IELTS

Too high or too low? Setting the right IELTS score for academic success

NAFSA Region III

Oct. 25, 2011

"We want qualified, applicants who are able to communicate effectively and excel in their work. The IELTS examination is a strong and well-constructed English proficiency test that caters to this demand."

Graduate Program Administrator, Brigham Young University

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What is IELTS?
It is the International English Language Testing System which is designed …

- *to assess the English language ability of non-native speakers* who intend to study higher education at undergraduate, graduate and professional schools where English is the language of communication.
    - Also used for professional certification, work and immigration.
- *to test communicative language proficiency*
- *as a 4-skills test* including listening, reading, writing, and a live, face-to-face speaking test performed by a trained, certified and monitored ESL professional

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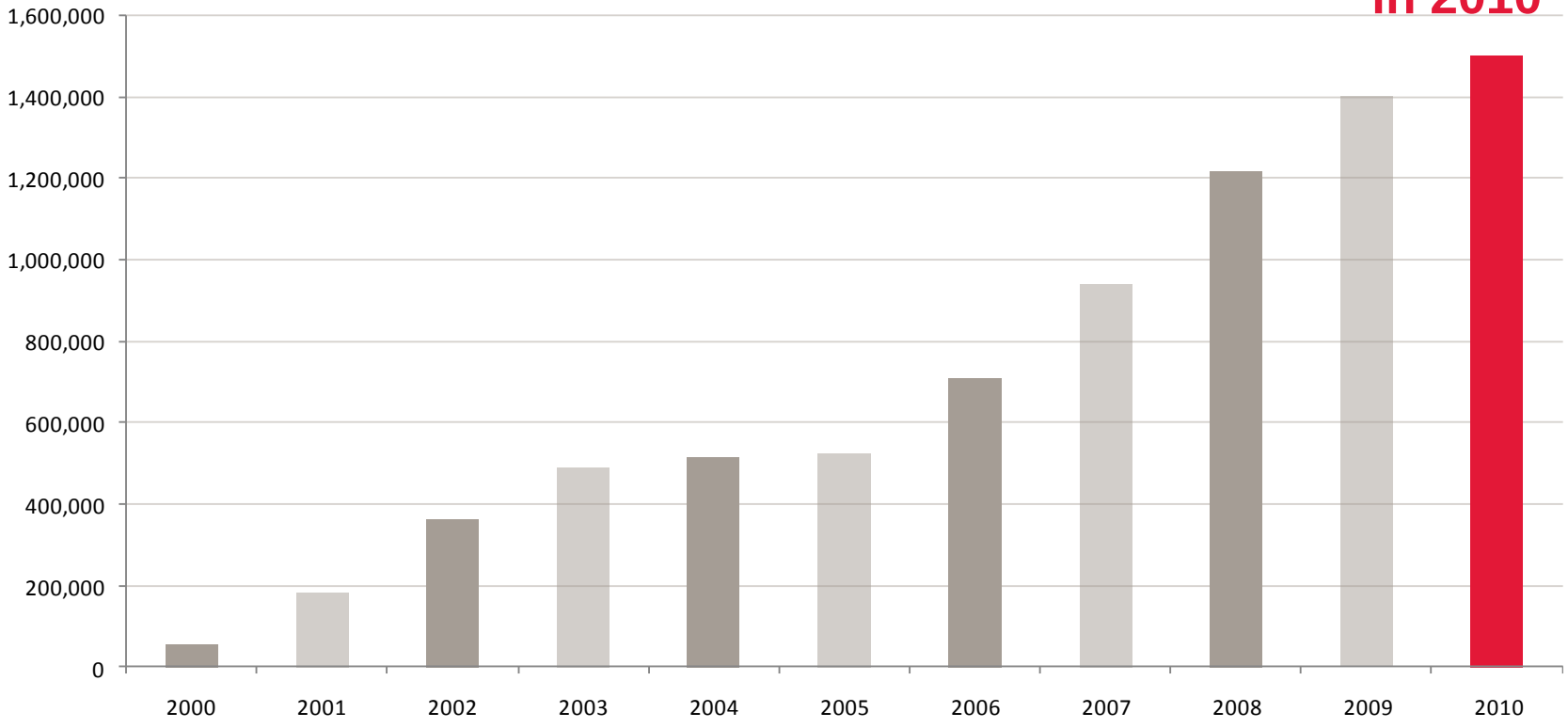
A brief history of IELTS

- 1970s -- ELTS test introduced by the British Council
- 1989 -- international joint partnership formed
- 1995 -- major content revision
- 2001 -- revised speaking test
- 2005 -- revised writing assessment
- 2008 -- new web-based administration system (IWAS)
- 2009 -- 20th anniversary year!
- 2010 -- rollout of online registration
- 2011 -- rollout of IAM test day photographs and biometrics
- 2012 – computer-based testing choice coming soon!

Growth of IELTS since 2000

1.5 million tests taken in 2010



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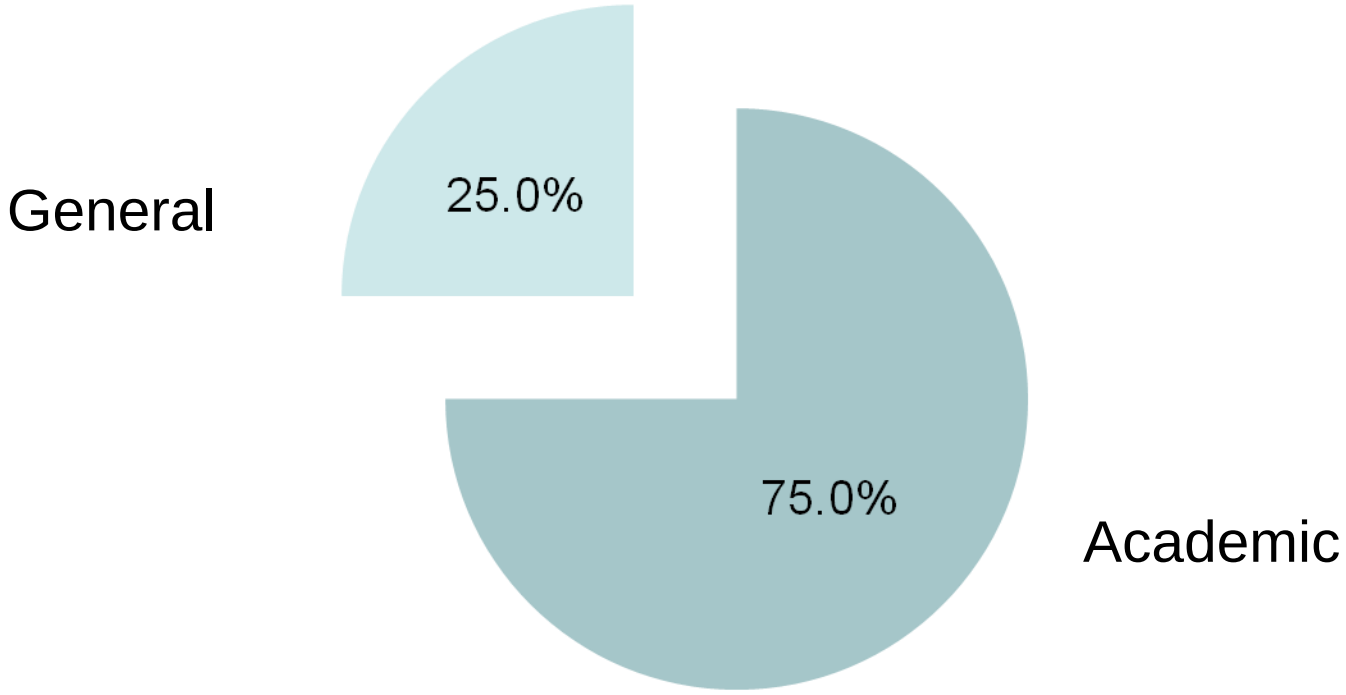
Global Candidature Breakdown 2010



