

An overview of Australian university entry requirements for international students

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The aim of the paper is to provide an overview of English language selection procedures in Australia. To do this, the paper looks at the selection practices of major universities in each of the eight Australian states and territories. Specifically, the paper focuses tests (and cut-off points) for selecting overseas students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Data has been collected through interviews with academic personnel at relevant institutions, as well as from existing university handbooks and national reports.

Universities in Australia

At present, there are 36 universities in Australia. The University of Sydney, began in 1850, is the oldest university in Australia. With the exception of Bond University, all Australian universities are public institutions. Australian universities have programs for both undergraduate and post-graduate students. Undergraduates generally spend three years to earn a degree, though a fourth year can be completed to attain an honours degree. Post-graduate students can enrol in graduate diploma courses, masters by coursework or masters by research. Doctoral students generally pursue a degree by research only, though Australian higher education institutions have introduced coursework into some PhD programs. For residents of Australia, fees vary from approximately AU\$3,300 for a full-time undergraduate arts student to about AU\$5,500 for a student studying for medicine. Pending legislature, fees are set to rise at most institutions. Living expenses for those who share accommodation at urban campuses are generally about AU\$10,000 to AU\$12,000. Like Australian students, fees vary for full-time international students depending on the type of course they do. An international student is defined as a person who is a non-resident of Australia. Humanities courses such as Arts, Commerce and Law which do not involve extensive work in a laboratory cost between \$A10 000 and \$A12 500 per year. Courses which involve a substantial amount of time working in a laboratory, as is the case in Engineering and Science, cost between \$A15 000 and \$A18 000 per year. Medical courses which require intensive laboratory work cost between \$A18, 000 and \$A24, 000 per year. Compulsory medical insurance for overseas students costs approximately AU\$240 per year. A total of 27,886 overseas students, including those whose first language is English, commenced study in 1996. Total enrolments for overseas students in 1996 was 53,188.

English language requirements

Each university in Australia requires non-English speaking students to demonstrate competence in English in one of three ways. First, students can enter a higher degree institution directly if they have completed their high school education at a school in Australia. This option is generally taken by students who seek to become permanent residents of Australia through migration with other family members.

Exams

A second way is to successfully pass a recognised examination of English proficiency. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is the preferred test in Australia. In 1996, approximately 12,000 candidates sat for IELTS examination. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), however, is equally recognised. Nearly 5,000 students in Australia took the TOEFL examination in 1996.

Other examinations recognised in Australia include the both the General Certificate of English (GCE) 'A' levels and 'O' levels tests. In addition, institutions accept the Hong Kong 'A' levels examination and successful passage of the Cambridge Certificate.

The Combined Universities Language Test (CULT) is widely used in New South Wales. Moreover, with respect to the Australian Comprehensive Test (ACT), entering students are expected to be attain a score of 70 or above in each component. There are four subtests in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Candidates receive a score of 100 on each subtest, for a total of 400 possible points. It takes approximately three hours to complete and costs AU\$150. Approximately 1,500 took the CULT examination last year.

The International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR), another Australian English proficiency test, is most widely used at Queensland universities. The ISLPR provides assessment in each of the four skills area. Candidates receive a score between zero and five (NS proficiency) level. The test is administered through an oral interview format. A score of 3 or above is usually required for direct entry to undergraduate programs.

Foundation year

A third way to enter an Australian university is to complete a foundation course. Foundation courses are one-year post-secondary courses designed to prepare overseas students for study in Australian universities. These courses vary widely in both their content but generally include an English language component. Note that foundation courses may have English language entry requirements, though these are generally lower than needed for direct entry.

To provide an overview of English language proficiency examinations, a survey of the requirements needed for entry from a sample of prominent universities was made (Table 1). At least one institution was included for each state and territory in Australia.

Table 1. *Entry requirements at selected Australian universities in 1997.*

Abbreviations TOEFL Test Sections: R = Reading L = Listening S = Speaking W = Writing

<u>Institution</u>	<u>IELTS Overall</u>	<u>IELTS Subtests</u>	<u>TOEFL</u>	<u>ETS TWE</u>	<u>Validity Period</u>
Australian National University	6.0 minimum* Arts & Law: 7.0	6.0	570 Arts & Law: 600 Non-Credit: 500	4.5 Arts & Law: 5.0 Non-Credit: 4.5	
Curtin University	Undergrad: 6.0 Grad: 6.5 MBA: 7.0	5.5 L, R 6.0 S, W Grad: 6.0 MBA: 6.5	550 Grad: 580	4.5	No limit
Flinders University	6.0		550		1 year
Griffith University	Undergrad: 6.0 Grad: 6.5	Undergrad: 5.5* Grad: 6.5*	550	5.0	
Macquarie University	6.0*	6.0 L, R, W 5.0 S	550 with at least 50 in each section		2 years
Monash University	Undergrad: 6.0 Grad: 6.5	6.0	Undergrad: 550 Grad: 580		6 months
Northern Territory University	6.0	6.0	560 - 570		1 year
University of Adelaide	6.0 LawSchool: 7.0	5.0 LawSchool: 6.0	Undergrad: 550 Grad: 640	Undergrad: 4 Grad: 5	2 years
University of Canberra	6.5		550	4.5	IELTS: 2 yrs. TOEFL: 1.5 yrs.
University of Melbourne	6.5	6.5	575	4.5	1 year
University of New South Wales	Undergrad: 6.5 Grad: 6.0-7.0	Undergrad: 5.5 Grad: 6.0	Undergrad: 500-600 Grad: 600	5	
University of Queensland	6.5 (coursework) 6.0 (research)	6.0	550	5	

University of Sydney	6.0*** Edu. & Health Grad. Level: 7.5	6.0	575 600**	4.5	2 years
University of Tasmania	6.0	5.5 R & L 6.0 W & S	Undergrad: 550 Grad: 57	4.5	1 yea
University of Western Australia	6.5	6.0	550		2 years

NOTES: * Some courses require higher levels
 ** For postgraduate physiotherapy B.Ed. candidates only
 *** Law under review

Notes

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Further information about Australian universities can be found through the WWW at www.fl.net.au/~robyeoh/ausuni.html [dead link]. Information about IDP Australia is available at www.idped.com.au [dead link].

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