

# Policy regarding English language entry requirements

## Purpose of Policy

To outline the University's English language entry requirements, and to provide details of the ways in which these can be evidenced.

## Overview

All applicants to the University are asked to demonstrate a level of English language competency, irrespective of their nationality or country of residence.

This policy establishes a single, comprehensive position on how English language competence is assessed for entry to undergraduate and postgraduate study at the University of Edinburgh, to ensure fairness and transparency for all applicants.

The policy distinguishes between the assessment of English for admissions purposes, and to comply with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Tier 4 regulations.

## Scope: Mandatory policy

This policy applies University-wide and to all applicants; undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research, online learning, and visiting students, except for visiting postgraduate research students who will be at the University for less than 12 weeks.

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## Document control

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Approving authority Recruitment and Admissions Strategy Group (now Student Recruitment and Fees Strategy Group)

Consultation undertaken College admissions practitioners, Student Recruitment Management Group

Section responsible for policy maintenance and review Student Recruitment and Admissions

Related policies, procedures, guidelines and regulations University of Edinburgh Admissions Policy  
UK Government Tier 4 visa requirements  
UK Government Student Route visa requirements (from Oct 2020)

UK Quality Code 2018 Core practices: *The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.*

Policies superseded by this policy None

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## The University of Edinburgh

### Policy regarding English language entry requirements

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 All applicants to the University are asked to demonstrate a level of English language competency, irrespective of their nationality or country of residence.
- 1.2 This policy establishes a single, comprehensive position on how English language competence is assessed for entry to undergraduate and postgraduate study at the University of Edinburgh, to ensure fairness and transparency for all applicants.
- 1.2 The policy distinguishes between the assessment of English for admissions purposes, and to comply with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Tier 4 regulations.

#### 2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies University-wide and to all applicants; undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research, online learning, and visiting students, except for visiting postgraduate research students who will be at the University for less than 12 weeks.

#### 3. General principles

- 3.1 The University has a responsibility to ensure that all students have a sufficient level of English language competence to undertake and derive full benefit from their chosen programme of study, and to contribute to a positive learning environment for all.
- 3.2 Applicants from a non-majority English speaking country who require a Tier 4 visa to study in the UK must also meet UKVI English language requirements for the University to sponsor them for a visa.
- 3.3 The minimum grade or score required in an approved test or qualification will be determined by the admitting College, and may vary by programme, according to the level of English competence required. The English language requirement for the most commonly presented qualifications is included in the entry requirements section for each degree programme in the online Degree Finder.

#### 4. Accepted qualifications

- 4.1 The English language qualifications that the University accepts which meet both English language competence and Tier 4 visa requirements are listed on the University website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/english>  
These qualifications have been assessed through the University's Admissions Qualifications Subgroup (AQS) as meeting the standards in all four language competencies required by

applicants who are not a national of a majority English speaking country, as defined by UKVI, even if the qualifications do not explicitly provide an assessment outcome for each competency.

- 4.2 The University may also accept English qualifications to meet its undergraduate English language competence requirement which have not been approved by AQS as meeting Tier 4 visa English language requirements, for example the US High School Diploma. These qualifications are detailed on the country pages of the University's website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/entry-requirements>.  
An applicant who is not a national of a majority English speaking country and who requires a Tier 4 visa would require an English language qualification from the list outlined in 4.1 at the appropriate level, in addition to a qualification in this category.
- 4.3 The following English language tests expire after two years: IELTS, TOEFL, Pearson Test of English and Trinity ISE. This is indicated on the English language entry requirements pages on the University website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/english>.  
Where an applicant holds an English language test with a two year expiry, the award date must be no more than two years from the start date of the programme. In cases where the award date is older, applicants will be asked to take a new test, or to provide one of the other English qualifications the University accepts.
- 4.4 Other than the qualifications listed in 4.3 above, qualifications used to meet English language requirements by applicants who are not nationals of a majority English speaking country must be no more than three and a half years old on the start date of the programme.

