

Notes for Departments and Colleges on the English Language Assessment Procedure for Incoming International Postgraduate Applicants

A joint document from the Graduate Admissions Office (GAO), the International Student Team (IST), and the Language Centre (LC)

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I. Introduction

The following is a joint document written by the **Graduate Admissions Office (GAO)**, the **International Student Team (IST)**, and the **Language Centre (LC)** with the aim of providing a clear and convenient overview of the procedures and requirements with regard to the Language Condition set for international postgraduate applicants.

II. University Minimum English Language Criteria

The University requires all applicants whose first language is not English to demonstrate competence in the English language at a very high level before they begin their proposed course of study. This minimum level for entry is set by the Board of Graduate Studies.

How applicants are required to meet this Language Condition depends on a range of factors, which includes their nationality, whether they have been educated in an English-speaking country before, which English language test they have taken, when and which level they achieved, as well as the requirements of the Home Office for those applicants who require a Tier 4 visa. Please note that the minimum level set by the Board of Graduate Studies is considerably higher than the level required by the Home Office for students intending to study on Tier 4 visas.

Point to Note

It is not possible for a Department to request that an applicant's Language Condition is 'waived'. All applicants must either meet the minimum entrance requirement through one of the listed criteria.

There are seven different ways for an applicant to meet the University's minimum entry requirement. These are:

Requirement met - (English Language Test not *normally* required)

- 1 Nationality of country List A;

Requirement met if 2 or 3 fulfilled

- 2 Completion of one of the accepted English Language Tests at the required minimum level no more than 2 years before the start date of their course;
- 3 Evidence of completing a 3-year qualification equivalent to at least a UK Bachelors, no more than 2 years before the start date of their proposed course, in one of the countries in List A.

The following applicants can be referred for a Language Centre Assessment

- 4 A national of country List B;
- 5 Applicants who have completed 2 years of university-level study in a country in List A or B no more than 2 years before the start date of their proposed course;
- 6 Applicants who have 'narrowly missed' the minimum required levels in one of the accepted English Language Tests.
- 7 Applicant has shown that they have met the level required at some point, e.g. via test (at required level) that has recently expired or University study more than 2 years ago AND have been working in an English-speaking environment since.

These will now be explained in brief:

1) Nationality of country List A

Nationals of the following countries would not *normally* be required to take an English Language Test.

List A contains the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia (also Christmas Island, Norfolk Island, Keeling Islands, Cocos Islands), Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, *Bermuda, British Antarctic Territory* (also *British Antarctica*), *British Indian Ocean Territory* (also *Chagos Archipelago, Indian Ocean Territory*), *British Virgin Islands*, Canada (with the exception of the French-speaking areas), *Channel Islands*, Dominica, *Falkland Islands, Gibraltar*, Grenada, Guyana, *Irish Republic*, Jamaica, *Malta*, New Zealand (also Niue, Tokelau, Cokelau, Cook Islands), St Kitts and St Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, UK, *Isle of Man*, USA

The countries and territories listed here are recognized as English-speaking countries and so therefore a language assessment is not *normally* required by the University. The Home Office also does not require a language assessment for students from these countries (*applicants from countries listed in italics do not normally require a Tier 4 visa*).

2) Completion of one of the accepted English Language Tests at the required minimum level no more than 2 years before the start date of their course.

The Board of Graduate Studies accepts the IELTS, TOEFL, CPE and CAE at the levels below. Higher levels may be set for specific courses, but it is not possible to set lower levels. The **University minimum levels** are as follows:

Test	Score Requirement
IELTS (Academic) or IELTS for UKVI Academic ¹	Overall band score of 7.0 , with not less than 7.0 in Speaking, Listening and Writing, and 6.5 in Reading. <i>Please see the note below for more information on the difference between the two IELTS tests.</i>
TOEFL iBT ²	Overall score of 100 with no element below 25
CAE ³	For tests taken before January 2015 : Grade A or B, plus an assessment by the Language Centre. For tests taken from January 2015 : no element lower than 193, plus an assessment by the Language Centre.
CPE ⁴	For tests taken before January 2015 : Grade A, B or C. For tests taken from January 2015 : with no element lower than 200, plus an assessment by the Language Centre.

