Language Cert

> **LANGUAGECERT PRELIMINARY CONCORDANCE REPORT**
>
> 24/10/2023

Contents

Concordance Overview

LanguageCert has introduced an English Language Test system for people intending to work or study where English is used as the primary language for communication. The system comprises LanguageCert Academic, used for higher education admissions purposes, and LanguageCert General, intended for work or vocational immigration purposes. LanguageCert is seeking formal acceptance of these high-stakes English language proficiency exams in strategically identified, international markets. With this end in view, LanguageCert has developed a systematic plan to demonstrate that the tests are valid (i.e., fit-for-purpose), reliable, and secure.

As part of this initiative, LanguageCert has commissioned a study into the extent of overlap in content and performance between LanguageCert and an established and widely recognised counterpart: the IELTS Academic and General Training tests. Materials sourced for analysis include publicly available manuals and online documentation, research and peer reviewed articles, and test scores. This paper reports preliminary results from this investigation.

LanguageCert

LanguageCert's established international English qualifications are recognised by employers, educational institutions, and professional bodies worldwide. LanguageCert and its test centre partner, Prometric, have a global network of 170 secure, assured facilities for SELT delivery in 119 countries. It is authorized by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) to deliver Home Office approved, Secure English Language Tests (SELTs) in the UK and globally and has been granted Awarding Organisation recognition by Ofqual (a non-ministerial government department that regulates qualifications, exams and tests in England) and by its Welsh counterpart, Qualifications Wales.

Summary of the tests

Academic

LanguageCert Academic

The LanguageCert Academic test is a recently developed (2022) assessment option for test takers seeking to study in English-medium, higher education settings. The test takes approximately 2.5 hours to complete and consists of four parts corresponding to four language skills: Listening (40 minutes), Reading (50 minutes), Writing (50 minutes), and Speaking (14 minutes). The test is designed to assess between the B1 and C2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001). Multiple task types are included to reflect the range of skills used in academic environments, and multiple response types are used for each skill, helping ensure no one response type will dominate and potentially bias results (Taylor and Chan, 2015). The test content measures competences appropriate for academic study in English-medium programmes, such as reading and listening for gist, or detailed understanding of a range of written and audio sources (e.g., academic articles, lectures, podcasts, interviews, and discussions). Additional competences include writing reports, articles and essays for an academic purpose; giving presentations; reading aloud; or taking part in a discussion. Test takers receive a score for each skill (Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing) along with an overall score and an indication of their CEFR level. More specifically, the test taker receives a score on the LanguageCert Global Scale, a scale which ranges between 0–100 and is aligned to six levels (A1–C2) of foreign language proficiency described in the CEFR.

The LanguageCert Academic test has been designed for computer-based administration and will be computer-based once fully operational. However, for the concordance study reported here, the administration was initially paper-based, as this allowed us to apply strict security measures while operational systems were under development. For the second stage of the study, the majority of participants are offered the computer-based version. Regardless of mode of administration, like IELTS, the Speaking component is carried out live with an interlocutor.

IELTS Academic

The IELTS Academic test is an established assessment of English language proficiency for individuals who plan to study in an English-speaking setting. The test takes approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes and evaluates the test taker's ability to use and understand English at an academic level. The test is designed to assess test takers between the A1 and C2 levels of the CEFR. It has four modules that assess Listening (30 minutes), Reading (60 minutes), Writing (60 minutes) and Speaking (11–14 minutes). The IELTS Academic and General Training tests share the same Listening and Speaking modules (i.e., these modules have identical formats and content). The Listening module requires test takers to listen to recordings of clear, intelligible speech and answer related comprehension questions. The Speaking module involves a face-to-face interview with an IELTS examiner to assess the test taker's English communication skills. The Reading module involves reading three texts and answering comprehension questions. The Writing module consists of two tasks, one involving the description and comparison of data, and the other requiring an essay in response to a prompt. The test taker's overall score on the IELTS Academic test ranges from 0 to 9, with 9 representing the highest level of proficiency. A score is awarded for each skill module as well as for overall performance across all four test modules.

IELTS is available in paper-based and computer formats. For those taking IELTS on computer, the Reading, Writing and Listening modules are completed on a computer, but the Speaking module is conducted face-to-face with an IELTS examiner. For the computer-based test, Speaking is done on the same day as the other components. With the paper version, there can be a 7-day delay between taking the Speaking test and the other modules.

