

# IELTS [ International English Language Testing System

## Annual Review 2001/2002

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# Introduction

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is an established test of academic and vocational English. It is designed to assess the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is used as the language of communication.

IELTS covers all four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking – at nine levels from Non User to Expert User (see Band Score descriptions below).

IELTS is managed jointly by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL)\*, British Council and IDP Education Australia (IDP: IA), through its subsidiary company IELTS Australia Pty Limited.

\* On 1 October UCLES EFL changed its name to University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations.

This Annual Review contains statistical details on the candidature and the test material released in 2001 and information on test development, recognition and an up-date on IELTS-related research in the period Sept 01–Aug 02. Further information on the test content can be found in the IELTS Handbook, the IELTS Information Booklet and the IELTS Specimen Materials available from Cambridge ESOL, British Council, IDP:IA and IELTS test centres.

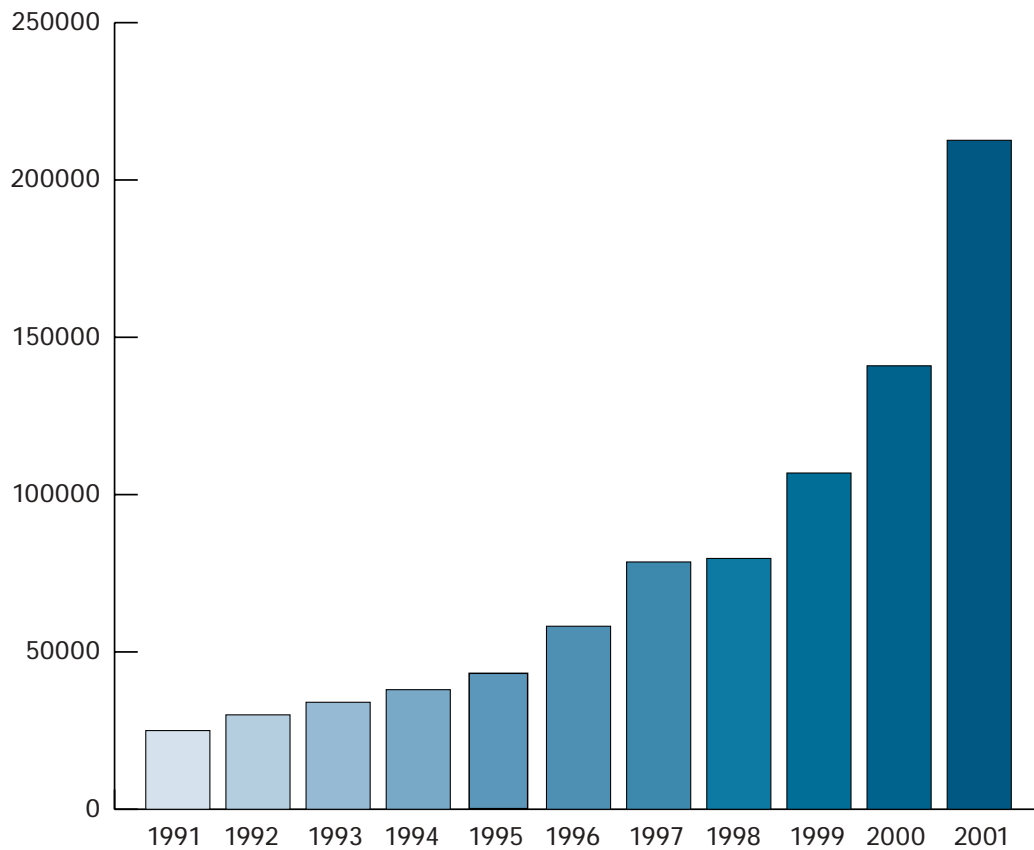
## IELTS Band Scores

<b>Band 9 – Expert User</b>
Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
<b>Band 8 – Very Good User</b>
Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
<b>Band 7 – Good User</b>
Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
<b>Band 6 – Competent User</b>
Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
<b>Band 5 – Modest User</b>
Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
<b>Band 4 – Limited User</b>
Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
<b>Band 3 – Extremely Limited User</b>
Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
<b>Band 2 – Intermittent User</b>
No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty in understanding spoken and written English.
<b>Band 1 – Non User</b>
Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
<b>Band 0 – Did not attempt the test</b>
No assessable information provided.

# Section 1 Tests in 2001

## IELTS candidature

In 2001 more than 200,000 candidates took IELTS and indications are that the recent strong growth is being maintained in 2002.



The split between Academic and General Training candidature is indicated below. The use of General Training by immigration authorities accounts for the proportional increase in General Training candidates since 1998.

	1995*	1996	1997	1998	1999*	2000	2001
Academic	71	82	83	77	66	72	71%
GT	13	18	17	23	29	28	29%

\*data incomplete

## Nationalities and First Languages

Candidates from over 200 countries took IELTS in 2001. The ten most common nationalities and first languages for both Academic and General Training candidates are indicated below.

### Academic candidates

Top 10 candidate nationalities 2001 (in descending order)	Top 10 candidate first languages 2001 (in descending order)
Chinese	Chinese
Indian	Thai
Thai	Arabic
Malaysian	Korean
Taiwanese	Indonesian
South Korean	Japanese
Indonesian	Spanish
Japanese	Bengali
Pakistani	Hindi
Bangladeshi	Urdu

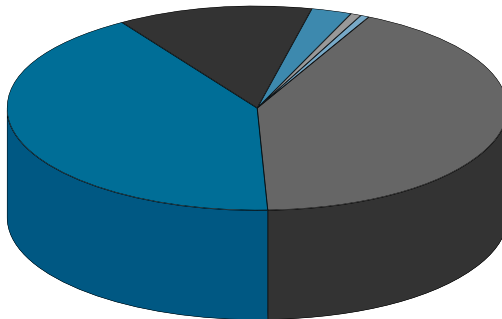
### General Training candidates

Top 10 candidate nationalities 2001 (in descending order)	Top 10 candidate first languages 2001 (in descending order)
Chinese	Chinese
Indian	Korean
South Korean	Hindi
Sri Lankan	Tagalog
Filipino	Arabic
Japanese	Gujurati
Russian	Singhalese
Malaysian	Japanese
Indonesian	Russian
Vietnamese	Punjabi

