



The British Association
of Lecturers in English
for Academic Purposes

English Language Good Practice Guide

Testing, Qualifications and English for
Academic Purposes in Higher Education

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Overview of English Language, Qualifications and English for Academic Purposes in UK Higher Education

Executive Summary

The BALEAP-BUILA English Language Good Practice Guide supports UK higher education institutions and wider stakeholders in understanding and evaluating the governance and processes surrounding English language qualifications, testing and provision in UK higher education. The Guide outlines good practice approaches which are prevalent across the sector in three key areas:

1. **Evaluating English language qualifications**
2. **English language on Pre-sessional and Pathway programmes (before the main degree programme)**
3. **Approaches to in-sessional (during the main degree programme) English for Academic Purposes.**

In addition to promoting evidence-based rationales which underpin robust decision-making processes, the Guide highlights the important role of continuous English language support, which is key to successful student academic outcomes and ensuring that students can gain maximum benefit from the full student experience which UK higher education has to offer.

The recommended good practice approaches in this Guide are informed by input from a wide range of stakeholders, including students, test and assessment providers, education providers and professionals working within UK higher education. They are endorsed by the following experts:

British Association for Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP)

BALEAP supports the professional development of those involved in learning, teaching, scholarship, and research in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). As the leading organisation in this field, BALEAP provides a forum for collaboration, research and sharing of practice through events, special interest groups (SIGs) and the BALEAP Accreditation Scheme (BAS).

British Universities' International Liaison Association (BUILA)

BUILA is a UK-wide, membership-led organisation, supporting the work and professional interests of higher education staff working on the international agenda, strengthening the sector by enabling the sharing of best practice and enhancing the knowledge and skills of members.

The Guide enables stakeholders to understand the complex landscape of governance and practice which underpins English language requirements within UK higher education. It emphasises the importance of a multi-layered approach to decision making, supported by well-governed practices, and provides operational guidance on how to implement processes which are transparent and auditable. More specifically, it is designed for the following key stakeholders:

- UK higher education professionals working in international admissions, recruitment, compliance, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and academics working across all disciplines.
- Regulatory professionals working within the context of English language compliance requirements such as the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) division of the Home Office.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the Guide is to support fair and appropriate access for international students, and effective governance and standards within the context of English language requirements and provision. Good practice in these areas ensures that requirements are appropriate for the course of study, enhance the student experience and safeguard the UK's reputation as a world-class study destination.

As such, the Guide promotes the following five key principles:

- Transparency for students and accountability for **higher education providers** to maintain trust and uphold standards.
- **Fair access** to UK higher education for students from all backgrounds, with clear choices and accurate information to support decision making.
- Robust governance of recognised qualifications and other evidence of English language competence.
- Evidence-based practice in English language provision, including **pre-sessional English**, pathway programmes and in-sessional offers, informed by current research and evidence.
- Availability of training and support on English language for all relevant higher education staff.

The UK's established expertise in education and assessment

The UK has a long-established reputation for leadership in qualifications and assessment, both at home and internationally. UK qualifications and higher education degrees are globally recognised, and UK awarding bodies, regulators and agencies have played a significant role in shaping assessment systems worldwide. This heritage underpins confidence in the UK's ability to exercise sound judgement in its own admissions and assessment practices.

In the UK, higher education providers operate within a robust framework of **quality assurance** and regulatory oversight underpinned by the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#). Providers have built deep expertise, as appropriate for their institution, in designing fair, evidence-based approaches to evaluating student readiness, as well as tailored provision, such as in-sessional English language classes, tutorials and resources for students during their studies.

This demonstrates sector competence in the assessment of **English language proficiency** and related provision, safeguarding the UK's global reputation.

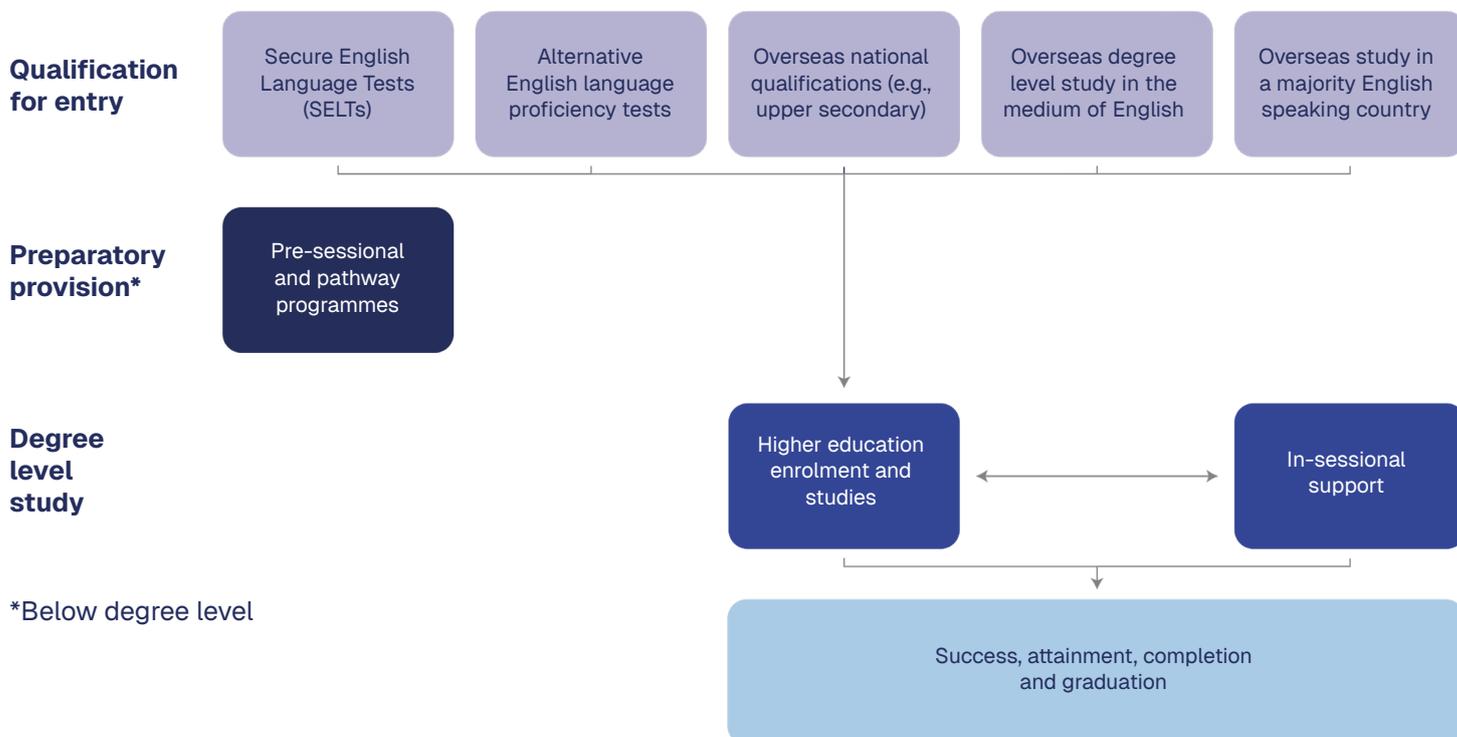
English Language qualification entry routes to study

