is no obvious link for students who may have a disability.

Test preparation and test practice resources :

Scored and unscored online practice tests are available and there is also an Official Guide to Pearson Test of English Academic (with CD-ROM) in paperback.

Skills pod for teachers offers online lesson ideas and skills pod for test-takers offers online advice and practice, including advice on using commercially available resources (e.g. the range of advanced learner's dictionaries) as well as Pearson's own resources. A Test Taker Handbook is also downloadable in Chinese, Korean and Japanese as well as English.

Evaluation and Comment

Standards of security and reliability and user support are obviously a high priority for the providers. Its strengths as a test for academic purposes include the clearly academic focus of its text base, in terms of texts which display, on the whole, academic style and vocabulary. This focus is obtained through the use of their own 37 million word academic corpus. The separation of communicative and enabling skills in rating and reporting is also a useful innovation, as it gives a deeper diagnostic value to the score report, as does the oral personal statement, although that obviously allows for a high degree of rehearsal. The amount of extended writing required is somewhat less than for other major tests and the reading texts are also quite short compared to others.

A major concern about this new test may be the use computer rating for the written and spoken performance as this is a departure from traditional testing practice. However Pearson claim high correlation between human and machine marking, at 0.96, and that the machine-generated scores explain 92% of the variance of the human ratings. They will continue to rescore randomly selected samples from live administrations of PTE Academic to monitor the accuracy of the automatic ratings. Information about their validity and reliability and the automated scoring procedures as well as other internal research and information about the academic corpus, PICAE, were available at <http://pearsonpte.com>

It is worth checking the research notes section of their website as a number of studies have been carried out since 2011.

Trinity ISE: Integrated Skills in English

Overview:

ISE consists of two modules - Reading & Writing and Speaking & Listening - thus according to Trinity 'reflecting the way that skills are used together in real life'.

Reading & Writing module

	ISE foundation	ISE 1	ISE 11	ISE 111
CEFR level	A2	B1	B2	C1
Time	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours
Task 1 long reading	300 words 15 questions	400 words 15 questions	500 words 15 questions	700 words 15 questions
Task 2 multi-text reading	3 texts 300 words 15 questions	4 texts 400 words 15 questions	4 texts 500 words 15 questions	4 texts 700 words 15 questions
Task 3 reading into writing	70-100 words	100-130 words	150-180 words	200-230 words
Task 4 extended writing	70-100 words	100-130 words	150-180 words	200-230 words

Speaking & Listening module

	ISE foundation	ISE 1	ISE 11	ISE 111
CEFR level	A2	B1	B2	C1
Total test time	13 minutes	18 minutes	20 minutes	25 minutes
Topic task	4 minutes	4 minutes	4 minutes	8 minutes
Collaborative task	-	-	4 minutes	4 minutes
Conversation task	2 minutes	2 minutes	2 minutes	3 minutes
Independent listening task	6 minutes	10 minutes	8 minutes	8 minutes
Examiner admin time	1 minute	2 minutes	2 minutes	2 minutes

ISE test levels and the CEFR

ISE x 4 skills reading, writing, speaking, listening	CEFR	
ISE 1V	Distinct merit pass	C2
ISE 111	Distinction, merit*, pass*	C1
ISE 11	Distinction, merit*, pass*	B2
ISE 1	Distinction, merit*, pass*	B1
ISE foundation	Distinction, merit*, pass*	A2

For more information see trinitycollege.com/CEFR

*Each skill is reported as a pass, merit or distinction on the certificate although the ISE qualification is either passed or failed
Both modules (Reading & Writing and Listening and Speaking) must be passed in to order to be awarded an ISE qualification

CEFR alignment and a guide to ISE level requirements for entrance to courses delivered in English. This may vary between institutions. Institutions determine their own minimum ISE achievement levels in line with course specifications and the anticipated English language demands placed on students. See below:-

	ISE 11 B2	ISE11 B2	ISE 11 B2	ISE 111 C1	ISE 111 C1	ISE 111 C1
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Level of achievement in all 4 skills	Pass	Merit	Distinction	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Academic courses-Advanced level	Unlikely to be suitable	Likely to be suitable	Likely to be suitable	Likely to be suitable	Suitable	suitable
Academic courses - Entry level	Likely to be suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable
Vocational training - advanced level	Likely to be suitable	Likely to be suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable
Vocational training - Entry level	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable

Evaluation

There is a collaboration between Trinity Lancaster Spoken Learner Corpus, which is a collaboration between Trinity and the Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) at Lancaster University.

The listening and speaking parts of the test are integrated which is as they claim an attempt at authenticity and certainly this is reasonable. The same applies to the integration of the reading and writing sections of the test.

The Michigan English Test (MET)

The Michigan English Test (MET) is an examination for test takers who want to evaluate their general English language proficiency in social, academic, and workplace contexts. Listening recordings and reading passages reflect everyday interactions in an American-English-speaking environment. *The MET was formerly called the MELAB.*

Level

The exact cut scores between adjacent CEFR levels, based on research conducted by Michigan Language Assessment, are available in Interpreting Scaled Scores in Relation to the CERF Levels. Selected CEFR performance descriptors illustrate what test takers should be able to do at each level.

Format

MET Listening, Reading, and Grammar

A paper-and-pencil test that contains 100 multiple-choice questions in two sections:

Section I: Listening

50 questions assessing the ability to understand conversations and talks in social, educational, and workplace contexts

Section II: Reading and Grammar

20 questions testing a variety of grammar structures

30 reading questions assessing the ability to understand a variety of texts in social, educational, and workplace contexts

Vocabulary is assessed within the listening and reading sections.

