



AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

AASW
English Language Policy Review
Briefing Paper

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Introduction

The Australian Association of Social Workers Pty Ltd (AASW) is in the process of reviewing its English Language Policy (the Policy). The Policy pertains to those people who qualified in social work in countries other than Australia, and who are seeking migration and employment. The Policy also applies to students from other countries who have graduated from AASW accredited social work programs.

The views of stakeholders are sought to allow the AASW Board of Directors to make an informed decision about a revised Policy; specifically in relation to the AASW's use of English language proficiency testing, and the exemptions to the testing requirement.

The current Policy specifies approved testing programs, minimum score thresholds, and exemption grounds where an English language proficiency test is required. The Board has sought the review to ensure the Policy:

- Remains aligned with contemporary English language testing frameworks;
- Is consistent with comparable Australian professional bodies and regulatory agencies;
- Sets fair, accessible, and defensible score thresholds; and
- Applies a just and evidence-based rationale for exemption grounds.

There are a number of principles which underpin this review. They are:

- English language requirements support a **high standard of safe, competent and effective practice**;
- Clients and communities rely on social workers who **can communicate clearly, safely and appropriately**;
- The Policy reflects the **community confidence** in the standards applied by a self-regulated trusted profession;
- The Australian Government expects **alignment of the requirements of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and other relevant governmental agencies** in respect of migration skills employment; and
- **Verifiable and invigilated testing** is a core consideration, reflecting AASW's commitment to the integrity, defensibility and rigour of the assessment process.

Background

The Australian Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) requires evidence of English language proficiency for applications for some Australian visas. This includes working and skilled visas, though exemptions apply for passport holders from the countries of Canada, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. A higher level of language skill can increase the points applicants are able to use to enhance their migration application.

DoHA requires English language proficiency at a Functional, Vocational, Competent, Proficient and or Superior level, depending on the visa sub-class. DoHA does not address social work specifically and does not set an English level requirement. However, for the level it defines as Proficient, an

IELTS Academic score of 7.0 is required in all four parts (spoken, written, reading and listening) of the test.

There have been changes over time, but as of August 2025, DoHA accepts a number of different tests, including IELTS, PTE Academic, TOEFL iBT, Cambridge C1 Advanced, and OET (applicable to health professionals). DoHA requires these tests to be taken at an authorised testing centre.

The AASW, on behalf of Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), is the assessing authority for Migration Skills Assessments for the social work profession. DEWR has contracted the AASW to undertake assessments for the purposes of migration and employment. A successful application also enables applicants to apply to the AASW for membership.

DEWR has similar contractual relationships with other professional bodies, including Speech Therapy Australia (SPA), Community Work Australia (CWA), the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, the Physiotherapy Board of Australia, and the Psychology Board of Australia. The Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) administers English language proficiency on behalf of the Occupational Therapy Board, the Physiotherapy Board and the Psychology Board (and other Boards) as there is a shared English language skills standard for these professions.

Current AASW Policy

In the time it has been responsible for assessing applications from overseas-qualified social workers, the AASW has updated the Policy several times, while adhering to DoHA and DEWR's parameters. Currently, the AASW requires overseas-qualified social workers, and international students who have graduated from an AASW accredited qualification, to use IELTS Academic as the test for English language proficiency.

Successful applicants need a minimum score of 7.0 in each of the four components of the test in one sitting; or a minimum score of 7.0 in each of the four components achieved in two tests in a six-month period, with no component scoring below 6.5 in each of the two sittings. The AASW accepts a One Skill Retake Test (OSRT) if, in one IELTS Academic test sittings, the applicant scored a minimum of 7.0 in three of the four components and a score of 6.5 in the other component. The OSRT must be sat within 60 days of the original IELTS Academic Test and achieve a score of 7.0 or more for the specific component of the test.

The AASW English Language Policy Migration Eligibility and Assessment exempts applicants from English language proficiency testing when there is:

- Completion of all secondary education that was taught and assessed in English in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom or the United States of America; AND
- Successful completion of the equivalent of three or more years full-time tertiary study, at a bachelor's degree or higher, that was taught and assessed in English in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom or the United States of America.

Migration and Employment Application Outcomes

It is important to note that of all the applications the AASW receives for Migration and Eligibility Assessment, the proportion of unsuccessful applicants due to English language proficiency is small. The AASW Annual Report for the year 2024-2025 shows this proportion to be 1.41%. The similar number for the year 2025-2026 is expected to be 1.1%. The slight fall between 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 occurred in spite of a 21% increase in applications for migration and eligibility assessment.

