



Australian Government

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

# ELICOS direct entry guide

30 November 2023

**TEQSA**

A student may enter a higher education course of study through a special arrangement involving the completion of an English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS). This type of arrangement is called an 'ELICOS Direct Entry'.

The main risk associated with ELICOS Direct Entry is that students will be admitted into a course of study without sufficient proficiency in English. To guard against this risk, the [ELICOS Standards 2018](#) (P4.1 c (ii)) state that, where providers deliver ELICOS courses under a direct entry arrangement:

*formal measures must be in place to ensure that assessment outcomes are comparable to other criteria used for admission to the tertiary education course of study, or for admission to other similar courses of study.*

The *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* (HES Framework) also create corresponding requirements for higher education providers accepting students through Direct Entry arrangements. Both ELICOS and higher education providers have obligations to assure themselves that ELICOS Direct Entry applicants have achieved outcomes comparable to the admission criteria used by other applicants. The purpose of this guide is to outline how ELICOS and higher education providers can best meet these obligations.

## Guidance for ELICOS providers

ELICOS providers must ensure that assessment outcomes for an ELICOS course with direct entry arrangements are comparable with other admission criteria for the course or similar courses.

A student's ability to understand and communicate in English at a comparable level can be assessed using commonly accepted tests such as:

- [CAE](#) (C1 Cambridge English: Advanced)
- [IELTS](#) (International English Language Testing System)
- [OET](#) (Occupational English Test)
- [PTE Academic](#) (Pearson Test of English)
- [TOEFL](#) (Test of English as a Foreign Language).

To demonstrate that a course for ELICOS Direct Entry satisfies the above requirements, providers should employ a variety of methods, including (but not limited to):

- external referencing through benchmarking
- benchmarking against valid frameworks for language proficiency
- tracer studies of student cohorts
- external testing.

## External referencing through benchmarking

External review should include benchmarking of:

- assessment inputs (tasks, marking criteria/rubrics and processes)
- assessment outputs (re-examination of samples of student work and grades awarded)
- any other relevant measures.

## Benchmarking against valid frameworks for language proficiency

Content and assessment inputs and outputs may be benchmarked to an externally-validated framework for language proficiency including (but not limited to):

- Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)
- International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR)
- Global Scale of English (GSE)
- Cambridge English Scale.

## Tracer studies of student cohorts

A tracer study collects information about a cohort of students over time. Providers that offer ELICOS Direct Entry should conduct tracer studies that compare cohorts of students entering a course of study via ELICOS Direct Entry with those who enter via other means at the required English language level. Where applicable, compared cohorts should all be from the same (or similar) course of study.

Tracer studies may be supplemented with qualitative feedback from former students or higher education academic staff. The feedback should be about how well the Direct Entry program is perceived to have prepared students for their higher education studies.

## External testing

External testing of the English proficiency level of students should adopt a test accepted by the higher education provider as the basis for entry for students who do not come through ELICOS Direct Entry. Any test involving a sample of students must:

- be large enough to be statistically robust
- be representative of the cohort as a whole
- minimise bias
- adopt a valid and transparent analysis of outcomes using established statistical methods.

Other methods of verification may be possible as agreed to on a case-by-case basis with TEQSA. Whichever method of verification is adopted, ELICOS providers should expect to undergo periodic review, with the frequency of review determined in part by the quality of evidence provided to TEQSA.

# Guidance for higher education providers

Several standards in the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* (HES Framework) are relevant for higher education providers accepting student through ELICOS Direct Entry arrangements. These include (but are not limited to):

- 1.1. Admission
- 1.2. Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning
- 1.3. Orientation and Progression
- 2.3. Wellbeing and Safety
- 3.3. Learning Resources and Educational Support
- 5.3 Monitoring, Review, and Improvement
- 7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students

In the context of ELICOS Direct Entry, these Standards mean that a higher education provider should be able to:

- satisfy itself the students directly entering a higher education course through an ELICOS provider have comparable proficiency in English as students admitted based on other English language admission requirements
- show how it has satisfied itself that such claims of comparable proficiency are credible.

Once students are enrolled through ELICOS Direct Entry, the higher education provider will also need to ensure students:

- have equivalent opportunities for success in relation to students who entered in other ways
- are provided with sufficient or appropriate post-entry language and learning support
- do not face impediments to progression and completion
- have their success rates monitored in comparison to other cohorts at a comparable English language level.

Processes for ELICOS Direct Entry should be formalised and transparent to all parties involved (including students) and should be periodically reviewed.

# Related resources

- [\*ELICOS Standards 2018\*](#)
- [Peer Review Portal](#): an (optional) online support mechanism which individuals, education providers, industry, networks and professional associations can use to meet national and international standards in external peer review
- [Guidance Note: Admissions \(coursework\)](#)
- [Guidance Note: Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning](#)
- Guidance Note: Wellbeing and Safety [under development]
- Guidance Note: Orientation and Progression [under development]
- Guidance Note: Learning Resources and Educational Support [under development]
- Guidance Note: Academic Monitoring, Review, and Improvement [under review]
- Guidance Note: Information for Prospective and Current Students [under development].

The background of the image is split diagonally from the top-left corner to the bottom-right corner. The upper-left portion is a solid blue color, and the lower-right portion is a solid orange color. The diagonal line is a thin, light-colored border.

**TEQSA**  
teqsa.gov.au