

**Research study to support the review of  
English benchmarks, validate French  
benchmarks and inform the examination  
process for the Medical Laboratory  
Technologist profession**

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## 1.0 Introduction to CLB/CNCLC

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) is the national standards body for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and *Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens* (NCLC). The department currently known as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) created the Centre in 1999 to ensure rigor and reliability in the use of CLB and NCLC in education, training, community, and workplace settings.

CLB and NCLC are based on a descriptive scale of 12 milestones, or reference points, along a continuum of language proficiency from basic to advanced levels. They reflect the progression of adult English as a Second Language (ESL) and French as a Second Language (FSL) learner proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

CLB and NCLC do not describe knowledge of distinct elements of language (e.g., specific syntax structures, pronunciation rules, vocabulary elements, micro-functions, and cultural conventions) but describe a person's communicative competence, i.e., their ability to carry out a communication task.

## 2.0 Background & Objectives

### 2.1 Examination Review

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Medical laboratory technologists (MLTs) are the fourth largest group of health care professionals in Canada. MLT professionals perform sophisticated laboratory investigations on the human body or on specimens taken from the human body. They also evaluate the technical sufficiency of the investigations and their results. The results of these tests provide important information that doctors, or other health care professionals need to make decisions about their patients' health. MLT professionals most often work in licensed laboratories, such as hospital labs, private labs, and government labs but may also work in areas such as medical research, forensics, education, community health, and industry. MLTs may also work in areas such as laboratory information management (using laboratory data to improve health care outcomes), laboratory management, or point of care testing (performance of laboratory tests outside of the laboratory).<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, LCRT Consulting identified the language requirements for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists in bridging programs to be in the CLB 7-9 range. LCRT recommended that participants entering with a CLB 7 be offered additional supports as they prepared for the professional certification exams and professional practice.<sup>2</sup> The research also indicated that the academic demands of the bridging programs were very different and often higher than those required in clinical settings due to the complexity of academic reading texts and the amount of information presented.

<sup>1</sup> [MLT PLA Guidebook.pdf \(csmls.org\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> LCRT Consulting. (2005). *LCRT Consulting and Access & Options for International Health Professionals* <https://www.themela.com/assets/documents/MELAFinalReportOctober2005.pdf>

The 2006 *Prior Learning Assessment and Internationally Trained Medical Laboratory Technologists* (PLA study) reviewed the CSMLS PLA system from the perspective of key stakeholders. The study identified that a lack of culturally appropriate soft skills and effective English language communication skills continued to be a barrier for successful integration into the workplace.<sup>3</sup> This demonstrated that an increasingly important aspect of the PLA process was the determination of English language proficiency levels communicative demands of medical laboratory practice. Activities included unstructured observations, interviews, analysis of authentic workplace materials and an item analysis of the professional practice exam.

In 2007/8 the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) conducted a project to investigate and validate the language proficiency of internationally educated medical laboratory technologists (IEMLTs) who applied to the CSMLS Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) process. The intent was to evaluate the level of proficiency required to succeed in the medical laboratory workplace and at the various stages of the certification process. The goal was to identify means of expediting IEMLT progress through the PLA process and ultimately into the workplace. The project also examined the demands of the CSMLS PLA exam and mapped CLB equivalencies to IELTS, TOEFL and MELA examination scores. The two benchmarking components of this project focused on benchmarking the language proficiency demands of the CSMLS certification examination and benchmarking the communicative demands of medical laboratory practice.

The result of this project was the setting of the following CLB levels<sup>4</sup>:

Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
8	8	8	7

These benchmarks were subsequently accepted by the CSMLS Board of Directors as entry-to-practice benchmarks for MLTs.

As part of the current project, CCLB was contracted to review changes in the education and examination processes since 2008, including the move to computer-based testing. It should be noted that CCLB did not propose to conduct a full standard setting process due to constraints related to budget and the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Simosko Associates Inc. (2006). *Prior Learning Assessment and Internationally Trained Medically Laboratory Technologists: Capstone Report*.  
[https://csmls.org/csmls/media/documents/publications/reports/capstone\\_and\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://csmls.org/csmls/media/documents/publications/reports/capstone_and_executive_summary.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>Strachan, A. (2007). *English Language Proficiency and Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists: An Investigation of Language Benchmarks and Assessment Tools for IEMLT Success. Phase I: Language Proficiency Levels Required to Work in the Profession*. Hamilton: Canadian Society of Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS)

## 2.2 The Certification Process

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The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) is the national certifying body for medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants, and the national society for Canada's medical laboratory professionals. The CSMLS is not a regulatory body, nor does it provide licensure to practice in Canada.

The CSMLS provides the competency-based Exam for the medical laboratory profession in Canada on behalf of the Canadian provincial Medical Laboratory Technologist (MLT) regulatory authorities and for those regions of the country that are not currently regulated. In provinces with an MLT regulatory authority, the MLT regulatory authority registers applicants who meet provincial registration requirements and regulates the practice of the profession, as delegated. The CSMLS has Exam and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) service agreements with each MLT regulatory authority (except for Quebec) which recognizes this Exam as an entry-to-practice requirement into the Canadian medical laboratory profession.

There are two ways to become initially eligible to write the Exam:

1. **EQUAL™ Accredited\* Canadian Medical Laboratory Educational Program Candidate**
  - To be eligible to write the Exam, candidates must have successfully completed all EQUAL™ accredited Canadian medical laboratory educational program requirements a minimum of two (2) weeks before the Exam date; or within the past twelve (12) months of graduation, never having previously registered for the same Exam.<sup>5</sup>
2. **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Candidate**
  - To be eligible to write the Exam, candidates must have successfully completed the CSMLS Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) process.<sup>6</sup>

Candidates who do not have English or French as their first language are required to demonstrate language proficiency at the equivalent of CLB 6/NCLC 6 to commence the technical review (PLA process) and the equivalent of CLB/NCLC 8 to be eligible to write the exam. Language proficiency may currently be demonstrated through presenting test scores from the following:

- Michener English Language Assessment (MELA)
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- TOEFL iBT
- International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
- IELTS – AC
- IELTS – GT
- Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST)
- Canadian Test of French for Scholars and Trainees (TESTCan)

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<sup>5</sup> CSMLS Certification Exam Eligibility: <https://www.csmls.org/Certification/Certification-Exam/Exam-Eligibility.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> CSMLS Certification Exam Eligibility: <https://www.csmls.org/Certification/Certification-Exam/Exam-Eligibility.aspx>

### 3.0 Test Score Validation

The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) *Prior Learning Assessment Information Handbook and Application* lists the following scores as the minimum language proficiency requirements.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1: Pre-Assessment

Test Section	TOEFL iBT	IELTS – AC	IELTS – GT	CanTEST
Listening		5.5	5.5	3.0
Reading		5.5	5.5	3.0
Speaking		5.5	5.5	3.0
Writing		5.5	5.5	3.0
Overall/Total	61-79			

Table 2: Eligibility to write the national examination or post-assessment

Test Section	TOEFL iBT	IELTS – AC	IELTS – GT	CanTEST	MELA
Listening	20	7.0	7.0	4.0	8
Reading	22	7.0	7.0	4.0	7
Speaking	22	7.0	7.0	4.0	7
Writing	24	7.0	7.0	4.0	8
Overall/Total	88				

As part of the current project, CCLB was requested to validate the scores required on the IELTS Academic test for pre-and post-assessment (5.5 and 7.0) and the TOEFL iBT (61-79 and 88). Validation is not the setting of cut or pass scores but rather determining how closely the scores appear to relate to CLB levels. The data CCLB used was obtained from sources in the public domain and was analyzed by CCLB to advise CSMLS about current language demands and inform future considerations.