Students whose first language is not English must provide evidence of English language ability to fulfil higher education entry requirements and satisfy UKVI requirements for a Student Visa. Different types of qualification may be accepted as evidence, according to the study route, the level of study and the UKVI status of the institution. The most common way to demonstrate English ability is via a **Secure English Language Test (SELT)**.

Higher education providers (HEPs) with a track record of compliance can self-assess evidence of English language via alternative proficiency tests, national qualifications in English language and overseas degree level study (equivalent to UK degree level) where English is the Medium of Instruction (**EMI**). HEPs may also accept successful completion of pre-sessional English or other pathway programmes.

These preparatory programmes enable students to develop and demonstrate their English language skills, build **subject-area** understanding, strengthen study skills, and gain familiarity with UK higher education and life.

Regardless of the entry point, it is important that ongoing English for Academic Purposes (EAP) support is maintained throughout the duration of the student journey. Students must be able to demonstrate a required level of English language proficiency at the outset of their course, but further support during the course of study should be available to ensure students successfully engage with their learning, socially integrate, and gain the most from their experience of studying in the UK. Further support may include English for Academic Purposes (EAP) modules of study within or alongside the main programme of study, EAP library and learning resources or dedicated staff who can provide wider EAP assistance if needed. The diagram below outlines the English language qualification routes currently available and the ongoing role of in-sessional support.



English language evidence is further stated on the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) which provides final confirmation that an institution has undertaken a thorough review of English language for each individual applicant. Evidence stated on the CAS reflects final confirmation resulting from robust decision-making processes within the institution.

Core components in evaluating English Language

Robust, evidence-based decision making requires the evaluation of core components that are integral to all English language qualifications and English language course provisions. The diagram below provides an overview of the key areas of evidence-based qualification and course evaluation.

The level of evaluation undertaken is scalable, depending on the size, resources and needs of each institution. However, it is important that the rationale for acceptance of any qualification or course includes evidence gathered from each of the four components.

- Accreditation
- Educational oversight
- Independent evaluation
- Research findings

Due Diligence

Quality Assurance

- Qualification/**course design**
- Assessment methods
- Test delivery and security
- Qualified EAP professionals and robust processes
- Verification of documentation and identification of fraudulent documents

Qualification evaluation

Monitoring and review

- Assessment tasks which are relevant for higher education study
- Assessment in reading, writing, listening and speaking
- Assessment exam tasks or learning outcomes mapped to CEFR

- Student progression rates
- Entry and exit grades
- Student and academic feedback
- Qualification changes and updates
- Institutional duty of care to the student

The core components can be summarised as follows:

- **Due Diligence:** Ensuring the qualification or course is offered by a reputable and recognised provider via accreditation, educational oversight and independent evaluation by a recognised third party or research studies.
- **Quality Assurance:** Ensuring the qualification or course is supported by robust quality assurance systems across its design, delivery, security measures and verification methods.
- **Qualification Evaluation:** Ensuring the qualification or course assessment reflects skills which are relevant to higher education study, offers assessment in all four skills of English and is mapped to the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages \(CEFR\)](#) at the required level.
- **Monitoring and Review:** Ensuring methods to monitor and review the qualification or course are in place at the outset, including tracking student academic outcomes, progression rates, student and academic feedback and provision for ongoing support as part of the institution's commitment to the duty of care.

The Guide provides detailed and operational good practice guidance on how best to implement the evaluation of core components in Sections 1, 2 and 3.

Continuous student support

After enrolment, higher education providers continue to play a key role in supporting all students to achieve academic success and enhance their overall experience, including through the provision of in-session EAP support.

Such provisions are taught and assessed by specialists in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and focus on improving and assessing the academic language skills which are necessary for all students to develop. In-session courses promote language as crucial for academic success, integrating language as key to effective communication for all students. In the UK, EAP is a distinct, well-regulated **discipline**, with research-driven teaching, specialised qualifications, and external recognition through professional bodies, aligned with quality assurance processes and the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

Key findings in English Language evaluation, provision and compliance

Ensuring that students have appropriate levels of English language forms a key part of higher education sponsor requirements as defined by UKVI. Higher education sponsors are required to complete an annual [Basic Compliance Assessment \(BCA\)](#) to maintain their licence to sponsor international students. Sponsors must not exceed set metrics for the rates of visa refusal, non-enrolment and course completion.