"Top 10" Nationalities of US-bound IELTS Test Takers (Global)	Mean Overall Band Score – IELTS Academic Module 2010
1. China	5.6
2. Saudi Arabia	5.1
3. India	6.0
4. Philippines	6.7
5. Kuwait	5.3
6. South Korea	5.9
7. Hong Kong	6.4
8. Nepal	6.0
9. Vietnam	5.9
10. France	6.7

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Scoring:

IELTS 9-Band Scale

9	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Non user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

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Commonly-used minimum band scores

8	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
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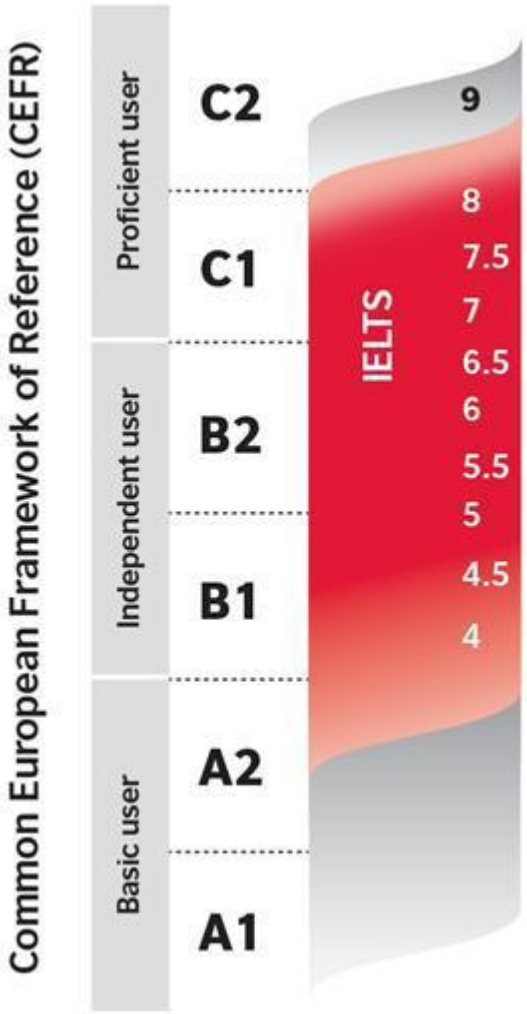
Too high? Too low? What's the right score for your campus?



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What scores do US schools require?

Levels/Sample Schools	Scores
Undergraduate	**Range = 6.0 - 7.0**
New York University	7.0
University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign	6.5
Arizona State University	6.0
Graduate	**Range = 6.0 - 8.5**
Columbia University	7.0
Columbia School of Journalism	8.5
Professional schools	**Range = 6.0 - 8.5**
Harvard MBA	7.0
LLM	**Range = 6.5 - 8.0**
Duke University	7.5
Indiana University	7.0

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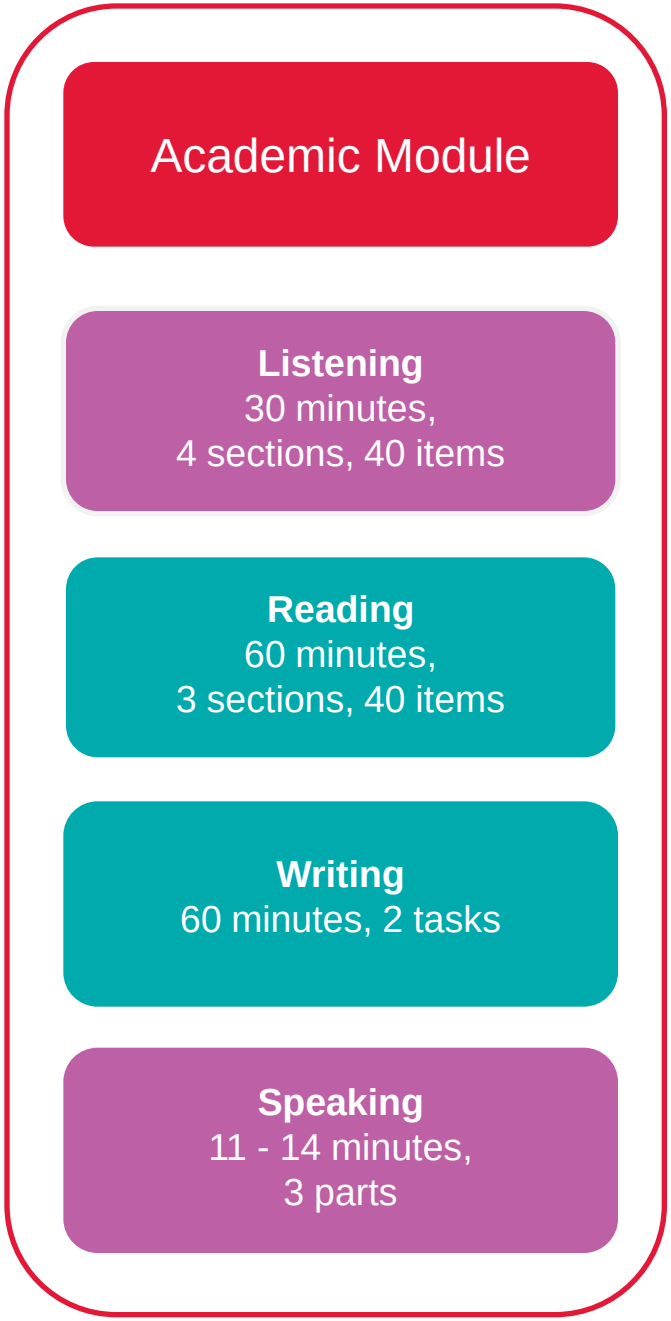
Test Format