Making comparisons between scores on different tests is challenging because tests differ in their design, purpose, and format and the greater the difference in design the more problematic the exercise is.<sup>8</sup> The high-stakes tests used to demonstrate the language proficiency of internationally educated medical laboratory technologists (IEMLTs) are largely based on frameworks other than the Canadian Language Benchmarks, have different constructs and different scoring bands. It was necessary to use several different data sources to carry out this validation.

<sup>7</sup> CSMLS *Prior Learning Assessment Information Handbook and Application*  
[https://go.csmls.org/cert/MLT\\_PLA\\_Guidebook.pdf](https://go.csmls.org/cert/MLT_PLA_Guidebook.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, 2004, Lim et al, 2013



## 3.1 Methodology

To validate the scores for IELTS Academic and TOEFL iBT, CCLB did the following:

- Reviewed the methodology and findings of the 2008 report: *The investigation of language assessment tools and benchmarks necessary for success for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists*.
- Used CCLB research on the relationship between the Canadian Language Benchmarks and the Common European Framework of Reference.
- Identified the constructs of each test and related them to the CLB framework based on test information available from the test companies.
- Used a correlation between CanTEST and CLB (CanTEST, which is now discontinued, was developed on the CLB framework).
- Referenced test correlations conducted by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

## 3.2 Data Collection

CCLB used documented and publicly available research to find common points of alignment between IELTS AC, TOEFL iBT and CLB.

### 3.2.1 CLB/CEFR alignment

Firstly, the researchers used *Aligning the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*, Brian North and Enrica Piccardo, 2018.<sup>9</sup> This provided a starting point for the validation process as, through extensive research and calibration activities, it showed that CLB could be aligned with the CEFR.

Table 3: CLB/CEFR alignment

CLB	CEFR
12	C2
11	C1
10	
9	B2
8	
7	B1
6	
5	

North and Piccardo's analysis put CLB 8 in the B2 area of the CEFR and CLB 6 in the B1 area, although the research does point out that there may be some fluidity as direct alignments were not always possible. This is important to note as CCLB found differences between the CLB/NCLC/CEFR alignments provided by the test companies and the North and Piccardo alignment.

<sup>9</sup> North, B. & Piccardo, E. (2018). *Aligning the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*. Research report. <https://www.language.ca/aligning-clb-and-cefr/>

### 3.2.2 CLB/CanTEST equivalency

As it appears there seems to be a discordance between North and Piccardo's alignment and those of IELTS and TOEFL, CCLB referred to an equivalency table determining the equivalency between CLB and CanTEST.<sup>10</sup> Although, CanTEST has now been discontinued, it was one of the tests accepted by CSMLS that was developed on the CLB framework and had undergone a formal validation, so it was deemed to be helpful to the research.

Table 4: Alignment between CLB/NCLC/CEFR and CanTEST

CLB/NCLC Piccardo/North	CEFR Piccardo/North	University of Ottawa CanTEST
5	B1	
6		3.0 (oral 3.5)
7		3.5 (oral 4.0)
8	B2	4.0 (oral 4.5)
9		4.5 (oral 5.0)
10	C1	5.0 (oral 5.0+)
11		5.0 +
12		C2

The table above, more clearly supports the North and Piccardo alignment of CLB than do the alignments provided by IELTS and TOEFL.

<sup>10</sup> North and Piccardo citing (CanTEST: St. John, J. / M. Des Brisay. Final Report - Development and Validation of CanTEST Versions for Canadian Language Benchmarks. January 2001)



### 3.2.4 TOEFL iBT/CEFR alignment

TOEFL iBT has maximum points total of 120. CSMLS requirements currently determine TOEFL iBT scores of 61 to 79 and 88 reflect language proficiency equivalent to CLB 6 and CLB 8.

As shown in Table 7 below, TOEFL's correlation between the iBT and the CEFR places a score of 61-79 in a very wide range between high B1 and low C1 and a score of 88 between CEFR B2 and C1.

Table 7: TOEFL iBT TO CEFR LEVEL<sup>14</sup>

CEFR LEVEL	Listening 0-30	Reading 0-30	Writing 0-30	Speaking	Combined
C2	28	29	29	28	114
C1	22	24	24	25	95
B2	17	18	17	20	72
B1	9	4	13	16	42

### 3.2.5 Other test alignments

CCLB considered other alignments to determine the relationships of the tests to the CLB framework and each other. IELTS presents Government of Canada CLB/IELTS equivalencies on its website. The Government of Canada has determined equivalencies between the Canadian Language Benchmarks and language tests from designated testing organizations through a panel of language experts.

The Government of Canada uses the IELTS General test for immigration and citizenship purposes and provides equivalencies between that version and CLB, not the Academic version. However, both the General version and the Academic version use the same scoring bands and the scoring equivalency is the same for both.

### 3.2.6 Interpretations

There are two important considerations regarding the interpretation of the results. The first is that we are trying to fit tests into frameworks on which they were not constructed. Secondly, the characteristics of the two tests differ significantly. TOEFL and IELTS tests, while they have the same number of sections measuring similar skills and underlying constructs, were built from different frameworks and different test blueprints<sup>15</sup>. For example, the TOEFL iBT test contains numerous task types that can only be presented on a computer-based test, IELTS Academic is just moving to a computer-based format. TOEFL assesses speaking through computer-based tests which are scored by a combination of artificial intelligence and human raters while IELTS assesses, and will continue to assess, speaking using a live assessor. As a result, TOEFL iBT scores do not mean the same thing as IELTS scores. The correlation outlined in Table 5 is extracted from a research study done for ETS, the developers of TOEFL iBT.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ets.org/s/toefl-essentials/score-users/scores-admissions/set/>

<sup>15</sup> [IELTS scoring in detail](#)

Table 8: Comparison of TOEFL iBT with IELTS

TOEFL Reading	IELTS Reading	TOEFL Listening	IELTS Listening	TOEFL Speaking	IELTS Speaking	TOEFL Writing	IELTS Writing	TOEFL Total Scores	IELTS Total Scores <sup>16</sup>
13-18	6	12-19	6	18-19	6	21-23	6	60-78	6
19-23	6.5	20-23	6.5	20-22	6.5	24-26	6.5	79-93	6.5
24-26	7	24-26	7	23	7	27-28	7	94-101	7

It is interesting to note that while the above table provides good accordance of IELTS iBT and IELTS academic with CSMLS requirements for pre-assessment CLB 6, it is more problematic at CLB 8 - the equivalencies for CLB 8 show that 94-101 points on TOEFL iBT correspond to the IELTS 7 requirement.

