

British Council increases IELTS capacity and holds agent roadshow in response to new UK visa policies

New UK visa policies recently announced by UKVI have now come into effect in China. The changes mean only authorised test centres can administer IELTS for visa purposes, and some applicants for student visas must pay a 'health surcharge' as part of their visa application. In addition, some applicants are now being issued with Biometric Residence Permits.

The British Council is taking a number of measures to minimise the impact of these new visa policies on Chinese students and UK host institutions.

In preparation for peak UKVI IELTS test season, the British Council is monitoring capacity at the 12 authorised test centres in China and adding test dates as necessary to meet demand. In anticipation of strong demand in May and June, capacity and test dates for this period have already been increased in order to accommodate more test-takers and ensure they can complete the test in time for their visa applications. The British Council continues to monitor UKVI IELTS registration numbers on a daily basis and to increase capacity accordingly.

In addition to the above we are also pleased to announce a new test centre in Beijing. Further details on this will be communicated at a later stage.

Furthermore, to ensure agents are aware of the new visa policies and understand how they affect students, the British Council organised a national roadshow in cooperation with UKVI. Between 23 and 29 April, agent workshops were held in key locations across China to inform agents of the recent changes and ensure they understand how this affects students preparing to study in the UK. Ciarán Devane, the British Council's new global CEO, addressed the agents, and IELTS staff and representatives from UKVI were on hand to answer questions and provide expert advice.

The top concerns that emerged from the roadshow are around capacity at the authorised test centres and confusion over which IELTS test students are required to take in support of their visa application, especially if students are taking pre-sessional or joint CAS courses. As a result of this, many students are opting to take the UKVI IELTS as a safe option, even if they are not required to, which may put pressure on the test centres.

UKVI is currently preparing further clarification on the above, which will be circulated to agents shortly.

The British Council will continue to respond to agents' enquiries with the support of UKVI and IELTS, and UK institutions are encouraged to contact their agents to clarify any outstanding issues.

For any enquiries, please contact Tiffany You (tiffany.you@britishcouncil.org.cn), Director of Exams North & Central China, or Jazreel Goh (jazreel.goh@britishcouncil.org.cn), Director Education Operations, China.