Academic Module

Total test time

2 hours 44 minutes
(+ 10 minutes transfer time)



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Listening

30 minutes (40 minutes with transfer)

- 4 sections, 10 questions: focus on social needs and educational / training contexts
- Increase in complexity through the sections
- Variety of native-speaker accents
  - US, Canadian, British, Australian, New Zealand
- Content vetted for cultural specificity during production

SECTION	Topic Area	Input	Main Skill Focus
1	Social needs	**Conversation** between 2 people with a transactional purpose e.g. finding out about services	Listening for and noting specific factual information
2	Social needs	**Monologue** or prompted monologue with a transactional purpose e.g. giving information about a public event	Listening for and noting specific factual information
3	Education and training	**Discussion** between 2 – 4 people in an academic context, e.g. tutorial or seminar	Following a conversation which involves negotiation of meaning. Listening for specific information, attitudes, and speakers' opinions
4	Education and training	**Monologue** in an academic context, e.g. lecture	Following an academic argument. Listening for main ideas, specific information, attitude and speaker's opinion

Listening sub skills
Listening for gist
Predicting content
Identifying detail
Listening for specific information
Inferring underlying meaning
Following signposting / referencing words
Listening to stress, rhythm and intonation

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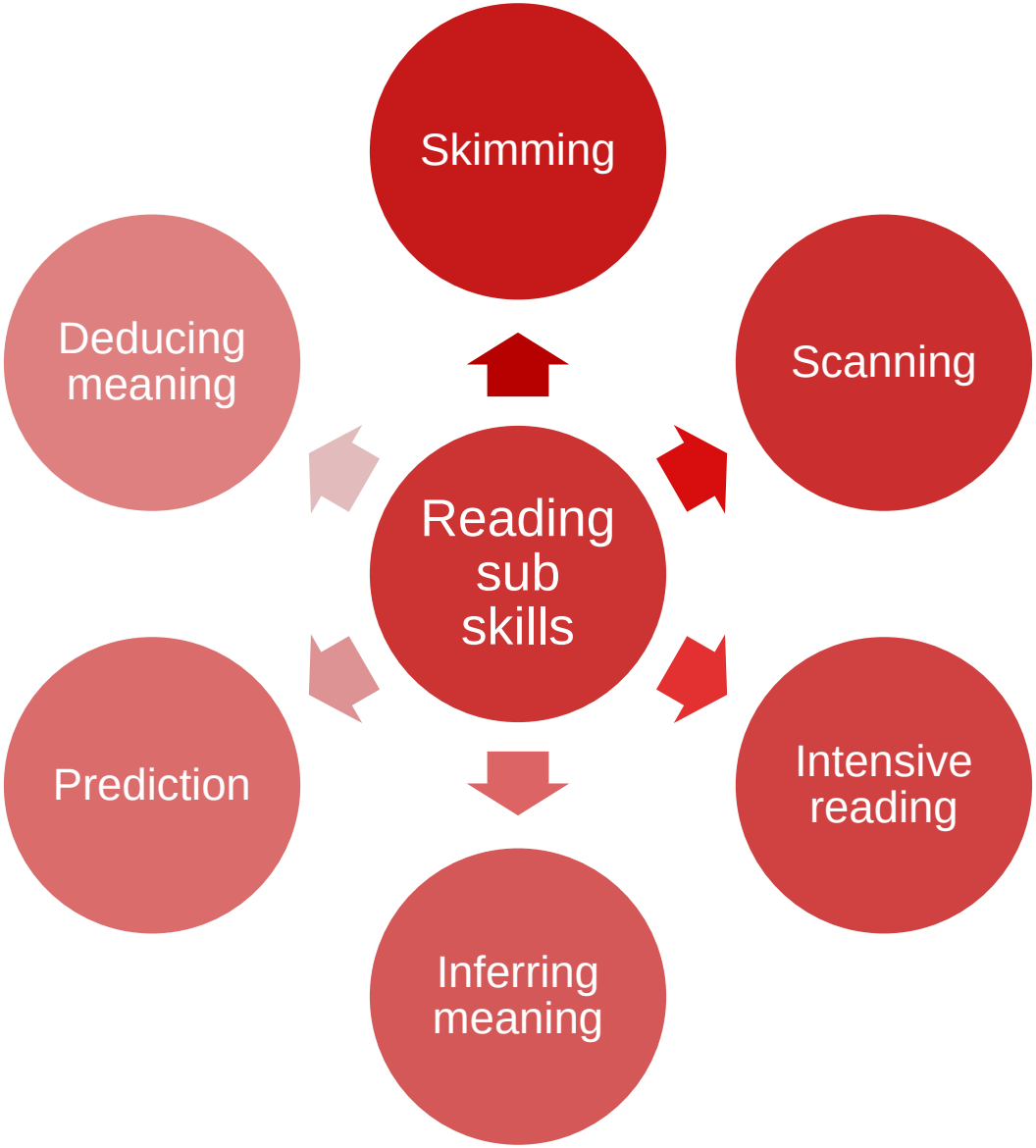
Academic Reading

60 minutes, 40 questions

- 3 passages, 2,000-2,750 words total
- Authentic, non-specialist texts from journals, books, and newspapers
- General interest topics that are interesting, appropriate, and accessible to all test takers


Skimming
Scanning
Intensive reading
Inferring meaning
Prediction
Deducing meaning
Reading sub skills

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Variety of task types in listening and reading

1. matching
2. classification
3. multiple choice
4. locating information
5. sentence completion
6. summary completion
7. short-answer questions
8. choosing headings for paragraphs of a text
9. identification of writers' views, attitudes, claims
10. notes, summary, diagram, flow chart, table completion

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Academic writing

60 minutes, 2 mandatory writing tasks

Task 1: 20 minutes, 150 words

- Describing visual information from a chart, table, graph or diagram in the candidate's own words

Task 2: 40 minutes, 250 words

- Presenting a solution to a problem / justify an opinion / compare and contrast evidence or opinions / evaluate and challenge an argument

Writing assessment criteria

Written performance is assessed using descriptors on four analytical sub-scales:

- Task Achievement (Task 1) / Task Response (Task 2)
- Cohesion and Coherence
- Lexical Resource
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy

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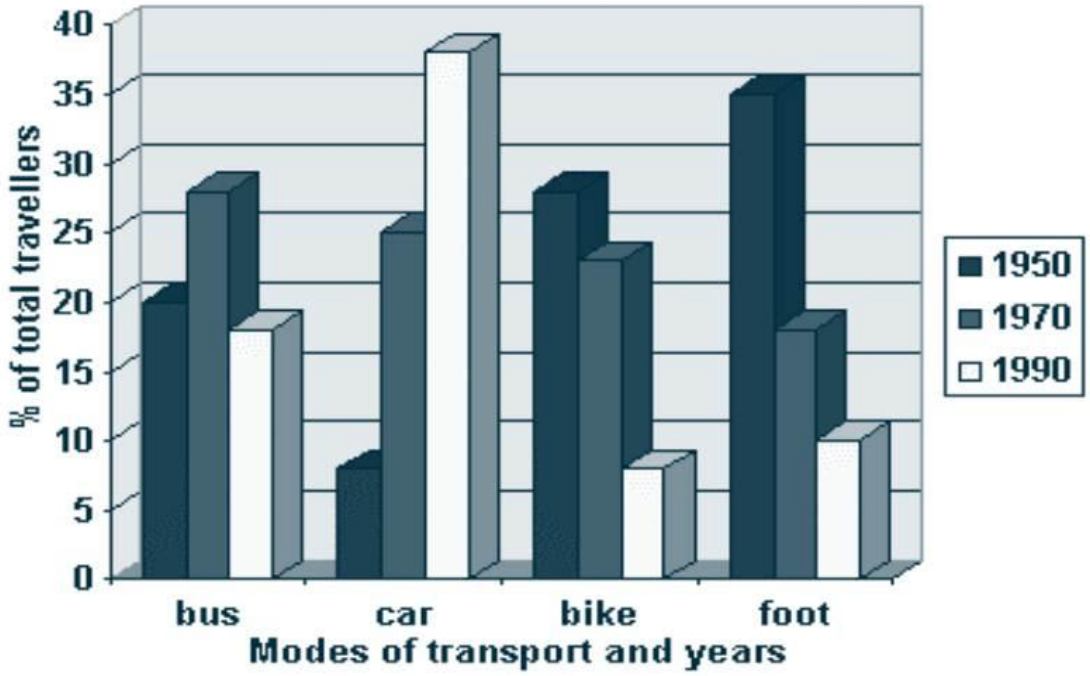
Sample writing task 1 (150 words)

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The graph below shows the different modes of transport used to travel to and from work in one European city in 1950, 1970 and 1990.

Write a report for a university lecturer describing the information.



Sample academic writing task 2 (250 words)

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

International tourism has brought enormous benefit to many places. At the same time, there is concern about its impact on local inhabitants and the environment.

Do the disadvantages of international tourism outweigh the advantages?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

IELTS speaking test format

Part 1 Introduction and Interview	Examiner introduces him/herself and confirms candidate's identity. Examiner interviews candidate using verbal questions based on familiar topic frames.	**4 - 5 minutes**
Part 2 Individual long turn	Examiner asks candidate to speak for 1-2 minutes on a particular topic based on written input in the form of a general instruction and content-focused prompts. Examiner asks one or two questions at the end of the long turn.	**3 - 4 minutes (includes 1 minute preparation time)**
Part 3 Two-way discussion	Examiner invites candidate to participate in discussion of more abstract nature, based on verbal questions, thematically linked to Part 2 prompt.	**4 - 5 minutes**

Example speaking part 1: Introduction and interview

Let's talk about where you live

- *Do you live in a house or an apartment?*
- *What do you like about your house / apartment?*
- *What is the area like where you live?*
- *Would you recommend this area as a place to live for young people (Why / why not)?*

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Example speaking part 2: Individual long turn

Describe a well-known person you like or admire.

You should say:

-- who this person is

-- what this person has done

-- why this person is well-known

and explain why you like or admire this person.

Example speaking part 3: Two-way discussion

Developments in education

- (describe) changes over the last ten years in your country
- (compare) your experience of education with that of your parents or grandparents
- (speculate) on likely changes in the next fifty years

A national education system

- (describe) your country's aims for education
- (compare) expectations of today's school-leavers with previous generations
- (evaluate) how well your education system prepares students for professional life

Different styles/methods of teaching and learning

- (describe) teaching styles/methods for different age-groups in your country
- (suggest) your preferred method of learning
- (evaluate) advantages/disadvantages of grouping learners by ability

Speaking assessment criteria

Spoken performance is assessed using descriptors on four analytical sub-scales:

- Fluency and coherence
- Lexical resource
- Grammatical range and accuracy
- Pronunciation

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Score setting/minimum band score review on your campus

- Brief, targeted “needs” survey across the curriculum on campus with faculty who teach internationals, ESL professionals and international admissions professionals
  - *In my job, I sometimes have to decide whether or not to admit students and an English language test score (such as IELTS) may play an important part in these decisions. Yes/No*
  - *Is there a requirement for minimum scores in any skill area (e.g. an overall score of 7.0 with a minimum score of 6.5 for Reading)?*
  - *Under what conditions would you accept a student with scores below this level?*
  - *In my opinion the **overall** IELTS entry score should be … lower/unchanged/higher/recommended score ___*
  - *In my opinion the **speaking** IELTS entry score for this course should be … lower/unchanged/higher/recommended score ___*

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Score setting (con't)

- Ask 3 key questions

  1. Is there language support on campus (and who pays)?

  2. What is the agreed **minimal** level of English proficiency to cope with the academic and social language demands?

  – what kinds of reading, writing, listening and speaking are involved in this context?

  – what level of proficiency is needed both in and outside the classroom?

  3. How does this minimally acceptable level of English translate into scores on the IELTS test?

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Score setting

- Communicate the minimum score across the campus, list it on the website and in application materials for international students wherever you have English language proficiency listed

- Keep track of student academic success (e.g., first year grades, years to degree).
  - Adjust score up or down depending on student performance on your campus
- Higher minimums can be set dependent upon linguistic demand and needs of departments

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Why we suggest 7.0 and higher for admissions: Common European Framework C1 Level

- *can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning*
- *can express themselves fluently and spontaneously with much obvious searching for expressions*
- *can use language flexibly, for social, academic and professional purposes*
- *can produce clear, well-structured, detailed texts, on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns and cohesive devices*
- *has a good command of a broad range of language allowing themselves to express themselves clearly and appropriately*
- *can consistently maintain a high level of grammatical accuracy*
- *can interact skillfully by selecting a suitable phrase from a range of discourse in order to contribute appropriately*