### 3.3 Findings

The CCLB research found that, as was determined in 2008, it is very difficult to validate the equivalency of two or more tests to each other due to the different frameworks on which the tests are built, different test constructs, different rating scales, different purposes for using the tests and different scoring bands and scales. CCLB's research confirmed that both IELTS Academic and TOEFL iBT are supported by extensive research on test validity, scoring and reliability which makes them fit for the purposes for which they are used by CSMLS.

CCLB's research indicated that there are some discrepancies between the scores requested by CSMLS and the equivalencies provided by the test companies and the Government of Canada. These discrepancies are highlighted in red in the tables below.

Table 9: Stage One: Pre-assessment

Test Section	CSMLS-CLB	CSMLS-TOEFL iBT	TOEFL iBT website equivalent	CSMLS - IELTS	GOC-IELTS
Listening	6			5.5	5.5
Reading	6			5.5	5.0
Speaking	6			5.5	5.5
Writing	6			5.5	5.5
Combined	6	61-79			

<sup>16</sup> Microsoft Word - Linking TOEFL iBT to IELTS Scores (ets.org)

**Table 10: Stage Two: Post-assessment minimum requirements in each test section to be eligible to write the Exam.**

Test Section	CSMLS-CLB	CSMLS-TOEFL iBT	TOEFL iBT website equivalent	CSMLS-IELTS Academic	GOC-IELTS
Listening	8	20	24-26	7.0	7.5
Reading	8	22	24-26	7.0	6.5
Speaking	8	22	23	7.0	6.5
Writing	7	24	21-23	7.0	6.0
Combined		88	92		

Based on the above findings:

- CSMLS requires a slightly higher IELTS reading score in the Pre-Assessment than the data suggests, as IELTS 5.0 not 5.5 appears to be CLB 6.
- The scores required by CSMLS for TOEFL iBT in the Pre-Assessment seem to be valid.
- Based on the above findings for the Post-Assessment, CSMLS requires a slightly lower IELTS score for reading as 7.5 not 7.0 appears to be a CLB 8.
- CSMLS requested scores for the other three skills appear to be a little high as CLB 8 appears to be IELTS 6.5 not 7.0.
- Based on the IELTS/ TOEFL iBT alignment it appears that CSMLS requirements for TOEFL iBT are low when compared with the TOEFL iBT determinations.

### 3.4 Recommendations

The required language benchmarks required for a MLT to write the Exam is a CLB 8 in Listening, Reading, and Speaking and a CLB 7 in writing which correspond to CEFR levels B2 and B1 respectively.

Based on the equivalencies of the CEFR with the TOEFL iBT and IELTS Academic, CSMLS may wish to conduct a standard setting process as

- the TOEFL iBT writing score demonstrates a C1 range. Using the data collected, a cut off score of 16 would better reflect the B1 CEFR level.
- the IELTS 7.0 score demonstrates a C1 range. Using the data collected, a cut off score of 5.5 would better reflect the B2 CEFR level for Listening, Reading, and Speaking and a cut off score of 5.0 would better reflect the B1 CEFR level for Writing.

The tables below show the suggested alignment in **red** based on CCLB's findings:

Table 11: Stage One: Pre-assessment

Test Section	TOEFL iBT	IELTS – AC	CLB
Listening		5.5	6
Reading		5.0	6
Speaking		5.5	6
Writing		5.5	6
Overall Total	61-79	5.5	

Table 12: Stage Two: Post-assessment minimum requirements in each test section to be eligible to write the Exam.

Test Section	TOEFL iBT	IELTS – AC	CLB
Listening	24	7.5	8
Reading	24	6.5	8
Speaking	23	6.5	8
Writing	21	6.0	7
Overall Total	92		

## 4.0 Setting Cut Scores for CanTEST and MELA

### 4.1 CanTEST

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CanTEST has been discontinued and test scores expire on August 15, 2022.

### 4.2 MELA, Michener English Language Assessment

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The only legally defensible way to determine MELA equivalency to CLB would be by holding a full standard setting exercise. Within the limits of this contract, CCLB used the following methods to determine the MELA equivalent to CLB:

- Reviewed the MELA test construct and scoring bands
- Reviewed the [MELA Validation Project \(themela.com\)](http://themela.com) which compared MELA to IELTS
- Reviewed equivalency tables already in existence
- Used the research in the section above on IELTS and TOEFL iBT alignment with CLB

The Michener English Language Assessment, or MELA, is a standardized English language proficiency test. It differs to most other English proficiency assessments in that it is occupation-specific not a general assessment of language proficiency. The MELA measures English language proficiency based on communication that is typical in health care education or practice settings. The test is referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB).

MELA is a Canadian-made, language test which was developed in 2004, specific to the health care sector. MELA was structured around a language benchmarking analysis, which was conducted to identify the communication skills needed to practice effectively and safely in the Canadian health care workplace. The test items were developed by language specialists with input from health care workers, employers, regulators, and test takers to ensure that the content was appropriate and meaningful. Guidance from language testing and measurement experts further ensures reliability and validity. The reliability of MELA test items was verified through detailed psychometric studies.<sup>17</sup>

A MELA validation report was published in 2013, by LCRT Consulting, the developers of MELA. By correlating MELA scores to scores obtained on a widely used standardized language assessment (IELTS), it was felt that concurrent validity evidence could be established. In addition to the concurrent validity data, the study also collected test-taker perceptions of MELA results to support content and face validity.

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<sup>17</sup> [MELA Test | MELA \(themela.com\)](http://themela.com)



Another validation activity collected data to support test reliability, such as inter-rater reliability. Finally, item and reliability analyses were conducted for individual items and tasks in MELA. Results of the MELA-IELTS study showed that MELA and IELTS scores correlate positively.