MET Speaking

The MET Speaking Test measures an individual's ability to produce comprehensible speech in response to a range of tasks and topics. It is a structured, one-on-one interaction between examiner and test taker that includes five distinct tasks. The tasks require test takers to describe information about a picture and about themselves, give a supported opinion, and state the advantages and disadvantages of a particular situation.

The five tasks are designed to give test takers the opportunity to speak on a number of different topics.

Task 1: The test taker describes a picture.

Task 2: The test taker talks about a personal experience on a topic related to what is seen in the picture.

Task 3: The test taker gives a personal opinion about a topic related to the picture.

Task 4: The test taker is presented with a situation and will have to explain some advantages and disadvantages related to that situation.

Task 5: The test taker is asked to give an opinion on a new topic and to try to convince the examiner to agree with the idea.

The MET Speaking Test takes approximately ten minutes. Ratings will take into account the fluency, accuracy, and clarity of speech in addition to the ability to effectively complete each task. The final rating is based on answers to all five parts of the test.

MET Writing

The MET Writing Test designed is to evaluate the ability to write in English. The test is intended for English language learners who range in ability from the high beginner to low advanced levels (CEFR levels A2–C1). In order to measure the writing proficiency of individuals at these differing levels of ability, the MET Writing Test requires test takers to produce written language at the sentence level, the paragraph level, and to produce a short essay. The MET Writing Test consists of two separate tasks:

Task 1

In Task 1, the test taker is presented with three questions on a related theme. These three questions require test takers to respond with a series of sentences that connect ideas

together. Task 1 is aimed at developing writers who can write sentences but may struggle to produce more than a paragraph.

Task 2 In Task 2, the test taker is presented with a single writing prompt. The task requires the test taker to produce a short essay. Task 2 is aimed at more proficient writers and evaluates the test taker's ability to write an essay that consists of several paragraphs.

The MET Writing Test evaluates the ability to construct a sentence, a paragraph, and a short essay in English. The two tasks take 45 minutes to complete.

The test taker's response to the two tasks are evaluated for several key writing skills; for example, range of vocabulary, connection of ideas, grammatical accuracy, and use of mechanics.

The MET and the CEFR

The MET is aimed at levels A2 to C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Read more about this on the Interpreting Scaled Scores in Relation to the Common European Framework Levels flyer.

Scoring

All test takers are required to record their answers to the paper-and-pencil test on specially designed answer sheets, which are then automatically scanned. Each correct answer contributes to the final score for each section, and there are no points deducted for wrong answers. Test takers receive a scaled score with a maximum of 80 for sections I and II, and a final score for these two sections; the final score is the total of the two sections. Scores for the speaking test are reported separately, also on a scale of 0–80.

Scaled Score

The MET does not have a pass score. The scaled score is calculated using an advanced mathematical model based on Item Response Theory. The scaled scores are not percentages. They do not show how many items you answered correctly, but rather where you stand on the language ability scale. This ensures that test scores are comparable across different administrations and fair to all test takers, regardless of when they took the test. (See Interpreting MET Scaled Scores in Relation to the Common European Framework Levels)

Results

MET scores represent a test taker's English language proficiency at the time the test was taken and are valid as long as the test taker's level of proficiency does not change. Because language proficiency can increase or decrease over time, score users are advised to consider the test taker's experience with English since the time of the test administration as well as the test scores themselves.

Each person who takes the MET receives a Michigan Language Assessment score report. The score report includes test taker details and the scaled score for each section of the test, ranging from 0 to 80.

A score report includes a final score, which is the average of all sections of the test taken by the candidate

For full information including example papers, writing and speaking scales contact michiganassessment.org

Test of English for Educational Purposes (TEEP) Test Digest

The TEEP is being described here as an example of the detail required of a 'small scale' test to convince both the UKVI and other academic institutions of its robustness in terms of validity and reliability. TEEP was created and is administered by The International Study and Language Institute (ISLI) at the University of Reading as a test for direct entry to UK universities (whether as a stand-alone test or a pre-sessional exit test). As stated above the test details are included here as an example of the level of detail expected by potential test-takers, agents, or other HE institutions who may decide to accept the test for direct entry. It is anticipated that further tests created by individual institutions can be added to this document.

The TEEP originated from an extensive study carried out into the Language Problems of Overseas Students in Tertiary Education in the UK (Weir 1983) in response to a growing need to judge the suitability of placing non-native English speaking students on UK university degree courses and was adopted by the AEB (Associated Examining Board, now AQA) during the 1980s. It was redeveloped into its modern format, in 2001 by Professor Barry O'Sullivan and Professor John Slaght and further modified and extended to include a focus task and speaking section by John Slaght and Bruce Howell circa 2008. It can be used as a stand-alone UK university entry test; this use expanded gradually both in the UK and overseas until 2011 when UKVI regulations excluded TEEP and any other 'small scale' tests from its list of qualifications for obtaining certain types of visa. Although TEEP can at the time of writing be used for direct entry to any UK university which supports its use and will be valid in this situation to obtain a visa, its use is mostly internal at the University of Reading. TEEP is an example of an in-house test which its administrators consider developed, comprehensive, and objective enough to mean that it is not necessary to employ any external assessment on the Pre-sessional English programme. However, like all HE institutions, the University of Reading and thus the TEEP is subject to UKVI approval through an audit.