General

LanguageCert General

The LanguageCert General test is for test takers seeking to migrate for work or vocational purposes and targets the A2-C1 levels of the CEFR. The test takes approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes and measures a range of skills and competences appropriate for personal, occupational and vocational contexts. Sections include Listening (30 minutes), Reading (50 minutes), Writing (45 minutes), and Speaking (12 minutes). Multiple task types are given to reflect the range of skills used in English speaking vocational environments. Multiple response types are used for each skill, helping ensure no one response type will dominate and potentially bias results (Taylor and Chan, 2015). Listening and reading sections assess test takers understanding of gist or detailed understanding of a

range of written and audio sources including adverts, articles, websites, diaries, radio programs, and podcasts. For the Writing component, test takers must write a neutral/formal short letter, email or report in response to a short input text, as well as an informal email to a friend/colleague, or a narrative/descriptive composition or informal article describing experience, ideas on a topic, future plans or explaining feelings. The Speaking section prompts test takers to communicate opinions and ideas on a variety of topics and to give personal opinions on contemporary issues. It is designed to reflect how a person may interact in real-life situations using a range of functional language to elicit or respond as appropriate, allowing test takers to show the ability to use a wide range of language functions and demonstrate sensitivity to register.

Mirroring LanguageCert Academic, the test taker receives a score on the LanguageCert Global Scale, a scale which ranges between 0–100 and is aligned to six levels (A1–C2) of foreign language proficiency as described in the CEFR.

As noted for the Academic test, the General test has been designed for computer-based administration and will be computer-based once fully operational. However, for the first phase of the concordance study reported here, the administration was paper-based as this allowed strict security measures to be applied while operational systems were under development. For the second stage of the study, the majority of participants are offered the computer-based version. Regardless of mode of administration, like IELTS, the Speaking component is carried out live with an interlocutor.

IELTS General Training

The General Training version of the IELTS is for individuals who wish to demonstrate practical, everyday English language skills. The test is intended to cover CEFR levels A1-C2 and takes approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes across four skill-based modules: Listening (30 minutes plus 10 minutes to transfer answers), Reading (60 minutes), Writing (60 minutes), and Speaking (10-15 minutes). The test is primarily designed for people who wish to migrate to an English speaking country, train or study at below degree level, or to undertake work-related training in an English speaking country.

The IELTS Academic and General Training tests share the same Listening and Speaking modules (i.e., these modules have identical formats and content). The Listening module requires test takers to listen to recordings of clear, intelligible speech and answer related comprehension questions. The Listening module requires test takers to listen to recordings of clear, intelligible speech and answer related comprehension questions. The Speaking module involves a face-to-face interview with an IELTS examiner to assess the test taker's English communication skills. The Reading module involves reading three texts and answering comprehension questions. The Writing module consists of two tasks, one involving letter writing and the other requiring an essay in response to a prompt. The test taker's overall score on the IELTS General Training test ranges from 0 to 9, with 9 representing the highest level of proficiency. A score is awarded for each skill module as well as for overall performance across all four test modules.

Similar to the Academic version of IELTS, IELTS General Training test takers can choose between paper-based and computer-delivered options.

Reporting results and feedback to participants

Results and feedback on performance can have a direct influence on teaching and learning. Similar to the IELTS tests, results for LanguageCert Academic and General are reported both as an overall score and as a score for each of the four language skills. This profile of scores is intended to help language learners to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Unlike IELTS, LanguageCert also offers feedback on the productive skill sections (i.e., Speaking and Writing). For Speaking, feedback is given on task fulfilment and communicative effect, coherence, accuracy and range of grammar, accuracy and range of vocabulary, and pronunciation, intonation and fluency. Feedback on Writing covers task fulfilment, accuracy and range of grammar, accuracy and range of vocabulary, and organisation. Providing more detailed information for feedback can help prompt learners to reflect on their performance (Chapelle et al., 2015) and can provide greater opportunity for learners to learn from their current performance so they may move toward their desired level of performance (Lam, 2021). Feedback can promote self-regulation (Mezek et al., 2022) and can enhance cognitive and emotional engagement (Mayordomo et al., 2022).

Content comparisons

This section provides content comparisons of the tests. Sections are subdivided by language skill (i.e., Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing), with LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic compared first, and LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training compared second.