The MELA results are reported on a scale of MELA 6 – 10. This scale is referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks 6 – 10.<sup>18</sup>

## 4.2 Findings

As the MELA was developed on the CLB framework by CLB experts and has undergone rigorous psychometric review and validation it would be logical to assume that it should align with CSMLS recommendations of CLB 6 and 8. Based on the correlations with IELTS and TOEFL iBT above, CCLB recommends the following cut scores:

**Table 13: Stage One: Pre-Assessment**

Test Section	MELA
Listening	6
Reading	6
Speaking	6
Writing	6

**Table 14: Stage Two: Post-Assessment**

Test Section	MELA
Listening	8
Reading	8
Speaking	8
Writing	7

It should be noted that MELA is not widely accepted by other health care professions. This may create difficulties and additional expenses for MLT applicants who may need to take another language proficiency test if they are not successful in the MLT PLA or certification processes.

<sup>18</sup> [FinalReportWEBCopyOctober2005.PDF \(themela.com\)](#)

## 5.0 Tests of French Language Proficiency

### 5.1 Background

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CSMLS lists TestCAN as the test of French language proficiency it accepts; however, TestCAN has now been discontinued.

CCLB selected four other French language proficiency tests to evaluate because they are recognized as “high stakes” and are widely available. Two of the tests are recognised by IRCC for immigration and citizenship purposes. The tests selected for evaluation were:

- The Test d'évaluation du français (TEF)
- The Test d'évaluation de français du Canada (TEF Canada)
- The Test de connaissance du français (TCF)
- The Test de connaissance du français du Canada (TCF Canada)

TEF and TCF were developed in France and are generally slightly more academic than the Canadian versions which have been adapted for immigration and citizenship purposes and have slightly less emphasis on grammatical and lexical skills.

On October 1, 2019, the CEFR introduced a new “scoring” scale to provide more readable results for candidates. Since then, all tests have been assessed on a single grid from 0-699 with 100-point increments per level. This update presents a problem in Canada, as the equivalency tables for language test results on the IRCC website (2021) are not up to date with the changes made by the CEFR. This presents an additional challenge in establishing cut-off scores when it comes to certain tests such as TEF and TCF.

### 5.2 Methodology

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We were able to find various tables that provided a good understanding of the updates made by the CEFR, as well as the changes they have created in terms of equivalencies and the representation of the levels of the other tests. We were also able to conduct a comparative analysis to clearly position these levels and their new values based on the changes in scale. This was possible for all tests except the TCF, for which we could not find a comparative table of equivalencies that was both dated after October 1, 2019, and set up according to the new CEFR values, which presented another challenge in establishing cut-off points.

Each of these tests was analyzed using a methodological approach called “comparative analysis” which is part of a tradition of qualitative research. We looked at the test constructs, proficiency levels and scoring bands for each of the tests and then determined equivalency scores each of these tests that we could recommend to CSMLS.

The first step in the process was to examine the relationship between the NCLC and the CEFR with the TestCAN, building on the extensive research conducted by Piccardo & North (2018) to determine a correlation between the NCLC and the CEFR. The research determined that the tests were sufficiently similar that an attempt to determine equivalent scores could be made.

## 5.3 Findings

We have included the table of TEF scores pre-October 2019, below, for comparison purposes and because these are the ones still referenced on the IRCC website.

Table 15: Table of Correspondance - TEF Canada -Test score equivalency chart (Pre-Oct 2019)<sup>19</sup>

CLB Level	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
10	263-300	393-450	316-360	393-450
9	248-262	371-392	298-315	371-392
8	233-247	349-370	280-297	349-370
7	207-232	310-348	249-279	310-348
6	181-206	271-309	217-248	271-309
5	151-180	226-270	181-216	226-270

Table 16: Table of Correspondance - TEF since Oct. 2019<sup>20</sup>

NCLC TEF 2019	CEFR TEF 2019	TEF Scores
5	B1	350-399
6	B2	400-449
7		450-499
8	C1	500-532
9		533-563
10		566-599
11	C2	600-699
12		

Table 17: Table of Correspondance - TEF Canada<sup>21</sup>

TEF	0-99	100-199	200-299		300-399		400-499		500-599			600-699	
CEFR	A1	A1	A2		B1		B2		C1			C2	
NCLC	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

<sup>19</sup> [Language test equivalency charts - Canada.ca](https://www.languagecanada.ca/language-test-equivalency-charts-canada-ca)

<sup>20</sup> [Correspondance-TEF-NCLC-CECR-après-le-01.10.2019.pdf \(lefrancaisdesaffaires.fr\)](https://www.lefrancaisdesaffaires.fr/Correspondance-TEF-NCLC-CECR-après-le-01.10.2019.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

Table 18: Table of Correspondance - TCF Canada- Test score equivalency chart<sup>22</sup>

CLB Level	Reading Compréhension écrite	Writing Expression écrite	Listening Compréhension orale	Speaking Expression orale
10 and above	549-699 (C1-C2)	16-20 (C1-C2)	549-699 (C1-C2)	16-20 (C1-C2)
9	524-548 (C1)	14-15 (C1)	523-548 (C1)	14-15 (C1)
8	499-523 (B2-C1)	12-13 (B2)	503-522 (C1)	12-13 (B2)
7	453-498 (B2)	10-11 (B2)	458-502 (B2-C1)	10-11 (B2)
6	406-452 (B2)	7-9 (B1)	398-457 (B1=B2)	7-9 (B2)
5	375-405 (B1-B2)	6 (B1)	369-397 (B1)	6 (B1)
4	342-374 (B1)	4-5 (A2)	331-368 (B1)	4-5 (A2)

This table shows that listening CLB 8 is placed at the CEFR 1 level while the other three skills are at B2 level. All skills at CLB 6 are at CEFR B1 level.

<sup>22</sup> [Language test equivalency charts - Canada.ca](https://www.cclb.ca/language-test-equivalency-charts-canada)

[TCF - Canada | France Education international \(france-education-international.fr\)](https://www.france-education-international.fr)

## 5.4 Recommendations

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CCLB recommends the use of the cut scores below.

Table 19: TEF recommended cut scores

TEF and TEF Canada	Pre-assessment	Post-assessment
Combined score	400-449	500-532

Table 20: TCF recommended cut scores

TCF and TCF Canada	Pre-assessment	Post-assessment
Reading	406-452	499-523
Writing	7-9	12-13
Listening	398-457	503-522
Speaking	7-9	12-13

- TEF Canada and TCF Canada should also be considered as they are widely available; however, they are not as academic in construct.

