English Language Requirements

At the last Qualification Group meeting on 9th June, Jane Magee had presented an updated Policy on English Language Requirements. This additional meeting of the Qualifications Group has been arranged specifically to discuss English Language Requirements.

JM opened the meeting by explaining that the policy was not trying to cover every eventuality. Instead, it was outlining what we are doing at a high level. We are trying to do different things for different categories of student including UG, EU UG, International UG and PG. JM explained that she wanted to focus on PGT students because we want more of them and we want them to be properly prepared. What she wants to do for PG is different for other student cohorts.

Undergraduate

JM asked if we could set a deadline for students taking IELTS as this is the qualification that is causing us the most issues. School qualifications cannot be retaken but IELTS can. ES explained that the bulk of International applications are received in January/February. Later applicants mostly submit their
test with their application. MJ said the issue is one of competition. For EU candidates it would be better to make a decision when the IELTS results are at hand but this is not possible for International applicants. We do not want to appear to be disadvantaging applicants.

SM asked what was driving the change in policy. There are lots of reasons and it is about getting the right quality of students in a fair way. Also, we need clarity and we need to know how we can help students prepare for university.

JM advised that IELTS is not a reliable test and it does not tell us about a student’s preparedness. If they do a pre-sessional they will be better prepared. If we set a deadline for IELTS then they would need to take a pre-sessional. MJ wants to get consistency across EU and International. He is not sure how to rate national school qualifications and if they are sufficient to prepare students. That is why he feels looking at IELTS seems appropriate. JM advised that the standard of school qualifications vary across Europe. ES advised that including a pre-sessional as part the offer for international students sitting A-Levels would not work as there is not enough time to get a visa once the results come out.

KM asked why there is an issue when we get more applicants than we have places. MNE advised that we are looking to grow the international markets and we do not want to put in too many barriers. ES explained that our two main existing markets are UK and North America and there is a risk associated with depending on these two only. MNE highlighted the decline in the UK population as a reason for needing to grow the international market, income is another and MJ stated the main reason is one of diversity.

AS asked if we had progression data for IELTS applicants that would show if it was a suitable test or not. JM has looked at it before but she asked do we go by overall scores rather than sub-scores? MNE will obtain the progression data.

MJ has concerns on the EU side and conversion as we use English language results to control the numbers. JM did not realise this when she was writing the policy.

ES raised the issue of overall scores and components scores and making offers by subject, e.g. English asks for a higher score. She suggested it should be done by Faculty from an advising point of view. Medicine would be the exception because of GMC rules.

For UG, MJ said, we need to have a list of qualifications that is transparent to everyone and one where we are confident that applicants satisfy all four elements of English language (reading, writing, listening and speaking). He highlighted the qualification from Finland where there is no writing element. It was agreed that the group should go through the list before it is published.

MNE asked if there were qualifications that we can add on e.g. Eastern Europe, West Africa. If students do not have acceptable high school qualifications then they should take IELTS and we should list the overall and component score by Faculty. MNE to get data on students who have EU qualifications that have taken IELTS. Going forward, offers must include the English language requirement for the qualification the student is studying. At the moment, taking IB as an example, we do not include the acceptable IB English qualification as part of the offer.
With other universities there is a move to Integrated Offers. In principle, all present agreed that we should move to Integrated Offers (combining a pre-sessional with an academic offer) however, they will not be used for EU applicants because of the need to control numbers. KM asked what happens if a student fails the pre-sessional. EF advised that some students may progress from the 4 or 2 week course to in-sessional support.

**Postgraduate**

Integrated Offers are supported by JM and Registry but it will need to be run by the Schools.

The introduction of the ELT test is for PG students as they need to hit the ground running. The test will allow ELT to give the Schools advice. The tests may be held on specified dates in country. MNE advised that our own test would need to be good enough in case we are audited. JM will ensure that it is good and it will be monitored externally. AS stated that as the test is only for PG students then we would need to be clear about that. JM is to continue working on the test and we should be able to have a look at it by the end of the summer.

MNE closed the meeting by summarising the actions agreed.

**Actions**

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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>By</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain progression data for applicants who have taken IELTS</td>
<td>MNE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obtain data on students who have EU qualifications that have taken IELTS</td>
<td>MNE</td>
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<td>Circulate the current list of acceptable qualifications</td>
<td>JM</td>
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<td>Additional qualifications to be added to the list</td>
<td>All</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draw up a statement about IELTS and sub-scores and publish on the website</td>
<td>JM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move to Integrated Offers for the next cycle</td>
<td>JM</td>
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