There are two test levels: postgraduate and undergraduate. The undergraduate level used for University of Reading purposes only.

Academic Test Characteristics

Skills tested

Exam length: 3 hours

Mode: Paper based

Language Knowledge

Time: 25 minutes

Undergraduate and postgraduate students complete the same LK version.

There are 50 questions in 4-option multiple-choice format. The test is a mix of grammar and related areas such as vocabulary, syntax and linking words. There is an approximately even distribution of 10 pre-determined language 'areas', attempting to ensure coverage of all relevant grammatical challenges.

Focus Task:

Time: 10 minutes

This occurs in both the undergraduate and postgraduate versions. It is an unassessed, 'brainstorming', i.e. schemata raising exercise and its aim is also to provide an authentic purpose to the topic-linked reading and listening sections of the exam. The essay title for the final part is presented, plus space for notes.

Reading:

Time: 35 minutes

The **postgraduate version** consists of one passage 1,000-1,200 words.

Edited texts from authentic academic sources. General academic style; but not highly technical language.

The first section is matching heading to paragraphs to check global understanding. Then a series of short-answer questions testing both general and detailed understanding of the text. Candidates are not marked down for spelling or grammar errors (unless serious). Final section is ordering the final paragraph (which is missing from the source) with the focus on coherence and cohesion.

Undergraduate version: Reading

Time: 45 minutes

There are two parts. Part one tests understanding of a document e.g. email or letter; Part two is a longer (circa 800 word) text more in line with the postgraduate version. There are circa 28 questions in total.

Listening:

Time: approximately 30 minutes

The **postgraduate version** consists of one 'lecture extract', heavily edited from authentic sources, 10-13 minutes long; played

once. Split into 4 sections. A series of short-answer questions tests both general and detailed understanding of the text. Some gap-filling or multiple choice questions. Candidates are not marked down for spelling or grammar errors (unless serious).

Undergraduate version

There are two parts. Part one consists of 4 short conversations. Part 2 is a longer lecture style talk. Candidates hear both parts twice. There is 3 minutes allocated for reading the questions at the beginning of the test.

Writing

Time: 1 hour

The **postgraduate version** is an essay on the topic given in the Focus Task, and related to the listening and reading texts. Candidates are expected to use their own ideas as well as ideas retrieved from the reading and listening sections and write in a formal, academic style. All papers are kept until the end, to allow reference to reading and listening sections.

The undergraduate version consists of two parts. In part one candidates respond to the contents of an email, letter, or memo. In part two, the task is similar to the postgraduate version and may be a report, a description of a process, a cause effect response etc.

Speaking:

Time: 22 minutes for 2 candidates

This section was added to the test format in 2008. It is taken separately from the rest of the test. Bot postgraduates and undergraduates are the same for the Speaking test.

The interlocuter, candidate A and candidate B speak, while the assessor observes.

The different parts of the Speaking test are linked to a common topic. There is a file of multiple topics to ensure candidates cannot inform and “prepare” other candidates for the topic. The candidates are given time to read instructions and clarify procedures. The pair discuss a ‘focus question’ to introduce the topic. Each candidate is then given information for a role, supporting one side of the argument. Five bullet points are given to each candidate: each gives a talk (monologues – 3 minutes each) based on these points plus any others they have added. Candidates are then given a scenario with 3 options and discuss possible solutions (dialogue - 4 minutes). In the final stage, the ‘focus question’ is revisited (dialogue – 2 minutes). The interlocuter encourages interaction but tries to stay out of discussions as much as possible. Up to 30% of the 22 minutes is silence, e.g. candidate reading instruction cards and making notes. The examiner gives grades for monologue (global), dialogue (global), plus three analytical criteria: spoken fluency, accuracy and range of grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation/intelligibility. The interlocuter manages the test but also makes global assessments (not analytical).

Integration of skills: The whole basis of the focus task-reading-listening-writing is its topic-linked structure. Reading, Listening and Writing topics are all related. Candidates are expected to use their own ideas as well as ideas retrieved from the reading and listening sections when completing the writing section of the test. Another feature of the TEEP is the emphasis on time management resulting from the integration of the reading, listening and writing sections where students retain all three sections of the test until the end and although they are advised by the chief invigilator to move on to the next section of the test this is not enforced. The theory behind this is that time management is a key skill that students need to acquire/develop in preparation for their future academic studies.

Scores and scoring procedures

Language Knowledge: Scan-read answer sheet

The raw score is converted to one of three ranks ‘below average’, ‘average’, ‘above average’ – based on data collected from current and past administrations – average referring to the “average pre-sessional English student level.”

Reading and Listening: There is double-marking by trained academic staff plus moderation. Keys to short answer questions are by definition open to debate, but are developed with expert agreement and on occasion altered when a suggested change is (near) unanimous.

taken. All scripts are double-marked by trained academic staff plus moderation. Final decisions about responses are made by the principal examiner.

Speaking: There is a standardisation session held before every administration. There are five criteria: Presenting ideas and information/Interactional skills/Fluency/Accuracy and Range/Intelligibility – each scored on a 9-band scale, including half-bands. The overall score calculation is an average of the five bands, with a slight weighting towards the two global bands.

Overall: A 9-band scale, including half-bands. In the case of borderline scores (.25 or .75 calculations), Language Knowledge results act as a decider: 'Above Average' round up; otherwise round down.