## Destinations

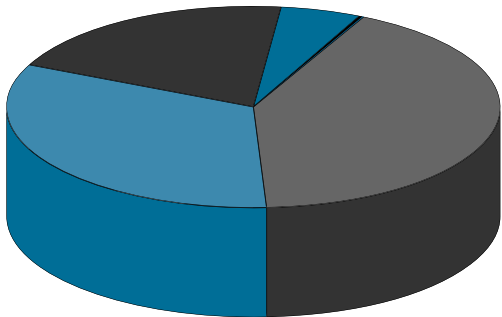
IELTS candidates are asked to indicate on their Application Form the country in which they intend to use their test results. In 2001, the stated destinations were:

### Academic candidates



United Kingdom	41.95%
Australia	41.56%
New Zealand	12.63%
Canada	2.62%
Eire	0.68%
United States of America	0.56%

### General Training candidates

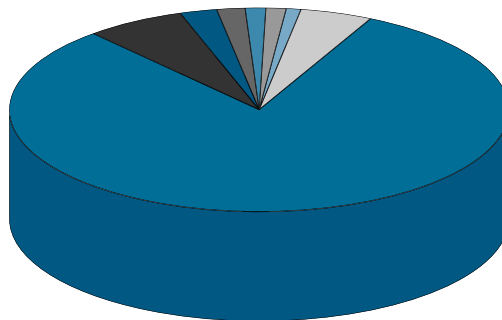


Australia	41.77%
New Zealand	32.72%
Canada	19.93%
United Kingdom	5.27%
United States of America	0.23%
Eire	0.08%

## Test purpose

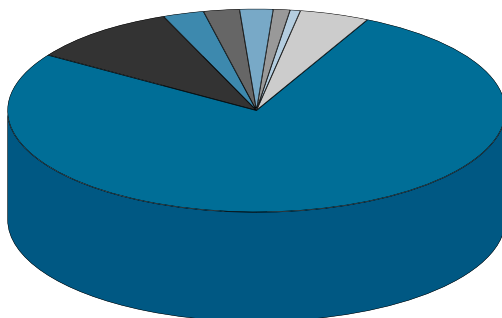
IELTS candidates are asked to indicate their purpose in taking the test. In 2001 the stated purposes were:

### Academic candidates



Higher Education	81.06%
Application to Medical Council	6.44%
Professional registration	2.40%
Higher Education Short Course	1.83%
Training or work experience	1.33%
Personal Reasons	1.31%
Employment	0.95%
Other	4.68%

### General Training candidates



Immigration	76.81%
Higher Education	9.71%
Training or work experience	2.68%
Personal Reasons	2.34%
Employment	2.17%
Professional registration	1.09%
Higher Education Short Course	0.67%
Other	4.54%

## Band Score information

Candidates receive scores on a nine band scale (see page 2). A score is reported for each module of the test. The individual module scores are then averaged and rounded to produce an Overall Band Score which is reported as a whole or half band. The mean Overall Band Scores for Academic and General Training candidates in 2001 are reported in the adjacent table together with mean Band Scores for the individual modules. These scores are in line with expected parameters of performance and are consistent with performance in 2000. The nature of the General Training candidature generally results in lower mean Band Scores than those of their Academic counterparts.

The figures below show the mean Overall Band Scores achieved by Academic and General Training candidates from the top ten nationalities taking IELTS in 2001 and the top ten first language backgrounds.

Candidates		Mean Overall Band Score
Academic candidates		5.95
General Training candidates		5.63

Module	Academic Candidates	GT Candidates
Listening	5.93	5.53
Reading	5.91	5.29
Writing	5.67	5.63
Speaking	6.06	5.81

### Top ten nationalities 2001

Academic (in descending order)		General Training (in descending order)	
Chinese	5.53	Chinese	5.43
Indian	6.63	Indian	6.02
Thai	5.48	South Korean	5.09
Malaysian	6.33	Sri Lankan	5.65
Taiwanese	5.53	Filipino	6.06
South Korean	5.61	Japanese	5.42
Indonesian	5.90	Russian	5.53
Japanese	5.74	Malaysian	6.29
Pakistani	6.26	Indonesian	5.71
Bangladeshi	5.62	Vietnamese	4.74

### Top ten first languages 2001

Academic (in descending order)		General Training (in descending order)	
Chinese	5.56	Chinese	5.45
Thai	5.48	Korean	5.09
Arabic	6.03	Hindi	5.92
Korean	5.61	Tagalog	6.05
Indonesian	5.90	Arabic	4.92
Japanese	5.74	Gujurati	5.59
Spanish	6.48	Singhalese	5.63
Bengali	5.80	Japanese	5.43
Hindi	6.69	Russian	5.50
Urdu	6.32	Punjabi	5.65

## Reliability of test material

Each year, new versions of each of the six IELTS modules are released for use by centres testing IELTS candidates. The reliability of listening and reading tests is reported using Cronbach's alpha, a reliability estimate which measures the internal consistency of a test. The following Listening and Reading material released during 2001 has sufficient candidate responses to estimate and report meaningful reliability values as follows:

Modules	Alpha
Listening Version A	0.88
Listening Version B	0.85
Listening Version C	0.87
Listening Version D	0.88
Listening Version E	0.89
Academic Reading Version A	0.87
Academic Reading Version B	0.85
Academic Reading Version C	0.84
Academic Reading Version D	0.83
Academic Reading Version E	0.85
Academic Reading Version F	0.87
General Training Reading Version A	0.85
General Training Reading Version B	0.80
General Training Reading Version C	0.86
General Training Reading Version D	0.83
General Training Reading Version E	0.83

The figures reported for Listening and Reading modules indicate the expected levels of reliability for tests containing 40 items. Values for the Listening are slightly higher than those for the Reading components; both Academic and General Training candidates take the same Listening module and so the test population represents a broader range of ability.

