



Communication on English waivers

18 May 2020

This communique provides a definition of English waivers that TEQSA will apply for the purposes of its regulatory activities. This document aims to provide a common understanding of TEQSA's use of the definition. Providers are encouraged to apply this definition as part of their interactions with TEQSA.

What is an English waiver?

For TEQSA's purposes, an English waiver is:

Where a student does not meet the higher education provider's documented English proficiency requirements for course admission, but regardless is admitted based on the student's life experience or other circumstances.

'Life experience' and 'circumstances' could mean professional accreditation, relevant work experience, citizenship or other factors deemed sufficient for an English waiver to be granted by the decision-maker nominated in the provider's policy (e.g. Dean, Head of Academic Unit, Deputy Vice Chancellor) or Academic Board.

English waivers are usually case-by-case admissions decisions that take place outside the provider's documented English requirements in its admissions policy or course requirements. However, some providers may explicitly spell out the conditions for an 'English waiver' within their admission policies or course requirements.

Scenario A: To be eligible to enter a Commerce degree, the provider requires, as part of its document requirements, a minimum score of 6.5 for IELTS (Academic) with no individual band less than 6.0, or citizenship of an approved English-speaking country.

Example: Student A, a Russian citizen, achieved an overall IELTS score of 6.5 but had some individual bands less than 6.0. The student had one year of work experience as an intern at a London public relations company and had stayed in the United Kingdom for three years. These factors do not meet the provider's documented English requirements. However, the Head of Academic Unit considered these factors and granted Student A entry. This decision was documented this decision internally as required by the provider's policy. TEQSA considers this to be an English waiver.

What is *not* an English waiver?

Where a student is admitted based on having met the provider's minimum English proficiency requirements outlined within the provider's statutes and regulations or admissions information and policy, these decisions are not considered to be English waivers.



Such alternative requirements may include forms of English testing such as TOEFL¹, Pearson, Cambridge, or other forms of demonstrating proficiency such as ELICOS², English language bridging programs, prior English qualifications, other senior secondary qualifications, and the provider's own English entrance exams.

For TEQSA's purposes, criteria that do not require English testing (such as citizenship or prior completed study in an English-speaking country) are not considered to be waivers if they are part of the provider's documented English proficiency requirements. In this instance, the provider has transparently documented the types of non-testing criteria that are considered to provide sufficient evidence regarding a student's level of English proficiency.

Scenario B: The provider's website stipulates that students can demonstrate that they meet the English language requirements if they have lived and worked in an English speaking country for at least five years.

Example: Student B, a citizen of France, has lived and worked in the United States for ten years and provided utility bills and supporting statements from employers as evidence. The provider granted Student B admission. TEQSA does not regard this to constitute an English waiver.

Scenario C: The provider has a published list of approved secondary qualifications that it considers to meet the English language proficiency requirements. This includes the STPM examination in Malaysia with a minimum B grade or higher.

Example: Student C achieved a B+ grade in the STPM examination and was granted entry on this basis. TEQSA does not regard this to constitute an English waiver.

Note

1. TEQSA's definition of English waivers should not be conflated with 'Other Forms of Testing which Satisfies the Institution' or exemptions within PRISMS³ reporting. The English language requirements or English waivers to obtain admission to a higher education course are different from the English language test evidence or exemptions under the *Migrations Regulations 1994*, which applies to student visa applications.⁴
2. Most providers allow for waivers within their statutes and regulations and/or admissions policies. These vary from broad provisions granting a decision-maker or Academic Board the authority to waive the admissions requirements, to detailed conditions for students to be granted waivers.
3. Where English waivers are granted, these decisions and the associated reasons are expected to be documented by the provider.

¹ Test of English as a Foreign Language

² English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students

³ Provider Registration and International Student Management System

⁴ Migration (IMMI 18/015: English Language Tests and Evidence Exemptions for Subclass 500 (Student) Visa) Instrument 2018 establishes the current English language tests, minimum scores and evidence exemptions for student visa applications.