The 0-9 scale was brought into use in 2001 and was designed to be 'in line' with IELTS – therefore the default comparison of scores is intended to correspond - something the test providers themselves are not always happy with but the legacy remains.

Test security

Every administration is overseen by University of Reading academic staff. All candidates must show passport ID and copies are taken. Invigilation is strict (detailed instructions are given and there are 'floaters' who check everything is running as planned). Certificates are signed in blue, stamped and embossed. Queries direct to the TEEP team are invited. Availability and accessibility

Held at Reading (UK) on 8 dates each year. (Pencil and paper only.)

Held in other locations under special arrangement and supervised by both University of Reading and local staff.

Test preparation and test practice resources

3 practice tests plus advice is available on the website. Teaching course books are available from the University of Reading (these are not designed for self-study). No other publisher currently produces material for the TEEP.

Contact details Fiona Orel/ Anna Ziomek,, International Study and Language Institute, University of Reading

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Marks are transferred to an answer sheet, which is then scan-read. Raw scores are converted to 9-band scale, including half-bands – based on trialling results plus past performances (each conversion will be version-dependent).

Integration of skills: The whole basis of the focus task-reading-listening-writing is its topic-linked structure. Reading, Listening and Writing topics are all related. Candidates are expected to use their own ideas as well as ideas retrieved from the reading and listening sections when completing the writing section of the test. Another feature of the TEEP is the emphasis on time management resulting from the integration of the reading, listening and writing sections where students retain all three sections of the test until the end and although they are advised by the chief invigilator to move on to the next section of the test this is not

enforced. The theory behind this is that time management is a key skill that students need to acquire/develop in preparation for their future academic studies.

Scores and scoring procedures

Language Knowledge: Scan-read answer sheet

The raw score is converted to one of three ranks ‘below average’, ‘average’, ‘above average’ – based on data collected from current and past administrations – average referring to the “average pre-sessional English student level.”

Reading and Listening: There is double-marking by trained academic staff plus moderation. Keys to short answer questions are by definition open to debate, but are developed with expert agreement and on occasion altered when a suggested change is (near) unanimous. All scripts are double-marked by trained academic staff plus moderation. Final decisions about responses are made by the principal examiner.

Speaking: There is a standardisation session held before every administration. There are five criteria: Presenting ideas and information/Interactional skills/Fluency/Accuracy and Range/Intelligibility – each scored on a 9-band scale, including half-bands. The overall score calculation is an average of the five bands, with a slight weighting towards the two global bands.

Writing: A standardisation session is held before every administration. There are three criteria: Content/Organisation and Argument/Grammar and Vocabulary – each is scored on a 9-band scale, including half-bands – the overall score is an average of the three. If the two markers’ grades are only 0.5-band apart, the higher grade is used; otherwise an average is

Overall: A 9-band scale, including half-bands. In the case of borderline scores (.25 or .75 calculations), Language Knowledge results act as a decider: ‘Above Average’ round-up; otherwise round down.

The 0-9 scale was brought into use in 2001 and was designed to be ‘in line’ with IELTS – therefore the default comparison of scores is intended to correspond - something the test providers themselves are not always happy with but the legacy remains.

Test security

Every administration is overseen by University of Reading academic staff. All candidates must show passport ID and copies are taken. Invigilation is strict (detailed instructions are given and there are ‘floaters’ who check everything is running as planned). Certificates are signed in blue by the test administrator, stamped and embossed. Queries direct to the TEEP team are invited.

Availability and accessibility

Held at Reading (UK) on at least 8 dates each year. (Pencil and paper only.)

Held in other locations under special arrangement and supervised by both University of Reading and local staff.

Test preparation and test practice resources

3 practice tests plus advice is available on the website. Teaching course books are available from the University of Reading (these are not designed for self-study). No other publisher currently produces material for the TEEP.

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Evaluation and Comment

The test providers' aim is to test academic language and skills as far as is practical in examination format. Conceding that the TEEP does not cover all EAP skills, the test providers justify this on the grounds that no single test can (Howell & Slaght, 2007). The Focus Task and pauses in the Speaking test attempt to provide candidates with time for schemata building. The Reading section time limit encourages expeditious reading, focusing only on the information that is required to complete the tasks. The format of the sources is (quasi-academic). The essay task is allotted a full hour to encourage planning, synthesising sources with own ideas, and use of referencing. The structure of the 'integrated' tests of reading, listening and writing encourages good time management. Both the 'integrated' reading, listening and writing test, and the Speaking test have a topic theme which is built on, rather than switching topics across tasks and sections.

The Language Knowledge section is justified as being both a 'warmer' (an easy start, in terms of format) and provides useful information for decision-making with borderline students.

All the above points are to be commended – the test providers are attempting to deliver a test which taps into 'EAP' rather than simply English language. The reportedly rigorous marking standards, including regular standardisation sessions are also to be commended. The meticulous processes described with invigilating and marking imply that the test is taken very seriously. TEEP has a good reputation among a widening circle of EAP experts, though this is mainly based on networking, trust and anecdotal rather than hard evidence (though there have been a considerable number of presentations at conferences).