## 6.0 Recommendations on other tests that could be considered to demonstrate language proficiency

### 6.1 Background

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Interesting discussions are currently happening within levels of Government and regulatory bodies as to the fairest and least onerous ways of asking candidates to demonstrate language proficiency requirements required for academic or certification purposes. These discussions include:

- Increasing the number of tests accepted to demonstrate language proficiency: Alberta College of Speech Language Pathologists, IELTS AC or GT.
- Accepting the tests used for immigration purposes: IELTS General, CELPIP and TEF: Ontario's proposed FARPACTA regulations, CSMLS current policy.
- Accepting non-objective evidence of language proficiency ([Modernizing Applicant Assessment \(cno.org\)](http://cno.org)).

Since 2008, CSMLS has provided IELMTS, whose first language is neither English nor French, an extensive range of tests through which language proficiency can be demonstrated. This allows candidates flexibility in selecting which test scores to offer. From summer 2021, one of those tests, CanTEST was discontinued. CSMLS requested CCLB to identify alternatives to CanTEST in addition to IELTS AC and TOEFL iBT.

### 6.2 Findings

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The following tests may be considered for use by CSMLS, but without further research CCLB is not endorsing the use of any of them:

- CAEL – The Canadian Academic English Language, or CAEL Assessment is a standardized test designed to measure English language proficiency for admission to college and university, and for membership in professional associations. Although not widely used in regulatory areas, CCLB has been approached by some regulators to evaluate its use.
- CELPIP – CELPIP is a general level test along the same lines as the IELTS General. It is accepted by IRCC for Immigration and Citizenship purposes. IRCC has conducted an alignment study between CLB and CELPIP which Paragon, the owners of CELPIP, claims has established a defensible link between the CLB and CELPIP test scores.
- IELTS General – This test is currently on CSMLS' list of approved tests. It is accepted for immigration and citizenship purposes. It is only offered in a face-to-face version as IELTS believes this provides the greatest degree of test security. Test content between the general and academic versions is the same for speaking and listening; it is the third question in the reading and writing tests that differs between the two versions. The two versions are scored using the same scoring bands.

- Pearson Test of English (PTE) academic version - Pearson is strongly promoting this test for immigration and regulatory purposes. Australia has recently adopted PTE as one of the tests it uses to demonstrate language proficiency for health care. Pearson has recently completed an alignment with CLB.
- DELF and DALF - research showed that they are just as reliable, appropriate, and valid as TEF and TCF and that they were comparable to the TESTCan in terms of validity and safety. However, although they are also administered by, among others, the Alliances françaises du Canada, they do not appear to be widely available geographically and are not frequently offered within and outside Canada. Also, France Éducation international indicates that an applicant who holds a DELF or a DALF must still take the TCF Canada, because the only certification that is approved by IRCC to apply for economic immigration or to obtain Canadian citizenship is the TCF Canada.

### 5.3 Recommendation

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- CCLB recommends that once CSMLS decides on the tests it will accept in the future, then a rigorous standard setting process involving all the tests should be conducted. This will ensure that there are valid cut scores for each of the tests that can be referenced to CLB/NCLC. Then all internationally educated MLTS will be able to reliably and fairly demonstrate their language proficiency to begin the PLA process or to challenge for certification no matter which test score they present. CSMLS will also benefit from having a legally defensible process that will inform training and certification requirements.

## 7.0 Certification Exam Review

### 7.1 Background

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In 2008, CSMLS published its final report on the Investigation of Language Assessment Tools and Benchmarks Necessary for Success for Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists. One component of this report addressed the benchmarking analysis of the certification examination which is a multiple-choice examination. The researchers analyzed the 640 questions to identify the linguistic (grammatical) complexity, the lexical (vocabulary) complexity and the question type which identified the level of cognitive engagement required to understand and answer these questions. The researchers proceeded on the assumption that the technical content knowledge and profession-specific terminology of the exam would not be a barrier to test takers. The questions were benchmarked against the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

As a multiple-choice exam demonstrates knowledge and not the performance of a communicative task per se, the analysis was limited to CLB descriptors related to the characteristics of the text and the characteristics of the reader as described in the CLB 2000. An objective analysis of these characteristics against CLB descriptors for characteristics of reading texts and characteristics of readers at different benchmarks led the researchers to conclude that a candidate for whom English is a second language would need to be minimally competent at Reading CLB 8 to pass the examination. However, they stated that the formal, high-stakes context (leading to professional certification) and the stringent time constraints of the CSMLS certification examination indicated performance and situational conditions that are more in line with language use as described in Reading CLB 10, suggesting that success in the exam would require a broader range of competence in reading, from Reading CLB 8 to 10, and indicating the importance of familiarity with test content and test taking skills and strategies. This benchmarking was not carried out in French.

The report also documented that the PLA pathway in use up to July 1, 2008, might have been challenging for IEMLTs since the standard for entering the CSMLS PLA process was CLB7+/8. As a result, the CSMLS adopted a two-stage language proficiency process, accepting language proficiency scores mapping to CLB 6 for entry into the PLA process, but maintaining the overall CLB 8 requirement to proceed to the certification examination.



## 7.2 Certification Examination and Scoring

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The certification examination consists of a general MLT examination and specific examinations for the different domains. The general examination consists of 210 multiple choice questions each of which is worth one mark.

Every Exam has a “pass mark”, which is the total percentage score each candidate must reach to pass. For each Exam, CSMLS establishes the cut score (pass mark) to identify a minimally competent MLP based on the Angoff method which determines the difficulty of that exam. The cut score determination is a judgment made by informed individuals (i.e., experts in the field of practice), arrived at through a rational discussion of the field of practice and an awareness of the consequences involved when making a decision that affects individuals. Anyone who achieves this mark passes the Exam, and there is no limit to the number of candidates who can pass.

As part of the current research project, CCLB was asked to review the certification examinations through a sampling of 20 questions in English and 20 questions in French to describe the benchmark level of the certification examinations in respect to the levels required to be licensed to practice in Canada. The intent of this research was to determine whether a more comprehensive review of the certification examinations would be beneficial.

## 7.3 Methodology

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The methodology focused on the following:

1. Determine what can be measured: All benchmarking describes the language proficiency level a person would need to be at to perform a certain task. To benchmark the Certification examination, it was necessary to consider the CLB proficiency levels that the test-taker would need to be at to comprehend and answer the test questions.
2. Select the team: CCLB selected two language and test experts to conduct the review using the current Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)/*les Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadien (NCLC)* standards. The original CLB and NCLC standards were updated in 2012 to provide clearer differentiation between levels and to reflect the different and expanding contexts in which the benchmarks are used. CLB/NCLC are task-based and describe the communicative competence of an individual to perform a task which, in this case, is to read, understand and answer a question. It is important to note that CLB and NCLC, although based on the same theoretical framework, are not copies of each other and therefore the test questions were benchmarked against the appropriate standard. Each expert benchmarked questions in their own language and then reviewed the other's benchmarking and then the two consulted to allow for a triangulation process which ensures greater reliability and validity.
3. Select the questions to be benchmarked: CCLB selected the 20 questions in French and 20 in English to be benchmarked from the 54 questions in English and 50 in French that were provided. (The questions that were provided had either been withdrawn from the test because of over exposure or some issues that were not revealed). The questions chosen to be benchmarked were selected to represent the diverse types of questions and the range of language demands that they presented.
4. Develop the tools to be used: A review sheet was developed and the appropriate CLB/NCLC were put into a table for easy access.
5. Finalise the methodology: The questions were benchmarked using a similar method to that used in the 2007 benchmarking activity for consistency. Each multiple-choice question was grouped into question type and then analysed for linguistic complexity and lexical complexity using the CLB/NCLC descriptors for reading.
6. Benchmark the questions: The questions were benchmarked against the CLB descriptors for reading and the rationale for the decisions was entered onto the review sheet.
7. Review the data and confirm findings through key informant interview data.