The good practice compiled in this Guide demonstrates a robust, evidence-based and student-centric approach across the sector. This facilitates consistency, high-quality standards, and compliance with UKVI requirements and maximises student success.

Drawing on the key principles of this Guide, good practice arrangements in English language:

- form an integral part of wider institutional strategy, enabling cross-functional collaboration across EAP, recruitment, admissions, compliance and receiving academic teams;
- are outlined in the institution's English language policy, supporting fair access for students from different backgrounds, by recognising a diverse range of qualifications and evidence of prior learning for entry;
- are evidenced in the institution's procedures, enabling transparency in the process of ensuring appropriate English language level requirements that are fit for the academic demands of the programme of study and enable students to fully participate in university or college life;
- evaluate English language entry tests, qualifications and courses using robust governance processes to protect both the institution and its students. Acceptable entry qualifications should be monitored and reviewed on an on-going cyclical basis;
- are fully compliant with UKVI Sponsor licence terms, demonstrating rigorous processes and appropriately trained staff are in place to ensure students are admitted via qualifications which have undergone the institution's evaluation and verification procedures, thus ensuring the integrity of the Student visa route;
- promote a positive student experience, by supporting the smooth transition into a new learning environment, building confidence and a sense of belonging, and nurturing the acquisition of intercultural skills;
- support academic success, by aligning English language admissions policy, pre-sessional EAP and pathway programme content, and assessment approaches with the academic demands of the degree programmes students are admitted onto;
- safeguard the UK's global reputation as a provider of world-class education, maintaining the UK's attractiveness as a study destination for students from all over the world.

This Guide sets out how this is achieved and provides practical templates which demonstrate the good practice approaches in place across the sector.

Using the Guide

This Guide brings together sector expertise on **English language testing, qualifications, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)** across the full student journey, from setting entry requirements and qualification verification through to pre-sessional and in-sessional English EAP programmes. These resources are intended to help UK higher education providers make **fair, transparent and evidence-based** decisions that protect academic standards, support international student success and experience, and safeguard the UK's reputation as a world-class study destination.

The following resources reflect the five key principles of the Guide and align with the recognised need for strong institutional practice in English language decision making and support, including sponsor compliance expectations and student outcomes - progression, completion and attainment.

The Guide is comprised of the following three sections:

Section 1: Evaluating English Language Qualifications

Section 1 provides guidance on the following areas:

- setting entry requirements;
- evaluating, accepting and monitoring English language tests, school-leaving qualifications, degrees taught in English and pre-sessional courses from external providers;
- emphasising cross-functional governance, transparency, and ongoing review using quantitative and qualitative evidence.

It contains example evaluation processes which may be used when considering different types of English language qualifications. It is useful for those involved in making and evaluating decisions on the above such as academics, admissions, compliance and recruitment staff within institutions, as well as regulatory body professionals.

[Open Section 1](#)

Section 2: English language on pre-sessional and pathway programmes

Section 2 provides guidance on the following:

- good practice in designing, assessing and assuring quality in pre-sessional and pathway provision, including effective course design, reliable and fair assessment, moderation, external examining and accreditation;
- approaches that support transition and preparedness for degree study.

It is intended to support EAP academic, programme support and professional staff involved in pre-sessional and pathway provision, pastoral staff involved in helping students prepare for higher education, as well as academic and admissions teams in receiving programmes.

[Open Section 2](#)

Section 3: Approaches to in-sessional English for Academic Purposes

Section 3 provides models for effective in-sessional EAP as a core element of academic support, covering:

- discipline-relevant provision;
- collaboration between EAP and subject teams;
- embedding and timing support for maximum impact;
- evaluation through engagement, satisfaction and academic outcomes.

Section 3 is relevant for EAP and multi-disciplinary academic staff, as well as those working in quality assurance and student support within an institution.

[Open Section 3](#)

Together, these three sections form a comprehensive, complementary set of resources that support joined-up institutional practice from robust English language decision making at the point of entry through to the provision of inclusive in-sessional support that helps students thrive throughout their studies in the UK.

Templates and annexes

A number of templates are included in order to provide practical guidance for processes and decision making. These are also included in annexes at the end of the Guide.

Conclusion

This Guide highlights the importance of appropriate governance and quality procedures in setting English language requirements for UK higher education, and the need for evidence-based approaches to assessment. To protect standards and the UK's international reputation, higher education providers must remain vigilant, while also offering a range of assessment routes so that access is fair and inclusive.

The Guide provides guidance on high quality pre-sessional, pathway and in-sessional EAP provision, highlighting the beneficial impacts of these on student satisfaction, attainment and course completion rates.

Looking ahead, culturally and linguistically diverse student groups will remain a defining feature of UK higher education. Global flows of students are also highly dynamic: the cohort of 2025 is very different to the cohort of 2021. The capacity to embrace this diversity and dynamism is not just a strength, but a necessity in today's interconnected world. It allows universities to expand their international reach and impact, and allows students to share perspectives, develop global networks and gain intercultural skills that benefit not only individual careers but also wider society.

UK higher institutions recognise the duty of care responsibilities that are essential in placing the student at the heart of an institution's governance, policies and practices. Decisions taken regarding English language can impact the student in a number of ways and it is important to consider the wider context from the student perspective

- Limited IT infrastructure in some overseas countries can make online testing inaccessible to certain groups of applicants.
- Do tests and courses ensure fair access for applicants with additional learning needs?
- What is the financial cost to applicants in taking the test or course?
- What are the digital literacy expectations for applicants in taking online tests?
- How do we help students acclimatise to a UK educational style of learning and assessment?
- What ongoing support can be provided, such as EAP provision, other academic skills resources, or library services?
- What student pastoral care can be provided and how do we focus on student mental health, well-being and integration?