¹ <http://www.ielts.org/>

² <https://www.ets.org/toefl/ibt/about>

³ <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/advanced/>

⁴ <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-qualifications/proficiency/>

Please refer to the Graduate Admissions website for the specific entry requirements for each individual course as Departmental minimum levels may be higher. See:
<http://www.graduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international-students/competence-english/what-tests-are-accepted>

Note on international students requiring a Tier 4 visa:

Following revisions to Home Office requirements on 6th April 2015 only the “IELTS for UKVI Academic” is an approved SELT. However, HEI’s sponsoring applicants for Tier 4 visas for degree level study may make their own assessment of language ability. As such the University continues to accept the non-SELT tests listed above. Applicants for degree level study will not be required to take a SELT test in order to obtain their visa.

3) Evidence of completing a 3-year qualification equivalent to at least a UK Bachelors, no more than 2 years before the start date of their proposed course, in one of the countries in List A.

Applicants who have completed a 3-year qualification equivalent to a UK Bachelors in a List A country, within the last 2 years, would also not *normally* be required to take an English Language Test (with the exception of French-speaking areas of Canada).

III. Language Centre Referrals

4) A national or country List B

Nationals of countries in List B or applicants who have (or are about to have) a 3-year bachelors or equivalent from a List B country (no more than 2 years old before the start date of the course) will be recommended to the Language Centre for an English Language assessment (if they do not already meet the language requirements via the above criteria in §1, §2 or §3).

The countries in List B are:

List B contains the following countries: Botswana, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, West Indies (with the exception of those in List A), Zambia, Zimbabwe.

A language assessment for applicants from these countries (except Netherlands) is required by the Home Office. As the University is a Highly Trusted Sponsor, the Language Centre is permitted to carry out this assessment on behalf of the University, as they conform to Home Office guidelines and meet the criteria of Tier 4.

5) Applicants who have completed 2 years of university-level study in a country in List A or B no more than 2 years before the start date of their proposed course;

Applicants who have completed a 2-year qualification equivalent to at least a UK Bachelors in a list A or List B country, within the last 2 years are normally asked to pass an accepted language test but they are also left a message on their Self Service

(CAMSIS) account to say that they may prefer to contact the Language Centre for an assessment, for which they are eligible (if they are made an offer of admission and have not already provided acceptable evidence of competence in English).

The Board of Graduate Studies has approved this as it is recognized that these applicants have studied in English at degree level.

6) Applicants who have ‘narrowly missed’ the minimum required levels in one of the accepted English Language Tests may be referred by the Graduate Admissions Office to the Language Centre for assessment.

Applicants who have achieved 0.5 less than the overall grade required for IELTS or 5 points less overall for the TOEFL are normally asked to pass an accepted language test but they are also left a message on their Self Service (CAMSIS) account to say that they may prefer to contact the Language Centre for an assessment, for which they are eligible.

Before agreeing that an assessment is suitable the Language Centre will consider:

- i) the individual scores achieved in each component,
- ii) the type of course applied for (i.e. one-year taught Master's or three-year research PhD)
- iii) the applicant's language background, previous test scores and any other relevant information.

The decision to refer the applicant to the Language Centre is made by the Graduate Admissions Office at the point of offer, and the applicant is notified of this referral through their Self-Service (CAMSIS) account.

7) Applicant has shown that they have met the level required at some point, e.g. via test (at required level) that has recently expired or University study more than 2 years ago AND have been working in an English-speaking environment since

Applicants who have clearly demonstrated that they have maintained the minimum language requirement by working in an English speaking environment since achieving the minimum levels required are normally asked to pass an accepted language test but they are also left a message on their Self Service (CAMSIS) account to say that they may prefer to contact the Language Centre for an assessment, for which they are eligible.

