

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/19/5

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

13 March 2019

Agenda Item 8

ENGLISH LANGUAGE POLICY

COVER SHEET

To consider a paper from the Qualifications Working Group (Global Engagement) regarding English Language Policy.

English Language Policy

1. Purpose

All prospective students to Ulster University must demonstrate that their English language competence is at a level to allow them to cope with the demands of higher education and gain full benefit from their chosen course or programme of research. This requirement is irrespective of an applicant's nationality or country of residence. The policy sets out the requirements on how English language competency is assessed for entry to undergraduate and postgraduate taught study including exchange and study abroad students.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all programmes leading to an Ulster University award following undergraduate and postgraduate (taught) study.

3 General Principles

- 3.1 The University, as a Home Office approved Sponsor of Tier 4 (General) student visas, must ensure that all students seeking admission meet the UKVI minimum English language requirements. Most courses at Ulster require IELTS (academic version) equivalent 6.0 which exceeds tier 4 minimum requirements.
- 3.2 The English language qualifications and tests approved for entry have been assessed as meeting the minimum standards in all four language competencies (reading, writing, speaking and listening) required by applicants who are not nationals of a majority English speaking country, as defined by UKVI, even if the qualifications do not explicitly provide an assessment outcome for each competency.
- 3.3 The list of Secure English Language Tests (SELTs), published by the UK Home Office that can be used to support a Tier 4 visa application are
 1. UKVI IELTS (Academic) - IELTS Consortium
 2. Integrated Skills in English (ISE)- Trinity College London

4 Undergraduate Applicants

- 4.1 All undergraduate applicants, whether they are studying on-campus or online, must meet the University's minimum requirement for English language competence through an accepted English qualification.

- 4.2 For degree-level study, English language competency 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. At Ulster, this equates to a minimum IELTS (academic version) equivalent 6.0 for the majority of programme with no individual band score less than 5.5. Some degree courses may have a higher English language requirement. The English language entry criteria for each course should be specified in the on-line prospectus.
- 4.3 For sub-degree level study, English language competency must be at least equivalent to level B1 of the CEFR in all four components. Tier 4 (General) student visa holders must be evidenced via a secure English Language Test (SELT) as defined by the UKVI (see 3.3)
- 4.4 Students who have not yet achieved a qualification evidencing that they are at the required English language level for admission onto their programme will be advised to take a SELT as part of their conditional offer and will be provided with details of appropriate pre-sessional English language support.
- 4.5 In addition to tests on the Home Office list of approved SELTs, the University, through being a Tier 4 Sponsor, is permitted to use our own methods of assessment for establishing the suitability of English language qualifications for entry. We must be able to justify why any non-SELT English language qualifications have been used as part of the student's admission. The list of English qualifications that we currently accept are listed on the English language entry qualifications on the University's Global website <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/global>
- 4.6 Some English language tests expire after two years. 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 date of issue of the CAS. In the cases where the award date is older, applicants will be required to take a new test, or to provide one of the other English qualifications we accept. Independent evidence of the qualification is required. This can be provided either by the applicant submitting the original certificate, or through security verification of the qualification from the testing body.

All other English language qualifications that the University accepts and that do not expire after a set period, must be no more than 3 years from the date of issue of the CAS.

- 4.7 For most of our courses we accept satisfactory completion of the University's International Foundation Programme or the Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes courses as meeting English language requirements for entry to degree courses. Some degree courses require a higher English language competency and so the International Foundation Programme or Pre-sessional courses will not be appropriate.
- 4.8 The following do not meet our 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 an applicant speaks English

4.9 An applicant who has successfully completed one academic year of undergraduate study (at RQF level 4) at a university in an English majority speaking country (or in the case of Canada, an English-speaking region) is considered to have met our English language requirement of CEFR B2, no more than two years prior to the proposed date of enrolment.

5 Postgraduate Applicants

5.1 All postgraduate taught and postgraduate research applicants, whether they are studying on-campus or online, must meet the University's requirement for English language competence.

