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Subject: Changes to Secure English Language Testing



Changes to Home Office-approved Secure English Language Testing (SELT)

The Home Office is making changes to Secure English Language Testing (SELT). Two providers have been selected to deliver Secure English Language Tests approved by the Home Office. The providers are:

- UK only: Trinity College London (for customers applying in the UK only)
- UK and Rest of World (ROW): IELTS SELT Consortia (for visa customers applying either outside or inside the UK)

The changes will take effect from 6 April 2015.

Transitional arrangements are in place to make sure applicants who take the language test on or before 5 April 2015 with the current providers will be able to use their certificates until 5 November 2015.

Why is this change being made?

Following abuse of the Secure English Language Testing (SELT) system, uncovered in 2014, a project was set up to tender for new, significantly strengthened, SELT arrangements.

An open competition commenced in October and Trinity College London and IELTS SELT Consortia have now been selected.

Changes to the SELT model

- New security features will be introduced, including CCTV, voice sampling and independent audits. Only centres approved for SELT purposes will fully meet our specific requirements for UK immigration purposes.
- It will be clear from the approved providers' websites and test results whether a test is taken at a SELT centre.
- We will also consolidate the number of tests approved for UK immigration purposes to simplify the offering to customers.
- There will be a reduction in the test centre network to increase control and our auditing ability. To ensure capacity can be met within a reduced network, we will introduce greater certainty of test availability. Providers will be required to meet new service standards to give candidates confirmation of the time it will take to complete the test and receive their results. Tests should be available within 28 days at every permanent SELT centre in the UK and overseas.

- We are also introducing temporary test sites in places where there is much lower demand which wouldn't justify a permanent centre. Tests will be delivered at least quarterly (according to local demand), in these centres.
- We will also move to a digital system. This will initially be achieved using online booking and providing candidates with electronic results for the purposes of their immigration application. Online testing will commence in 2016.

SELT Policy

We have transitional arrangements in place for these changes. Applicants who take the language test on or before 5 April 2015 with the current providers will be able to use their certificates until 5 November 2015 for the purposes of a UK immigration application.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will retain their ability to make their own assessment of English Language capability for degree level courses and above. The HEI policy around English language ability is not changing.

Concerns have been raised that any test other than those approved for SELT may not be secure enough for sponsors to rely on. We are not making any evaluation on the security or quality of other provider's tests. It is simply the case that only tests taken at a SELT centre have been conducted according to the identity and other security features the Home Office now requires for immigration purposes.

From November 2015, we will be bringing English language requirements for settlement and naturalisation into line with the requirements which apply to other immigration applications. Applicants will be required to take a Secure English language test and other English language qualifications will no longer be accepted.

FAQs

Can providers meet demand?

Providers have made plans to meet anticipated customer demand with extra flexibility should numbers be higher. Meeting demand is a key requirement of the commercial arrangements. We will monitor demand closely and providers have the ability to add to the test centre network where there is evidence of additional demand.

Will there be sufficient coverage?

There is coverage broadly across the world and focussed in major cities for immigration demand, aligned to our Visa Application Centre (VAC) network. We recognise some customers will have to travel further than before, but this should be no further than to the VAC they would need to apply to. We will monitor demand closely and providers have the ability to add to the test centre network where there is evidence of additional demand.

Can HEIs really use other tests to assess English language ability for degree level and above?

HEIs retain their ability to make their own assessment of English Language capability for degree level courses and above. The HEI policy around English language ability is not changing.

Are the new tests more difficult?

No - they are mapped against the Common European Framework for Reference at the