The total number of all outcome decisions for both years was 2700, of which 35 applications were linked to unsuccessful outcomes due to the AASW English Language Policy. This means that only 1.2% of all decision outcomes were unsuccessful due to a failure to meet IELTS Academic minimum score of 7.0 in each of the components for English language proficiency.

Brief Literature Review

There is little research-based published literature relevant to the Briefing Paper and there does not seem to be a publication which compares the validity and reliability of tests and applies them specifically to social work.

Several authors have produced research in relation to the experience of applicants using English language proficiency tests, and these highlight disparity between the language used in the tests and that required in practice in human and social care services, including social work (Battaglia, Flynn & McDermott, 2024; Grieve, Ta & Ross; 2023). Grieve et al (2023) for example, found the “decontextualised” language used in tests did not accurately assess socio-pragmatic language skills relevant to social work, and were not a good predictor of a student’s success in a social work placement. Yao & Grieve (2026) stated that a profession-specific test should be used to assess readiness for practice.

Papadopoulos (2017) & Yao & Grieve (2026) stated the use of the tests could be seen as discriminatory, and the associated costs create financial hardship and delay workplace participation. Frost (2021) argued that applicants may be precluded from employment because of the necessity to study and repeatedly sit the tests.

The validity of IELTS Academic was discussed by Read (2022) and they concluded that the evidence for test-score reliability is reasonably strong for reading and listening, but weaker for speaking and writing. Frost (2021) argues that the validity evidence of English language proficiency tests, including IELTS Academic, is insufficient to assess language skill. Frost argues for the inclusion of lived experience as a determinant of functional English. Pearson (2019) found that there was examiner scoring inconsistency in IELTS when applicants asked for a remark. This was cited as a concern for those who must retake a component of the IELTS, as occurs in a OSRT.

Tests

There are number of tests which are used by Australian assessing authorities within the health, human services and social care settings. The tests most commonly used for professional practice, and relevant to social work, are IELTS Academic, Cambridge C1 Advanced, PTE Academic and TOEFL iBT Australia. DoHA requires applicants to sit these tests in authorized testing centres in Australia, and each of the centres requires proof of identity.

The tests differ in several ways including: the way skills are tested, cost, time allowed for each component of the test, time taken to produce results and the use of live interviews to test the speaking component. The table below compares the tests according to these variables and the information available on their respective websites.

Table 1 - Comparison of English Language Proficiency Tests

IELTS Academic, Cambridge C1 Advanced / C2 Proficiency, PTE Academic, and TOEFL iBT — Australia, 2026

Feature	IELTS Academic	Cambridge C1 Advanced / C2 Proficiency	PTE Academic	TOEFL iBT
Cost (Australia, 2026) Approx	AUD \$490	AUD \$330–\$440 (varies by centre)	AUD \$490 (varies by centre)	AUD \$260–\$270 (varies by centre)
All 4 skills tested?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Live speaking interview?	Yes — one-on-one with a human examiner	Yes — paired face-to-face format, two candidates + two examiners	No — AI-scored, speak into a microphone	No — AI/remote-rater scored, speak into a microphone
Test centres	Most capital cities and some regional cities	Some capital cities	Most capital cities (multiple sites in each city)	Most capital cities, some regional centres
Test length Approx	2 hrs 44 min	4 hours (4 papers)	2 hrs (135 min)	3 hours
Results turnaround Approx	3–5 days (computer-delivered) / up to 13 days (paper)	2–4 weeks (results online); certificate 4–6 weeks after	Typically under 48 hours	3–8 days
Score validity	2 years	Never expires (though employing organisations may want evidence of recent testing)	2 years	2 years
Identity verification required?	Yes — valid passport (or national ID for non-UKVI in eligible countries) matching registration details; photo taken at check-in	Yes — same ID as used at registration; mandatory test-day photo taken by centre staff as an extra identity check	Yes — valid passport (in most countries) checked at centre; ID scanned/verified at check-in	Yes — ETS-approved photo ID with signature required; name must exactly match registration; photo, voice sample and signature taken
Component timings Approx	Listening 30 min; Reading 60 min; Writing 60 min; Speaking 11–14 min	Reading & Use of English 90 min; Writing 90 min; Listening ~40 min; Speaking ~15 min (per pair of candidates)	Speaking & Writing 54–93 min; Reading 29–30 min; Listening 30–43 min	Reading ~30 min; Listening ~29 min; Speaking ~8 min; Writing ~23 min (new format, effective 21 Jan 2026)

