

Exemption policy

You are exempted from providing a language test result if you can prove your English proficiency through one of the following qualifications:

1. A secondary or higher education diploma from a recognized majority English-speaking country

In order to qualify for this exemption, you must have completed either a full (upper) secondary education, a full-time higher education undergraduate degree (at least 3 years), or a postgraduate degree ***taught exclusively in English*** in one of the following [recognized majority English-speaking countries](#):

- Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada (exc. Quebec), Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, Malta, New Zealand, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom (inc. British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies), United States of America (inc. Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Virgin Islands)

2. A higher education diploma from an exempted country or region

In order to qualify for this exemption, you must have completed a full-time higher education undergraduate degree (at least 3 years) or a postgraduate degree ***taught exclusively in English***, from one of the following countries or regions:

- Aruba, Botswana, Cameroon (Anglophone education system only), Curaçao, Eswatini, Fiji, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Micronesia, Namibia, Nigeria, the Netherlands (inc. Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius, HBO), Papua New Guinea, Puerto Rico (U.S.A.), Quebec (Canada), Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sint Maarten, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

You will need to provide an official statement from your university confirming that English was the sole language of instruction during your entire programme.

3. A secondary education diploma with English as a subject taught at VWO-equivalent level

In order to qualify for this exemption, you must have obtained a secondary education diploma where English was taught at or equivalent to Dutch VWO-level, and included in the list below:

Country or region	Diploma or exam name	Examination/subject/profile requirements
Any	International Baccalaureate	English as language of instruction
Europe	European Baccalaureate	English as L1 or L2
Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, the Netherlands, Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten	VWO	
Austria	Reifeprüfung Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule (AHS)	English as subject on the Prüfungsgebiet der Reifeprüfung transcript
Belgium (Flanders)	Examen Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs, derde graad (ASO)	English as subject on school examination transcript (indicated with 'EX')
Caribbean Islands	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE)	
	CAPE/CXC Associate Degree	
Denmark	Studentereksamenbevis (STX) Bevis for Højere Forberedelseseksamen (HF) Højere handelseksamen (HHX) Højere teknisk eksamen (HTX)	Engelska as subject on school examination (Studentereksamen)
Estonia	Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus	English listed as subject on the state examination certificate (Riigieksamitunnistus). Minimum B2-level English must be obtained.
Finland	Ylioppilastutkintotodistus / Studentexamenbevis	Englannin A or B1 listed on national matriculation examination (Ylioppilastutkinto/ Studentexamen)
France	Baccalauréat Français Internationale (BFI)	Section Britannique / Section Anglais
Germany	Abiturprüfung Gymnasium	English course must be part of school examination (Prüfungsfach) either as Leistungskurs or Grundkurs. Exemption is also possible when English course is not examination subject but still Leistungskurs. Aforementioned courses can be indicated by the following abbreviations in transcript (depending on Bundesland): PF, LK or eA.
Hungary	Gimnáziumi Érettségi Bizonyítvány	Angol as subject on school matura examination (Érettségi vizsga)
Latvia	Atestāts par Vispārējo Vidējo Izglītību	Angļu valodā as subject on national examination (Centralizētais eksāmens)
Lithuania	Brandos Atestatas	Užsienio kalba (Anglų) as subject on the final state matura examination (Brandos Egzamino)
Luxembourg	Diplôme de Fin d'Études Secondaires	English as subject on school examination (Examen de fin d'études secondaires)
Malta	Matriculation Certificate	Only from University of Malta
	3 Maltese A-levels	From MATSEC Board
Norway	Vitnemål for Videregående Opplæring	English course ENG1002 or ENG1007
Romania	Diplomă de Bacalaureat	Limba Engleză as subject on national examination (Examenul de Bacalaureat)
Singapore	Singapore/Cambridge GCE A-levels	A-levels in at least three H2 and one H1 content courses
Slovakia	Vysvedčenie o Maturitnej skúške (Gymnázium)	Anglický jazyk as subject on Maturita examination as both an internally-assessed and an externally-assessed component
Suriname	VWO	
South Africa	National Senior Certificate (NSC) + IEB Certificate	South Africa National Senior Certificate (NSC) in combination with either an IEB Advanced Programme Certificate or an IEB Further Studies Certificate in English (with a passing grade)
Sweden	Slutbetyg från Gymnasieskolan	Engelska 5, 6 and 7 must all be listed on transcript
	Högskoleförberedande examen	Engelska 5, 6 and 7 must all be listed on transcript

Background

The current UG language test exemption policy is simultaneously very varied across faculties and levels (with Bachelor's programmes having a much broader exemption policy than Master's, and many faculties having their own additional exemption rules) and severely limited, with many native or high-level English speakers not being included in the exemption list. This new proposal aims to make the exemption policy simpler and fairer in the following ways:

- Applying the same exemption policy for all faculties for both Bachelor's and Master's programmes
- Extending the general exemption for applicants with a VWO-diploma to include other diplomas with English as a subject passed at VWO-equivalent level
- Granting exemptions for native speakers from an expanded list of recognized majority English speaking countries (following [UK immigration guidelines](#))
- Further expanding the exemption policy for native speakers by adding additional exemptions for English-taught higher education diplomas from a number of other majority English speaking countries (aligning with the [Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education](#))

Discussion

One policy for Bachelor's and Master's programmes

While a VWO diploma automatically grants Dutch applicants an exemption from the English language test requirement for both Bachelor's and Master's programmes, many of the other diplomas that grant an exemption for Bachelor's programmes currently do *not* automatically do so for a Master's programme. In addition, applicants from a number of English-speaking countries (mainly from the Caribbean area) get a language test exemption for Bachelor's programmes, but not for Master's. This latter difference is especially problematic, as it (inadvertently) implies that the native English level of applicants from these regions is lower than that of native speakers who are exempted for both Bachelor's and Master's programmes.

In order to simplify the policy, we propose to make the exemptions the same for both Bachelor's and Master's level.

VWO-equivalent level of English

As a VWO diploma legally automatically grants applicants an exemption for both Bachelor's and Master's programmes, we propose that all diplomas that have been recognized (by Nuffic) as teaching English at a VWO-equivalent level can provide the same exemption.

NB: This exemption does *not* apply to all diplomas that meet the general VWO-equivalent entry level requirements, only to the diplomas included on the exemption list.

Exemptions for native speakers from all recognized majority English speaking countries

Under our current policy, only native English speakers from the USA, UK, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and English-speaking Canada are automatically exempted from having to provide a language test result. While it may be difficult for us to determine which applicants from the 88 territories in the English-speaking world “qualify” as native speakers, exempting only the six most affluent of these regions from having to pay the €210-€295 test prices is certainly not a fair or desirable solution. We propose exempting native speakers from all the most commonly recognized majority English speaking countries instead. As a baseline for this exemption, we are using the [List of countries considered to majority English Speaking for UK Visa Purposes](#). The use of a UK governmental source for this policy still carries colonial implications, but is also a clear marker for the countries we should always *minimally* have to include in our exemption policy. Because we do not have the tools to easily assess if someone is a “native”, in practice we will exempt any applicant who has completed a full upper secondary education in one of these countries. In addition, applicants who completed higher education in one of these countries will also be exempted, as we can be sure that they have met the required standard of academic English for graduating in a native-English speaking university environment.

Further exemptions for higher education diplomas from majority English speaking countries

Mandatory English tests for native English speakers, especially those from lower-income countries, are the subject of fierce debate and frequent protests. Up until now, some UG faculties have maintained a much broader exemption policy, and have generally had a very positive experience in doing so. Most notably, the Faculty of Law’s exemption policy has included many majority English-speaking former British colonies not listed in the UK Home Office list. Using this experience, we propose setting up a third category of exempted regions and countries based on the [Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education](#) (which also served as the basis for the Utrecht University policy). The main difference between this exemption category and the previous one is that for these countries, we only accept a completed higher education diploma as proof of sufficient English proficiency - thus ensuring that the level of *academic* English is up to standard. This differs somewhat from the Norwegian Directorate, where secondary education is often also accepted for these countries.

Our list also diverges from the Norwegian Directorate for two territories: Firstly, we have added an exemption for Rwanda (where the official language of instruction for all higher education was changed to English in 2006), based on the Faculty of Law’s positive experiences with this exemption. Secondly, we have added an exemption for higher education completed in English for all countries in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The current phrasing of the exemption would also include Dutch HBO degrees completed fully in English (which would cover applications from Dutch applicants without a VWO diploma, who currently cannot get an exemption).

This category could potentially be expanded to include other non-majority English speaking countries of which we know the academic level of English taught at universities meets that of the University of Groningen, but we would need to develop clear guidelines for this policy.

Lastly, two noteworthy majority-English speaking countries have currently *not* been included in the exemption list: India and Pakistan. While their exclusion is not without controversy, the immense linguistic diversity in these countries makes it difficult to guarantee the quality of the level of academic English, even for programmes with English as the only language of instruction.

List of Countries Considered by the Home Office as Majority English Speaking for UK Visa Purposes <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-english-language>

Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (basis for UU policy)
<https://hkdir.no/en/foreign-education/lists-and-databases/higher-education-entrance-qualification-gsu>