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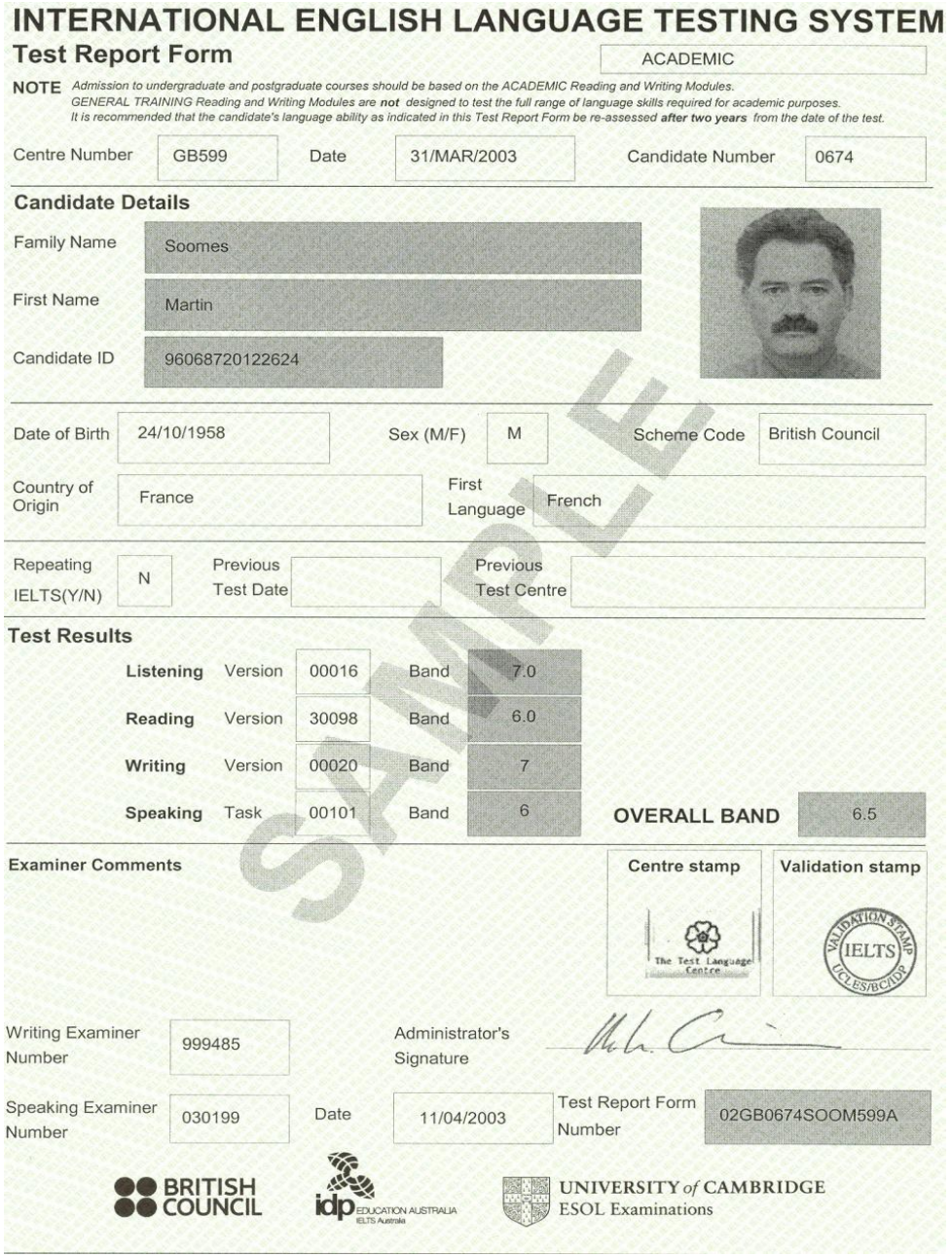
Test Report Form Score Reporting

- Paper or electronic reports

- Sent directly from the test center to the receiving institution

- Test takers receive 5 free copies for cost of the test and can request additional score copies from their test center up to 2 years from test date for a small administrative fee



INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING SYSTEM

Test Report Form — ACADEMIC

NOTE *Admission to undergraduate and postgraduate courses should be based on the ACADEMIC Reading and Writing Modules. GENERAL TRAINING Reading and Writing Modules are **not** designed to test the full range of language skills required for academic purposes. It is recommended that the candidate's language ability as indicated in this Test Report Form be re-assessed **after two years** from the date of the test.*

Centre Number: GB599 | Date: 31/MAR/2003 | Candidate Number: 0674

Candidate Details

Family Name: Soomes

First Name: Martin

Candidate ID: 96068720122624

Date of Birth: 24/10/1958 | Sex (M/F): M | Scheme Code: British Council

Country of Origin: France | First Language: French

Repeating IELTS(Y/N): N | Previous Test Date: | Previous Test Centre:

Test Results

Listening	Version	00016	Band	7.0
Reading	Version	30098	Band	6.0
Writing	Version	00020	Band	7
Speaking	Task	00101	Band	6

OVERALL BAND 6.5

Examiner Comments

Centre stamp: The Test Language Centre

Validation stamp: IELTS VALIDATION STAMP UCLES/BC/IDP

Writing Examiner Number: 999485 | Administrator's Signature:

Speaking Examiner Number: 030199 | Date: 11/04/2003 | Test Report Form Number: 02GB0674SOOM599A

BRITISH COUNCIL | idp EDUCATION AUSTRALIA IELTS Australia | UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE ESOL Examinations

SAMPLE

Centre Number:	10294
Centre Name:	International House, London
Candidate Number:	001234
Candidate ID:	A1234
Family Name:	Moulding
First Name:	Carly
Date of Birth:	1980-01-01
Sex (M/F):	F
Repeating IELTS:	N
Previous Test Date:	
Previous Test Centre:	

Test Results	**Overall Band 6.5** Band Scores Explained
Date of Examination:	2007-08-16
TRF Number:	07100012345AMJ294A
Listening	Band 7.5
Reading	Band 5.5
Writing	Band 6.5
Speaking	Band 6.5

Always use the free Test Report Form Verification Service (TRFVS)

Log in at www.ielts.org/TRF and click on “TRF Query”