The reliability of the Writing and Speaking modules cannot be reported in the same manner because they are not item-based; Writing and Speaking modules are assessed at the test centre by qualified and experienced examiners according to detailed descriptive criteria. Reliability of marking is assured through the face-to-face training and certification of examiners and all examiners must undergo a re-certification process after two years.

Continuous monitoring of the system-wide reliability of IELTS Writing and Speaking assessment is achieved through a sample monitoring process. Selected centres world-wide are required to provide a representative sample of examiner's marked tapes and scripts such that all examiners working at a centre over a given period are represented. The tapes and scripts are then second-marked by a team of IELTS Senior Examiners. Senior Examiners monitor for quality of both test conduct and rating, and feedback is returned to each centre. Analysis of the paired examiner-Senior Examiner ratings from the sample monitoring data produces correlations of 0.85 for the Writing module and 0.92 for the Speaking module.

The performance of materials in the Writing and Speaking modules is routinely analysed to check on the comparability of different test versions. Mean Band Scores for the Academic Writing versions released in 2001 ranged from 5.33 to 5.86. Likewise mean Band Scores for the General Training Writing versions released in 2001 ranged from 5.38 to 5.85. The mean Band Scores for the Speaking tasks released in 2001 ranged from 5.80 to 5.92. The analysis for both Writing and Speaking shows a very consistent pattern across different test versions over time.

## IELTS centres

IELTS centres are run by either British Council, IDP Education Australia: IELTS Australia (IDP:IA) or Cambridge Examinations and IELTS International (CEII) through its registered company IELTS INC. Centres are British Council offices, IDP Education Australia offices or universities/language schools. There are currently more than 250 centres in over 110 countries world-wide.

In 2001/2002 the following IELTS centres were opened:

### **Brunei Darussalam**

IDP Education Australia Gadong

### **India**

IDP Education Australia New Delhi

### **Indonesia**

IDP Education Australia South Jakarta

### **Iran**

British Council Tehran

### **Kenya**

Australian University Studies Institute Nairobi

### **Sweden**

Folkuniversitetet Gothenburg

Folkuniversitetet Lund

### **Tanzania**

British Council Dar es Salaam

### **United Arab Emirates**

Higher Colleges of Technology Abu Dhabi

### **United Kingdom**

International House London

Sheffield Hallam University Sheffield

### **United States of America**

Inlingua English Center Arlington Virginia

### **Zambia**

British Council Lusaka

The list below indicates the largest 20 centres world-wide in 2001.

- 1 Beijing (China IELTS network)\*
- 2 Shanghai (China IELTS network)\*
- 3 Guangzhou (China IELTS network)\*
- 4 UTS Sydney (IDP: IA)
- 5 Chennai (British Council)
- 6 Mumbai (British Council)
- 7 New Delhi (British Council)
- 8 University of Auckland (IDP:IA)
- 9 UNITEC Auckland (IDP:IA)
- 10 Kuala Lumpur (IDP:IA)
- 11 Bangkok (IDP:IA)
- 12 IALF Jakarta (IDP:IA)
- 13 Manila (IDP:IA)
- 14 Eurocentres Lee Green London (British Council)
- 15 University of Queensland (IDP:IA)
- 16 Bangkok (British Council)
- 17 Hong Kong (IDP:IA)
- 18 Colombo (British Council)
- 19 RMIT Melbourne (IDP:IA)
- 20 Hong Kong (British Council)

\* British Council manages delivery of IELTS in China on behalf of the China IELTS network, which is a partnership between British Council and IDP Education Australia.

## Section 2 Test Development

### The IELTS Speaking Test Revision Project

The *IELTS Annual Review for 2000/2001* reported on the project to revise the IELTS Speaking Test, specifically the development of the assessment criteria, rating scales, test format and task design. The revised format of the Speaking Test was successfully introduced world-wide in July 2001 following an extensive programme of examiner (re)training.

The three IELTS partners – Cambridge ESOL, British Council and IDP Education Australia: IELTS Australia – traditionally share the responsibility for managing IELTS examiner training, including any retraining necessary due to test revision. When the plan for the IELTS Speaking Test Revision Project was first drawn up in 1998, it made provision for Cambridge ESOL to produce the examiner training materials and also to arrange for the first wave of retraining to train Senior Trainers at a regional level. British Council and IELTS Australia routinely co-ordinate the IELTS examiner resource at centre level, so it was agreed they would arrange for examiner retraining to be cascaded to the local level via their respective test centre networks world-wide and using their teams of IELTS Trainers.

During the second half of 2000, a comprehensive set of new examiner training materials was developed. These were prepared by the IELTS Chief Examiners and Senior Examiners in the UK and Australia in close consultation with Cambridge ESOL; all the personnel involved had extensive experience of working with the earlier training materials package and they had also been directly involved in developing the revised speaking test. The new set of materials included:

- an *IELTS Examiner Induction Pack* with accompanying video and worksheet;
- an *IELTS Examiner Training Pack*, with 2 accompanying videos and detailed Notes for Trainers.

The content and format of the IELTS Induction and Training Packs drew upon previous practice in IELTS examiner training; they were also informed by the wealth of experience gained over recent years in inducting and training oral examiners world-wide for the various Cambridge ESOL speaking tests. Both packs were designed to be suitable for immediate use in retraining existing examiners for July 2001, but also appropriate for training new IELTS examiners after July 2001.