#### Qualifications for undergraduate applicants only

- 4.5 The University accepts completion of all Foundation English for Academic Purposes modules taken as part of its International Foundation Programme at specified grades to meet English language requirements for undergraduate degree programmes.

#### Qualifications for postgraduate and graduate-entry applicants only

- 4.6 The University accepts previous undergraduate or postgraduate degree-level study, including one year Masters programmes, which has been taught and assessed in English in a majority English speaking country. Applicants who are not nationals of a majority English speaking country and whose qualification is older than three and a half years will be considered on a case by case basis. The process for further consideration is set out in Section 10.
- 4.7 The University accepts undergraduate or postgraduate degree-level study, including one year Masters programmes, awarded by some universities in non-majority English speaking countries where teaching and assessment are conducted in English. Accepted degrees must be awarded by universities that have been assessed by the University's Admissions Qualification Group (AQS) in accordance with the process set out in Section 11. A list of approved universities is published online: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/english/postgraduate>
- 4.8 The University does not accept undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications awarded by UK universities where all study has taken place at an overseas campus in a non-majority English speaking country, unless the overseas campus has been assessed and approved in accordance with the process set out in Section 11.

- 4.9 The University does not accept degrees taught and assessed entirely online as evidence of English language proficiency, except for online degrees awarded by the University of Edinburgh.
- 4.10 The University accepts undergraduate or postgraduate degree-level qualifications jointly awarded by the University of Edinburgh with partner universities in non-majority English speaking countries where teaching and assessment are conducted in English, even if the partner universities are not on the list of approved universities.
- 4.11 Where a student has transferred to a university in a majority English speaking country or to an approved university in a non-majority English speaking country to complete their studies, at least fifty percent of the total duration of studies must be undertaken post transfer and in English, including the final year of study, for this to meet the University's English language requirement.
- 4.12 Professional registration and English language qualifications for professional purposes may also be approved for entry providing they constitute a formal assessment of English language competence to the required standards, and they have been approved by the Admissions Qualifications Group in accordance with the arrangements set out in Section 11. Any professional qualifications approved for entry will be published on the University website.
- 4.13 The University accepts satisfactory completion of its pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes programme immediately prior to the start date of a postgraduate degree programme. Pre-sessional English programmes delivered by other universities can be accepted on the same basis, providing they have been assessed and approved by AQS. Any approved pre-sessional English programmes will be listed on the University website. Pre-sessional English programmes will have an expiry period of two years from the date awarded.

#### Evidence which cannot be accepted

- 4.14 The following do not meet the University's English language requirements, because they do not constitute a formal assessment of English language competence:
- General work experience in an English language environment
  - References/general statements confirming the applicant speaks English
  - Formal/informal interview

#### **5. Tier 4 requirements**

- 5.1 Applicants who require a Tier 4 visa must have an English qualification that is at an equivalent level to at least B2 on the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR), unless they are a national of a majority English speaking country as defined by UKVI (see Appendix 1).
- 5.2 The English language qualifications and tests approved by the University of Edinburgh to meet Tier 4 English language requirements are detailed on the University website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/english>

- 5.3 The English language competency requirements exceeds Tier 4 visa requirements. Any margin of flexibility in University English language requirements for admissions purposes will remain above the UVKI requirement.

## **6. Students transferring to the University of Edinburgh**

- 6.1 Students who transfer to the University of Edinburgh through a formal partnership arrangement and who have been taught and assessed in English for at least one year at the partner university, will be considered to have met the University's requirement for English language competence.
- 6.2 Students who transfer to the University of Edinburgh from a university in a majority English speaking country, or from a university which has been approved through the University of Edinburgh's due diligence process, will be considered to have met the University's requirement for English language competence on the basis of a minimum of one year's successful study in English at their previous institution.
- 6.3 Students who transfer to the University of Edinburgh from a university in a non-majority English speaking country which has not been approved through the University of Edinburgh's diligence process will be required to provide an acceptable English language qualification to demonstrate that they meet the University's requirement for English language competence.