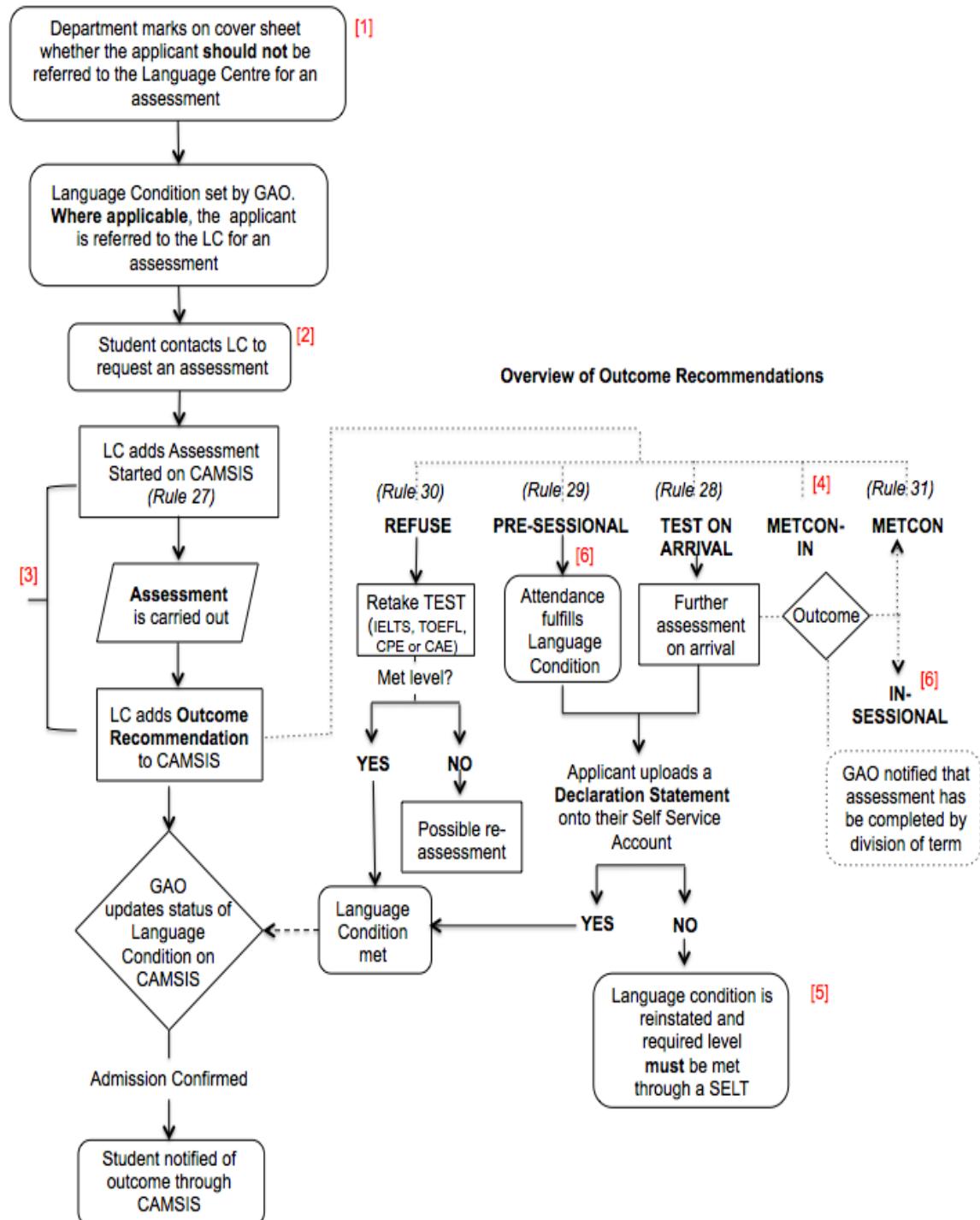
Summary:

Unless an applicant is either a national of a country in List A, or has completed a 3-year degree within the last 2 years at a university in country List A, they **must meet the minimum language requirement through either one of the accepted English language tests at the minimum level or, if eligible, through successful assessment by the Language Centre.**

The **Graduate Admissions Office** is responsible for setting the Language Condition and notifies the applicant through their Self-Service (CAMSIS) account if they are eligible to be referred to the Language Centre for an assessment.

IV. Flowchart of Language Centre Assessment Process

The flowchart details the assessment process for an applicant who has been referred by the GAO to the Language Centre for an English language assessment.



Explanatory Notes (nos. refer to those on the Flowchart)

1. Departments are requested to check the box on the offer recommendation cover sheet if they do **not** wish the applicant to be assessed by the Language Centre. If this box is ticked, applicants will be required to meet criteria §1, §2, or §3.
Please note that ticking this box currently means that the Department is **not willing to allow **any** assessment by the Language Centre for any of the reasons listed.
2. If an applicant contacts the Language Centre directly for an assessment prior to an offer being made, the Language Centre will assess them (as this helps spread the volume of assessments) but the applicant will not be notified of the outcome of the Language Centre assessment until the offer of admission is made. The Language Centre recommendation will not be accepted (whatever it is) if the Department have ticked the exclusion box on the cover sheet, and the applicant will be required to complete one of the accepted English language tests at the required minimum level.
3. Departments and Colleges can be notified via e-mails when:
 - a. the Language Centre are assessing the applicant (*Rule 27*)
 - b. the Language Centre have added an Outcome Recommendation after the assessment (*Rule, 28, 29, 30, 31*)
4. The outcome 'Met Condition with Recommended In-Sessional' (see *Section V below*) does not have a workflow rule, or email notification, since it is simply advisory. Attendance is **not** a condition of admission. This advice is noted in the Comments section of the student record.
5. If the outcome of the assessment is to undertake either the Pre-Sessional or the Test of Arrival, then the applicant is required to upload a statement confirming that:
 - a. they have sufficient funds to cover the cost of the recommended language course;
 - b. that they accept that they will not be permitted to continue their course of study if they do not attend the recommended language course.Providing this statement is a condition of the applicant's offer of admission.