IELTS examiner (re)training took place during a face-to-face training session lasting a minimum of 7 hours. Before attending the training day, trainees received the IELTS Induction Pack to watch at home or in their local test centre; the induction video and worksheet help to familiarise them in general terms with the test format and procedures. The programme for the actual training day includes:

- a detailed focus on test format and procedures;
- peer-practice activities in handling the test materials;
- an explanation of the assessment criteria and rating scale descriptors;
- rating practice with volunteer candidates;
- viewing of video extracts for each test part as well as whole video performances.

The training day ends with the trainees being asked to rate one or two video performances as a practice exercise; these ratings are then collected in and checked by the Trainer to monitor standards of performance in rating and identify any problem areas.

Between January and March 2001, a small team of experienced IELTS Senior Trainers delivered examiner retraining to more than 60 IELTS Trainers in 15 regional locations around the world. During the early training sessions in February 2001 the Training Pack was 'trials' with a small number of Trainers around the world: this meant that minor adjustments could be made to the final edition used from March onwards. Once Trainers had been retrained as IELTS examiners, they then delivered retraining to groups of IELTS examiners at a local level within their area. By the end of June 2001, more than 2500 IELTS examiners had attended over 150 face-to-face retraining sessions carried out in most of the 105 countries where IELTS was on offer.

From March 2001, queries and other comments began to feed back to the IELTS partners and were collated by the project team based at Cambridge ESOL. This led to the development of a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document which was circulated to all Trainers in May 2001 to provide helpful clarification and additional notes for guidance where necessary.

The IELTS Examiner Training Pack included feedback questionnaires for Trainers and examiners inviting comments on their experience of using the materials. Completed forms were returned to Cambridge ESOL and were then analysed to help evaluate the usefulness of the training programme. By late September 2001 75 Trainer feedback forms had been returned for analysis and results showed that over 90% of Trainers considered the Training Pack to be 'very good' or 'fairly good'; any concerns expressed related primarily to aspects of timings for the day, and to features of the training materials layout (e.g. size of print). Over 1000 examiner feedback forms were returned and analysed: 99% of examiners reported the training session to be 'very good' or 'fairly good' and 88% of examiners considered the guidelines in the Instructions to Examiners booklet to be 'very good' or 'fairly good'; 96% of examiners described the explanation of assessment procedures and criteria as 'very good' or 'fairly good', and similar figures reported finding the video profiles (96%) and the practice session with volunteer candidates (95%) either 'very helpful' or 'fairly helpful'. Examiners expressed some concern about the time available to cover everything in the training session.

On the whole, feedback from both Trainers and examiners was very positive and this is one measure of the success of the world-wide (re)training programme. A further set of FAQs was provided in December 2001 and suggestions for improvement to the training materials will feed into the second edition of the Examiner Training Pack.

Some additional materials were developed as part of the IELTS examiner training strategy. These include:

- two *IELTS Examiner Certification Sets* (to enable examiners to gain certificated status following attendance at a training session);

- an *IELTS Self-access Standardisation Pack*, with video and worksheets (a form of ‘norming pack’ to provide examiners with material for extra rating practice prior to live examining).

After IELTS examiners have attended a face-to-face training session they are asked to rate a set of speaking test performances in order to demonstrate the accuracy of their assessment. An examiner must mark to an acceptable standard in order to receive certificated status and be qualified to examine for a period of 2 years. All retrained examiners were required to complete a certification set by the end of 2001. These certification ratings are being analysed by Cambridge ESOL to monitor examiner reliability and to investigate aspects of the criteria and scale functioning as part of the ongoing validation programme for the revised IELTS Speaking Test. Other studies will focus on the reactions of test users (i.e. examiners, candidates, IELTS administrators) to the revised Speaking Test format.

The exercise to retrain and standardise over 2500 IELTS examiners world-wide within a 4–5 month period required considerable investment on the part of all three IELTS partners, not only in terms of professional input but also in terms of the logistical expertise and financial support needed. The world-wide network of trainers and examiners established as a result of this retraining activity is steadily being developed into a comprehensive professional support system for IELTS examiners; this system will include procedures for regular co-ordination (i.e. standardisation) and monitoring activities. In this way, we can ensure that the IELTS speaking test continues to be a ‘quality instrument’ for assessing L2 spoken language ability.

## The IELTS Writing Test Revision Project

The IELTS Writing Test Revision Project began in June 2001 with three main objectives:

- 1 the development of revised rating scales, including definition of assessment criteria and revised band descriptors (Task 1 and Task 2 for the General Training Module and the Academic Module);
- 2 the development of materials for training trainers and examiners;
- 3 the development of new certification/re-certification sets for examiners.

It was agreed that the IELTS Writing Revision Project should closely model the approach successfully used for the earlier IELTS Speaking Test Revision Project, and would be divided into the following five phases:

Phase 1	Consultation, Initial Planning and Design	June – December 2001
Phase 2	Development	January – June 2002
Phase 3	Validation	July 2002 –
Phase 4	Implementation (incl. examiner retraining)	To be decided
Phase 5	Operation	To be decided

Initial discussion within the Revision Working Group was informed by a review of recent commissioned and non-commissioned studies relating to IELTS Writing, and also by a comprehensive survey of the literature on holistic and analytic approaches to writing assessment. The next step was to explore current practice among IELTS Writing assessors, in order to gauge their attitudes

towards their respective assessment practice and to highlight theoretical and practical factors which would help shape the redevelopment of the writing assessment criteria and scales.