Note: the above information was extracted from the test websites and were correct at the time the Discussion Paper was written

- **International English Language Testing System Academic (IELTS Academic)**

IELTS Academic is a test widely accepted by organisations, including those in higher education and government. It has four components within the test, with each component assessing a different capability. The components are reading, writing, listening and speaking. The speaking component is done with a live examiner, face-to-face. There are authorized testing centres in all capital cities, and some in regional areas, each of which require proof of identity. IELTS Academic test results are normally made available within a few days, and it allows a OSRT, enabling users to retake just one component of the four-component test, where, in the original test, a minimum of 7.0 in three of the four components was achieved.

- **Cambridge C1 Advanced**

The Cambridge C1 Advanced test has strong academic credibility, particularly in the United Kingdom and Europe. The Cambridge C1 Advanced tests English at a high-level of achievement, and though it is used less frequently in Australia, achievement at a high-enough level enables registration with AHPRA and Boards. Like IELTS Academic, it has four components to the test and uses live interviews for the spoken element. It also has authorized testing centres in Australia which requires proof of identity.

- **Pearson Test of English Academic (Pearson Test for English Academic)**

PTE Academic is widely accepted by higher education institutions, employers and immigration authorities and is known for issuing its test results quickly. It also includes four components in its test. The test is computer-based and AI scored, with no live speaking component. It has authorized testing centres in Australian capital cities with proof of identity required.

- **Test for English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Test Australia (TOEFL iBT Australia)**

TOEFL iBT is widely accepted and the dominant test for the United States and many higher education institutions. It has an Australian specific test which, if successful, enables registration with AHPRA. It also includes four components and is computer-based, and the spoken element is AI generated and scored. It has authorized testing centres in Australian capital cities and requires proof of identity.

Summary

In summary, each of the tests discussed above have similarities and differences. All of the tests require successful achievement in reading, writing, listening and speaking, though they may be tested differently; and all have authorized testing centres.

IELTS Academic requires the speaking component of the test to be completed in a live face-to-face interview. Cambridge C1 Advanced also requires a live speaking component, however this is

conducted with two examiners and two academics. PTE Academic and TOEFL iBT use AI generated and scored interviews, where the candidate speaks into a microphone.

DoHA requires all English language proficiency testing to be conducted at authorized testing sites, and the four tests considered in this Briefing Paper meet this requirement, and have testing centres in most capital cities, and some regional locations. IELTS Academic appears to have more testing centres than other tests.

The length of the test ranges from two hours (PTE Academic) to 4 hours (Cambridge test) and each of the test websites includes practice opportunities. There is variability in costs, with TOEFL iBT being the cheapest, and IELTS Academic and PTE Academic being the most expensive (though the costs vary according to testing site).

The wait period for results also varies, from less than 48 hours for PTE Academic and up to four weeks for the Cambridge tests (longer if a certificate is required). All the tests state the results are valid for up to two years before application for migration, except for the Cambridge test which does not expire. It should be noted that organisations which use the Cambridge test often set their own expiry date. DoHA accepts tests that have been taken up to three years before application for migration is made, and the Policy aligns with this position.

Other Australian Professions and Entities

Other professions and entities in the health, human and social care sector in Australia also use English language proficiency testing to assess eligibility for migration, employment, membership and registration. Different professions and entities accept different results as evidence of English language proficiency. This Briefing Paper focuses on several professions, specifically three registered by AHPRA, Speech Pathology Australia, and Community Work Australia (CWA).

- **Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA)**

AHPRA regulates a number of professions relevant to this Briefing Paper; specifically occupational therapy, physiotherapy and psychology. The English language proficiency tests accepted by AHPRA, the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, the Physiotherapy Board of Australia and the Psychology Board of Australia (AHPRA and the Boards), are IELTS Academic, Cambridge C1 Advanced; OET; PTE Academic and TOEFL iBT Australia.

The APRA and Boards require an IELTS Academic score of 7.0 in the spoken, listening and reading component. It accepts 6.5 for the written component. The lowering of the score for the written component would seem to have been as a result of the report written by Krug (2023) which was commissioned by the Australian Government. The report was in relation to a review of Australia's regulatory settings related to overseas health practitioners, to try and increase the number of health professionals working in Australia.

