A new tool to review English language score requirements for academic programs

Best practice in using scores from standardised English proficiency tests encourages score users to periodically review their score entry requirements.

To assist you to accomplish this, Educational Testing Service (ETS) TOEFL has developed the tools and expertise to offer a process known as Standard Setting which is new to most Australian institutions. Cath Moore, TOEFL iBT English Language Consultant, has the training and skills to conduct sessions for institutions.

What is standard setting?

The purpose of standard setting is to determine what level of performance on the TOEFL iBT test is appropriate for applicants entering your courses. In other countries, this process is also used to set the requirements for professional registration of practitioners whose first language is not English.

Of course, this process can be repeated with any standardised English proficiency test that your institution utilises.

Who participates?

A panel of 12-20 staff participates in the Standard Setting meeting where they review samples of test questions and examinee responses, and judge if the applicants at particular score levels are ready to commence their programs. Attendees also become familiar with the scoring standards.

The panel in a standard setting session will normally represent a variety of stakeholders in the admission process. Participants might include academic staff, admissions officers and English language experts. Participants need to be familiar with and able to think about the English language demands of students coming into the courses under consideration.

Professional development

Standard setting events are a means of allowing institutional staff learn more about what a test score means and how the score is arrived at. Thus it provides a professional development opportunity for staff seeking to understand more about what an English proficiency test assesses and enables them to articulate the basis for their decisions.

Preparation

Participants are provided with some pre-session material designed to help them think about the various tasks that students are required to engage in during the course of their studies and the skills they need in writing, speaking, listening and reading. Participants complete these pre session materials and bring them to the Standard Setting session.

How long does it take?

A full Standard Setting session normally takes two days. The first day commences with discussions about requirements and typical examples of language performance then examines each of the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing separately. There are various scoring iterations and a
final recommendation from the group is developed. Any recommendations from this session are, of course, subject to the final decision of the institution.

We are also offering a 1 day session that focuses only on the productive skills of speaking and writing if it is not possible to allot 2 days in everyone’s busy schedule.

**An offer of a free Standard Setting session**

I am writing to offer you this opportunity either as an individual institution or with a small group of other institutions whose requirements might be similar. The choice of courses for this exercise is yours. You might examine a set of courses with similar requirements e.g. diploma or degree programs or a specialised set of courses with targeted requirements.

Given institutional schedules and the required preparation times, we are considering offering sessions in early December 2013 and in 2014.

**More information at AIEC**

Cath Moore is offering an Information Session at AIEC at **Morning Tea on Thursday 10 October** in the Exhibition Area of the Conference venue. Alternatively you may write directly to Cath at cmoore@etsglobal.org if you have questions about the process.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you would like to take up this option to better inform you and your colleagues about the basis for admission decisions around English language proficiency.