## 7.4 Tools and Samples

Below are the CLB/NCLC descriptors that were used in the benchmarking and one English and one French benchmarked question to exemplify the process.

CLB Reading Descriptors		
<b>STAGE II: Intermediate (Levels 5-8)</b>		
Stage II spans the range of abilities required to function independently in most familiar situations of daily social, educational and work-related life experience, and in some less predictable contexts (moderately demanding contexts of language use).		
CLB 5 In moderately demanding contexts	<b>Global performance</b> Understand simple and some moderately complex texts in predictable, practical, and relevant social, educational, and work-related situations. <b>Example tied to competency statements:</b> Understand simple to moderately complex, step-by-step instructions and instructional texts for multistep procedures related to everyday situations.	<b>Sample tasks</b> Follow instructions on how to clean up a spill using a commercial product. Interpret a simple chart to explain a familiar government process.
CLB 6 In moderately demanding contexts	<b>Global performance</b> Understand an adequate range of moderately complex texts in predictable, practical, and relevant social, educational, and work-related situations. <b>Example tied to competency statements:</b> Understand moderately complex instructions and instructional texts for multistep procedures related to everyday situations, where the sequence must be inferred.	<b>Sample tasks</b> Follow security instructions and safety regulations at work. Read about a familiar health problem in 2 different online sources. Compare the information and consider the recommendations.
CLB 7 In moderately demanding contexts	<b>Global performance</b> Understand an expanding range of moderately complex texts in less predictable but relevant social, educational, and work-related situations. <b>Example tied to competency statements:</b> Understand moderately complex instructions and instructional texts for multistep procedures related to familiar tasks, which may be specialized or technical.	<b>Sample tasks</b> Read and follow instructions on how to conduct a moderately complex science experiment. Read and paraphrase a short research report for an academic assignment.
CLB 8 In moderately demanding contexts	<b>Global performance</b> Understand most moderately complex texts in less predictable but relevant social, educational, and work-related situations. <b>Example tied to competency statements:</b> Understand extended, moderately complex, multistep instructions and instructional texts for established (set) procedures related to specialized tasks.	<b>Sample tasks</b> Read and follow instructions for performing CPR to prepare for a first aid certificate test. Read and interpret workplace charts (such as patient health status chart for nurses or equipment maintenance charts for technologists) for use in one's own occupation.

<b>Compréhension de l'écrit</b>		
<b>STADE II : Intermédiaire (niveaux 5 à 8)</b>		
Comprendre des textes modérément complexes pour prendre part, de façon plus active, à une plus grande variété de situations de communication. Fonctionner de façon autonome dans la plupart des situations quotidiennes de la vie sociale, des études et du travail, de même que dans des contextes moins prévisibles, modérément exigeants d'utilisation de la langue.		
<b>NCLC 5</b>	<b>Performance globale</b>	<b>Exemples de tâches</b>
Le contexte est modérément exigeant et généralement prévisible.	Comprendre des textes sur des sujets concrets et familiers liés à la collectivité, au travail et aux études. <b>Exemples tirés des descripteurs de compétences clés :</b> Comprendre des consignes, parfois à l'aide d'illustrations, sur des procédures peu familières. Comprendre des textes simples à modérément complexes.	Au travail, lire un courriel annonçant une activité de financement, et décider d'y participer ou non. Lire une note de service sur une nouvelle ligne de conduite au travail.
<b>NCLC 6</b>	<b>Performance globale</b>	<b>Exemples de tâches</b>
Le contexte est modérément exigeant et généralement prévisible.	Comprendre une variété de textes sur des sujets concrets liés à la collectivité, au travail et aux études. <b>Exemples tirés des descripteurs de compétences clés :</b> Comprendre des consignes, parfois à l'aide d'illustrations, relatives à des procédures peu familières dont l'ordre n'est pas toujours clair. Interpréter l'information dans des textes non continus modérément complexes.	Lire un plan de cours préparé par un professeur. Déterminer la charge de travail, les critères de notation et le niveau de difficulté du cours.
<b>NCLC 7</b>	<b>Performance globale</b>	<b>Exemples de tâches</b>
Le contexte de communication est modérément exigeant et imprévisible.	Comprendre une variété de textes sur des sujets concrets ou parfois abstraits liés à la collectivité, au travail et aux études. <b>Exemples tirés des descripteurs de compétences clés :</b> Comprendre des consignes sur des procédures techniques ou spécialisées peu familières. Consulter des ouvrages de référence version papier ou en ligne, y repérer de l'information et l'intégrer à son texte.	Trouver des articles dans plusieurs sites Web d'actualité pour obtenir des précisions sur un sujet. Lire et suivre des instructions pour faire une expérience scientifique modérément complexe.
<b>NCLC 8</b>	<b>Performance globale</b>	<b>Exemples de tâches</b>
Le contexte est modérément exigeant et imprévisible.	Comprendre une variété de textes sur des sujets concrets ou abstraits liés à la collectivité, au travail et aux études. <b>Exemples tirés des descripteurs de compétences clés :</b> Comprendre des textes détaillés, pouvant contenir des ambiguïtés et qui traitent de sujets abstraits. Comprendre des consignes sur des procédures techniques ou spécialisées peu familières, dont l'ordre n'est pas toujours clair.	Lire et suivre la procédure de réanimation cardiorespiratoire (RCR) pour se préparer à un examen de secourisme. Lire un billet de blogue d'un politicien pour déduire son point de vue et sa tendance politique.

**Objective:**

The assignment of reading proficiency levels required to comprehend and answer questions on the laboratory technologist certification exam.

The determination is based on content, terminology, language complexity, answer choice, question type and syntax.