For potential to be fully realised, students need a fair, rigorous, student-centred approach to admissions and qualifications assessment, and developmental support from the very start of their journey. They benefit from guidance that helps them understand and make the most of the opportunities offered by a multicultural, multilingual environment. Equally, staff across higher education - both academic and professional - require the knowledge and skills to guide and support diverse student groups effectively. By preparing both students and staff in this way, UK higher education can continue to deliver academic excellence, inclusivity and global impact.

Further Resources

The following suggested resources are likely to be useful to higher education providers in making decisions on good practice in relation to the areas of English language learning, teaching, and assessment covered in the Guide.

Note that where reports and resources reference particular potential evidence of language proficiency, this Guide does not endorse any specific tests or qualifications.

The **Association of Language Testers** in Europe (ALTE) is a test provider association that promotes fair and accurate language testing practices, including a **validation** scheme for higher education providers wishing to benchmark their own language assessments.

Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)

Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) - Q-Mark

British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) provides external accreditation of EAP provision, professional recognition and EAP relevant CPD and research.

BALEAP Accreditation

Professional Development Our Expertise

The Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA), based at the University of Bedfordshire, produces research on language testing and assessment, and provides resources and training.

CRELLA | University of Bedfordshire

The Common European Framework of References for Languages is an international standard describing language ability across six levels (A1–C2), used to compare qualifications and test results. It can be used to support **mapping** of English language tests and other qualifications.

The CEFR Levels - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

CEFR benchmarking manual and templates (Council of Europe)

ECCTIS provides educational consultancy and **benchmarking** services of international qualifications for institutions, test providers, and awarding bodies.

Ecctis

Research and independent evaluations

Home Office Student Sponsor Guidance including Basic Compliance Assessment (**BCA**) details:

Document 3: Student sponsor compliance

The UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment (UKALTA) is a professional organisation providing a forum for the exchange of information and research on language testing. Their reports and briefing papers provide useful information for higher education providers.

UKALTA

Reports and Briefing Papers

UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) provides independent advice and guidance to education providers and international students on all aspects of international student policy. It provides specialist forums for staff in member institutions to discuss immigration compliance and student advice. It offers a range of training programmes to support staff in UK universities and colleges on the immigration rules, including on legal requirements for English Language assessment.

UKCISA

Annexes and Templates

Annex A: Evaluating an online English language test

- Must have documents
- Useful but not always possible to obtain
- Best practice but may not be available

Key documents required:

Providers should take a multi-layered approach to gathering documents for evaluation. Some documents are required to make decisions. Others are useful for further information and context but may not always be available.

- Confirmation of quality assurance systems
- Sample test tasks (computer-based tests may offer sample exam tasks for analysis)
- Current mark schemes which match the exam tasks
- Test specification and security information
- Anonymised test taker writing and speaking samples which show examiner/ AI marking

The documents listed above should be obtained directly from the test provider. Documents, website links, email correspondence with the provider and internal mapping to the CEFR should be saved centrally within the institution and readily available for audit purposes.

Evaluation stage

Stage 1: Quality assurance systems in test design and security

Process

- Determine whether the test is supported by robust quality assurance systems with regards to test design and administration (e.g., qualified EAP staff who undertake test design, invigilation and marking, test tasks are kept securely).
- Determine whether the test is supported by robust research which evidences the **validity** and **reliability** of the test (the test provider should be able to explain this research to a non-specialist audience).
- Determine whether the test is supported by robust security measures. Consider the following:
 - Test location- is the test taken in a test centre or available to take remotely in the test taker's home?

Evidence saved

- Test specification
- Correspondence with test providers
- Independent evaluations from external organisations (e.g., Ecctis)

- What device(s) can be used to take the test (e.g., PC or mobile phone)?
- How is the identity of the test taker verified online (e.g., facial scan)?
- How is the test administered securely (e.g., is the browser locked down to prevent access to online resources)?
- How is the test invigilated remotely (e.g., is there a human invigilator or AI detection of academic misconduct)?
- Determine how the test is marked (e.g., machine marked or human marked or both).

Evaluation stage

Stage 2: Assessment and CEFR mapping

Process

- Analyse exam tasks for all four skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and map exam tasks to ensure a minimum of CEFR B2 level is assessed (or higher if required). Consider whether the exam tasks assess skills which are authentic, relevant and useful in a higher education/academic setting, particularly whether speaking and writing tasks require long enough answers to accurately assess proficiency, whether reading and listening texts reflect B2 language and are not too simplistic.
- Analyse mark schemes for speaking and writing skills and map the minimum grades which are required to meet CEFR B2 level (or higher if required).
- Analyse marked test taker samples (if available) to fully understand how students are assessed against speaking and writing mark schemes.

Evidence saved

- Sample tasks with dates
- Mark schemes which match the exam papers
- Marked test taker samples for speaking and writing (machine and/or human marked)
- Internal mapping of exam papers

Evaluation stage

**Stage 3:
Grading**

Process

- Determine what grade (or grades if more than one) is required to reflect CEFR B2, or above. The test provider should be able to offer this information based on their own research. It is important that any grade alignment research is underpinned by robust quality assurance processes.

Evidence saved

- Internal mapping and grade alignment
- Test provider research on grade alignment

Evaluation stage

**Stage 4:
Sector
research**

Process

- Research whether the qualification is widely accepted across UK higher education and international higher education. If so, it is useful to cross check other institutions' entry requirements.

Evidence saved

- Market research and sector analysis

Evaluation stage

**Stage 5:
Other
information**

Process

- Record any other relevant information, such as whether the qualification enables wider access to UK higher education, whether it caters for test takers with additional needs.

Evidence saved

- Test provider information

Evaluation stage

**Stage 6:
Decision and
Rationale**

Process

- Determine whether the qualification is to be accepted (or not) and record the date and department/job role for the authorising member of staff.

