

Queen's University Belfast

English Language Policy

Linked Policies:

Postgraduate Admissions Policy (2025 entry) : [Postgraduate Admissions Policy](#)

Undergraduate Admissions Policy (2025 entry): [Undergraduate Admissions Policy](#)

1. Introduction

All applicants to the University (Home or International) are required to demonstrate that they have an appropriate grade or score in an approved qualification or examination in English language before they can register on an academic programme. The minimum requirement is normally Grade C or 4 in GCSE English Language or equivalent qualification acceptable to the University.

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Student Route sponsors must ensure that students have met the minimum UKVI language requirements for all non-UK nationals requiring a UKVI Student Route Visa to study in the UK. Applicants whose first language is not English are required to produce evidence of their proficiency through qualifications such as a Secure English Language Test (SELT), or an alternative test or qualification acceptable to the University such as IELTS Academic, TOEFL iBT, iGCSE, or an INTO English language test e.g. Pre-Sessional English.

Queen's University Belfast aims for the highest standards of quality in all its admission related activities and this policy establishes a single position on how competency is assessed for entry to study. The English Language Policy is transparent, fair and consistently applied which ensures:

- that prospective students have the appropriate level of English Language competency to succeed on their programme of study
- compliance with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) rules pertaining to English Language competency for Student visa purposes.

The University will review the policy and procedures as and when updates to the Student Route Policy and Sponsor Guidance are issued by the UKVI, and will amend its practices if required.

2. Scope of the Policy

All applicants must meet the English language entry requirements for their chosen programme in order to study at Queen's University Belfast.

This policy stipulates the English Language criteria which must be satisfied for admission. UKVI Student Route applicants and students must meet the UKVI English language proficiency requirements in all four components of language learning, (reading, writing, listening and speaking) for Student visa application purposes.

3. Abbreviations

AAS	Admissions and Access Service
APRG	Admissions Policy Review Group
CAS	Confirmation for Acceptance of Studies
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MESC	Majority English Speaking Country
PSE	Pre-Sessional English
SELT	Secure English Language Test
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UKVI	UK Visas and Immigration

4. Minimum Requirements for English Language Proficiency

The UKVI minimum English language requirement must be met; CEFR B2 level for courses at Bachelor degree level and above, and CEFR B1 level for courses below Bachelor degree level. Secure English Language Tests (SELTs) must be obtained for admission to courses which are below degree-level.

The minimum standard level of English language proficiency required for entry to a degree course leading to an undergraduate or postgraduate award shall normally be an overall score of 6.0 or 6.5 in the IELTS Academic test or acceptable equivalent, with not less than 5.5 in any test component.

Some degree programmes may require a higher score overall and / or in individual sub-skill components of the IELTS test. The [Coursefinder](#) webpage shows specific programme requirements under the “Entry requirements” tab.

5. Assessment of English Language

Assessment of evidence of meeting the English Language entry requirement is made at the point of application; if the applicant cannot provide the prescribed evidence at the point of application an English language condition will be included in the offer.

6. Offers with an English language condition:

For those applicants who are required to obtain an English language qualification prior to taking up their place on a course/research programme, the conditional offer will be made in terms of achieving an appropriate score in an IELTS Academic test (or equivalent qualification acceptable to the University).

7. Acceptable qualifications

The University’s list of acceptable English Language qualifications is available at:
<http://go.qub.ac.uk/EnglishLanguageReqs>

The University reserves the right to amend the specific scores required overall in a test (or in test components), if comparability guidance from the test provider changes.

8. Validity period

Award dates for IELTS, TOEFL, Pearson Test of English and Trinity ISE English language tests must be no more than two years from the expected start date of the intended course of study.

In 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 accepted by the University.

For school-level qualifications which are comparable to A-level standard (according to ENIC/ECCTIS) and are taken in the final year of high school, a validity period of five academic years is normally applied.

For school-level qualifications which are comparable to GCSE-level standard (according to ENIC/ECCTIS), a validity period of seven academic years is normally applied.

A full list of accepted English language tests plus validity periods for each accepted test is displayed on the University website <http://go.qub.ac.uk/EnglishLanguageReqs>.

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 which the University accepts.

9. Re-takes

Test results must normally be achieved in one sitting.

A combination of IELTS/TOEFL (or any other test) is not accepted, with the exception of the IELTS One Skill Retake.

The one skill retake must be taken within 60 days of the original test. Only one retake is acceptable. The two-year validity period starts on the date that the original test was taken.

10. Verification

Scores are verified with the respective test or qualification provider where this service is available.

Any applicant who presents fraudulent results to the University will have their application withdrawn or their offer revoked, in line with the University's Undergraduate and Postgraduate Admissions Policies.