Other criticisms that could be held against TEEP are:

- it may be too topic-dependent – e.g. if a Politics student meets a topic such as business practices, they may perceive that the test is biased against them;
- there is an over-reliance on short-answer questions;
- the once-only listening for the postgraduate level test is not currently popular (for further information consult the literature, particularly the work of John Field (CRELLA) **but** the lecture part of the undergraduate test is heard twice. A further criticism is the relatively short time for the reading section thus limiting the range of skills tested; the undergraduate reading test is 15 minutes longer at 45 minutes.
 - not enough preparation material is available (for external candidates) although the Garnet Education EAS series (2012) for preessional courses have been written by University of Reading staff and are specifically tailored to match the skills relevant to the TEEP. Revised editions of the Garnet Academic Reading and Academic Writing are planned for 2020.

Password English Language Tests

Password English language tests are designed and academically managed by CRELLA (the Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment), a research group involved in the development and validation of many of the world's most renowned English language assessments including IELTS and the Cambridge suite.

The tests are formally aligned to the CEFR .

Password Reading

Password Reading consists of five sections. In each section, there is one reading task to be completed. Test-takers have 1 hour and 15 minutes to complete all tasks.

Password Writing

Password Writing assesses a test-taker's ability to write an essay. Test-takers are presented with a choice of two essay titles to choose from and are given instructions regarding length and content. The test takes 30 minutes.

Password Listening

Password listening consists of five sections. In each section, there are one or more listening tasks to be completed. Test-takers will hear the recording twice. The second time they hear the recording the question(s) will appear. Once test-takers press the play button, it is not possible to pause or restart the recording. Notes can be made to help prepare answers. Test-takers have 1 hour to complete the five sections.

Password Speaking

Password Speaking has five sections with one or more speaking tasks (questions) in each, simply answered by speaking into the microphone. There is about the same amount of time available to prepare answers as there is to speak. Notes can be made to help prepare answers. The test takes 20 minutes.

Password Knowledge

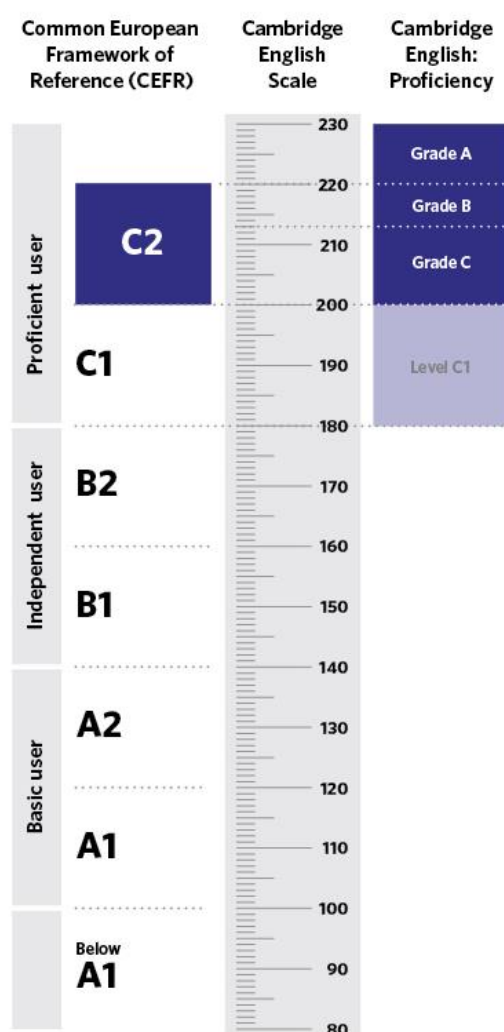
Password Knowledge is a sophisticated test of English language grammar, vocabulary and reading. It consists of five sections and takes 1 hour to complete.

Evaluation

CRELLA is a leader in all areas of English language assessment. Please check the CRELLA website for research into the validity of the test carried out by the CRELLA team headed by Professor Tony Green.

Cambridge English: Advanced (CPE)

The Cambridge CPE is one of a suite of Cambridge English tests which covers all four language skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking and a fifth test component ‘Use of English’ designed to assess such features as morphology, syntax and discourse structure. The Use of English section of the test has been combined with the test of Reading since the whole test was revised in 2013. The test components cover a range of tasks designed to assess the test taker’s overall ability to communicate effectively in English and is intended to represent Common European Framework Level C2, learners are expected to be ‘approaching the linguistic competence of an educated native speaker’ and ‘able to cope with high-level academic work’ (CPE Handbook). The table below is representation of how the CPE is benchmarked against the CERF and gives an indication of the scoring system.



Exam Format (since 2013)

Paper	Content	Purpose
Reading & Use of English 90 minutes	7 parts/53 questions	Shows you can deal confidently with different types of text, such as fiction and non-fiction books, journals, newspapers and manuals.

Writing 90 minutes	2 parts	Requires you to be able to write a variety of text types, such as essays, reports and reviews.
Listening 40 minutes	4 parts/30 questions	Requires you to be able to follow and understand a range of spoken materials, such as lectures, speeches and interviews.
Speaking 16 minutes per pair of candidates	3 parts	Tests your ability to communicate effectively in face-to-face situations.

Integration of skills: There is no explicit assessment of integrated skills in the CPE exam.

Test security: Exam papers are prepared, printed and despatched under secure conditions. All Cambridge ESOL Authorised Test Centres have to follow a detailed code of practice to ensure high standards of security throughout the testing process, from registration to the recording of results; certificates are printed on security-enhanced paper and include other concealed features to prevent forgery and malpractice. The authenticity of certificates can be checked by using Cambridge ESOL's free Online Verification Service.