Evidence saved

- Internal decision making/ sign off documents

Evaluation stage

Stage 7: Monitor and Review

Process

- Track progress and progression outcomes for applicants enrolling with the qualification.
- Review the qualification annually to check for any changes to the curriculum or assessment.

Evidence saved

- Internal monitoring and review documents

- Must have documents
- Useful but not always possible to obtain
- Best practice but may not be available

Annex B: Evaluating an upper secondary English language qualification

Providers should take a multi-layered approach to gathering documents for evaluation. Some documents are required to make decisions. Others are useful for further information and context but may not always be available.

Key documents required:

- Confirmation of educational oversight of the course
- Recent (still valid) past exam papers
- Recent (still valid) mark schemes which match the exam papers
- Upper secondary English language curriculum and/or syllabus
- Anonymised test taker writing and speaking samples which show examiner marking

The documents listed above should be obtained from official websites or provided directly from the relevant authority (e.g., Ministry of Education, Matriculation or examination awarding body). Documents, website links, email correspondence with authorities and internal mapping to the CEFR should be saved centrally within the institution and readily available for audit purposes.

Evaluation stage

Stage 1: Educational oversight and quality assurance

Process

- Determine which official body is responsible for providing educational oversight and quality assurance for the course and the assessment. For upper secondary qualifications, this would typically be the Ministry of Education or Matriculation/ examination awarding body.
- Determine whether the qualification is assessed internally (by schools) or externally by the exam board or a mixture of both. If assessments are set internally by schools, it may not be possible to map a centralised test which all students will sit.

Evidence saved

- Ministry of Education/ awarding body websites, documents sent directly by the relevant authority, email correspondence with relevant authorities

Evaluation stage

Stage 2: English language curriculum/ syllabus and CEFR mapping (if available)

Process

- Determine whether the curriculum/ syllabus confirms assessment in all four skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking). If not, it will not be possible to accept the qualification without further supporting assessment from the institution (e.g., an institution's speaking test if there is no speaking assessment included).
- Determine whether the curriculum/ syllabus states learning and/ or assessment objectives which reference CEFR levels. If so, it is likely that the course has been designed to meet specific CEFR levels.
- Determine whether the curriculum/ syllabus states learning and/ or assessment objectives which are not mapped to CEFR levels. If so, map these objectives to the CEFR.
- Determine whether the qualification is assessed during the course (formative assessment), at the end of the course in final exams (summative assessment) or a mixture of both. It is important to understand how the final grade (or grades) is comprised.

Evidence saved

- Curriculum and/or syllabus
- Internal mapping of learning and/ or assessment objectives to the CEFR

Evaluation stage

Stage 3: Assessment and CEFR mapping (if available)

Process

- Analyse exam papers for all four skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and map exam tasks to ensure a minimum of CEFR B2 level is assessed (or higher if required). Consider best practice tips such as whether the exam tasks assess skills which are relevant and useful in a higher education/academic setting, whether speaking and writing tasks require long enough answers to accurately assess proficiency, whether reading and listening texts reflect B2 language and are not too simplistic.
- Analyse mark schemes for speaking and writing skills and map the minimum grades which are required to meet CEFR B2 level (or higher if required).
- Analyse marked test taker samples (if available) to fully understand how students are assessed against speaking and writing mark schemes.

Evidence saved

- Exam papers with dates
- Mark schemes which match the exam papers
- Marked test taker samples for speaking and writing (if available)
- Internal mapping of exam papers

Evaluation stage

Stage 4: Grading (if available)

Process

- Determine what grade (or grades if more than one) is required to reflect CEFR B2, or above. If one final grade is given, it is important to ensure that the required entry grade is set high enough to ensure a minimum of CEFR B2 is reached in all four skills.

Evidence saved

- Internal mapping and grade alignment

Evaluation stage

Stage 5: Sector research

Process

- Research whether the qualification is widely accepted across UK higher education and international higher education. If so, it is useful to cross check other institutions' entry requirements.

Evidence saved

- Market research and sector analysis

Evaluation stage

Stage 6: Other Information

Process

- Record any other relevant information, such as whether the qualification enables wider access to UK higher education, whether it caters for test takers with additional needs.

Evidence saved

- Wider research about the qualification

Evaluation stage

Stage 7: Decision and Rationale

Process

- Determine whether the qualification is to be accepted (or not) and record the date and department/job role for the authorising member of staff.

Evidence saved

- Internal decision making/sign off documents

Evaluation stage

Stage 8: Monitor and Review

Process

- Track progress and progression outcomes for applicants enrolling with the qualification.
- Review the qualification annually to check for any changes to the curriculum or assessment.

Evidence saved

- Internal monitoring and review documents

- Must have documents
- Useful but not always possible to obtain
- Best practice but may not be available

Annex C: Evaluating degrees taught and assessed in the medium of English

Key documents required:

Providers should take a multi-layered approach to gathering documents for evaluation. Some documents are required to make decisions. Others are useful for further information and context but may not always be available.

- Official **Medium of Instruction (MOI)** letter from the awarding institution confirming full applicant details, full programme name and dates, and confirmation the programme was fully taught and assessed in the medium of English
- Official transcript from the awarding institution confirming all modules of study contained in the programme
- Overseas National Higher Education policy documents
- Overseas Quality Assurance for Higher Education policy and/or academic standards documents
- Overseas Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) policy documents
- Overseas awarding institution policy documents
- Overseas degree programme specification and/or assessment details
- Examples of graduate theses or dissertations from the programme (may be published on the awarding institution website to demonstrate expected standards)

MOI letters should be provided directly from the recognised awarding institution, on official letter headed paper, signed and stamped by named, authorised university personnel, such as a Registrar. The policy documents listed above should be obtained from official websites or provided directly from the relevant authority. Documents, website links, email correspondence with authorities and internal mapping to the CEFR should be saved centrally and readily available for audit purposes.