Applicants who have had an application withdrawn or offer revoked will not be able to reapply to the University for 12 months.

11. Pre-session English (PSE)

Where an applicant does not meet the English language entry requirement for their target programme of study, they may be eligible to study Pre-Sessional English (PSE) at INTO Queen's.

11.1: The University will assign a joint CAS to cover a pre-sessional course on campus (of 10 weeks' maximum duration) at INTO Queen's and main course of study (undergraduate / postgraduate / research) in the following situations:

- The student has received an unconditional offer on their main course of study, or
- The only condition attached to their offer is they must progress from CEFR Level B1 to the appropriate standard of CEFR Level B2 during the pre-sessional course.

Applicants for PSE are required to achieve the appropriate English Language entry requirement to progress to their target programme of study.

11.2: In all other cases, a CAS will be issued by INTO Queen's for the pre-sessional course only. A new CAS will be assigned by the University for the main course if the student successfully completes the pre-sessional course, meets all conditions of their offer on the main course of study and meets the conditions of this policy.

The pre-sessional course is no longer than three months in duration.

The pre-sessional course ends less than one month before the main course starts.

For applicants who elect to take online PSE, the CAS for the main course of study (undergraduate / postgraduate / research) will be issued upon confirmation from INTO Queen's that the student has successfully completed the PSE course to the required standard.

12. English Language Exemptions

12.1: Majority English Speaking Countries

Applicants who are either nationals of a country which is deemed by the Home Office/UKVI to be majority-English-speaking*, or who hold a degree or an equivalent qualification which was taught in

a country deemed to be majority-English-speaking** will normally be assumed to have met the UKVI requirements for postgraduate admission. However, in some circumstances, applicants may be required to submit evidence of an English Language qualification to satisfy University course entry/general entrance requirements.

* You are from a majority English-speaking country if you are a national of:

Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the British Overseas Territories, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, Malta, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America.

** If you have completed an academic qualification equivalent to a UK Bachelor's degree which was taught in one of the majority English-speaking countries listed below, you are normally exempt from additional English language requirements:

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

Canada is considered a MESC for Canadian nationals only. If you are not Canadian, and you hold a degree from Canada which you are using as evidence to meet the English language entry requirement for your course, then you will need to provide official confirmation from the institution that your degree from Canada was fully taught and assessed in English.

Degrees awarded by recognised institutions in Ghana will be accepted as meeting the University's English language requirements.

In all cases listed above, degrees must have been completed no more than five years prior to the expected date of admission.

Undergraduate applicants who are nationals of a majority-English-speaking country must have at least GCSE Grade C/4 in English Language or equivalent qualification acceptable to the University.

12.2: Partnership Agreements

Incoming students are required to meet the English Language requirements of this policy, unless stipulated otherwise in a University partnership agreement.

12.3: Met in a previous application

The applicant has already shown they met the English language requirement, at the level required for their current application, in a previous successful application for entry clearance or permission to stay.

12.4: Disability or Long-Term Condition

A test provider may exempt the student from sitting a component because of a disability or long-term condition.

The UKVI regulations permit the University to issue a CAS for visa purposes, where an applicant has been exempted from part of the English test by the test provider due to a disability or long-term condition. However, before issuing a CAS, the Admissions and Access Service (AAS) must ensure that the student has a sufficient level of English competency to be successful on the course.

AAS will consider all the circumstances of an individual case and explain the decision for the exemption on the CAS.

13. Deferred Offers

Applicants holding deferred offers must ensure that they have an English Language qualification acceptable to the University which is still valid for CAS/visa purposes for the new date of admission, and meets the course requirements for the new year of entry. It is the responsibility of the applicant to check that their English language qualification is acceptable for the new date of admission. Information and guidance is available on the University's website regarding English language requirements.

14. Process for the assessment of English language qualifications for entry

The Admissions and Access Service (AAS) carries out due diligence on all qualifications before their acceptance for University entry purposes including but not limited to the following:

- The curriculum and/or method of assessment provides evidence of competence in all four components, (reading, writing, speaking, listening)
- The method of assessment is sufficiently secure and robust
- The overall score and individual sub-scores (where available) are officially mapped to CEFR and (ideally) IELTS
- The test / qualification is awarded by a recognised accredited provider
- The qualification has been submitted to APRG for review and approval

Lists of qualifications and tests accepted for undergraduate and postgraduate entry will be published on the University website and maintained by AAS.

If it is decided that a qualification which was previously accepted as meeting the English Language competency requirements is no longer acceptable, this will be reported to the Admissions Policy Review Group (APRG) clearly outlining the reasons.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it remains compliant with the Student Sponsor Guidance and UKVI requirements as well as good sector practice.

Any changes to this policy will be developed through discussion with the APRG which meet on a regular basis.