



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Tighter English language requirements for GSM visas from 1 January 2010

What are the changes?

There are two English language changes. The first relates to people who nominate a trade occupation. The second relates to applicants for a Skilled-Regional Sponsored visa.

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship announced on 12 May 2009 that the English language requirement for all General Skilled Migration (GSM) visa applicants who nominate a trade occupation will be increased to a minimum of 6.0 (Competent English) in each of the four components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test. This will replace the previous English language threshold of Vocational English (a minimum of 5.0 on each of the four components of an IELTS test).

For Skilled-Regional Sponsored GSM visa subclasses, the threshold English language standard will be raised from an average of 5.5 to an average of 6.0 in an IELTS test. The change was introduced for applicants for the offshore Skilled-Regional Sponsored (Subclass 475) visa from 1 July 2009, and will apply to the onshore Skilled – Regional Sponsored (Subclass 487) visa from 1 January 2010.

Who will it affect?

The increased language requirements will apply to all new GSM applications lodged after 1 January 2010.

Applicants who applied for a GSM visa before the commencement of these changes will not be affected.

How are provisional regional visas affected?

In recognition of the increased language requirements, no Subclass 487 visa applicants will be required to enrol in an English language training course. This is already the case for Skilled-Regional Sponsored (Subclass 475) visa applicants.

Further information about all visa requirements is available on the department's website.

See: [Visa Options](#)

Why is the English language requirement changing?

This increase in the English language requirements for applicants nominating a trade occupation, aligns with the English language requirements for applicants nominating all other occupations for a GSM visa.

The aim of the GSM Program is to select migrants who, because of the skills they possess, are more likely to find skilled employment shortly after they arrive in Australia. A high level of English language ability is recognised as being essential for achieving this objective.

In recognition of the importance of English language skills, since 1 September 2007, the GSM Points Test has been adjusted to award more points to applicants with very strong English language skills. Those applicants who demonstrate Proficient English (a minimum of 7.0 in all four components of an IELTS test) are awarded 25 points, while applicants who meet the English language threshold are awarded 15 points. The allocation of these extra points means that most applicants who achieve the higher English language standard will be eligible for a permanent GSM visa.

Will there be transitional arrangements for overseas students?

There will be no transitional arrangements for overseas students enrolled in trade courses.

Overseas students currently enrolled in a trade course will have been given seven months since the Minister's announcement to either lodge a visa application or to increase their English language skills prior to making a GSM visa application.

Applicants who apply for a student visa to study a Certificate III trade course are expected to have an English language level of an IELTS 5.0 if they enrol in a preliminary 20 week ELICOS course, or 5.5 with no preliminary ELICOS course.

Given that overseas students must have studied for a total of two years in Australia before being eligible to apply for GSM, it is reasonable to expect students to have improved their English to IELTS 6.0 over this period.

Are partner points affected by the increase to English language requirements?

Yes, if you wish to claim points for your partner's skills in your application, they must also meet the new English language requirement. Further information about all visa requirements is available on the department's website.

See: [Visa Options](#)

Why do the requirements for skilled migration keep changing?

The migration program is one of the tools the Australian Government can use to assist industry to address skills shortages and to meet the needs of the economy. The migration program is continually reviewed and assessed for its relevance and outcomes in light of the economic and social needs of Australia. The Government routinely adjusts migration levels and requirements according to the economic circumstances of the day.

The global economic situation has continued to deteriorate, and this has significantly weakened Australia's economic situation, including an increase in unemployment.

The Government is committed to ensuring that skilled migration continues to meet the needs of the economy, particularly in the wake of the global economic crisis. Combined with the Government's *Nation Building and Jobs Plan*, a responsive skilled migration program will help Australia emerge sooner from the global economic downturn.

Current and Future GSM Reforms

Reforms have been introduced to GSM to ensure that the skill stream of the Migration Program is driven by the needs of industry and targets skills in critical need across a number of sectors, particularly those skills in shortage and which contribute to the health of the economy.

The Government will continue to monitor the skilled migration intake and has set the 2009-10 Migration Program, including priority processing arrangements and the Critical Skills List, to reflect the economic climate.