6. Applicants who do not attend the Pre-Sessional or In-Sessional if required are removed from the register and withdrawn from their course.

V. Language Centre Assessment

In order to comply with Home Office requirements as well as to ensure that the University's entrance requirements are being met, the assessment covers all four skills areas: **Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking**. The first three are assessed in an **online assessment** whilst speaking is assessed by means of a **telephone interview**.

Applicants are advised to spend around **3 hours** on the **online assessment**, although they may spend as long as they wish to since the assessment is not timed. They must, however, complete the assessment in one sitting since their answers are only recorded once the assessment has been submitted. When they are sent the login details for the assessment, they are asked to complete the assessment within 24 hours. If they cannot do so because of prior commitments, we ask them to let us know. The assessment sits behind two password-protected pages: an initial assessment

webpage and then their own actual assessment which they login to with their USN number and a password they have been sent.

In the **Listening** section applicants are asked to write a summary of a 15-minute extract from a lecture given by a University academic. In the **Reading** section, applicants are given two input texts – one in prose and one in table format – on a the topic of critical thinking skills and they are asked to respond to a ‘discuss’-type question, drawing on the information in the two input texts as well as on their own arguments. In the section specifically designed to assess **Writing**, the applicants are asked to:

- 1) explain as if writing for an educated but non-expert audience the nature of their postgraduate research if applying for a PhD or the reasons for their choice of taught postgraduate programme;
- 2) give an honest self-assessment of their academic English abilities in all skills areas, and;
- 3) rewrite a passage so that it conforms to the stylistic conventions of academic objectivity.

Once the online assessment has been completed, if required, the applicant will be contacted to arrange a **telephone interview**. This typically lasts **around 15 minutes**. Questions include their motivations for choosing their research area or taught course; what initially drew them into their research area and what their hopes are after completing the course they have applied for; what experiences, if any, they have had overseas in an English-speaking country or otherwise; and if they have presented a jagged set of scores in one of the accepted English language tests, what their explanation is having taken that particular test on that particular day.

The assessment is so designed that there are no right or wrong answers since in the online assessment for all five questions applicants are asked to provide their own written responses to the questions set. So even if an applicant were to be aware of the assessment before taking it, they would not know the answers to any of the questions since these are student-specific.

- The **online assessment** covers understanding of written and spoken academic input materials, clarity of expression, fluency, accuracy, coherence and cohesion, register, lexical and grammatical range and ability, and awareness of academic conventions.
- The **telephone interview** covers the ability to discuss their own research and related questions, ability to discuss non-academic topics, ability to react to both formal and informal questions, fluency, accuracy, intonation, pronunciation, and spoken lexical and grammatical range and ability.

When submitting the online assessment, the applicants are asked to confirm that it is their own work. When the telephone interview is carried out, reference is made both to the online assessment as well as the application documents submitted to the University (held on CAMSIS). Note is also made of the date and time of the telephone interview. Should there be any concerns that what has been submitted is not the applicant’s own work, the recommendation to the Graduate Admissions Office is that the applicant is asked to retake one of the accepted English language tests and meet the University’s minimum requirement that way.

The assessment cannot be prepared for in the commonly accepted sense of ‘prepare’ – in fact, we would not encourage applicants to do so. The assessments are not graded in that the applicant must attain a certain score in order to be deemed to have passed – the assessment is diagnostic. **It has been designed to not only assess the applicant’s language ability, but also to give an indication of their academic**

skills awareness and proficiency in the context of an English-speaking academic environment.

On the basis of the assessment, together with all other relevant information on the applicant's English language background, a **recommendation** is made to the Graduate Admissions Office who will either accept or reject the outcome recommendation. Any queries with regard to the assessment outcomes should be addressed to the Graduate Admissions Office and not the Language Centre. Queries regarding the assessment itself can be directed to the Language Centre (adtis@langcen.cam.ac.uk).