AHPRA will accept test results from one test sitting, or a maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period. The test results must have been attained within two years of application for registration. The websites for AHPRA and the Boards include the equivalent scores for the other tests cited above.

AHPRA and the Boards allow some exemptions in relation to English language proficiency testing. An exemption can be made if:

1. The applicant has met the National Board English Language Skills registration standards in relation to a profession under AHPRA's National Scheme and wish to apply for registration with another Board; or
2. The applicant has completed two years secondary education where teaching and assessment occurred in English, and their tertiary qualification was taught and assessed solely in English, in one of the countries recognised by AHPRA and the Boards; or
3. The applicant completed at least 10 years of their primary and secondary school education, including teaching and assessment, in English in a recognised country; and the tertiary qualification was taught and assessed in any country solely in English; or
4. The applicant's tertiary qualification was taught and assessed solely in English in a recognised country, and they undertook advanced education (a degree at Australian Qualifications Framework level 7.0 or higher) in which they were required to read, write, listen and speak English. Further, applicants applying for this exemption are to have had no more than two years break while obtaining their qualifications and advanced education, and the last period of education was completed within two years of applying for registration.

AHPRA and the Boards allow limited registration without an English language proficiency test if the applicant wants to perform a demonstration in clinical techniques, conduct research that limits or does not involve patient contact, or to undertake postgraduate study, examination or assessment, or supervised practice.

- **Speech Pathology Australia (SPA)**

Like the AASW, SPA is not included in AHPRA and is self-regulating. It is also contracted by DEWR to assess applications for migration and employment for speech pathologists qualified in other countries.

As part of its self-regulation, SPA issues the credential *Certified Practicing Speech Pathologist*, which indicates that the person holds a recognised speech pathology qualification and meets SPA certification requirements.

Applicants who have completed their qualifications in countries other than England, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, New Zealand or Canada must meet a number of criteria, including the ability to use English effectively in the Australian speech pathology context, and provide "superior" English Language testing results. The term "superior" is linked to DoHa's rating scale (equivalent to IELTS Academic 8.0).

DoHA requirements for skilled migration visas is for English language proficiency to be at a "competent" level (lower than "superior") However, the SPA *Overseas Qualified Competency Assessment Guide for Applicants* states that a "higher level of English language competence is required for the practice of speech pathology in Australia" (p.10).

SPA will accept results from two tests: IELTS Academic and OET (a test specifically for health professionals). The required IELTS Academic test score is 8.0 overall, with no component scoring below 7.5. SPA will accept results from one in-person test sitting, or combined scores

from a maximum of two test sittings in a 12 month period when all four components were tested in each sitting. It will also accept IELTS Academic OSRT and requires test results to have been scored within two years of the application.

SPA offers exemptions for English language proficiency testing if the applicant:

1. Has completed their primary speech pathology degree in England, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, New Zealand or Canada; and
2. Is a full member of the speech pathology professional association in one of those countries.

- **Community Work Australia (CWA)**

Like the AASW, CWA is self-regulated and is the DEWR approved assessing authority for qualifications within the profession of community work. Since August 2025, CWA accepts the results from the following tests: IELTS (general or academic), PTE Academic, Cambridge C1 Advanced, TOEFL iBT PTE, CELPEP General, LANGUAGECERT Academic AND MET.

CWA allows three options for applicants to prove English language proficiency. The first option is the achievement of required levels for the scores identified above. For IELTS, the score required is 7.0 in each of the four components. The results must have been attained in the previous three years, and applicants are able to submit multiple tests, including OSRT (called a Single Section Retake for the MET test) if they were taken within a 12 month period. CWA will not accept online tests.

The second option is the attainment of a bachelor, masters or doctorate, or completion of all secondary and post-secondary/vocational studies from Australia, Canada, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The third option open to applicants is to have a valid (or has expired by less than six months) skills assessment outcome for general skilled migration if they have previously received this assessment. CWA no longer accepts employment as evidence of English language proficiency.

Summary

In summary, AHPRA and the relevant Boards accept a range of tests, including IELTS Academic. SPA accepts IELTS Academic and OET, while CWA accepts a greater number of tests than any other entity. AHPRA and the Boards require an IELTS Academic score of 7.0 in three of the four components, and will accept 6.5 as the score for the written component. SPA requires a higher IELTS Academic score of 8.0 overall, with no component scoring below 7.5, if the applicant wishes to practice speech pathology in Australia. CWA will accept a score of 7.0 in all four components of the IELTS Academic and IELTS General tests.