The consultation phase began with a series of semi-structured interviews with groups of IELTS Academic and General Training Writing assessors in the UK and Australia. These interactions led to the construction of a survey questionnaire which was sent out to a sample of several hundred IELTS assessors based at a range of test centres worldwide. The function of the interviews and questionnaires was to elicit from assessors individual approaches and attitudes to the assessment of IELTS writing tests, especially in relation to differing domains (Academic and General Training) and differing task genres (Task 1 and Task 2). Protocol analyses are capable of revealing rich insights on the part of assessors which can be instrumental in helping to develop assessment criteria and scales that are valid, reliable and practical.

The questionnaire, which was designed to be concise and able to be completed in a short time frame, consisted of sections exploring assessors’ approaches and attitudes to:

- rating the different task types for Task 1 and Task 2
- using Global and Profile scales
- interpreting the assessment criteria and band descriptors

From the information presented, it was clear that many examiners had a wide experience of teaching and examining although a number of relatively inexperienced EFL/EAP teachers had limited experience of IELTS writing assessment.

Phase 1 of the project was completed to schedule and highlighted some key issues from the perspective of the assessor which have provided a valuable focus for the subsequent development phase, e.g.

- variation in sequencing of rating
- variation in reference to Writing Assessment Guide
- variation in use of global/profile approaches
- interpretability of particular criteria

The Revision Working Group includes both internal Cambridge ESOL staff and external academic consultants and Senior Examiners with a strong interest in Academic Writing as well as experience with IELTS and international students in the university context; Phase 2 of the project – the design and development of revised draft criteria and descriptors – has recently been completed in preparation for trialling and validation from the middle of 2002.

## CBIELTS

CBIELTS has been developed to give candidates more choice in how they take IELTS. Candidates who decide to take the computer-based listening and reading modules will have the choice of taking the writing module on screen or on paper. All CBIELTS candidates will take the face-to-face speaking module.

Following the report in the Annual Review 2000/2001 the final phase of CBIELTS trialling is currently taking place in selected centres. Subsequent to successful validation it is expected that CBIELTS will be available globally in 2003.

## Section 3 Recognition and Acceptance of IELTS

IELTS is specified as fulfilling English language requirements for entry to academic courses by the majority of institutions of further and higher education in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom and by a growing number of universities and colleges in the USA. It is also used by a number of professional bodies world-wide, including the Ministry of Defence, and the General Medical Council in the UK, the Australian Medical Council and Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Medical Council of Ireland and the New Zealand Immigration Service.

In addition it is used for screening and recruitment purposes in-country by universities, business schools and professional bodies in the private sector in a number of overseas countries, including Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Colombia, Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, Malaysia, Myanmar, Poland, Turkey and Vietnam.

IELTS has been accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in the UK as part of the UK National Qualifications Framework.

A selection of IELTS score requirements for academic entry is given below.

Country Institution	IELTS Overall Band Scores	IELTS individual Band Scores
<b>Australia</b>		
Australian National University, Canberra	6.5	Minimum of 6.0 in each module
Murdoch University, Perth	6.5	Minimum of 6.0 in each module
<b>New Zealand</b>		
University of Auckland	6.0 6.5 (postgraduate admissions)	Minimum of 5.5 in all modules for undergraduate courses
<b>Canada</b>		
University of Toronto	6.5	Minimum of 6.0 in each module
Simon Fraser University, Vancouver	6.5	
<b>United Kingdom</b>		
Durham University	6.5	
University College, London	6.5–7.5	
University of Edinburgh	6.0	
<b>Ireland</b>		
Trinity College, Dublin	6.0	
University College, Cork	6.0	
<b>USA</b>		
	<i>Undergraduate schools</i>	
New York University	7.0	
George Mason University	6.5	
Hawaii Pacific University	6.0	
Pepperdine University	6.5	
	<i>Graduate schools</i>	
University of California, Berkeley	7.0	
Rice University	7.0	
Boston University	7.0	
University of Minnesota	6.5	
University of Pennsylvania (Graduate School of Education)	7.0	

An up-to-date list of institutions which specify IELTS scores as fulfilling their English language requirements is available on the IELTS website ([www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)).

IELTS is not a certificated pass/fail examination but provides a profile of a candidate's performance on a Test Report Form. Many institutions require minimum scores in particular skill areas to suit the demands of particular courses. In addition, the requirements for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate courses may differ. In general an Overall Band Score of 6.0, 6.5 or 7.0 in the Academic modules is accepted as evidence of English proficiency by institutions of further education world-wide. However, institutions themselves are responsible for determining the IELTS Band Scores appropriate to their particular courses or requirements. Institutions should note that IELTS Band Scores reflect English language proficiency alone which is one of the many factors relevant to academic success or failure. It is standard practice for the scores reported on an IELTS Test Report Form to be accepted by institutions as evidence of a candidate's English language ability for a two-year period from the date of the test.

IELTS is also accepted by a range of professional bodies world-wide as fulfilling their English language requirements and examples of this are shown below.

Institution	IELTS Overall Band Scores	IELTS individual Band Scores
General Medical Council, UK	7.0 (Academic)	Minimum of 6.0 in each module
Nursing and Midwifery Council UK	6.5 (General Training)	Minimum of 5.5 in Listening and Reading and minimum of 5.0 in Writing and Speaking
Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia	6.5 (Academic)	Minimum of 7.0 in Speaking
Australian Medical Council	7.0 (Academic)	
Institution of Engineers, Australia	6.0 (Academic or General Training)	
Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs	4.0–6.0 (General Training)	Points are awarded towards an applicant's General Points Score on a sliding scale from Band 4.0 to Band 6.0
New Zealand Immigration Service	5.0 (General Training)	
Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration	(General Training) 7.0 minimum for 'High' proficiency 5.0 minimum for 'Moderate' proficiency 4.0 minimum for 'Basic' proficiency	

## Information for admissions and testing personnel

A publication is available (Introduction to IELTS: Guidelines for testing and admissions personnel) for advisors on the testing of English for academic and training purposes within academic institutions or professional bodies. It is designed to give readers a clear picture of how the test operates, how it has developed over the years and why it is regarded as an established test of academic and vocational English.