<b>Reading</b>		
<b>Language task: Read, understand, and respond to the question</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>CLB level</b>
<p><b>Reading Evaluation, Example question:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>11 of 210 What is the first step to take when 4L of 95% ethanol spills near a flotation bath?</p> </div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><input type="radio"/> Apply absorbent material to contain the spill</p> <hr/> <p><input type="radio"/> Evacuate the laboratory</p> <hr/> <p><input type="radio"/> Don appropriate PPE to clean up spill</p> <hr/> <p><input type="radio"/> Unplug the power source, if it can be done safely</p> </div> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">For 1 point</p>	<p>Resource: Certification examination questions</p> <p><b>CLB descriptors:</b></p> <p>II. Comprehending instructions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand moderately complex instructions and instructional texts for multistep procedures related to familiar tasks, which may be specialized or technical. (CLB 7)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interprets information.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Context of communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In moderately demanding contexts (CLB 6,7,8)</li> <li>• In demanding contexts (CLB 9) (Exam is a demanding context but task appears to be CLB 7)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relatively short (CLB 6)</li> <li>- Moderate in length (CLB 7 and 8)</li> <li>- Finds specific, detailed information for comparing and contrasting. (CLB 6)</li> <li>- Finds, integrates, compares, and contrasts information. (CLB 7)</li> <li>- Finds, integrates, compares, and contrasts and analyzes information. (CLB 8)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	7
<p><b>Justification for CLB 7:</b></p> <p>Understands moderately complex instructions and instructional texts for multistep procedures related to everyday situations, where the sequence must be inferred. (CLB 6) (up to 10 steps)</p> <p>Understand moderately complex instructions and instructional texts for multistep procedures related to familiar tasks, which may be specialized or technical. (CLB 7)</p> <p>Understand extended, moderately complex, multistep instructions and instructional texts for established (set) procedures related to specialized tasks. (CLB 8) (10-13 steps in a clear and explicit text). <i>(In this case appears neither extended nor set procedure for a specialized task)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interprets, sequence and location signals and implied meanings to infer the correct sequence. (CLB 6,7,8)</li> <li>• Follows instructions as required to complete the task. (CLB 6,7,8)</li> </ul> <p>Analyze information appears at CLB 8 and it was felt that analysis was not required for this task leading to the determination of CLB 7.</p>		

**Objectif :**

L'attribution des niveaux en compétences de langue de la certification de l'examen des technologistes de laboratoire se fait par l'étude des questions présentes.

L'étude des questions repose sur leur contenu, la terminologie, le choix des réponses, l'information recherchée et la syntaxe de celles-ci.

<b>Compréhension de l'écrit</b>		
Tâches langagières confirmant l'atteinte des niveaux de compétences	Notes d'analyse	Niveau
<p><b>Évaluation de la compréhension de l'écrit</b>  <b>Exemple de question :</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>4 of 210 Que faudrait-il faire en premier sur réception d'un échantillon soupçonné de contenir du <i>Clostridium botulinum</i>?</p> </div> <p><input type="radio"/> Cesser le traitement de l'échantillon</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Effectuer une analyse de toxine</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Aviser le laboratoire de santé publique</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Mettre l'échantillon en culture anaérobie</p>	<p>Ressource : Questions de l'examen de certification</p> <p><b>Indications descriptives des NCLC :</b></p> <p>IV. Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprendre et interpréter l'information des textes non continus détaillés et modérément complexes (moteurs de recherche, index, glossaires, tables des matières, plans de sites Web, graphiques, organigrammes).             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Faire le tri des éléments d'information.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Contexte de communication :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modérément exigeant et imprévisible (NCLC 7-8)</li> </ul> <p>Sur le plan grammatical :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprendre du vocabulaire concret, abstrait et spécialisé ainsi que des expressions idiomatiques et des tournures propres à l'argumentation. (NCLC 7)</li> <li>• Utiliser ses connaissances de la grammaire et de la syntaxe pour comprendre les textes. (NCLC 5-6)</li> <li>• Comprendre des phrases complexes. (NCLC 5-8)</li> </ul>	7
<p>Justification de la désignation du niveau 7 :</p> <p>Le technicien de laboratoire est amené à lire des questions avec du vocabulaire spécialisé, exemple « Oocyste protozoaire ». Il y a beaucoup de vocabulaire spécialisé ce que le place aux NCLC 7-8.</p> <p>Il doit aussi avoir de bonnes connaissances de grammaire et de syntaxe pour saisir ce qu'on lui demande, mais il n'est pas nécessaire qu'elles soient approfondies (NCLC 5-6).</p> <p>Les phrases sont complexes (NCLC 5-8), mais non ambiguës (NCLC 9).</p> <p>Le contexte est cependant exigeant en situation d'examen et imprévisible en vue des questions (NCLC 7-8).</p> <p>Étant donné que c'est un examen choix multiples, l'étudiant doit trier l'information et procéder par élimination (NCLC 7).</p> <p>On peut déterminer que ces questions correspondent au niveau NCLC 7.</p>		

## 7.5 Findings

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1. Test question types:
  - The sample that was provided included all the types of questions identified in the previous study.
  - Responses are frequently “memory” rather than demonstrating knowledge.
2. The way the questions are written:
  - The multiple-choice examination questions are largely well-written in plain language with very little complex grammar and syntax.
  - The questions/distractors are short and explicit.
  - The more difficult vocabulary is technical, and it should be expected that this will be familiar to candidates.
3. Benchmark range:
  - The multiple-choice format of the examinations fitted CLB/NCLC 7/8 descriptors where the requirement is to find the information to complete the task (NCLC 7 “faire le tri de l’information”).
  - The questions met descriptors from CLB/NCLC 6 to 10 with most of the questions requiring language proficiency around a CLB/NCLC 8.
4. Computer-based testing
  - The switch to computer-based testing was not mentioned as a factor in the data collected.
  - Candidates have opportunities to practice on sample tests.
  - Some training programs said that they included digital literacy in their programming.

## 7.6 Conclusion

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- A minimally competent candidate at Reading CLB 8 should be able to read, understand and respond to most of the questions based on the limited selection that were benchmarked.

## 7.7 Recommendations

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CCLB recommends reviewing the following considerations if success rates on the certification exam are low:

- Consideration should be given to the amount of memorisation required to complete the test. Interviewees pointed out that in the workplace they frequently checked on the LMS and didn't need to remember every detail.
- Is the timeframe very tight to complete the number of number of questions required to be completed?
- Does the high-stakes nature of the examination put undue pressure on candidates, especially internationally educated ones who may be unfamiliar with this type of test?
- Are there cultural or ethics questions that might be unfamiliar to non-Canadian test takers?



## 8.0 Length of validity of examination results

### 8.1 Findings

An operational requirement for all English language testing programs is the need to establish a period after which test scores will no longer be reported to test scores users.<sup>23</sup> Most major test companies have determined two years to be the period after which test scores will no longer be reported to test score users and thus have put an expiry date on the tests.