www.ielts.org

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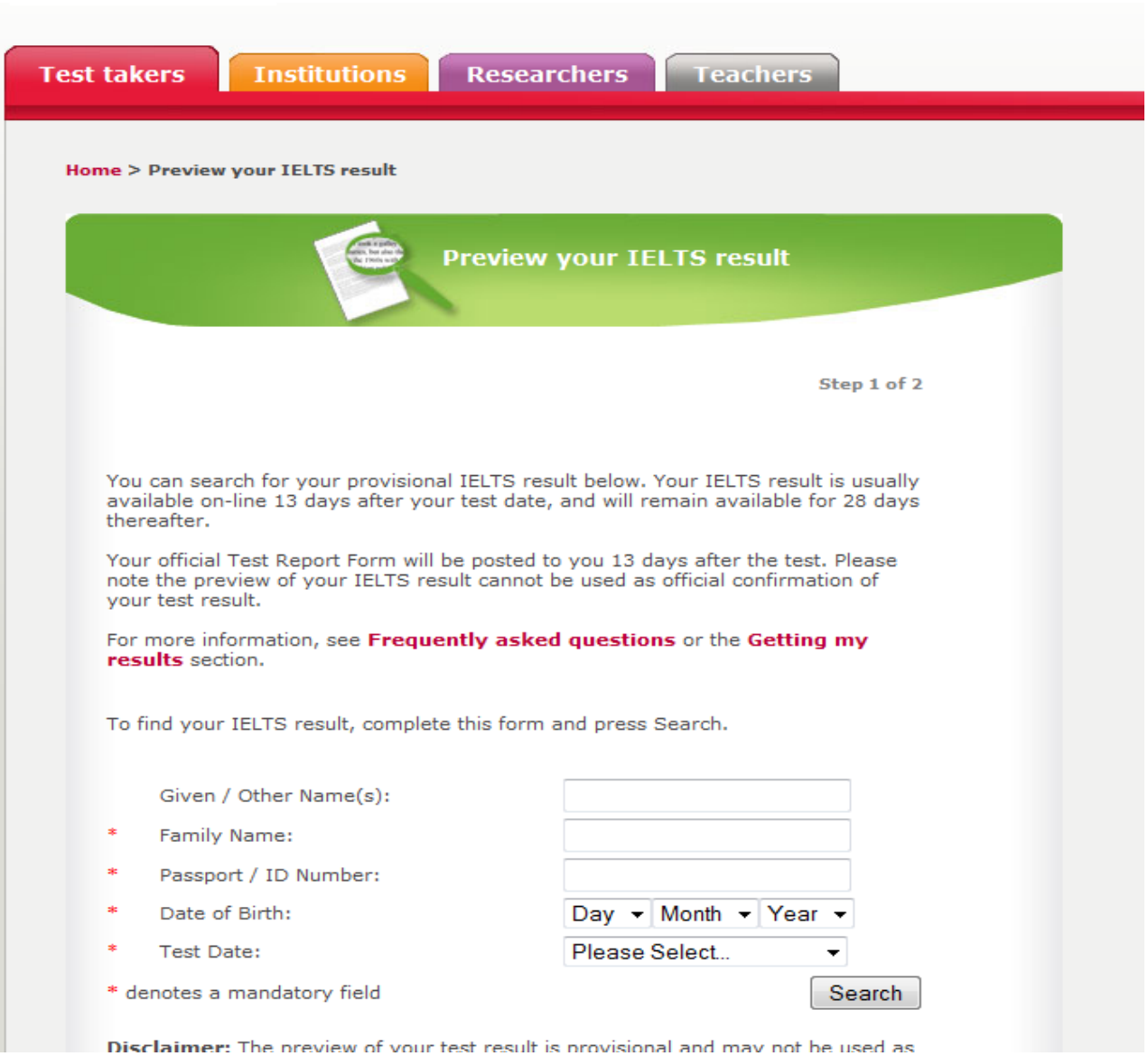

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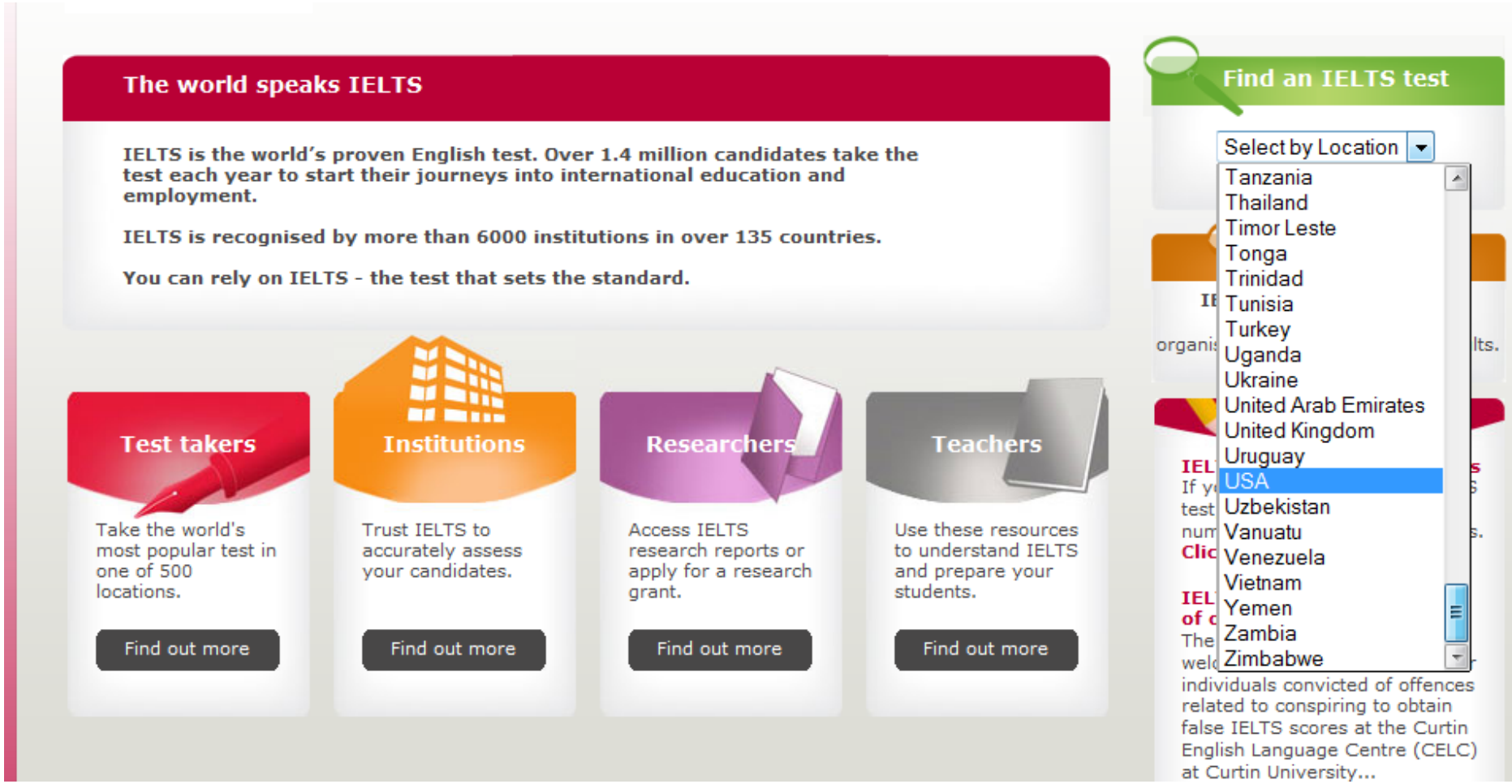