Outcome Recommendations

On the basis of the assessment, the Language Centre will make one of five possible recommendations to the Graduate Admissions Office. These are:

Pre-Sessional	The language condition is met on the understanding that the applicant attends the ADTIS Pre-Sessional course.
Test on Arrival	The language condition is met on the understanding that the applicant takes a further Test on Arrival and also undertakes any follow-up action recommended by the Language Centre following the result of the assessment.
Met Condition with Recommended In-Sessional	It is considered that the applicant's English language abilities fulfill the English language requirements for their course and therefore the language condition has been met, but the Language Centre recommends that the applicant attend the In-Sessional Support Programme to further strengthen and refine their academic English skills set. <i>Attendance is not a condition of their admission.</i>
Met Condition	It is considered that the applicant's English language abilities fulfill the English language requirements for their course and therefore the language condition has been met, with no further recommendations.
Refuse	The language condition has not been met and the applicant must retake one of the accepted English language tests. If this is not possible before the start of term, they may need to apply to defer or resubmit their application.

VI. Pre-Sessional Course

The requirement to attend the five-week intensive Pre-Sessional course that runs from mid-August to the third week in September is set if the assessment has highlighted weaker areas which need to be addressed so that the student can hit the ground running when they start their degree programme in October.

Whilst students who have displayed minor inadequacies in their proficiency of the English language are required to attend the Pre-Sessional, the overwhelming reason for mandating attendance of the Pre-Sessional is a lack of the prerequisite postgraduate academic English skills required to meet the demands of their course of study.

The objective of this five-week intensive programme is to provide the students with extensive tailored guidance and support in order to equip them with all the necessary

academic English skills. The programme therefore addresses five key areas: 1) Key Language Skills, 2) Postgraduate Study Skills, 3) Transferable Skills, 4) Cultural Awareness / Soft Skills, and 5) Introduction to the University.

In terms of formative assessment all students are expected to write three research papers (1000, 2000, and 4000 words) within their discipline (*the specific type of ‘paper’ and focus depends on the individual student*) and deliver three videoed presentations (5 mins, 10 mins, and 20 mins with 10 mins Q&A) within their discipline – in addition to other work set. Each week every student has a half-hour supervision with their ADTIS supervisor so that they can receive individualized feedback and guidance, and there are a range of compulsory and voluntary workshops in the afternoons. These include bespoke workshops delivered by the University Library on using their resources, both static and digital, most effectively; individual vocal delivery sessions; and transition to Higher Education workshops. In addition to the above, there is also a full Social and Cultural programme which is run by a graduate student at the University.

As such the focus of the programme is on the whole student, not simply their competency in the English language. In terms of delivery, the programme adopts an integrated skills approach. Whilst individual skills are trained in isolation, the greater focus is given to raising their awareness of how the skills interlink so as to consciously promote their development as autonomous (language) learners.

Basically, whilst the Pre-Sessional has academic English skills as its primary focus, it is far more than simply a language course – it is an academic English skills training course tailored to the needs of international graduate students at Cambridge. These academic skills are trained by heightening their awareness of language and its use in all aspects of their studies so as to engender a greater sense of learner autonomy and reflection.

At the end of the course, reports are written on the students for whom the attendance of the course was a condition of their entry to the University. If there are any outstanding concerns, these are then flagged with the Student Registry, the student’s Department and their College. Whilst the successful attendance of the Pre-Sessional fulfills the students’ language condition, all students on the Pre-Sessional automatically receive In-Sessional Support for their first year if they wish to without at not additional cost. Their attendance of the In-Sessional is, however, completely voluntary.

You will find a Sample Pre-Sessional Schedule on the Language Centre website: http://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/eap/Sample_Schedule.pdf.

Please note that Pre-Sessional Course ONLY runs once a year in August – if the applicant’s intended start date is Lent or Easter Term, then the attendance of the Pre-Sessional is not an option. The applicant will be asked to retake one of the accepted English language tests; or defer entry until October so that they can attend the Pre-Sessional. **The Pre-Sessional must be attended before they start their degree programme.

VII. Test on Arrival

The Test on Arrival is set if the assessment has shown minor weaknesses in their academic English ability for which they may require additional support once they are in Cambridge. On arrival in Cambridge, they will therefore be contacted by the Language Centre to come in for an additional assessment.

There are two possible outcomes of this assessment:

- 1) no further action is required from the applicant or,
- 2) additional support is required and applicants must attend the In-Sessional Support Programme. Failure to do so will result in the applicant being withdrawn from their course of study.