Data collected since 1995 on candidate and test performance has been analysed to provide information on trends and patterns in the test takers and test materials. The publication is available free of charge from Cambridge ESOL, British Council or IDP Education Australia: IELTS Australia.

## Recognition in North America

Cambridge Examinations and IELTS International (CEII), through IELTS INC., maintains continued and significant growth in the area of recognition at US and Canadian undergraduate and graduate institutions. IELTS presentations at institutions of higher learning, international, national, and regional conferences have contributed to the on-going process of recognition of IELTS.

The growth in the number of US test centres will provide more access for test takers through regularly scheduled IELTS testing sessions at more authorised test sites and specially arranged off-site testing. The latest list of North American recognising institutions and IELTS test centres can be found on the IELTS ([www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)) and CEII ([www.ceii.org](http://www.ceii.org)) websites.

CEII continues to provide admissions professionals, ESL teachers and administrators, and international advisors with current information and the latest research studies to assist them in making high-stakes decisions about test takers. In 2002 IELTS was represented at the following professional conferences and events in North America:

- Council of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS), February 2002, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL), April 2002, Salt Lake City, Utah
- Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), April 2002, Salt Lake City, Utah
- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), April 2002, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals (NAGAP), April 2002, San Diego, California
- Language Assessment Ethics Conference, May 2002, Pasadena, California
- Association of International Educators (NAFSA), May 2002, San Antonio, Texas
- State University of New York College Admissions Professional (SUNYCAP), June 2002, Rochester, New York
- National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), September 2002, Salt Lake City, Utah
- European Council of International Schools (ECIS)/Council of International Schools (CIS), November 2002, Berlin, Germany
- Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), December 2002, Washington, DC

## Section 4 IELTS Research

All IELTS-related research activities are co-ordinated as part of a coherent framework for research and validation. Activities are divided into areas which are the direct responsibility of Cambridge ESOL, and work which is funded and supported by IELTS Australia and British Council.

### Update on Cambridge ESOL funded research

Over the past year the Cambridge ESOL Research and Validation Group has continued to carry out validation work according to three broad strands of activity:

- Routine Operational Analyses concerning the administration cycle of the test, i.e. test production, test conduct, marking/grading, post-test evaluation (including ongoing pre-testing and standards-fixing activity);
- Instrumental Research Activities concerning small-scale projects which are designed to inform the operational activities but which cannot be addressed as part of the routine work, e.g. studies to inform the Writing Test Revision Project and ongoing validation activity relating to the revised IELTS Speaking Test (see also Section 2);
- Longer-term Research Projects concerning long-term research objectives in the field of language assessment which are particularly relevant to future developments, e.g. work on a common scale for writing, work to locate IELTS within the Common European Framework of proficiency levels.

#### 1 The revised IELTS Speaking Test

Research and validation activity associated with the revised IELTS Speaking Test over the past year has focused on collecting data from live speaking tests and on developing suitable methodologies and instruments for analysis. Digitisation technology is now being used to convert analogue cassette recordings of IELTS tests into electronic soundfiles; these can then be transcribed as electronic textfiles and analysed using either conventional qualitative techniques or some of the more quantitative approaches now possible via commercially available text analysis software (e.g. Wordsmith). A set of transcription conventions has recently been developed which is now being used in the transcription of a large dataset of speaking test performances; this work constitutes the first phase in the development of a larger project to build an IELTS speaking test corpus.

A second project over 2001/2002 has been to develop an observation checklist instrument which can be used in real-time to investigate the range and frequency of spoken language functions occurring in IELTS speaking tests. The checklist instrument was developed and validated in 2001 in collaboration with Dr Barry O'Sullivan of Reading University, UK, and has recently been applied to a large dataset of IELTS recordings as part of the ongoing validation of the revised test format. Use of an observation checklist is providing a useful complementary methodology to the more labour-intensive transcription approach.

Findings from both these projects will be presented at future conferences and will be reported in the Cambridge ESOL quarterly newsletter, Research Notes.

#### 2 IELTS and the Common Scale for Writing

Work completed during 2001/2002 on the IELTS Writing Revision Project is reported in Section 2 of this Annual Review. In addition to this, however, various other studies have been undertaken to explore features of writing performance by IELTS candidates; such studies are often linked to other research projects being carried out by Cambridge ESOL in the field of second language writing ability and its assessment.

#### 3 The IELTS Impact Study

The IELTS Impact Study is collecting data world-wide on the effects of the test on a broad range of stakeholders, including students, candidates, teachers and receiving institutions. The study is part of the continuous validation and revision processes to which all Cambridge examinations are subjected. The more consultation data available to Cambridge ESOL and its IELTS partners on the impact of the test, the stronger the assurance of its validity, reliability, positive impact and practicality.

In Phase 1 of the IELTS Impact Study, Cambridge ESOL commissioned initial development work from the Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language at Lancaster University, under the supervision of Professor Charles Alderson (see, for example, reports to Cambridge ESOL by Alderson and Banerjee 1996, Bonkovski 1996, Herrington 1996, Horak 1996, Winetroube 1997). Phase 2 of the study saw extensive analyses and pre-testing of the draft data collection instruments by Cambridge ESOL Validation Unit, with consultancy support from, among others, Professor Lyle Bachman, Dr Jim Purpura, Professor Antony Kunnan, and Dr Roger Hawkey.

The past year has seen the beginning of the implementation of Phase 3 of the IELTS Impact Study.

A survey has been carried out of over 300 language centres world-wide, including universities, British Council and IDP:IA centres, and language schools. The survey, which achieved a high response rate of over 65 %, ascertained key baseline data such as the following:

- language tests for which each centre runs courses
- the numbers, durations and dates of such courses per year
- the numbers and nationalities of students
- the textbooks and other materials used.