English Language Proficiency Requirements in Other Countries

For the purposes of the Briefing Paper, it is useful to consider how other English-speaking countries assess English language proficiency for employment. New Zealand and England have national social work accrediting bodies. Canada and the United States do not have a national regulator, though Canada has an umbrella body (the Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators). In Canada, registration is undertaken provincially. The United States registers by state, with no shared professional standard. Therefore, for ease of comparison, this Briefing Paper will only consider New Zealand, England and Ontario, Canada.

- **New Zealand**

The New Zealand social work profession is regulated by the Social Workers Registration Board (NZSWRB). The NZSWRB accepts only IELTS Academic as the test for English language proficiency. It requires an overall score of 7.0 or above across all four components of the test. Like Australia, it requires the test to be taken in an authorized testing centre.

Further, the test must have been taken in the two years prior to application. It allows a OSRT within 60 days of the first sitting of the test. They will allow testing across two sittings of the test if they are both taken within a six-month period, and the applicant achieves a score of at least 7.0 for all components in at least one of the two sittings of the test. If the applicant cannot achieve this, but only fails by .5 in only one of the four components, the NZSWRB may ask the applicant to provide supporting documents (from placement or work supervisors).

The NZSWRB's exemptions for testing are:

1. If the applicant's social work qualification was taught and assessed in English in a jurisdiction approved by the SWRB; or
2. If the applicant is registered as a social worker in a jurisdiction accepted by the SWRB; and where English is the first or official language in the jurisdiction and English is the applicant's first language, or an English language test was required to gain the registration; or
3. If the applicant has a social work qualification accredited by the AASW.

- **England**

Social Work England is the regulating body for England, while Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate regulators. For the purposes of this Briefing Paper only England will be considered. Social Work England requires evidence of English language proficiency in speaking, writing, reading and listening from applicants. IELTS Academic is the only English language proficiency test Social Work England will accept, and it requires an overall score of 7.0. It also requires the test to be undertaken in an authorized testing centre, and to have been taken within two years of the application being made.

Social Work England does allow exemptions to testing. To qualify for an exemption, the applicant must have:

- Been awarded their recognised social work qualification within the last five years; and
- Obtained the qualification in a country where English is the first and native language; and
- Been taught and examined in English.

Exemption may also be made if the applicant holds a passport for a country on their citizen list, which includes Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the United States, Canada and some of its former colonies. Exemptions are also made for applicants registered with the equivalent social work regulator in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

• Ontario, Canada

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) requires evidence of English or French language proficiency for registration. It accepts results from a range of different tests, including IELTS Academic, IELTS General, TOEFL iBT, CELPIP and PTE. The necessary scores for IELTS Academic is 7.0 or higher in each of its four components. The test results can be no more than two years old. The OCSWSSW website does not provide information regarding exemptions to English language proficiency testing.

Summary

In summary, New Zealand and England will only accept IELTS Academic, with a score of at least 7.0 in all four components of the test. Ontario accepts other tests, however IELTS Academic test scores must all be above 7.0. All jurisdictions require the tests to have been completed within two years of the application being made.

Exemptions to English language proficiency testing generally apply to applicants who have studied their social work qualification in an accepted country, and have been taught and assessed in English.

Discussion

As stated above, this Briefing Paper seeks the views of stakeholders to enable review of the AASW's English Language Policy. The key areas in the Policy to be reviewed are:

- Acceptable English language proficiency tests
- Acceptable test results
- Exemption Grounds

There is much information anecdotally about the advantages and disadvantages of each of the tests. For example, the following opinions can be found on various websites and in social media:

- The use of authorized testing centres does not prevent cheating;
- Live interviews can introduce bias;
- Live interviews feel "more natural;"
- AI generated interviews are less intimidating;
- AI generated interviews do not always adjust for accent and speaking volume;

- Some social work positions and roles rely more heavily on the spoken word than the written, and therefore a lower score in writing is acceptable;
- Some social work positions and roles do not include direct interaction with the public and so spoken English is less important than written;
- That cost of testing is a major inhibitor for some candidates;
- The tests are based on topics that are not relevant to the social work profession; and
- That the tests use formal English which is not usually heard or read in Australia.