5.2 Postgraduate applicants who are nationals of a majority English speaking country as defined by the UKVI, including the UK, will be deemed to meet the University's requirements for English language competency on the basis of their previous undergraduate or postgraduate study which has been taught and assessed in English.

5.3 In addition to tests on the Home Office list of approved SELTs, the University, through being a Tier 4 Sponsor, is permitted to use our own methods of assessment for establishing the suitability of English language qualifications for entry. We must be able to justify why any non-SELT English language qualifications have been used as part of the student's admission. The list of English qualifications that we currently accept are listed on the English language entry qualifications on the University's Global website <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/global>

5.4 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 University's and the Home Office's requirements for Tier 4 students:

- Antigua and Barbuda
- Australia
- The Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Dominica
- Grenada
- Guyana
- Ireland
- Jamaica
- New Zealand
- St Kitts and Nevis
- St Lucia
- St Vincent and the Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago
- United Kingdom
- United States of America

5.5 The University accepts undergraduate or postgraduate degree-level study, including one-year master's programmes, awarded by approved universities in non-majority English speaking countries where teaching and assessment are conducted in English, provided the award date is no more than three years prior to the issue of CAS. This may be evidenced on the degree transcript or by a letter from the awarding institution.

- 5.6 Where an undergraduate student has transferred from a university where teaching and assessment are conducted in a language other than English 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 studies undertaken must be in English, including the final year of study, for this to be accepted as meeting the University's English language requirement. This could be confirmed by a letter from the awarding institution or evidenced in a transcript.
- 5.7 Some English language tests expire after two years. 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 date of issue of the CAS. In the cases where the award date is older, applicants will be required to take a new test, or to provide one of the other English qualifications we accept. Independent evidence of the qualification is required. This can be provided either by the applicant submitting the original certificate, or through security verification of the qualification from the testing body.

All other English language qualifications that the University accepts and that do not expire after a set period, must be no more than 3 years from the date of issue of the CAS.

- 5.8 For most of our courses we accept satisfactory completion of the University's Pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes courses as meeting English language requirements for entry to degree courses. Some degree courses require a higher English language competency and so the Pre-sessional courses will not be appropriate.

6.0 QAHE On-line English language test

Ulster has approved an on-line English test developed and offered by our partner QAHE. The QAHE English language test should not be viewed as an alternative to English language testing but rather as a method of re-assessing applicants who nearly meet our requirements or in cases where a test has expired.

We only offer the opportunity to take the QAHE EL test where:

- 6.1 an applicant is 0.5 one component below the English language entry requirement for their main course of study and all other band scores are at, or above, the entry requirement. In this case the QAHE on-line English language test may be used to reassess the applicant.
- 6.2 an applicant meets the English language requirement but their test/examination has expired or will expire before the date of issue of CAS.

7.0 Incoming Study Abroad Students

All study abroad students must meet degree-level English language capability which 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. At Ulster, this equates to a minimum IELTS (academic version) equivalent 6.0 for the majority of programmes.

7.1 Exemptions

Study Abroad applicants in the following situation will not be required to sit an English Language test:

- 7.1.a Competency for nationals of a UKVI defined majority English speaking countries
- 7.1.b Competency through Higher education in a UKVI defined majority English speaking country. The applicant must be currently enrolled at a university in a UKVI defined majority English speaking country and have successfully completed 1 year of study and a University recognised on NARIC at the required academic standard for entry.
- 7.1.c Competency through previous education in a UKVI defined majority English speaking country. The applicant must have obtained a University level qualification from a UKVI defined majority English speaking country, no more than 5 years prior to the course start date.

8.0 Incoming Erasmus Students

Ulster does not ask for language proficiency certificates from Erasmus+ students, but all students are expected to have English language proficiency to the minimum levels given above. As most Erasmus+ students are EU nationals, they are able to enter the UK for study without a visa, and must therefore simply have a level of English in line with our requirements above.

If, however, an applicant is a non-EU national applying to study with us for a full academic year under the Erasmus+ programme, and English is not their first language, they will need to provide a Secure English Language Test (SELT) certificate showing that you meet both Ulster University and UK Visas and Immigration's requirements as detailed previously.