

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 22 May 2017

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(BE17/284) - Citizenship changes – increase to an IELTS of 6 - Programme 2.1: Citizenship

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA) written:

What is the basis for increasing the English language citizenship requirement to an IELTS of 6, considering:

- a) That ISLPR 2 is the exit point for AMEP;
- b) An IELTS of 6 is entry for higher education, and;
- c) That the purpose of IELTS is different to ISLPR?

Would this change give an advantage to people who are from English speaking countries over every other migrant?

Answer:

English language is essential for economic participation and social cohesion. A strong theme of the 2015 *National Consultation on Citizenship Australian Citizenship – Your Right, Your Responsibility* was the importance of English language to being a citizen and full integration into Australian society.

The Government has decided to introduce a requirement for citizenship applicants to have competent English language through listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Applicants in the skilled migration programme already have to demonstrate competent English at IELTS of 6 or equivalent.

It is expected that applicants from English speaking countries who are competent in the English language will meet this requirement. As is currently the case for skilled migration assessments by the Department, citizens of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, the United States of America or New Zealand who hold a valid passport will be exempted from English language testing.

English language test exemptions for age and disability also applies to applicants over 60 years of age, or under 16 years of age at the time of application or those with an enduring or permanent mental or physical incapacity. Applicants who have undertaken specified English language studies at a recognised Australian education institution will also be exempted.

Australia's Migration Programme is non-discriminatory and visas are granted to applicants who meet requirements set out in the *Migration Act 1958* and *Migration Regulations 1994*. Permanent visa holders can apply for citizenship by conferral provided they meet the criteria in the *Citizenship Act 2007* and *Citizenship Regulation 2016*.