Availability and accessibility: CPE is offered in March, May, June and December. Candidates must enter through a recognised centre. The test is taken in around 90 countries worldwide, with the majority in Europe and South America.

Test preparation and test practice resources:

A number of coursebooks and practice materials are available from publishers. Care should be taken to ensure that coursebooks and practice materials selected accurately reflect the content and format of the examination.

Past papers and examination reports

Cambridge ESOL produces past examination papers, for practice, and examination reports, providing a general view of candidates' performance overall and on each paper, and guidance on the preparation of candidates.

Evaluation and Comment

CPE is a well-respected test of English with high standards of reliability and security. The marking and test-setting procedures are robust and examiners are routinely monitored to ensure reliability. Although around 36% of the candidates for CPE report that they are taking the test 'for study', the focus of the test itself is general in nature. While test takers at this level will have a high level of general language proficiency appropriate for most degree programmes, the CPE does not provide an assessment of specific academic or study skills. This is a well-regarded test for general communicative purposes with extensive research to support its validity, reliability and impact for that stated purpose.

Cambridge ESOL offer the following 'Can Do' statements to indicate the typical abilities of a test taker at this level in a study context:

- Listening and speaking – 'CAN understand colloquial asides and cultural allusions'.
- Reading and Writing – 'CAN access all sources of information quickly and reliably. CAN make accurate and complete notes during the course of a lecture, seminar or tutorial'. (CPE Handbook). This is a far from comprehensive list of the skills needed to cope with the demands of a degree programme and the research for these claims is based solely on self-

report data from test-takers most of whom are not preparing for further study. The CPE does not specifically assess the ability to make notes in a lecture or seminar, so this claim is, arguably, questionable.

The exam was revised in 2013, with the aim of making it more suitable for Higher Education purposes. This includes a compulsory essay based on summarizing and evaluating two reading texts. Given the high level of language proficiency required at this level (the CPE is intended to discriminate between candidates at the C1 and C2 levels), it is reasonable to assume that CPE test takers achieving a pass grade will not find language to be a barrier to coping with the demands of most English-medium degree programmes. Thus, it would be unnecessary to set CPE as a minimum entry requirement for universities or programmes. These can be accessed via: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/assets/pdf/exams/cpe/cpe-bulletin-4.pdf>

Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE)

Exam format

C1 Advanced is a thorough test of all areas of language ability (cambridgeenglish.org)

The updated exam (for exam sessions from January 2015) is made up of four papers developed to test English language skills.

The Speaking test is taken face to face, with two candidates and two examiners. According to the online description this creates a more realistic and reliable measure of your ability to use English to communicate (cambridgeenglish.org)

Integration of skills: There is no explicit assessment of integrated skills in the CAE exam, although writing task 1 is based on written input.

Scores and scoring procedures: The statements of results includes the grades awarded, a graphical display of the candidate's performance in each paper and a standardised score out of 100 which allows candidates to see exactly how they performed.

Grades: A = 80–100 marks; B = 75–79 marks; C = 60–74 marks; Grade D = 55–59; E = 54 marks or below. The overall CAE grade is based on the total score gained by the candidate in all five papers. It is not necessary to achieve a satisfactory level in all five papers in order to pass the examination.

Test security: Exam papers are prepared, printed and despatched under secure conditions. All Cambridge ESOL Authorised Test Centres follow a detailed code of practice which ensures the highest standards of security throughout the testing process, from registration to the recording of results; certificates are printed on security-enhanced paper and include other concealed features to prevent forgery and malpractice. The authenticity of certificates can be checked by using Cambridge ESOL's free Online Verification Service.

Availability and accessibility: The CAE is offered at least once per month from February to December. Some administrations are paper-based and others are computer-based. Candidates must enter through a recognised centre.

Test preparation and test practice resources:

A number of coursebooks and practice materials are available from publishers. Most coursebooks will need to be supplemented; care should be taken to ensure that coursebooks and practice materials selected accurately reflect the content and format of the examination.

Past papers and examination reports

Cambridge ESOL produces past examination papers for practice, and examination reports, providing a general view of candidates' performance overall and on each paper, and guidance on the preparation of candidates.

Evaluation and Comment

CAE is a well-respected test of English with high standards of reliability and security. The marking and test-setting procedures are robust and examiners are routinely monitored to ensure reliability. Although around 24% of candidates take CAE 'for further study', the focus of the exam is itself is general in nature. Cambridge ESOL offer the following 'Can Do' statements to indicate the typical abilities of a test taker at this level in a study context:

- Speaking and listening, 'Can follow up questions by probing for more detail. CAN make critical remarks/express disagreement without causing offence';
- Reading and writing 'CAN scan texts for relevant information and grasp main topic of text. CAN write a piece of work whose message can be followed throughout'.

While test takers achieving a good pass grade at CAE are likely to have a level of language proficiency appropriate for most degree programmes, the test does not assess specific academic or study skills. In particular, the writing tasks bear little resemblance to the kind of writing tasks students on a degree programme are likely to be required to produce as they are based on short texts of around 200 – 250 words and covering mostly general text types such as letters, proposals, reports and articles. This is a well-regarded test for general communicative purposes with extensive research to support its validity, reliability and impact for its stated purpose.

Note that FCE (Cambridge English: First) is sometimes presented for direct entry. However, the focus of the test and its content are general in nature rather than aimed specifically at an academic context; test takers achieving a pass grade at FCE are unlikely to have a level of language proficiency appropriate for most degree programmes. However, FCE may be appropriate for assessing the general English language proficiency of applicant for foundation year programmes or for long term pre-sessional courses.