Speaking

Academic Speaking comparison

The following table summarises the Speaking skill comparison between LanguageCert Academic and IELTS (there is a single Speaking module used in both the Academic and General Training tests). Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 1. Speaking test comparison of LanguageCert Academic and IELTS (Academic and General Training)

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Target Level	B1-C2	A1-C2
Skills focus	Tasks are designed to elicit speaking skills such as communicating opinions and ideas on a variety of topics (e.g., study skills, news, daily life) and giving personal opinions on contemporary issues. Test takers will also demonstrate their ability to communicate (targeting higher education settings) using a range of functional language to elicit or respond as appropriate to show the ability to use a wide range of language functions and use of register, to read aloud and answer questions, and to prepare and deliver a presentation in response to a visual stimulus and answer subsequent questions.	Tasks are designed to elicit speaking skills such as communicating personal information, expressing and justifying opinions, explaining, suggesting, speculating, expressing preferences, comparing, summarizing, and narrating.
Skill integration	LanguageCert Academic Speaking entails an integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing modalities. An examiner (interlocutor) orally explains the tasks and asks questions, requiring the test taker to listen and respond appropriately. In Part 3, the test taker must read a short passage and answer questions from the examiner, and in Part 4 test takers must discuss a visual stimulus, such as a chart. In this task, test takers are able to take notes for preparation, engaging writing skills.	IELTS Speaking entails an integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing modalities.

Task description	The exam is delivered in person at a distance by the interlocutor. Speaking tests are recorded.	The Speaking Test consists of an oral interview between the test taker and an examiner. Speaking tests are recorded.
	Task 1. (Initial exchange) The examiner introduces himself/herself and confirms the test taker's identity. Test takers give and spell their names and give their country of origin. The examiner then asks up to five general questions on different topics which are expected to be familiar to test takers, such as about study skills or daily life. Questions are scaffolded in advance in the examiner's script sheet. After the test taker replies, the examiner responds and/or comments briefly and thanks the test taker before moving to Part 2.

Task 2. (Role play) Two situations are presented by the examiner (interlocutor) and test takers are required to respond to and initiate interactions. The examiner begins by explaining that this part of the test is a role play and that the test taker is expected to either start or respond to a situation. The examiner then selects the first role play situation from a prepared list on the examiner sheet, and the interaction continues for approximately two turns before stopping and the next situation is introduced. The examiner selects the second topic from a second list of topic options provided on the examiner sheet. Approximately two turns are given for the interaction, and if there is additional time, an additional situation may be introduced.

Task 3. (Read aloud and passage discussion) The examiner provides the test taker with a Task Sheet which contains a reading passage of approximately 100 words. The examiner allows 30 seconds of preparation time and asks the test taker to read the text out loud. The examiner further explains that afterward, the examiner will ask the test taker some questions about the topic. One or more questions, taken from a list on the examiner sheet, is then asked dependent upon time.

Task 4. (Presentation) The examiner explains that the test taker will now be asked to give a presentation based on a visual stimulus (e.g., a chart or graph). The test taker has 60 seconds of preparation time, and then must talk about a topic provided by the interlocutor for two minutes. Once the test taker has presented for two minutes or has finished their presentation, the examiner asks follow-up questions for the remaining time. | **Task 1**. (Introduction and interview) The examiner introduces himself/herself and checks the test taker's identity. Then the examiner asks the test taker general questions on some familiar topics such as home, family, work, studies, interests. To ensure consistency, questions are taken from a scripted examiner frame. This part of the test focuses on the test taker's ability to communicate opinions and information on everyday topics and common experiences or situations by answering a range of questions.

Task 2. (Long turn) The examiner gives the test taker a task card which asks the test taker to talk about a particular topic, includes points to cover in their talk and instructs the test taker to explain one aspect of the topic. Test takers are given 1 minute to prepare their talk, and are given a pencil and paper to make notes. Using the points on the task card effectively, and making notes during the preparation time, will help the test taker think of appropriate things to say, structure their talk, and keep talking for 2 minutes. The examiner asks the test taker to talk for 1 to 2 minutes, stops the test taker after 2 minutes, and asks one or two questions on the same topic. Part 2 lasts 3-4 minutes, including the preparation time. This part of the test focuses on the test taker's ability to speak at length on a given topic (without further prompts from the examiner), using appropriate language and organising their ideas coherently. It is likely that the test taker will need to draw on their own experience to complete the long turn.

Task 3. (Discussion) The examiner and the test taker discuss issues related to the topic in Part 2 in a more general and abstract way and – where appropriate – in greater depth. This part of the test focuses on the test taker's ability to express and justify opinions and to analyse, discuss and speculate about issues. |

Timing	14 minutes approximately (Part 1: 3 minutes; Part 2: 2 minutes; Part 3: 4 minutes; Part 4: 5 minutes)	11-14 minutes (Part 1: 4-5 mins; Part 2: 3-4 mins; Part 3: 4-5 minutes)
Scoring and weighting	Examiners award a raw score of up to 48 points: Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect (8 points x 2), Coherence (8 points), Accuracy and Range of Grammar (8 points), Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary (8 points), and Pronunciation, Intonation and Fluency (8 points).