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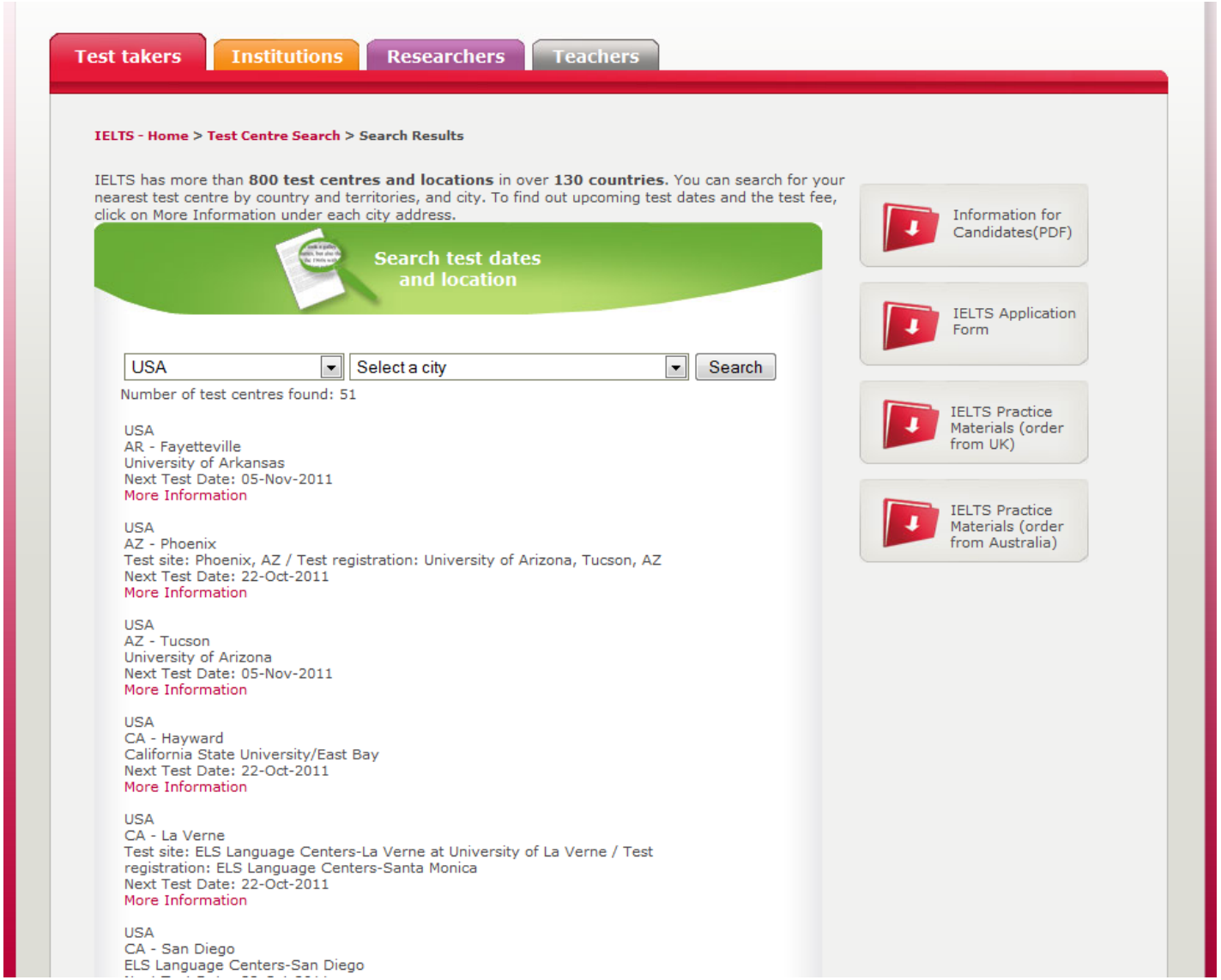

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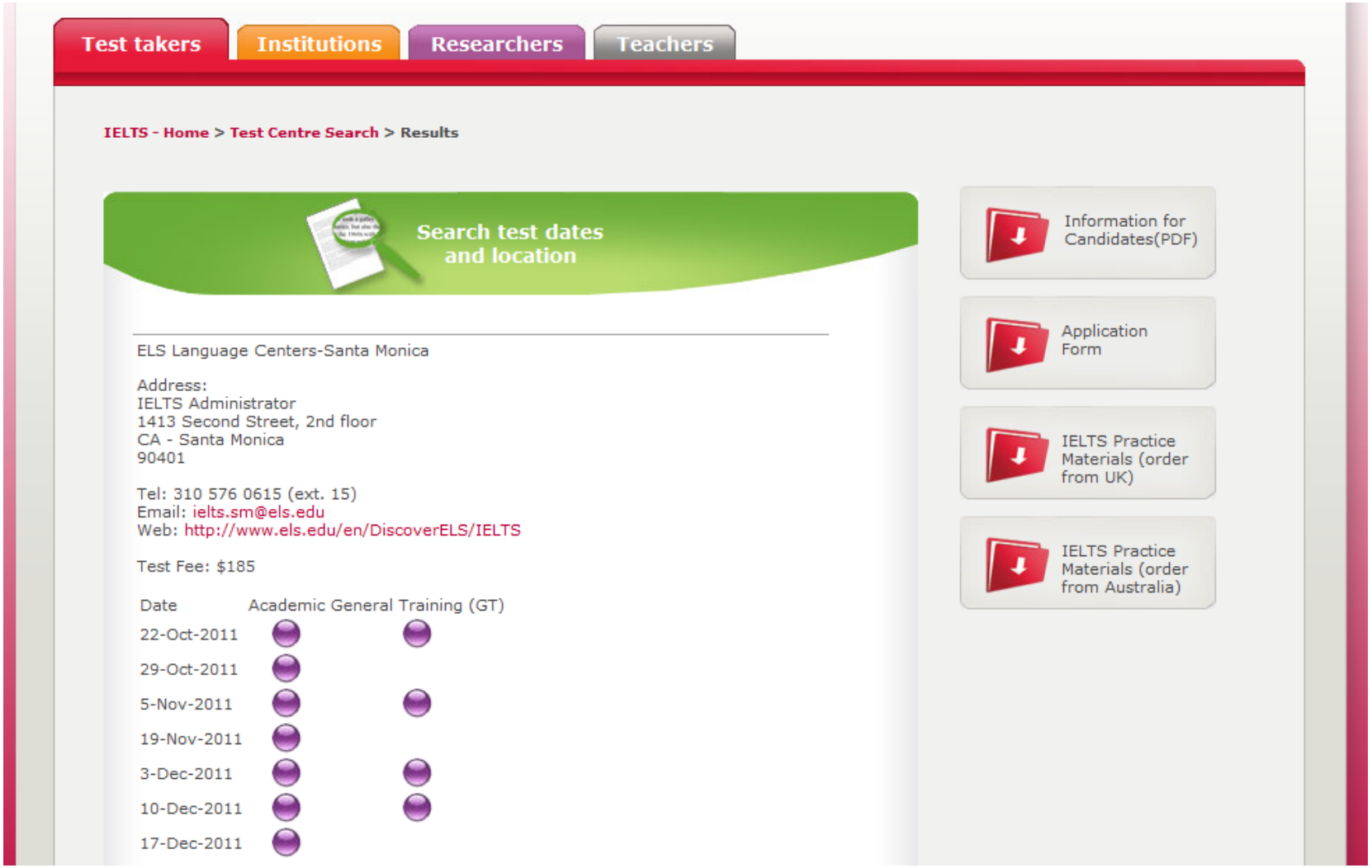
Test takers
Institutions
Researchers
Teachers
IELTS - Home > Test Centre Search > Results
Search test dates and location
ELS Language Centers-Santa Monica
Address:
IELTS Administrator
1413 Second Street, 2nd floor
CA - Santa Monica
90401
Tel: 310 576 0615 (ext. 15)
Email: ielts.sm@els.edu
Web: http://www.els.edu/en/DiscoverELS/IELTS
Test Fee: $185
Date
Academic
General Training (GT)
22-Oct-2011
29-Oct-2011
5-Nov-2011
19-Nov-2011
3-Dec-2011
10-Dec-2011
17-Dec-2011
Information for Candidates(PDF)
Application Form
IELTS Practice Materials (order from UK)
IELTS Practice Materials (order from Australia)