## **7. Visiting student applicants**

- 7.1 Visiting undergraduate students must meet the English language competence requirements published online: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/english/visiting-exchange>
- 7.2 Visiting postgraduate students must meet the published English language competence requirements for their degree programme.
- 7.3 Visiting students who require a Tier 4 visa must have an English qualification that is at an equivalent level to at least B2 on the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR), unless they are a national of a majority English speaking country as defined by UKVI (see Appendix 1).
- 7.4 Visiting students from a university in a majority English speaking country, or from a university which has been approved through the University of Edinburgh's due diligence process, will be considered to have met the University's requirement for English language competence on the basis of a minimum of one year's successful study in English at their previous institution.

## **8. University of Edinburgh English language test**

- 8.1 The University of Edinburgh English Language Education (ELE) have developed an English language test which has been assessed as robust and secure, and at the required level to comply with Tier 4 regulations. ELE can therefore provide English language testing for students who are unable to access an English language test locally for exceptional reasons. These include applicants for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Programme, applicants with refugee or asylum seeker status, and applicants from countries disrupted by local emergencies. Staff should contact the Head of Admissions in Student Recruitment & Admissions for advice on countries currently covered by this arrangement.

## **9. Record keeping for applicants requiring a Tier 4 visa**

9.1 Evidence of English language qualifications **must** be recorded in the applicant's EUCLID record. This includes, for example, copies of English language test or qualification certificates, degree certificates from institutions in Home Office designated majority English speaking countries or which have been approved through the University of Edinburgh due diligence process, and scans of a passport photo page confirming nationality. In all cases, admissions staff should use the notes section on the EUCLID application record to clearly state the evidence obtained. All records must be retained until 12 months following graduation.

## **10. Process for the consideration of flexibility**

10.1 All applicants are expected to meet the English language requirements set out in this policy. However, the University recognises that there may be occasions where an individual's circumstances justify the consideration of additional information. For example, if an applicant has a degree that meets the requirements of the policy but is now out of date, evidence that the applicant has continued to live and work or study in a majority English speaking country since graduation may be taken into account in determining whether the applicant meets the appropriate academic English language standards.

10.2 Each College has a process by which a case for the consideration of flexibility can be raised by staff to a delegated senior person within the College who will assess the request for validity. Colleges may delegate responsibility for managing this process to individual Schools where admissions operations are carried out within Schools. However, the process of delegation must be a formal one overseen by the main College Admissions Office.

10.3 Where a case is raised within a College or School and the delegated person in the College believes additional consideration should be given, the following process should be followed:

10.3.1 Details of the applicant's circumstances, and any supporting evidence, should be provided by the delegated person to the Head of Admissions in Student Recruitment & Admissions using the English language flexibility request form, which is available on the Student Recruitment & Admissions wiki.

10.3.2 The Head of Admissions will assess the evidence provided and will decide whether the case for flexibility can be determined on the basis of delegated authority from the convener of the Student Recruitment Strategy Group.

10.3.3 Where the case for flexibility falls outwith the Head of Admissions' delegated authority, the decision on whether flexibility can be granted will be taken by the Director of Student Recruitment & Admissions.

10.4 Decisions on two categories of English language flexibility request have been delegated to the Colleges, and can be determined by senior members of College admissions staff who have been given that responsibility by the Head of College. These categories are:

10.4.1

- Where an applicant has successfully completed a degree in a majority English speaking country or at an approved university more than 3.5 years previously, **or**
- has met English language entry requirements with an IELTS or TOEFL test which is between 2 and 3.5 years old **and**
- where there is documentary evidence in the form of work references and/or payslips or tax documents confirming that the student has lived and worked continuously in an MESC since graduation or the date of their English language test.