This assessment is carried out in the Language Centre. At the start of term, students are sent an e-mail notifying them that they are required to come to the Language Centre for a further assessment. As the initial assessment, this assessment consists of an online component which assesses **Listening**, **Reading** and **Writing**, and where necessary, there is a follow-up **face-to-face interview** with the Director of English for Academic Purposes. Unlike the initial assessment, however, the Listening and Reading sections in this assessment both have a set of multiple choice questions which are designed to gauge the student's level of comprehension of a generic academic text. In the Writing sections they asked to:

- 1) summarize a 750-word discursive passage in 250 words;
- 2) to write on what they understand by the term 'Academic English', and;
- 3) to give an honest self-assessment of their academic English abilities, commenting on what they see as their strengths and weaknesses and highlighting any specific areas where they feel they need to improve their academic English abilities.

The Test on Arrival is primarily set in cases where there have been minor concerns in the initial assessment with regard to the 'style' of their academic English as opposed to exhibiting linguistic difficulties. For example, a student can have very good general English language abilities, but they may still struggle since they are unaware of the accepted conventions of academic English within their specific discipline. If such concerns are still present once they arrive in Cambridge, then they will be asked to attend the English for Academic Purposes In-Sessional Support Programme.

VIII. Academic Year Programme: In-Sessional

The In-Sessional provides support during the academic year and is tailored to the individual student. This support is designed to cater to the academic English needs of postgraduates, postdocs and undergraduates at the University and lasts for one calendar year irrespective of the entry term. The programme consists of focussed two-hour workshops and individual supervisions with an ADTIS supervisor.

Details of workshops offered each term can be found on our website:

<http://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/lc/adtis/in-sessional.html>

All students on the In-Sessional may attend as many of the weekly workshops as they wish to. Details of the workshops are published at the start of each term on the programme's CamTools site as well as on our website. The number of initial supervision hours allocated is dependent, however, on the student's language condition status - i.e. whether or not attendance on the programme is a condition of their entry to the University. The standard number of supervision hours is 6 hours over the course of the year – and these can be face-to-face, via e-mail, or over the telephone/Skype; whichever is the most appropriate medium given the nature of the support.

The In-Sessional is not conceived as an additional course, but is intended to support students in addressing any academic language and language-related issues they may have so that they become more autonomous language learners. Whilst the focussed workshops cover the wider generic aspects of English at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, the supervisions are tailored to the needs of the individual student.

IX. Bespoke Academic English workshops for Departments and Colleges

Currently, all the In-Sessional workshops are run in the Language Centre itself. However, in response to ad-hoc enquiries from Departments and Colleges to run tailored workshops for them on their site, we are now planning a series of standalone workshops that can be delivered off-site.

Instead of the two-hour model that is used on the In-Sessional, our intention is for the standalone workshops to be either run as a series of shorter workshops or as full- or half-day sessions (depending on the nature of the specific workshop) so that there is sufficient time for practice and skills progression.

Drawing on our extensive body of in-house developed materials that are currently used on the regular In-Sessional Support Programme, at a Department's or College's request, we will either tailor these or develop bespoke new workshops/courses. For example, many of our In-Sessional workshops focus on aspects of academic writing and presentation skills. We can tailor these so that they are either discipline-specific in their focus – for example, *Writing a First Year Report in the Physical Sciences* or *Academic Writing Style in the Social Sciences* – or skills-specific, such as *Vocal Delivery for Speakers of Chinese* or *Getting the Tone Right in E-mails*. We have also recently developed a suite of *Study Skills* workshops specifically designed to support the needs of international students who may be new to the UK HE learning and teaching culture: for example, *Understanding your Learning Style*, *Effective Group Work*, and *Communicating Assertively*.

Should you wish to contact us about tailored workshops for your Department or College, then please e-mail us on adtis@langcen.cam.ac.uk.

X. ADTIS Online Learning Objects

To complement our face-to-face support, we have been developing a series of online learning objects on various aspects of academic literacy, which are freely available to all registered members of the University on our website:

<http://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/arriving/pre-arrival-information/online-resources-academic-english> (Raven protected)

We are continually expanding this provision and so please check our website for updates – additional ones coming online this year are: *Self-Study Toolkit*; *Literature Review*, *Argumentation*, *Avoiding Plagiarism*, and *Study Block & Procrastination*.

The three *Pre-Arrival* learning objects are also available on the International Students webpage where Raven login is not required:

<http://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/arriving/pre-arrival-information/online-resources-academic-english>