The exam is delivered in person at a distance by the interlocutor. All tests are recorded. The interlocutor awards the marks for Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect in real time. The other examiner listens to the recording and awards marks for the other criteria. The criterion for task fulfilment and communicative effect is double weighted.

Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect
A measure of the ability to manage the tasks adequately for the level and link the utterances into coherent speech.

Coherence
A measure of the ability to provide coherent responses, particularly over extended speech, and the linking of ideas and contributions.

Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary
A measure of the ability to vary and demonstrate control of lexis and register as appropriate to the task.

Accuracy and Range of Grammar
A measure of the ability to vary and demonstrate control of grammatical structures as appropriate to the task.

Pronunciation, Intonation and Fluency
A measure of the ability to produce the sounds of English in order to be understood with appropriate stress and intonation and maintain the flow of speech. | Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy and Pronunciation. The four criteria are equally weighted. Scores are reported in whole and half bands. Detailed performance descriptors have been developed which describe spoken performance at the nine IELTS bands.

Fluency and Coherence
The ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech. The key indicators of fluency are speech rate and speech continuity. The key indicators of coherence are logical sequencing of sentences, clear marking of stages in a discussion, narration or argument, and the use of cohesive devices (e.g. connectors, pronouns and conjunctions) within and between sentences.

Lexical Resource
This criterion refers to the range of vocabulary the test taker can use and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed. The key indicators are the variety of words used, the adequacy and appropriacy of the words used and the ability to circumlocute (get round a vocabulary gap by using other words) with or without noticable hesitation.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy
This criterion refers to the range and the accurate and appropriate use of the test taker's grammatical resource. The key indicators of grammatical range are the length and complexity of the spoken sentences, the appropriate use of subordinate clauses, and the range of sentence structures, especially to move elements around for information focus. The key indicators of grammatical accuracy are the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech and the communicative effect of error. |

	Rating For Speaking, LanguageCert uses two scoring raters. The interlocutor awards marks on 'Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect' as they are communicating directly with the candidate. The other criteria are marked remotely by a second examiner. Collecting marks from two different examiners allows for information to be gathered on performance from two perspectives. The interlocutor/assessor is directly involved in the interaction with the candidate and is therefore in a strong position to judge task completion and communicative effect (helping prevent prepared answers); however, the interlocutor must also focus on test administration Having a second examiner who can listen to a recording asynchronously permits greater time and focus to evaluate the more 'analytical' criteria of coherence (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, intonation and fluency). Enabling examiners to focus on their individual assessment tasks helps promote fair assessment. Incongruent scores—where a test taker's performance on the task fulfilment criterion is markedly different from performance on the other criteria—are flagged to be reviewed by a third (and deciding) examiner.	**Pronunciation** This criterion refers to the ability to produce comprehensible speech to fulfil the Speaking test requirements. The key indicators will be the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible and the noticeability of L1 influence. **Rating** For Speaking, IELTS uses a single rater. The Speaking is recorded, however, and if there is need for remarking, a second, separate rater will be used for rating.
Cognitive processing: Levels of speaking	Conceptualisation	Conceptualisation
	Grammatical encoding	Grammatical encoding
	Phono-morphological encoding	Phono-morphological encoding
	Phonetic encoding	Phonetic encoding
	Self-monitoring	Self-monitoring
	Reciprocal, i.e., direct (face-to-face)	Reciprocal, i.e., direct (face-to-face)
	Planning time allowed	Planning time allowed
Discourse mode	Descriptive, biographical, expository, argumentative	Descriptive, biographical, expository, argumentative
Nature of information	Mix of concrete and abstract	Mix of concrete and abstract
Presentation	Both verbal and non-verbal (e.g., graphs)	Verbal and textual (e.g., a cue card)

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Skill integration

The speaking components of both tests require an integration of skill modalities, incorporating listening, reading, and writing with speaking. Integrating speaking with reading and listening provides a functional assessment, simulating real-world language use where language skills and processes are simultaneously engaged (Butler et al., 2000), thereby providing greater generalizability to the target language use domain. For both LanguageCert and IELTS, listening is required to interact with the interviewer, where the test taker listens to the interlocutor, interprets aural instructions and questions, and vocalizes responses in accordance. In LanguageCert Academic, test takers read and discuss a passage for Task 3, and for Task 4, test takers review a visual stimulus, such as a graph, and present it to the interlocutor. Reading is used in the IELTS exam where participants read instructions for the long monologue task. Note taking is permitted for both tests, meaning the Speaking sections for each can engage all language skills.