Cambridge C1 Business Higher

Developed and administered by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), the Business Higher examination is aimed at individuals who wish to study a

business-related field and at employers who wish to gauge their employees English language level. The content includes business-related topics but does not require specialist knowledge or skills. There are three stages in the examination suite: B1 Business Preliminary, B2 Business Vantage and C1 Business Higher. **This digest only covers the C1 Business Higher.**

Test Characteristics

Skills Tested

Exam Length: 3 hours and 10 minutes + 16 minutes for speaking

Mode: Paper-based

Reading

Time: 60 minutes 6 tasks – 52 items

Task 1: approx. 420 words – identifying specific details – 8 matching items

Task 2: approx. 330 words – coherence and cohesion – 6 matching items

Task 3: approx. 580 words – identifying main ideas and details – 6 multiple choice items

Task 4: approx. 236 words – vocabulary – 10 multiple choice items

Task 5: approx. 275 words – grammar & vocabulary – five gap-fill items

Task 6: approx. 180 words – proofreading – 12 items

Writing

Time: 70 minutes – 2 Tasks

Task 1 – Write a report based on graphical information – 120-140 words

Task 2 – Choose between writing a report, a letter or proposal – 200-250 words

Listening

Time: 30 minutes + 10 minutes to transfer answers to mark sheet

3 Tasks – 30 items

Task 1: 2-3 minute monologue – identifying details - 12 fill in the gap items

Task 2: 3 – 4 minutes for five short monologues – listening for gist and details - 10 matching items

Task 3: 4-5 minute conversation or discussion between two or more participants - identifying details - 8 multiple choice items for each task, the recording is played twice.

Speaking

Time: 16 minutes

In the speaking test, two candidates work on three tasks. There are two examiners only one of whom interacts with the candidates.

Task 1: Each individual is asked questions on personal or work-related topics

Task 2: One candidate chooses one topic from a set of three and gives a one minute presentation, the other candidate listens and asks a question at the end. The roles are then reversed.

Task 3: The pair works together to simulate a discussion of a business-related situation. The candidates are assessed on grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication.

Integration of skills: There is no explicit assessment of integrated skills on the BEC Higher exam. However, the writing tasks work from descriptions of business scenarios and brief prompts, including graphs and business letters. The speaking task is also based on written prompts.

Scores and scoring procedures: The statement of results includes the overall grade awarded and a standardised score out of 100. Grades: A = 80–100 marks; B = 75–79 marks; C = 60–74 marks; Grade D = 55–59; E = 54 marks or below. The four skills are weighted equally (25% each) in determining the grade. It is not necessary to achieve a satisfactory level in all four sections to pass the examination. BEC Higher has three passing grades (A, B, & C) and two failing grades (D & E).

Test security: Exam papers are prepared, printed and despatched under secure conditions. Certificates are printed on security-enhanced paper and include other concealed features to prevent forgery and malpractice. Candidates must show a photo ID before exams. Students receive a 'Statement of Results', the authenticity of which can be checked by using Cambridge ESOL's free Online Verification Service.

Availability and accessibility: BEC can be taken as a computer-based examination. Tests are available monthly at centres worldwide. An internet-based examination is not available. Contact details: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/index.html> has extensive information on all aspects of the test.

Test preparation and test practice resources: Cambridge ESOL publishes detailed descriptions of the test types, annual examiners reports and advice to candidates. Several preparation books are available.

Evaluation and Comment

Higher is one of a suite of three Business English Exams offered by Cambridge ESOL. The Cambridge Business exams were originally developed for China at the request of the Chinese National Education Exams Authority in the mid-1990s. The purpose of the tests was to assess the communicative ability of Chinese students who wished to work in international and joint-venture companies. The C1 Higher (previously BEC 3) was last to be developed and added to the suite. In 1998, the Cambridge Business (BEC) exams were made available worldwide and the suite was fully revised in 2002 and again in 2013. Despite the claims that the C1 Higher is appropriate for assessing readiness to study business at university level, the primary purpose of the test is to assess Business English as used in professional contexts.

Some of the task types on the C1 Higher mirror task types from other Cambridge ESOL exams which should in theory lead to ease of comparability. However, it is important to note that there are clear differences between the tests which should be taken into account when deciding whether or not to accept scores from the C1 Higher for any particular programme. For example, the overall amount of reading and the length of the individual readings are much shorter in the C1 Higher than for the Cambridge Advanced exam although the two exams are purportedly at the same level of difficulty. The first writing task mirrors Task 1 on the IELTS both in terms of the format of the input and the expected length

of the output. However, the second task provides candidates with a choice of writing a report, a letter or a proposal. It could be argued that the formulaic nature of letter writing might advantage candidates who choose that option and also that the task itself is of little relevance in an academic context.

Cambridge Business, in common with other Cambridge tests, has good standards of reliability and security. The test content aims at a realistic business-related context through tasks such as report writing and business correspondence. It would be useful to see validation studies which demonstrate that the test tasks are equally useful for determining that test takers' readiness to perform in an academic business environment.

Information on ESP and School level examinations

ESP and Vocational Tests

In some cases HE institutions may consider tests of English designed for specific or vocational purposes for direct entry to academic study into a related subject. Care should be taken that these are designed to give a full assessment of the candidate's English skills. Some may be designed primarily for professional and work purposes rather than for study in that discipline.