An analysis of how different entities and jurisdictions assess English language proficiency shows there is consistency in accepted tests, as IELTS Academic is accepted by all jurisdictions and professions included in this Paper. Similarly, most entities require an IELTS Academic score of 7.0 or above. Most allow two sittings of the test, with some variation between the time permitted between each of the tests. Like the AASW, SPA CWA and the NZSWRB allow a OSRT, subject to specific conditions. Table 2 provides an overview of how each of the entities assess English language proficiency.

Table 2 - Comparison of English Language Proficiency Requirements by Entity

AASW, AHPRA & Boards, Speech Pathology Australia (SPA), NZSWRB, Social Work England and OCSWSSW — 2026

Entity / Jurisdiction	Accepted Test(s)	Minimum IELTS Academic Score	Test Sitzings Allowed	One Skill Retake	Validity Period
AASW	IELTS Academic only	7.0 in all four components	Single sitting, or two sittings within 6 months (no component below 6.5)	Yes – within 60 days; must score 7.0+	3 years
AHPRA & Boards (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Psychology)	IELTS Academic, Cambridge C1 Advanced, OET, PTE Academic, TOEFL iBT Australia	7.0 in three of four components (6.5 accepted for writing)	Single sitting, or two sittings within 12 months	Unclear	2 years (allows more than two years if certain conditions are met)
SPA (Speech Pathology Australia)	IELTS Academic, OET	8.0 overall (no component below 7.5)	Single sitting, or two sittings within 12 months	Yes	2 years
NZSWRB (New Zealand)	IELTS Academic only	7.0 in all four components	Two sittings within 6 months (7.0 in all components in at least one sitting)	Yes – within 60 days	2 years
Social Work England	IELTS Academic only	7.0 overall	Single sitting only – no second sitting permitted	No	2 years
OCSWSSW (Ontario, Canada)	IELTS Academic, IELTS General, TOEFL iBT, CELPIP, PTE	7.0 in each of four components	Not specified	Unclear	2 years
	IELTS (Academic or General), PTE Academic, Cambridge C1 Advanced, TOEFL iBT, CELPIP General, LanguageCert Academic, MET	7.0 in each of the four components (bands). Note: will also accept IELTS General.	For IELTS and MET only: multiple sittings can be combined within a 12-month period. All other tests: single sitting only, no combining of scores	Yes – IELTS One Skill Retake and MET Single Section Retake accepted	3 years

Note: figures are drawn from each entity's published English language policy as summarised in the AASW English Language Policy Review Briefing Paper (September 2026) and were correct at the time of writing.

In regard to the ground for exemptions, there is similarity between those allowed by the AASW and other entities and jurisdictions. Essentially, exemptions exist for those applicants who have undertaken secondary education in English, and their tertiary qualification has been taught and assessed in English.

The NZSWRB adds a variation that no other jurisdiction or entity included in this Briefing Paper seems to include. That is, it will accept supporting documents from placement or work supervisors which attest to the applicant's skill in a specific component, if the applicant has failed only that component by .5.

Authors included in literature reviewed for the Briefing Paper argue that all tests, including IELTS Academic, uses language which is decontextualized and not relevant to social work practice. While the recommendation made by Yao & Grieve (2026) for the social work profession to have a specific test may have merit in assisting the development of socio-pragmatic language, DoHA's list of approved tests does not include profession-specific assessment.

Conclusion

This Briefing Paper sought to bring together information to assist stakeholders and the AASW Board of Directors to review the English Language Policy, in preparation for the Board to make changes, if required, to the Policy.

While there may be questions in relation to the sole use of IELTS Academic as the test for English language proficiency, the AASW is not the only social work entity or jurisdiction to do so. Nor does it seem there is any other test better equipped to assess English proficiency for practice in Australia. While researchers and writers' comment on the formal and irrelevance of the language used in the test to social work, DoHA does not allow for any profession-specific English test to be used for migration or visa purposes.

There may be some latitude in increasing the grounds for exemption, or allowing an alternative to a lower score in one of the four components of IELTS Academic, as AHPRA has done. Similarly, there may be merit in adopting the NZSWRB strategy of allowing referees to attest to skill in certain circumstances. However, it does not seem there are any markedly different or better methods, or tests, to assess English language proficiency, while keeping within the contractual arrangements with DEWR and the parameters set by DoHA.

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- <https://support.cambridgeenglish.org/hc/en-gb/articles/11821760782610-Cambridge-English-Regulations>

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<https://www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/register/id.html>

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[Socialworkengland.org.uk](http://socialworkengland.org.uk)

[Speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)