Evaluation stage

Stage 1: Qualification and institution verification

Process

- Verify that the awarding institution is recognised and has the relevant degree awarding authority.
- Verify that the degree programme is accredited by the relevant authority.
- Verify that the degree is comparable to a UK degree.
- Verify that the MOI letter includes all the required information and meets the receiving institution's expectations with regards to format.
- Check the qualification is still within the receiving institution's validity period.

Evidence saved

- Official overseas sources of verification (as stated on UK ENIC database)
- UK ENIC confirmation

Evaluation stage

Stage 2: EMI policy research (if policy documents are available)

Process

- Research whether there is a national education policy which confirms EMI for the institution/field of study/programme.
- Research whether there is a higher education quality assurance policy or academic standards policy which confirms EMI for the institution/field of study/programme.
- Research whether there is a PSRB policy which confirms EMI for field of study/programme.
- Research whether there is an institutional policy which confirms EMI across the entire institution/field of study/programme.

Evidence saved

- Policy documents from official websites or documents received directly from the relevant authority

Evaluation stage

Stage 3: Programme specification (if available)

Process

- Analyse the programme specification to determine whether the course is fully taught and assessed in the medium of English.
- Analyse the programme specification to determine whether the learning environment requires engagement in all four skills of English and, if so, benchmark the skills required to the CEFR (e.g., the ability to listen and take notes in lectures, to speak in oral presentations, to read specialist material or write extended essays- these skills can be benchmarked to the CEFR).

Evidence saved

- Programme specification with internal CEFR benchmarking

Evaluation stage

Stage 4: Assessment

Process

- Analyse the programme assessment methods and/or the transcript to determine whether examination tasks require communication in all four skills of English. If so, benchmark the skills required to the CEFR (e.g., a thesis will require reading and writing skills, an oral defence/ viva voce will require speaking and listening skills).

Evidence saved

- Assessment methods as stated in the programme specification
- Assessment stated on the transcript

Evaluation stage

Stage 5: Sector research

Process

- Research whether the qualification is widely accepted across UK higher education and international higher education. If so, it is useful to cross check other institutions' entry requirements.

Evidence saved

- Market research and sector analysis

Evaluation stage

Stage 6: Other information

Process

- Record any other relevant information, such as whether the qualification enables wider access to UK higher education.

Evidence saved

- Wider research

Evaluation stage

Stage 7: Decision and Rationale

Process

- Determine whether the qualification is to be accepted (or not) and record the date and department/job role for the authorising member of staff.

Evidence saved

- Internal decision making/ sign off documents

Evaluation stage

Stage 8: Monitor and Review

Process

- Track progress and progression outcomes for applicants enrolling with the qualification.
- Review the qualification annually to check for any changes to the curriculum or assessment.

Evidence saved

- Internal monitoring and re-view documents

Annex D: Evaluating a Pre-sessional English course from another provider

Key documents required:

Providers should take a multi-layered approach to gathering documents for evaluation. Some documents are required to make decisions. Others are useful for further information and context but may not always be available.

- Must have documents
- Useful but not always possible to obtain
- Best practice but may not be available

- Confirmation of educational oversight/ accreditation of the course
- Recent (still valid) exam papers
- Recent (still valid) mark schemes which match the exam papers
- Course specification and curriculum/ syllabus
- Anonymised test taker writing and speaking samples which show examiner marking

The documents listed above should be obtained directly from the pre-sessional provider. Documents, website links, email correspondence with the provider and internal mapping to the CEFR should be saved centrally within the institution and readily available for audit purposes.

Evaluation stage

Stage 1: Educational oversight and quality assurance

Process

- Determine which official body is responsible for providing educational oversight and quality assurance for the course and the assessment. This may be a UK higher education provider, or an accreditation body such as BALEAP, the British Council or the Independent Schools Inspectorate. It is important to check that the accreditation covers the teaching and learning of English, as opposed to other academic subjects which may be offered on pathway programmes, noting that only BALEAP offers specialised accreditation of EAP provision.
- Determine whether the course and the assessment is supported by robust quality assurance systems, as per the accreditation regulations (e.g., properly qualified EAP staff who undertake course design, assessment design and examination, internal and external exam moderation processes, and **test security** measures to ensure tests are stored and administered securely).

Evidence saved

- Course specification and curriculum
- Quality assurance documentation from the provider
- Accreditation reports from external agencies (e.g. BALEAP, the British Council/ Independent Schools Inspectorate)
- Independent evaluations from external organisations (e.g., Ecctis)

Evaluation stage

Stage 2: English language curriculum/ syllabus and CEFR mapping

Process

- Determine whether the curriculum/ syllabus confirms assessment in all four skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking). If not, it will not be possible to accept the qualification without further supporting assessment from the institution (e.g., an institution's speaking test if there is no speaking assessment included).
- Determine whether the curriculum/ syllabus states learning and/or assessment objectives which reference CEFR levels. If so, it is likely that the course has been designed to meet specific CEFR levels. It is recommended that internal CEFR mapping is conducted to ensure agreement with the pre-sessional provider's own mapping.
- Determine whether the curriculum/ syllabus states learning and/or assessment objectives which are not mapped to CEFR levels. If so, map these objectives to the CEFR.
- Determine whether the qualification is assessed during the course (formative assessment), at the end of the course in final exams (summative assessment) or a mixture of both. It is important to understand how the final grade (or grades) is comprised.

Evidence saved

- Curriculum and/or syllabus
- Internal mapping of learning and/or assessment objectives to the CEFR

Evaluation stage

Stage 3: Assessment and CEFR mapping

Process

- Analyse exam papers or assessment information for all four skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and map exam tasks to ensure a minimum of CEFR B2 level is assessed (or higher if required). Consider whether assessments are relevant and useful in a higher education/academic setting, whether speaking and writing tasks require long enough answers to accurately assess proficiency, whether reading and listening texts reflect B2 language and are not too simplistic, noting that good practice in pre-sessional provision goes beyond language.

