

Proposal for acceptance of the Cambridge First (FCE) and INTO English Language Assessment (IELA) as exams to meet the University of South Florida's English language requirement

INTO USF would like to propose two additional exams to be used by international graduate students to meet the university's English language requirement. We suggest the following revision to the university's graduate handbook (new English language tests in bold):

Applicants from countries where English is not the official language must also demonstrate proficiency in English in one of the following ways:*

- a. *By providing scores of 79 or higher on the internet based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT)*
- b. *By providing a score of 6.5 or higher on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).*
- c. *By providing a score of 53 or higher on the Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE-A)*
- d. ***By providing an overall score of 176 or higher (with minimum subscores of 169) on the INTO English Language Assessment (IELA)***
- e. ***By providing an overall score of 176 or higher (with minimum subscores of 169) on the Cambridge English First (FCE)***
- f. *By earning a score of 153 (or equivalent) on the GRE Verbal exam.*
- g. *By earning a baccalaureate or higher degree at a regionally accredited institution in the U.S.*
- h. *Applicants who earn a baccalaureate or equivalent degree at a foreign institution where English is the language of instruction (for the institution and not just the major) may meet this requirement. However, other related factors (including test scores) will also be considered. Medium of Instruction must be documented on the transcript or on an official Certificate of Medium of Instruction from the Institution*

Support for this proposal

1. Background to IELA and FCE

Cambridge English is the UK-based examination body behind both the INTO English Language Assessment (IELA) and the First Certificate in English (FCE), as well as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. Cambridge English has developed a solid reputation for the quality and reliability of the tests it has run over its 100-year history. Cambridge English language exams and language teacher qualifications are recognized and accepted in a wide range of institutions worldwide. The FCE exam is well-established as an English language assessment; the IELA exam was recently developed through a partnership between INTO University Partners Inc and Cambridge English. The involvement of Cambridge English in both exams attests to the quality and reliability of the exams. The rationale for INTO to develop an in-house exam is in order to offer it at INTO centers worldwide and have the test accepted at INTO university partner institutions.

2. Comparison of IELA and FCE with IELTS and TOEFL

Currently USF accepts the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), IELTS, and the Pearson Test of English – Academic (PTEA) for international students to demonstrate that they meet the university’s English language requirement. The following table represents a comparison of TOEFL and IELTS with IELA and FCE.

	TOEFL	IELTS	IELA	FCE
Skills tested	Reading, listening, speaking writing	Reading, listening, speaking writing	Reading and use of English, listening, speaking, writing	Reading and use of English, listening, speaking, writing
Test delivery	Internet-based	Paper-based	Computer-based	Paper-based
Content	Academic tasks and language use	Academic tasks and language use	General English tasks and language use	General English tasks and language use
Length of the test	4 hours: Reading: 60-80 mins Listening: 60-90 mins Speaking: 20 mins Writing: 50 mins	2 hours 45 mins: Listening: 30 mins Reading: 60 mins Writing: 60 mins Speaking: 11-14 mins (can be taken separately)	1 hour 40 mins to 1 hour 55 mins: Listening, Reading & Use of English – 45-60 mins Writing – 40 mins Speaking 13-15 mins	4 hours: Reading and use of English - 110 mins Listening – 80 mins Writing - 40 mins Speaking- 14 mins (taken separately)
Scoring (note: all organizations train, certify and monitor human raters)	Reading and listening – automatic (probably scantron) Writing – computer + human rated Speaking – human rated	Human rated	Listening, Reading and Use of English – computer adaptive Writing – computer rated Speaking – human rated	Listening, Reading and Use of English – automatic (probably scantron) Writing: Human rated Speaking- human rated
Scoring scale	0-120 (aimed at all levels of language learner)	0-9 (aimed at all levels of language learner)	142-185 (aimed at CEFR B1-C1 levels*)	142-185 (aimed at CEFR B1-C1 levels*)

*CEFR ([Common European Framework of Reference](#)) is an international standard for describing language levels. Students need an upper B2 level of English to function successfully at an English medium university. Pathway entry requires a lower B2 level.

3. Test security

Since TOEFL, IELTS and FCE are well-established language exams accepted by many education and other institutions around the world, with well-attested test security practices, this proposal will report only on the test security measure of the IELA exam. Below is a summary of relevant points from the document “6. IELA Test Security” attached to this proposal

Location: IELA tests are administered at INTO Regional Offices or INTO delivery centers (such as university partner or INTO language centers).

Proctors: (Note: In British English the term *invigilator* is used) Only INTO, Cambridge English, or INTO university partner employees can proctor IELA exams. A *Head Invigilator* must be

present at each IELA test session, and there established minimum ratios of proctors to candidates.