10.4.2

- Where a student has an IELTS or TOEFL test which is within the 2 year expiry date but which is below the entry requirement for their degree, but which is at or above the agreed University of Edinburgh minimum requirement.

## **11. Process for the assessment of English language qualifications for entry**

11.1 The University's Admissions Qualifications Subgroup (AQS), reporting to the Student Recruitment Strategy Group (SRSB), carries out due diligence on all qualifications prior to their acceptance for University entry purposes.

11.2 The following criteria will be applied when considering the acceptability of new qualifications:

- Does the curriculum and/or method of assessment provide evidence of competence in all four components, (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?
- Is the method of assessment sufficiently secure and robust?
- Is there sufficient compelling evidence that students meeting the University's English language requirements via the method of assessment will be able to undertake and derive full benefit from their studies?

11.3 The minimum grade or score required in an approved qualification for entry to a specific programme will be determined by the admitting College. In all cases this will be at or above the level required for Tier 4 purposes.

11.4 Lists of qualifications and tests accepted for undergraduate and postgraduate entry purposes will be published on the University website and maintained by Student Recruitment & Admissions, on the basis of decisions made by the AQS and SRSB.

### Qualifications which are no longer approved for entry

11.5 If it is decided that a qualification which was previously accepted as meeting English language competency requirements is no longer to be accepted, AQS will formally confirm this decision in order to provide a clear audit trail of any such decisions.

## **12. Policy review**

12.1 This policy will be reviewed annually by the Student Recruitment Strategy Group and revised in light of changes in legislation and University regulations and strategic objectives.

Version 5: Revised and approved by the Student Recruitment Strategy Group, November 2020

First approved by Recruitment & Admissions Strategy Group, May 2014

## Appendix 1.

### UK student visa English language requirements

1. The Immigration Rules stipulated by the Home Office UKVI, require sponsors to ensure that all applicants for a student visa are able to demonstrate a sufficient standard of English.
2. For degree-level study, English language capability must be at least equivalent to level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning (CEFR) in all four components of reading, writing, speaking and listening.
3. For sub-degree level study, English language capability must be at least equivalent to level B1 of the CEFR in all four components for a student to be sponsored as a Tier 4 General Student migrant. This must be evidenced via a Secure English Language Test (SELT) as defined by the UKVI.
4. In addition to tests on the Home Office list of approved SELTs, the University, through being a Highly Trusted Sponsor and a Higher Education Institution, is permitted to use its own methods of assessment for establishing the suitability of English language qualifications for entry.
5. Some English language tests expire after a specified period of time has elapsed. All tests must be valid according to the UK Home Office at the start of the degree programme. Details of validity can be found on the Home Office website:  
<https://www.gov.uk/student-visa/knowledge-of-english>
6. If an applicant is a national of a country on the list of majority English speaking countries, they would be deemed acceptable in meeting the Home Office's requirements for a student visa. "Nationality" is defined as being a passport holder from one of these countries:
  - Antigua and Barbuda
  - Australia
  - The Bahamas
  - Barbados
  - Belize
  - Canada
  - Dominica
  - Grenada
  - Guyana
  - Ireland
  - Jamaica
  - Malta
  - New Zealand
  - St Kitts and Nevis
  - St Lucia
  - St Vincent and the Grenadines
  - Trinidad and Tobago
  - UK
  - United States of America
7. Completion of an academic qualification at least equivalent to a UK Bachelor's degree in one of the following majority English speaking countries would be deemed acceptable in meeting the Home Office's requirements for a student visa:
  - Antigua and Barbuda
  - Australia
  - The Bahamas
  - Barbados
  - Belize
  - Dominica
  - Grenada
  - Guyana
  - Ireland
  - Jamaica
  - Malta
  - New Zealand
  - St Kitts and Nevis
  - St Lucia
  - St Vincent and the Grenadines
  - Trinidad and Tobago
  - United Kingdom
  - United States of America