From the survey data, a case-study sample of around 50 centres was selected, representing IELTS nationality and language populations. To collect both qualitative and quantitative impact study data from students, teachers and administrators at these centres, the IELTS Impact Study data collection instruments developed and validated in Phases 1 and 2 of the project have been finalised.

These now include:

- a modular questionnaire for students/candidates pre- and post-IELTS and on preparation courses for the test, covering language learning background, strategies and attitudes; test-preparation programmes; attitudes to (and, where appropriate) experience of the IELTS test
- a language teacher questionnaire, covering background, views on IELTS, experience of and ideas on IELTS-preparation programmes
- a materials evaluation instrument to be completed by language teachers on books and other materials used to prepare students for IELTS or similar international exams
- a classroom observation instrument to be used for the analysis of live or video-recorded IELTS-preparation lessons at the case-study centres
- a receiving institute questionnaire eliciting experiences and attitudes from higher education institution administrators and subject teachers.

These instruments have been despatched to the selected centres, some of which will also be visited by members of the IELTS Impact Study team for additional stakeholder interviews and focus group sessions. From the analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data collected, hypotheses will be developed across many areas of IELTS impact. Findings and recommendations that are felt to need further research will receive it in a possible Phase 4 of the Impact Study. The full final report of the Study will be published as a volume in the Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press Studies in Language Testing series.

#### 4 Conference Presentations and Publications

During 2001/2002 Cambridge ESOL staff presented research papers relating to IELTS at a variety of national/international conferences, including: ALTE EYL Conference (Barcelona, Spain – July 2001); EA Conference (Sydney, Australia – Oct 2001); Language Testing Forum (Nottingham, UK – Nov 2001); BALEAP (London, UK – February 2002); AAAL (Salt Lake City, USA – April 2002); TESOL (Salt Lake City – April 2002); METU (Ankara, Turkey – May 2002); NAFSA (San Antonio, USA – May 2002).

Issues 6, 7 and 8 of Cambridge ESOL Research Notes (November 2001, February and May 2002) all included articles on IELTS together with announcements about the British Council/IELTS Australia funded research programme and the IELTS MA dissertation award.

#### British Council/IELTS Australia funded research program 2001/2002 (Round 7)

As part of their ongoing commitment to IELTS-related validation and research, IELTS Australia and British Council once again made funding available for research projects in 2001/2002. Such research makes an important contribution to the monitoring and test development process for IELTS (e.g. the IELTS Writing Revision Project); it also helps IELTS stakeholders (e.g. English language professionals and teachers) to develop a greater understanding of the test.

All funded research is managed by the IELTS Research Committee comprising representatives of the three IELTS partners as well as other academic experts in the field of applied linguistics and language testing. The Committee agrees research priorities and oversees the tendering process. The maximum amount of funding made available for any one proposal is £13,000/AUS\$30,000.

In October 2001, the IELTS Research Committee met to review and evaluate the submitted proposals according to the following criteria:

- relevance and benefit of outcomes to IELTS
- clarity and coherence of proposal's rationale, objectives and methodology
- feasibility of outcomes, timelines and budget (including ability to keep to deadlines)
- qualifications and experience of proposed project staff
- potential of the project to be reported in a form which would be both useful to IELTS and of interest to an international audience

It was agreed to fund the following proposals:

*The impact of IELTS on the preparation classroom: stakeholder attitudes and practices as a response to test task demands* – Cyril Weir & Antony Green, Centre for Research in Testing, Evaluation and Curriculum, University of Surrey Roehampton, UK

*Issues in the assessment of pen and paper and computer-based IELTS writing tasks* – Russell Whitehead, Birkbeck College, London, UK

*A longitudinal study of the effects of feedback on raters of the IELTS Writing Module* – Barry O'Sullivan & Mark Rignall, Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Reading, UK

*Assessing the impact of IELTS preparation programs on candidate performance on the General Training Reading and Writing Module* – Chandra Rao, Kate McPherson, Rajni Chand & Veena Khan, University of the South Pacific, Fiji

*A cross-sectional and longitudinal study of examiner behaviour in the revised IELTS speaking test* – Annie Brown, Language Testing Research Centre, Melbourne, Australia

Cambridge ESOL has provided data, materials and other types of support for several of these projects. Full reports on the projects are due by December 2002 and it is hoped to publish the reports after evaluation by the Research Committee and independent academic experts.

In May 2002 IELTS Australia and British Council issued a new call for research proposals (Round 8) to cover the period 2002/2003.

The following topics were identified as among the areas of interest for research purposes:

- work relating to the revised IELTS Speaking Test;
- work relating to the range of tests now used for university/college entry in Australia/New Zealand/UK/Canada;
- work relating to IELTS and test impact;
- work relating to IELTS band score gain and intensive English language training.

Work on other issues of current interest to IELTS stakeholders will also be considered. Submitted proposals will be reviewed in November 2002 and successful applicants notified before the end of the year.

### **Survey of British Council/IELTS Australia funded research proposals 1995–2000**

The allocation of funding for external research into IELTS dates back to 1995 with some initial studies sponsored by IELTS Australia covering a range of issues. Since 1995 more than 40 IELTS-related research projects and nearly 60 different researchers have received funding under this programme (see list on page 17).

The list illustrates the broad range of issues and themes which have been addressed through British Council/IELTS Australia-funded research programme. Findings from many of these studies have helped to inform revisions to the IELTS test (e.g. the revised IELTS Speaking Test) and have helped shape other developments relating to IELTS (e.g. impact projects, market strategies).

IELTS Australia has published some of the completed research projects in three volumes of *IELTS Research Reports* in 1998, 1999 and 2000 (available from IELTS Australia). A further selection of completed reports is also being produced as an edited volume in the Cambridge ESOL/CUP *Studies In Language Testing* series (2002/3).

