

**Government response to:  
Petition of Sher Singh: Lower the English language requirements  
for transport sector workers**

**Presented to the House of Representatives  
In accordance with Standing Order 380**

# Government response to the petition of Sher Singh

## Introduction

1. The Government welcomes the Petition Committee's referral of this petition. We acknowledge this matter and thank the petitioner for bringing it to the Government's attention.
2. The Government has considered the petition of Petition of Sher Singh: *Lower the English language requirements for transport sector workers.*
3. The Government is responding to the petition in accordance with Standing Order 380.

## Request from the petitioner

4. The petition, which received 5,030 signatures, requests:  
*"That the House of Representatives urge the Government to lower English language requirements for transport sector workers seeking permanent residence to a Pearson Test of English (PTE) academic score of 36–41 and an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 5."*
5. The petitioner's reason is stated as:  
*"We are respectfully asking for work visas that we think would better reflect the transport sector workforce and would align with Australia's settings. In our view the current IELTS score does not reflect the skills required for workers, and migrant exploitation is better addressed by holding exploitative employers to account."*

## Government response

6. The petitioner's concerns relate to the English language requirements for the Transport – Work to Residence visa.

## Transport – Work to Residence visa

7. The Transport – Work to Residence visa intends to facilitate a pathway to residence for individuals filling labour market shortages in the transport sector<sup>1</sup>. The pathway was introduced by the previous Government in 2023, including the English language requirements. Prior to this transport sector workers in Level 4 and 5 roles did not have a pathway to residence.

## English requirements

8. Unless otherwise exempt, applicants for skilled residence visas (which enable an indefinite stay to live, work, and study in New Zealand), regardless of field of employment, are required to meet a minimum standard of English proficiency. To qualify for a skilled residence visa, applicants must attain a score of at least IELTS 6.5 (general or academic) or exceed equivalent scores in tests such as TOEFL iBT (79), PTE Academic (58), B2 First (176) or OET (Grade B) – considered the halfway point between a 'competent' and 'good' user of the English language.
9. It is important that there is consistency of these requirements across the skilled residence pathway. This supports New Zealanders confidence in the immigration system

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<sup>1</sup> Most roles covered by the Transport – Work to Residence visa were removed on 7 April 2024, with maritime roles remaining (Ship's Master and Deck Hands). The removed roles (Bus Driver, Aircraft Refueler, Furniture Removalist, Tanker Driver, and Tow Truck Driver) are still eligible for this pathway if they began employment and met other eligibility criteria prior to 7 April 2024.

by ensuring that skilled migrants applying to be able to reside in New Zealand indefinitely can communicate competently in our most widely spoken language. English requirements are set in immigration instructions: [SR2.10 English Language Requirements](#).

10. In comparison, for the temporary Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV), the requirement for an applicant working in an ANZSCO<sup>2</sup> skill level 4 or 5 occupation is IELTS level 4 (or equivalent). Someone scoring this is considered a 'limited' user of English.

### **Rationale for the English language requirements**

11. The minimum standard of English language competence for a skilled residence visa (such as the Skilled Migrant Category, Green List – Straight/Work to Residence, and Care Workforce/Transport – Work to Residence) has been in place since 2003 to support successful settlement and integration into New Zealand's society and economy. Meeting these requirements in a robust and independently assessable manner is essential for good settlement outcomes, particularly for migrants transitioning from temporary work visas to residence. This includes being able to participate in and contribute to all aspects of life (particularly: social, economic, cultural and civic).
12. An Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) has lower English language requirements, in part reflecting the more short-term nature of the visa. Occupations on the Transport – Work to Residence visa are granted a five-year maximum continuous stay, meaning someone on an AEWV working in a Transport Sector Agreement occupation would have time to improve their English proficiency to the level required for residence, should they then choose to apply.
13. Once an individual attains residence, they can live in New Zealand permanently, access further government assistance, and work in any role they are successful in applying for. Evidence strongly suggests that English-language proficiency is a key driver of labour market success, positive settlement outcomes and plays a crucial role in workplace safety.
14. There is currently no plan to review the English language benchmark for the Transport – Work to Residence visa or skilled resident visas more generally
15. The English-language benchmark for skilled residence is not intended to reflect the competence required for a particular occupation, rather it intends to be reflective of what is required to thrive in and contribute to New Zealand in the long term. This includes the ability for at least the primary applicant to be able to read, write, and speak English well. It is importantly to note that this requirement is for the primary applicant only and there are lesser requirements for partners and dependent children over 16. Children under 16 do not need to meet an English language requirement.

### **Conclusion**

16. We acknowledge the challenges some migrants have in meeting the English language requirements for residence. However, we consider there is a strong rationale for these requirements. Transport sector workers on the Transport - Work to Residence pathway who cannot meet the required level of English after three years can apply for a further

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<sup>2</sup> Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

two years on their work visa provided, they meet at least IELTS 4.0 or equivalent. This provides additional time for them to improve their English language skills

17. An overall IELTS 6.5 score is the consistent and long-standing benchmark across skilled residence pathways. It is an independent measure of competent English and while there are some differences, New Zealand's settings are broadly in line with the main skilled residence pathways for countries like Australia and Canada. At this level, a person is generally able to communicate effectively in most situations, including in the workplace and community, although they may still make occasional errors or misunderstandings. Evidence shows that strong English language skills support better employment outcomes and successful long-term settlement.