Evidence saved

- Exam papers or assessment instructions with dates
- Mark schemes which match assessments

- proficiency and involves the development of broader academic skills and an understanding of the linguistic expectations of particular disciplines.
- Analyse mark schemes for speaking and writing skills and map the minimum grades which are required to meet CEFR B2 level (or higher if required).
- Analyse marked student samples (if available) to fully understand how students are assessed against speaking and writing mark schemes.

- Marked assessment samples for speaking and writing (if available)
- Internal mapping of assessments

Evaluation stage

Stage 4: Grading

Process

- Determine what grade (or grades if more than one) is required to reflect CEFR B2, or above. If one final grade is given, it is important to ensure that the required entry grade is set high enough to ensure a minimum of CEFR B2 is reached in all four skills. The pre-sessional provider may be able to offer this information based on their own research. It is important that any grade alignment research is underpinned by robust quality assurance processes.

Evidence saved

- Internal mapping and grade alignment
- Pre-sessional provider research on grade alignment

Evaluation stage

Stage 5: Sector research

Process

- Research whether the qualification is widely accepted across UK higher education and international higher education. If so, it is useful to cross check other institutions' entry requirements.

Evidence saved

- Market research and sector analysis

Evaluation stage

**Stage 6:
Other
information**

Process

- Record any other relevant information, such as whether the qualification enables wider access to UK higher education, whether it caters for students with additional needs.

Evidence saved

- Pre-sessional provider course information

Evaluation stage

**Stage 7:
Decision and
Rationale**

Process

- Determine whether the qualification is to be accepted (or not) and record the date and department/job role for the authorising member of staff.

Evidence saved

- Internal decision making/sign off documents

Evaluation stage

**Stage 8:
Monitor and
Review**

Process

- Track progress and progression outcomes for applicants enrolling with the qualification.
- Review the qualification annually to check for any changes to the curriculum or assessment.

Evidence saved

- Internal monitoring and re-view documents

Template A: Sample summary decision-making template for the acceptance of English language qualifications

Name of qualification:

Name of provider/awarding body:

Type of qualification: English language test/international secondary school/degree taught in the medium of English/pre-sessional/other:

1. Due Diligence

Summary of accreditation/educational oversight/ independent evaluation/educational research studies in support of the provider

2. Quality Assurance

Summary of quality assurance systems supporting test design, delivery and security

Summary of how the qualification and/or documents will be verified as authentic and not fraudulent

3. Qualification evaluation

Details of academic English assessment via tasks which are relevant for higher education study

Details of how the qualification has been benchmarked to the required CEFR level in reading, writing, listening and speaking?

4. Monitoring and Review

Summary of how the qualification will be monitored and reviewed on an on-going basis

5. Sector benchmarking

Summary of any market research in wider sector acceptance and entry requirements

6. Proposed entry requirements and validity period

What are the proposed entry requirements for the qualification and how do these align with CEFR levels?

What is the recommended validity period for the qualification?

7. Supporting evidence

List the evidence which has been gathered to support acceptance (provide links to internal files)

8. Decision

Decision to accept or reject the qualification for entry

Decision made by:

Job Title:

Department:

Date:

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Academic discourses	The specialised ways of using language, communication and reasoning that construct and convey knowledge within academic communities. They reflect the conventions, values and methods of particular disciplines or fields of study.
Academic language and literacy skills	The specialised language abilities and communication practices needed to understand, produce and engage with academic texts and discourse. They include listening, speaking, reading and writing in ways that meet the conventions and expectations of higher education study.
Academic literacies	The range of skills, practices and ways of thinking required to produce and interpret meaning in academic contexts. It recognises that writing, reading and communication are socially situated and shaped by disciplinary, cultural and institutional expectations.
Access and Participation Plan (APP)	A strategic document required by the Office for Students (OfS) in the UK that outlines how higher education providers will improve access, success and progression for students from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds. They set measurable commitments to promote equity and inclusion across the student lifecycle.
Accessibility	The extent to which assessments and learning environments are fair and inclusive for all students, including those with disabilities or diverse backgrounds.
Assessment for learning	A concept fostering an approach to assessment that focuses on support for learning rather than only measurement of learning.
Authenticity	The degree to which a test reflects real-world or academic language use and tasks.
Benchmarking	The practice of comparing practice with that of other higher education providers to assure alignment with sector standards eg entry requirements, tests accepted, mix of in-sessional provision offered.
British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP)	The global forum for EAP professionals, BALEAP is a professional organisation that supports the teaching and research of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in higher education. It provides accreditation, training and resources to promote high standards and good practice in EAP provision.

Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA)	A UK government system that evaluates international student sponsors (such as universities) on key metrics to ensure they effectively manage their students, focusing on low visa refusal rates (maximum 5%), high student enrollment (minimum 95%), and high course completion rates (minimum 90%).
British Universities' International Liaison Association (BUILA)	A professional association representing staff working in international recruitment, partnerships and marketing within UK higher education. It supports good practice, training and collaboration to enhance the UK's global engagement and international student experience.
Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)	An international standard describing language ability across six levels (A1–C2), used to compare qualifications and test results.
Construct validity	The extent to which a test accurately measures the theoretical trait or ability it is intended to assess. It is central to ensuring that test scores genuinely reflect the construct being evaluated rather than unrelated factors.
Course design	The systematic process of planning and organising a course's content, structure, learning activities and assessments to achieve specific educational goals and outcomes.
Critical thinking	The ability to analyse information objectively, evaluate evidence and arguments and make reasoned judgments. It involves questioning assumptions, recognising bias and applying logic to reach well-supported conclusions.
Degree outcomes	The final results achieved by students, typically expressed in degree classifications such as First, Upper Second, Lower Second, or Third Class.
Discipline	A distinct field of academic study or branch of knowledge with its own methods, theories, and conventions. It shapes how knowledge is produced, communicated and evaluated within a specific academic community.
Discourses and genres	Distinct forms and conventions of language use in academic and disciplinary contexts, such as essays, reports or research articles.
Discourse analysis	The study of how language is used in texts and contexts to construct meaning, relationships, and social realities. It examines patterns of communication beyond the sentence level, considering both linguistic features and the surrounding social or cultural context.
English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)	The use of English to teach academic subjects other than English itself, in contexts where English is not the primary language of the majority of learners.
English for Academic Purposes (EAP)	The teaching and learning of English aimed at developing the language and study skills needed for higher education contexts.