Ensuring student identity: This extract is taken from the attached document “6. IELA Test Security”:

Ensuring the Identity of Candidates

To prevent the possibility of fraud, the Head Invigilator must be satisfied with the identity of each candidate attending the test by carrying out adequate checks on the identity of each of the candidates. The process is as follows:

- *Each candidate must show the Head Invigilator formal documentation of their identity (picture-evidence is required), e.g. through presenting a passport. The invigilator is then required to copy the formal document of identity.*
- *The copy of identification must be signed by the candidate for additional cross-referencing of the candidate’s ID during the application process. Failure to do so could question the authenticity of the individual candidate attending the test.*
- *The copy must also include the following information from the Head Invigilator:*
 - *Name and Signature of Head Invigilator;*
 - *Name of the Head Invigilator’s institution;*
 - *Date of test;*
 - *Location of test.*

The signed document of identity is stored on a secure INTO-based repository using a portal. UK Operations at INTO University Partnerships is responsible for managing and monitoring the repository. Document/s of identity are made available to external sources as is required.

4. Test reliability

As with test security, the reliability of the FCE test, as other Cambridge English tests, is well established (see <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/research-and-validation/quality-and-accountability/>). This proposal will therefore focus on the IELA. The attached document “8. Test Development & Reliability V5.1” explains in detail how the test reliability of IELA is established and maintained.

Also, a relatively small pilot study was conducted at INTO Colorado State University (INTO CSU). The INTO CSU study compared the results of 95 of their international students who took both the TOEFL and the IELA exam. The study coordinator concluded:

“A non-parametric correlation (Spearman’s rho) was carried out between the IELA test average for listening, writing and reading and the TOEFL average (listening, structure/written expression and reading). The correlation is strong and significant ($r_s=.744$, $p=.000$, $N=95$). I believe this is a very positive result...I feel that the IELA test could be adopted as a possible alternative to TOEFL iBT and IELTS tests for admission purposes.” (Maite Correa, Ph.D., INTO CSU Program Evaluation and Assessment, 2017)

5. Establishment of cut-off scores

Both the IELA and FCE exams scores are based on the Cambridge English Scale (CES) which is a range of scores used for reporting the results of Cambridge English exams. It is built on existing results reporting and years of research and is designed to complement the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The cut-off scores identified for USF are based on published concordances of Cambridge English language exams with IELTS (e.g. <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/28894-cae-comparing-scores.pdf>) and relate directly to the IELTS scores USF currently uses for both Pathway and Direct Entry admission.

6. Acceptance of IELA and FCE at other institutions

As mentioned above, FCE is a long-established exam that is part of a suite of English language exams accepted at many educational institutions around the world (see <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/why-choose-us/global-recognition/results.aspx?country=united%20states&type=higher%20education&exam=cpe,cae,fce#>). Currently, other INTO North America partners accept FCE for Pathway admission, including for the one-semester graduate and undergraduate Pathway (e.g. INTO Colorado State University, INTO Oregon State University, INTO St. Louis University, and INTO Washington State University). All INTO partner universities in the UK (except the University of Manchester) accept IELA as an entry test to both the INTO Center and the partner university directly. All INTO North America partners currently accept IELA for Pathway entry and most are currently proposing IELA as a test to meet the university's direct entry English language requirement.

7. Other comments

British and American English

IELA, FCE and IELTS are UK-based exams. However, Cambridge English is at pains to ensure the exams provide a balanced international profile. British and American spellings are both accepted, provided there is a degree of consistency. Listening texts are spoken with a variety of accents, and the reading and listening texts used focus on broad cultural topics and settings.

General versus academic English

As shown in the table above, IELTS and TOEFL are specifically designed as tests of academic English, incorporating the kind of tasks and language that students will encounter and be expected to use as students at an English-medium university. IELA and FCE, on the other hand, do not have a specific academic focus and seek to test a candidate's general language proficiency.

There is some research that suggests that tests of general English are as good if not better measures of a student's underlying English language ability than academic-focused tests (see for example, Al-Musawi & Al-Ansari, 1999; Fox, et al., 2007). Similarly, in an examination of various language tests, including IELTS, TOEFL, and FCE, Stoyhoff (2009) concluded that all the tests examined "are suitable for their intended purpose" (p. 1) and cites a Cambridge

handbook as stating that the FCE “is intended to assess everyday written and spoken English at an upper intermediate level ... for people who want to use English for work or study purposes” (p. 22).

Anecdotally, colleagues within INTO USF, who have experience of working with international students arriving at USF with IELTS and TOEFL scores, have also suggested that these tests do not necessarily accurately measure a candidate’s underlying language ability. It is possible for students to “cram”, particularly for the IELTS test, where there are predictable tasks types (including description and analysis of a chart or table) and where assessment of speaking and writing include more focus on organization of and connections between ideas than general English tests which focus more on accuracy and complexity of language.

However, there is no doubt that students need some mastery of academic skills (such as listening and note-taking, making presentation, leading and participating in discussions, reading strategically) in order to be successful at an English-medium university. How far students with better language are more successful than students with better academic English skills is not certain; nor is it clear which is easier to develop once the student is in university classes in an English-speaking environment.

8. Conclusion

While no English language test is an accurate predictor of international student success in an American university, we believe that both FCE and IELA are useful, reliable, and valid measures of a student’s English language ability, and that the cut-off scores suggested above reflect the level of English knowledge a student would need to function successfully in graduate degree programs at the University of South Florida. Alongside INTO University Partners and Cambridge English, we will monitor the ongoing success of students admitted with these exams through direct entry and through the Pathway program to ensure the appropriacy of both the exams and the cut-off scores.

Respectfully submitted,

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References

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