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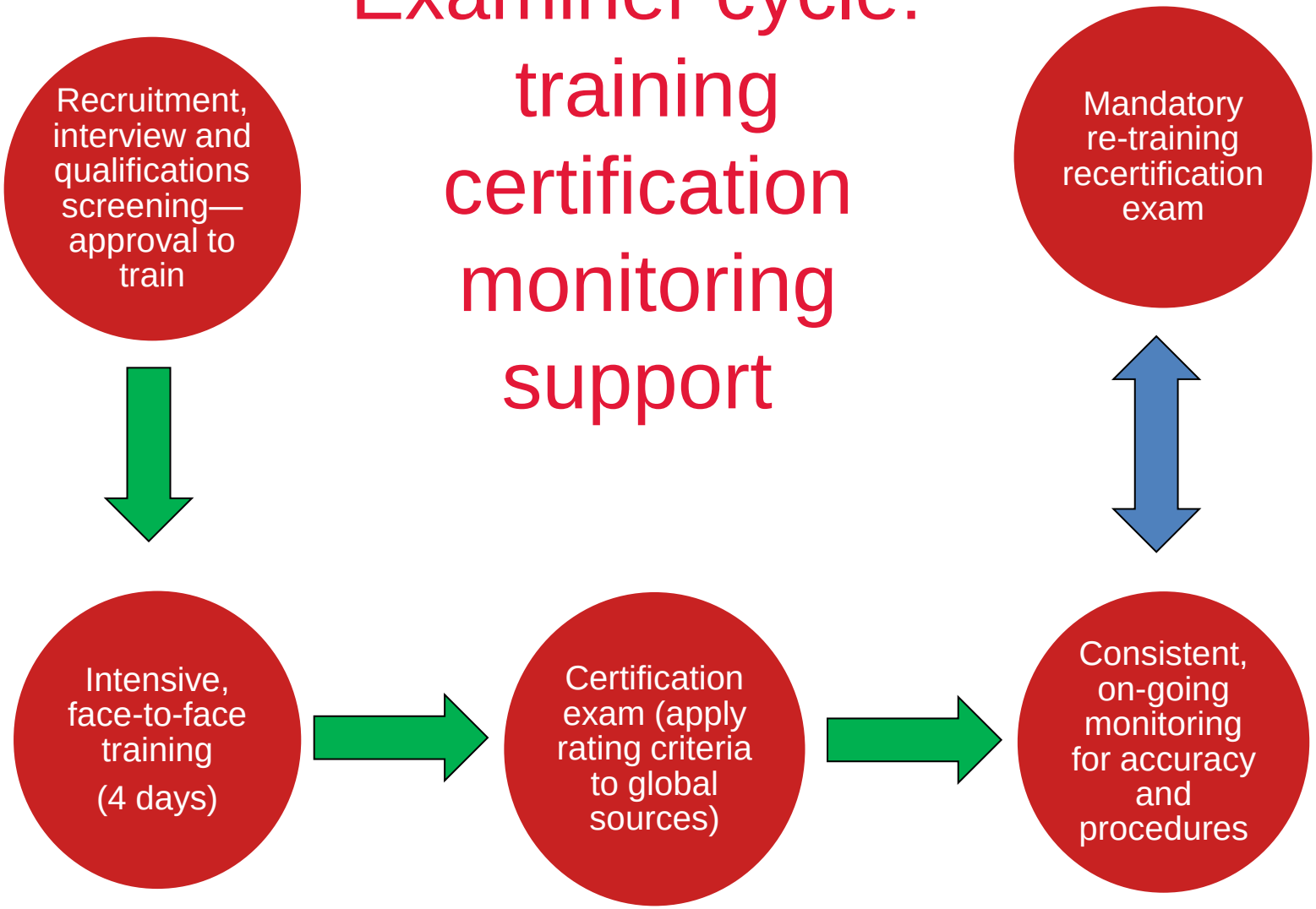
IELTS examiners: rigorous selection, training, certification and monitoring

- Stringent minimum professional requirements
- Must have an undergraduate degree PLUS
  - Recognized TESOL / TEFL certificate (e.g., CELTA, DELTA) or degree (e.g., M.A. TESOL or Applied Linguistics)
  - All degrees and certificates must be verified by IELTS before training is permitted
- Minimum 3 years post-degree/certificate teaching experience
- Pass oral interview screening by examiner trainer

Examiner cycle: training certification monitoring support



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Test Security

- Unique test versions in different time zones
- Candidate passport checked before and during each test component
- Proctoring and secure storage of test takers' belongings
  - No personal items may be brought into the test room
- Global security systems and protocols ensure consistent approach
- Scheduled and unannounced "spot" audits for every test center

Identity Authentication Management (IAM) System

- Initial biometric measure captured on check-in plus mandatory test day photographs
- Biometric verification must be conducted at every entrance to a secure area
- Documented audit trail of all system actions

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IAM and identity management

- Ensures the test taker who took the test is the person pictured on the TRF
- Adds an additional layer of security to ensure all modules are taken by the same person
- Passport and facial recognition techniques/checking remain unchanged
- Copy of current, valid passport presented to register for the test is retained by the test center

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FAQs

- How often is the test given?
  - IELTS is offered up to 4 times per month on Saturdays and Thursdays

- How much does the test cost?
  - $185 in the US
  - Fees are set by country to reflect the local economy and payable in local currency (see website for locations and fees)

- Where can test takers find information on test centers and dates?
  - Search “locations” for test centers on www.ielts.org
  - Online registration ieltsregistration.org

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Take-away message: IELTS puts people first

- valid, reliable, secure test available globally 48 test dates per year
- pen and paper test
- live, face-to-face speaking test
- multiple levels of security including the latest biometric technology
- people-oriented test centers, administrators, examiners and staff

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www.ielts.org