

KNOW YOUR SELTs: What the B2 shift means for your learners — and how to prepare them

One of the most significant policy changes affecting the ESOL sector in recent years comes into force on 26 March 2027, when the English language requirement for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) rises from B1 to B2. For providers, understanding exactly what this means in practice — and communicating it clearly to learners — will be essential over the coming months.

What is a SELT?

To apply for ILR or British citizenship, learners cannot simply present a qualification from their ESOL course. They must pass a government-approved Secure English Language Test (SELT), taken at an approved centre. Only specific tests from approved providers are accepted — and booking the wrong test or the wrong level will result in a refused application, regardless of the learner's ability.

What's B1 and B2?

The government describes B1 as GCSE standard of English and B2 as A Levelⁱ. These terms were originally defined in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) created by the Council of Europe as a way of measuring language competence across all languages and levels.ⁱⁱ

B1 is an intermediate level of language, similar to ESOL Entry Level 3. Here is the CEFR 'can do' descriptor from the Council of Europe:

Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

B2 is an upper-intermediate level, equivalent to mid ESOL Level 1. Here is the descriptor:

Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

What does the current B1 test involve?

Contrary to what some learners assume, the current ILR test does not cover all four skills. It is a speaking and listening test only — reading and writing are not assessed. There are currently four approved providers offering B1 SELTs for ILR:

- **Trinity College London** — GESE Grade 5 (approximately 10 minutes, around £150)
- **IELTS SELT Consortium** — IELTS Life Skills B1 (approximately 20 minutes, £182)
- **Pearson** — PTE Home B1 (22 minutes, approximately £150–£180)
- **LanguageCert** — International ESOL SELT Speaking & Listening (11-13 minutes, £160)

Each provider uses its own scoring system, all mapped to the B1 CEFR standard. Trinity GESE Grade 5, for example, awards a Pass with Distinction, Pass with Merit, Pass, or Fail. IELTS Life Skills uses a straight pass or fail at B1 level.

What changes in 2027?

From 26 March 2027, learners applying for ILR will need to demonstrate B2 level English. In other visa routes where B2 is already required — such as the Skilled Worker route from January 2026 — a 4-skills SELT is used.

However, there is a critical detail that providers and learners need to be aware of: the Home Office has not yet confirmed which specific tests will be approved at B2 for ILR, nor whether the test will remain a two-skill assessment or expand to four skills.

This is a gap the sector should be actively pressing the Home Office to clarify — and soon. Learners who begin preparing now need to know what they are working towards.

How long does it take to get to B2 from B1?

For most learners, it takes approximately 200 ‘guided learning hours’ – a combination of tuition and self-study – to move up from B1 to B2. An individual may need fewer or more depending on the learning environment and their own aptitude and motivationsⁱⁱⁱ. It’s important to keep this in mind when supporting learners.

What should providers be doing right now?

There are three practical steps providers can take immediately:

First, audit your current learners who are on an ILR pathway. Identify those who are working towards B1 and may need to aim higher, and those who may have enough time to reach B2 before they apply for settlement.

Second, make sure your learners understand the difference between an ESOL qualification and a SELT. Completing an ESOL course — however excellent — does not automatically qualify them for ILR. They will still need to book and pass an approved SELT at an approved centre.



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Third, keep a close eye on Home Office guidance over the coming months. When the approved B2 SELT list for ILR is confirmed, communicate it quickly and clearly to your learners. We will cover any updates as soon as they are available.

For the latest list of approved SELT providers and tests, visit: [gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt)

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/higher-standard-of-english-now-required-to-settle-in-the-uk>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://specialistlanguagecourses.com/how-long-does-it-take-to-learn-english/>