English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP)	Language provision that focuses on communicative practices specific to a discipline.
English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP)	Provision that typically focuses on generic skills such as essay writing or critical reading in a decontextualised manner.
English language proficiency	A person's ability to use English effectively across listening, speaking, reading and writing in academic and everyday contexts.
Fair access	'Fair access' refers to initiatives and policies designed to ensure that students from all backgrounds, particularly those from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, have equal opportunities to enter and succeed in higher education. It involves removing barriers to equitable participation and promoting diversity and inclusion.
Formative and summative assessments	Formative assessments provide ongoing feedback to support learning; summative assessments evaluate achievement at the end of a course or module.
Higher education providers	Universities and other institutions in the UK that deliver degree-level or equivalent qualifications and are recognised by UK regulatory bodies.
In-sessional English	English language and academic skills support offered during a student's main programme of study to aid success and integration.
Intercultural competence	The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures by understanding differences, recognising one's own cultural perspective and adapting behaviour with empathy, openness, curiosity and respect for others' values and beliefs.
Learner autonomy	The capacity of students to take responsibility for their own learning by setting goals, making choices, and evaluating their progress. It involves developing independence, self-regulation and the ability to learn beyond formal instruction.
Learning aims	Broad statements that describe the overall intentions or goals of a course or programme - what educators want students to understand, appreciate or achieve by the end of their learning experience.
Learning outcomes	Clear, measurable statements of what learners are expected to know, understand, or be able to do by the end of a course or programme, demonstrating achievement of the learning aims.
Mapping	The process of aligning and comparing English language tests or qualifications against recognised frameworks such as the CEFR or institutional requirements.
Medium of Instruction (MOI)	The language used to teach academic subjects and deliver instruction within an educational setting.

Needs analysis	The process of identifying learners' language, academic and professional requirements to design courses or materials that effectively meet their specific learning goals and contexts.
Overseas-domiciled students	Students whose permanent residence is outside the UK prior to beginning their studies at a UK institution.
Pathway programmes	Structured preparatory courses that combine academic subjects and English language development to support entry into UK degree programmes.
Practitioner in EAP	A professional who applies theory, pedagogy, and research to support students' development of academic English and study skills. They combine practical classroom expertise with reflective and evidence-informed practice to enhance learning outcomes.
Predictive validity	How well test scores forecast future performance, such as success in academic study.
Pre-sessional English	Short, intensive courses taken before the start of a degree to help students meet required English language levels and prepare for academic study.
Process and product in EAP assessment	Evaluation of both how students develop their academic skills (the process) and the final outcomes they produce (the product). This dual focus supports deeper learning, promotes academic integrity and helps identify and assist students who need support before high-stakes assessments.
Progression rate	The proportion of students who successfully move from one stage of study to the next within their programme.
Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)	The independent body that monitors and advises on standards and quality in UK higher education. It works with universities and colleges to ensure students receive a high-quality academic experience and that qualifications meet national expectations.
Quality assurance	The processes and systems used to ensure that academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are consistently maintained and meet agreed expectations.
Quality enhancement	The continuous improvement of learning and teaching, using evidence and feedback to innovate and raise standards beyond baseline requirements.
Reliability	The consistency and stability of test results across different times, versions or assessors.
Retention rate	The percentage of students who continue their studies rather than withdrawing before completion.

Scaffolding	The temporary support and guidance provided by a teacher to help learners perform tasks or understand concepts they could not manage independently. As learners gain confidence and ability, this support is gradually reduced to promote autonomy and mastery.
Secure English Language Test (SELT)	An approved English language exam required by the UK Home Office for certain visa and immigration applications. It is conducted under strict security conditions to ensure the reliability and authenticity of test results.
Subject area	A specific domain of study or teaching that falls within a broader academic discipline. It represents a focused field of knowledge, such as economics within the discipline of social sciences or linguistics within the discipline of humanities.
Teaching English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) qualification	A professional certification that recognises teachers' expertise in delivering English for Academic Purposes in higher education contexts. It assesses knowledge, skills and reflective practice specific to supporting students' academic language development.
Test security	Measures taken to protect test content and administration from misuse, fraud or compromise, ensuring results remain trustworthy.
UK-domiciled students	Students whose main residence is within the UK before starting higher education study.
UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI)	A division of the UK Home Office responsible for managing the country's visa system, immigration control and citizenship applications. It sets and enforces the rules for individuals seeking to study, work or live in the UK.
Universities UK International (UUKi)	The international arm of Universities UK, representing and supporting UK universities' global engagement. It works to enhance the UK's international education profile through policy advocacy, partnerships, and research on international mobility and collaboration.
Validity	The extent to which a test accurately measures what it is intended to measure.
Validation	The process of gathering evidence to confirm that a test or qualification is appropriate, fair and effective for its intended purpose.
Virtual learning environment (VLE)	An online platform that supports teaching and learning by providing access to course materials, communication tools, assessments and collaborative activities in a digital space.
Washback	The influence that testing has on teaching and learning, which can be either positive (improving learning) or negative (narrowing focus).

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