ICFE- International certificate for Financial English (please note the following taken from the Cambridge website (cambridgeenglish.org))

The C1 Business Cambridge English: Financial (ICFE) discontinued from December 2016

Following the review of the assessment services which we provide, *Cambridge English: Financial* is discontinued from December 2016. This means that you can no longer register for a *Cambridge English: Financial* exam.

We recommend Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) as the best alternative to Cambridge English: Financial which is targeted at CEFR Level C1. It assesses the language skills required by professionals in the workplace and is recognised by more than 6,000 universities, businesses, government departments and other organisations around the world.

We also offer Cambridge English: Business Higher (BEC Higher) which tests an advanced level of English in a professional context.

School Level Examinations

UK-based examinations

These are examinations in English conducted within the UK education system. There are a range of providers in England, Wales and N. Ireland, now under the regulation and oversight of Ofqual (Information available at www.ofqual.gov.uk). In Scotland there is one provider of school and vocational qualifications, the SQA (Information available at www.sqa.org.uk).

The GCSE, IGCSE (First Language Grade C) and Scottish Standard Grade Credit Level and Northern Irish counterparts, Adult ESOL Level 2 and SQA ESOL Higher Level are all accepted as part of the entry requirements for domestic students, so any overseas student presenting

with these qualifications at the grade required for domestic students should be accepted on the same terms.

Note that the **English Baccalaureate** is not a qualification in itself, but an indication of high performance in a group of core GCSE/IGCSE subjects, including English. In this case it might be advisable to check that the IGCSE English presented is the First Language version (see below).

IGCSE English as a second language is aimed to assess a level of practical communication ideal for everyday use, which can also form the basis for further, more in-depth language study. It is claimed by ICE as suitable for evidence of English proficiency for direct entry at Grade C, but, unlike its First Language counterpart, the texts and tasks on the papers available are very different in level and content from the other tests reviewed and would not prepare students for the demands of academic study. Only reading and writing are tested, and there is no listening. Oral endorsement is also required: syllabus 0511 includes a count-in oral component but 0510 does not. It would be advisable to treat this qualification with caution. It would be probably be suitable only for pre-sessional entry for intending undergraduate students. Further information is available at <http://www.cie.org.uk/qualifications/academic/middlesec/igcse/subjects>

Adult ESOL Level 2 provided as part of the Edexcel skills qualifications suite is also accepted for direct entry for domestic students. The paper-based tests in listening/speaking reading and writing can be taken separately on demand. The reading is assessed through the Adult Literacy National Test. The rather brief tests and the format of a single task for each text make this less challenging than other tests reviewed. However, the preparation for the writing component involves a range of tasks and use of sources, which would be helpful in preparation for academic study. Further information is available at <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/esol/esol-life/levels/Pages/default.aspx>

In considering these school and vocationally based qualifications as evidence of English, it is important to note that these exams are based on descriptors that ensure comparability with other school exams across the curriculum, rather than only levels of language proficiency. This means that credit is given for aspects which would not usually feature in the descriptors of English tests or proficiency frameworks such as the CEFR, for example: standard of cognitive skills, learner autonomy, transferable skills, the complexity demands of the knowledge required and the amount of study involved to achieve them, as well as evidence of study of the course content. These types of requirements might actually be good indicators of capacity for academic study, but will not discriminate specifically between individual students' English proficiency. An illustration of this is that most literate native English speaking adults would be expected to perform at direct entry level in any of the reviewed tests of English proficiency, whereas many native English speakers do not achieve pass grades in the school examinations.

Overseas School Examinations

When deciding on acceptability of overseas school examinations in English, the factors mentioned above should also be taken into account. Such exams may measure how well the

candidates have performed in relation to factors other than simply language proficiency. It is also advisable to compare realistically the likelihood of a UK pupil with GCSE French, for example, being able to study at a French University to the likelihood of a non-native speaker with an equivalent English as a second language school qualification being able to cope with English-medium Higher Education.

Where the exams are taken in the context of English-medium education, it might be expected that the English exam would be evidence of a level of proficiency equivalent to an English GCSE, for example. Although this may be the case, when using such results caution should be exercised on two accounts. One is the extreme variability of what is actually involved in 'English medium education'. Tan and Lan (2011) report a very varied pattern of delivery with some pupils receiving only key topic words (e.g. the names of chemical elements and compounds) in English, but the lessons being conducted mostly in L1 so that the pupils received no practice in language use. In this case the level of English required in the English exams is likely to reflect this relatively limited exposure to English in the educational environment. In considering school exams, even where A Level or Baccalaureate exams are presented for direct entry, it is advisable to seek evidence on length, content and skills coverage of the exams using the criteria used in the Test Digests. Exams may test writing only in the form of grammar transformations or cloze tests or in essay formats that lend themselves to memorising of large chunks or formats and therefore test only accuracy of reproduction.

A second point in exercising caution is where the form of local English and literacy styles may be radically different from the standard international forms of English and that used in UK academic institutions. University teachers report problems for students for countries such as Nigeria or India, where some students from these areas experience problems in written and oral contexts. It is good policy to encourage such groups of students to attend appropriate level pre-sessional courses to make sure these problems are addressed before they begin academic study.

Tan, M. and Lan, O.S. (2011). Teaching Mathematics and Science in Malaysian classrooms: The impact of teacher beliefs on classroom practices and student learning. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 10, 5-18