

## **An overview of IELTS**

### **A Brief history**

The story of IELTS goes back to 1980 when the first version of an exam called "ELTS" was introduced as a way of testing applicants to British colleges and universities. The exam was revised and redesigned in 1989 and 1995. The Speaking test was further revised in 2001 and the Writing assessment was changed in 2005. The exam that began so quietly in 1980 with just a few thousand people taking it, now has about 500,000 candidates all over the world every year.

### **Who takes IELTS?**

IELTS is an exam with an important real-life purpose. People who take it want to prove their level of English in order to study or get work using English.

IELTS scores are useful not just in the UK – they are widely accepted by organisations across the English speaking world (for example in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.) as well as in many other countries (including South Africa, Brazil, Italy and Turkey).

### **What's in the exam?**

- IELTS is a test of 4 skills: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.
- For Reading and Writing, you can choose either General Training or Academic. If you're taking IELTS because you want to study in higher education, you'll probably need the Academic format.
- And there's just space here to mention one interesting thing that's not in the exam: There's no separate Grammar exam!

### **What do IELTS scores mean?**

IELTS isn't a pass/fail exam. Every candidate taking IELTS is placed in a band between 1 and 9 for each module – where 1 means unable to use the language and 9 means expert user. The candidate is also given an overall band score. Band scores for Listening and Reading can include half bands (e.g. 6.5) but Speaking and Writing are only graded in whole bands. The overall band score is an average of all four papers and can include half bands.

### **A few IELTS facts**

- You can take the exam at Test Centres all around the world.
- Results are normally available within two weeks.
- In some locations you can take the new computer-based IELTS test.
- If you get a lower score than you expected, you can retake the exam the next time it is run. No distressing waiting!
- The whole exam takes about 2 hours 45 minutes to complete.