## Round one – 1995

*Survey of receiving institutions' use and attitude towards IELTS,* Clare McDowell & Brent Merrylees

*Comparison of writing assessment procedures,* Greg Deakin

*An investigation into approaches to IELTS preparation with a particular focus on the Academic Writing component of IELTS,* James D H Brown

*A comparative study of IELTS and Access test results,* Magdalena Mok

*The effect of interviewer behaviour on candidate performance in the IELTS oral interview,* Alan Davies & Annie Brown

*The misinterpretation of questions in the reading and listening components of the IELTS test,* Stephen Heap & Gayle Coleman

*An investigation of the predictive validity of IELTS amongst a sample of international students at University of Tasmania,* Fiona Cotton & Frank Conrow

## Round two – 1996

*A comparison of IELTS and TOEFL as predictors of academic success,* Brian Lynch, Kathryn Hill & Neomy Storch

*Construct validity in the IELTS Academic Writing Module: a comparative study of Task 2 topics and university writing assignments,* Tim Moore & Janne Morton

*IELTS in context – issues in EAP for overseas students,* Robynne Walsh & Greg Deakin

*Specifying the internal and the candidate group profiles of IELTS results in 1996 from Australian test centres,* A. Lee, Christine Bundesen & Magdalena Mok

*An investigation of the effect of students' disciplines on their IELTS scores,* Cynthia Celestine

*An investigation of speaking test reliability with particular reference to candidate/examiner discourse produced and examiner attitude to test format,* Clare McDowell & Brent Merrylees

## Round three – 1997

*The relevance of IELTS in assessing the English language skills of overseas students in the private education and training sector,* Greg Deakin & Sue Boyd

*The impact of gender in the IELTS oral interview,* Kieran O'Loughlin

*A study of response validity of the IELTS writing module,* Carol Gibson, Peter Mickan & Stephan Slater

*An investigation of raters' orientation in awarding scores in the IELTS oral interview,* Annie Brown

*Predictive validity in the IELTS test: a study of the relationship between minimum IELTS scores and students' academic success,* Mary Kerstjens & Caryn Nery

*Monitoring IELTS examiner training effectiveness,* Clare McDowell

*A monitoring program of examiner performance in IELTS Australia centres,* Brent Merrylees

## Round four – 1998

*An evaluation of selected IELTS preparation materials,* Judy Coleman & Rae Everett

*An impact study of 2 IELTS user groups: immigration and secondary,* Brent Merrylees

*A study of the response validity of the IELTS Writing test – Stage two,* Peter Mickan

*The validity of the IELTS test in an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) context,* Elizabeth Manning and Barbara Mayor

*Impact study proposal,* Dianne Schmitt

*Identifying barriers in performance-based language tests in Korea,* Young-Shik Lee and Peter Nelson

## Round five – 1999

*An analysis of the linguistic features of output from IELTS Academic Writing Tasks 1 and 2,* Barbara Mayor, Ann Hewings & Joan Swann

*Investigation of linguistic output of Academic Writing Task 2,* Chris Kennedy & Tony Dudley-Evans

*The effect of standardisation training on rater judgements for the IELTS Writing Module,* Mark Rignall & Clare Furneaux

*Task design in Academic Writing Task 1: the effect of quantity and manner on presentation of information on candidate writing,* Kieran O'Loughlin & Gillian Wigglesworth

*An investigation of the scoring of handwritten versus computer based essays in the context of IELTS Writing Task 2,* Annie Brown

*The impact of the IELTS test on preparation for academic study in New Zealand,* John Read & Belinda Hayes

## Round six – 2000

*Monitoring score gain on the IELTS Academic Writing module in EAP programmes of varying duration,* C.J. Weir & Antony Green

*Assessing the value of bias analysis feedback to raters for the IELTS Writing Module,* Barry O'Sullivan & Mark Rignall

*Investigation of linguistic output of General Training Writing Task 2,* Chris Kennedy

*What's your score? An investigation into performance descriptors for rating written performance,* Peter Mickan

*Investigating the relationship between intensive EAP training and band score gain on IELTS,* Catherine Elder & Kieran O'Loughlin

*The attitudes of IELTS stakeholders: administrator, lecturer and student perceptions of IELTS in Australian and UK universities,* R.M.O. Pritchard, Roisin Thanki, Sue Starfield & David Coleman

*A comparative study of Academic IELTS and General Training IELTS for the secondary school market,* Cheah Sutling, Gettha Rajaratnam and Dr Norazina Ismail

## IELTS MA Dissertation Award 2001

The three IELTS partners sponsor an annual award of £1000 for the MA dissertation in English which makes the most significant contribution to the field of language testing.

For the 2001 award, submissions were accepted for dissertations completed in 2000. The IELTS Research Committee met in October 2001 to review the shortlisted submissions. After careful consideration, the Committee announced the winning dissertation to be that of Sang-Keun Shin, studying at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The Committee considered Sang-Keun Shin's dissertation – *An Exploratory Study of the Construct Validity of Timed Essay Tests* – to be an excellent example of applied linguistics research within the language testing domain. His study examined the construct validity of timed essay tests by comparing the composing processes of L2 writers in test and non-test situations. Sang-Keun Shin will be presented with his award at a public ceremony during the Language Testing Research Colloquium in Hong Kong in December 2002.

The IELTS Research Committee felt that two other dissertation authors should be mentioned for the quality of their contributions: Eleftheria Nteliou – *Cambridge ESOL 'Main Suite' Speaking Tests: Describing the Test-takers' Language Output in terms of CALS Checklist of Operations at KET and FCE Levels* (Reading University, England) and Nick Boddy – *The Effect of Individual Interpretation of the Elicitation Phase of the IELTS Speaking Test on its Reliability* (Macquarie University, Australia).

Details of the application process for the IELTS MA Dissertation Award can be found on the IELTS website: [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)