There is very little research available on test expiry dates). Weir and O' Sullivan's<sup>24</sup> research on the development of the IELTS test went back to 1941 and demonstrated ad hoc development that seems to have resulted in some test practices, including length of validity, emerging without a solid rationale behind them.

IELTS states that while it is up to each organisation to set a validity period that works for their purposes, it recommends a two-year validity period for IELTS test results, based upon the well-documented phenomenon of second language loss or 'attrition', a topic it says is well-researched and documented in academic literature. "The level of second language competence gained and the extent of opportunity for subsequent practice both affect how much language ability is retained or lost over a period of time."<sup>25</sup>

Touchstone Institute, when discussing text expiry dates for nursing regulation, states the rationale for two-years was probably connected as much to a testing organization's ability to manage and store data as it was to evidence of language attrition.<sup>26</sup>

Other language tests add caveats to their expiry dates. CAEL makes scores available for two years from the date of the test; however, the length of time that its scores are valid for various institutions is determined by the institutions individual policies. The Cambridge English exam result/certificate does not have an expiry date. It shows that on a particular date, language skills at a specified level were demonstrated, but it adds language skills are known to diminish over time if not used and maintained.

The TEF is valid for two years from the date of taking the test but has a very flexible retake policy - it can be taken as many times as needed with 30 days between two takes.

Experts at five Canadian universities, a leading Canadian test developer, the leading test expert in the United Kingdom, a representative of IDP Australia and an exchange on the subject on the Language Testing Research and Practice on-line forum in 2018, confirmed that there appears to be no data to support the decision to use the two-year period rather than a one-year period or a three-year period or really any expiry period.

<sup>23</sup> Powers, Donald E. and Lall, Venessa. Supporting an Expiration Policy for English Language Proficiency Test Scores. October 2013. Research Memorandum ETS RM-13-09, Educational Testing Service. Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>24</sup> Weir, Cyril J., and O'Sullivan Barry. Assessing English on the Global Stage, The British Council and English Language Testing, 1941-2016. 2017. Downloaded from <https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/assessing-english-on-the-global-stage/>

<sup>25</sup> IELTS Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing <https://www.ielts.org/-/media/publications/quality-and-fairness/quality-and-fairness-2015-us.ashx?la=en>

<sup>26</sup> Touchstone Institute. Considerations for Extending the Validity Period of CELBAN Test results, June 2019.

## 8.2 What, if any, implications, or risks are associated with extending the expiry date?

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The biggest risk is to patient safety but as we can see from the research above, it appears to have been a someone arbitrary decision from someone, somewhere, to assign the two-year validity date proposed by most test companies and we have no evidence that a change in expiration dates would impact on patient care. It is worth remembering that most tests are designed to provide only a snapshot of test takers' capabilities at a given point in time when a test is taken and that test scores may become less trustworthy indicators of these capabilities as time passes.<sup>27</sup> CCLB's work with internationally educated professionals has established that language tests are not always valid indicators of the communication skills required for safe and effective practice in the workplace.

What can be recognised is that there are many factors that affect language acquisition and language attrition. Certainly, proficiency in a foreign language, is thought to decline more rapidly because of disuse and exposure to the target language, whether it be through formal language training or everyday use, will lessen the risk of attrition. For IEMLTs currently in Canada, it would seem more likely that their English or French language skills will improve rather than decline if they are living, working, or studying in the target language.

Research has found

- Those who use all four skills every day in an English medium environment (so functioning & living in an English-speaking country) can increase their skills by half a band score (typically 6 > 6.5 or 6.5 > 7) in 3-6 months.<sup>28</sup>
- Of university students tested on entry and again at end of semester 1 to see how they performed, those who received support services for language (buddy program, extra classes, or tutoring) were able to improve up to half a band score in the first semester.<sup>29</sup>
- The longer the interval between testing and test score use, the less reflective the test score will be of a test taker's proficiency.<sup>30</sup>

A positive implication of lengthening the score validity period would be increased levels of fairness that protect examinees against being required to retake a test for which they have already received a sufficient score. They would also be cushioned against delays in the regulatory process.

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<sup>27</sup> Powers, Donald E. and Lall, Venessa. Supporting an Expiration Policy for English Language Proficiency Test Scores. October 2013. Research Memorandum ETS RM-13-09, Educational Testing Service. Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>28</sup> Elder, Catherine. O'Loughlin, Kieran. Investigating the Relationship between Intensive English Study and Band Score Gain on IEL TS. Universities of Auckland and Melbourne. International English, Language Testing System (IELTS) Research Reports 2003, Volume 4, Editor: Robyn Tulloh, IELTS Australia Pty Limited, ABN 84 008 664 766 National Library of Australia.

<sup>29</sup> Humphreys, Pamela. Exit Testing: A Whole-of-University Approach, Griffith University, Australia CAM TESOL featured speakers, Language Education in Asia, Volume 1, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Powers and Lang, Op. Cit.

### 8.3 What are the strategies or measures that can be implemented to mitigate such risks?

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One strategy that could be implemented quickly, could be to require some additional proof of actively maintaining or improving language proficiency. The IELTS test recommends that a Test Report Form more than two years old should only be accepted as evidence of present level of language ability if it is accompanied by proof that the test taker has actively maintained or improved their English language proficiency.<sup>31</sup>

This could be done by the applicant providing evidence of taking English courses during the wait period, evidence of employment in an occupation requiring active use of the English language or through other areas where the use of the English language is required on a regular basis. The following could be used to demonstrate supporting evidence:

A certificate from an English as a Second Language (ESL) course or an academic course in English (or French if this is the target language). Research on the Canadian Language Benchmarks suggests that there is an increase of one benchmark with between 250 and 350 hours of study.

Experience working or volunteering in English. This should be in an employment or volunteer situation that requires significant communicative interaction with colleagues and/or the public. The experience need not be in a health care environment provided it demonstrates extensive and demanding use of language.

Another strategy to demonstrate fairness might be to require applicants, whose test results have recently expired, to undertake a standardised interview with a small panel of two people – a subject matter expert and a language expert – to confirm the legitimacy of their language.

### 8.4 Conclusion

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Research has demonstrated that there is no valid evidence for the current two-year period, but it has shown that there may be some evidence of language attrition that might indicate that the shorter validity period may be preferable in some cases. These cases are usually when the test taker has not had significant exposure to the language that was tested, after the test. In the case of most IEMLT candidates in Canada, they are living and often studying and working in their target language – whether it be English or French. This exposure to the target language daily is more likely to support language acquisition than language attrition and therefore the language skills of many of them will be stronger when they achieve regulation than when they took the proficiency test.

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<sup>31</sup> IELTS Op. Cit.