Tasks

LanguageCert Task 1 and IELTS Task 1
The initial tasks are similar for LanguageCert and IELTS, discussing concrete, familiar topics; however, less time (by 1-2 minutes) is spent in introductory exchanges in LanguageCert compared to IELTS. Because test takers have more time in the initial IELTS Speaking task, more time is spent on concrete, common, and personally familiar topics. Topic familiarity and concreteness are associated with ease of understanding, theoretically making this part of the speaking section more accessible to lower-level language users. Conversely, in LanguageCert, more focus is given to sections with less personal familiarity, potentially making it more challenging.

LanguageCert Task 2
The two minutes less in LanguageCert's initial task is compensated for in the role play. Role play is a unique element to the LanguageCert Academic intended to engage pragmatic interaction and interactional competence.

LanguageCert Task 3 and IELTS Task 2
The third task in LanguageCert and the second task in IELTS require a combination of reading and speaking. In IELTS, test takers are presented with a card which contains brief notes on a given topic. Test takers are given 1 minute to prepare and are encouraged to take notes, further engaging a multimodal skillset with writing. This contrasts with LanguageCert where test takers are given a passage to read aloud and subsequently discuss.

LanguageCert Task 4 and IELTS Task 3
The final task for both tests is a longer response of approximately 5 minutes. For IELTS, participants build from responses in the previous section, and, with the help of the interlocutor, are expected to articulate more abstract notions. The final task for LanguageCert Academic is an independent response intended to reflect the participant's ability to present academic information. To aid preparation and organisation, LanguageCert encourages note taking at this stage. Participants are given 60 seconds to view the question prompt (e.g. a graph) and plan their response. After giving a presentation of up to 2 minutes, participants are asked a follow-up question or questions as time permits.

Rating and scoring

Task fulfilment (and rubric misalignment)
LanguageCert Academic and IELTS (Academic and General Training) both explicitly measure coherence, vocabulary, grammatical range, and pronunciation. There is a difference, however, in how the two tests approach task fulfilment. Task fulfilment assesses a test-taker's ability to meet the specific requirements of a task, such as providing a relevant answer to an interlocutor's question. The ability to complete tasks successfully is an important aspect of language proficiency and indicates the test-taker's ability to use language for real-world purposes. LanguageCert explicitly includes task fulfilment as an assessment criterion. IELTS may implicitly include task fulfilment as part of the test; however, task fulfilment is not explicitly included in the publicly reported grading criteria. Consequently, there appears to be no direct mechanism for markers to address or report in this regard.

Weighting

In LanguageCert, test takers are awarded a mark from 0-8 for each of five criteria (task fulfilment and communicative effect, coherence, accuracy and range of vocabulary, accuracy and range of grammar, and pronunciation, intonation, and fluency). Following the inclusion of task fulfilment, the criteria of Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect is double-weighted, so that the maximum raw marks a test taker can be awarded is 48. This necessarily has an influence on analytic scoring. IELTS is even weighted across descriptors.

Holistic vs analytic scoring

Both Speaking tests are examined by human raters. IELTS is marked analytically, but scores are reported on a single holistic scale with scores ranging from 0 to 9. Holistic reporting does not permit detailed feedback on specific areas for improvement and no feedback is provided to test takers other than this single score. LanguageCert Speaking is assessed and reported analytically, with subscores for task fulfilment (16 points) along with coherence, vocabulary, grammatical range, and pronunciation (8 points each). LanguageCert provides feedback to the test taker on each of these analytical components. In addition to indicating a more refined explication of performance which may highlight areas of strength and areas for improvement, an analytic approach to scoring promotes transparency.

Number of raters

LanguageCert Speaking includes two raters for Speaking assessment opposed to a single rater used in IELTS Speaking. Analytic scoring increases systematicity and transparency of Speaking ratings; however, rating remains subjective. Raters may have varying standards and can vary in their own consistency. While a second rater can be used to enhance the reliability and validity of the marking (Bejar, 1985), LanguageCert does not implement two raters for each criterion. Instead, LanguageCert splits rating duties between the interlocutor and a second rater. The interlocutor rates "Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect" while the second rater rates the remaining criteria remotely. Splitting the rating in this way permits the interlocutor to rate in real-time (i.e., is the test taker directly responding to the questions being asked) without the cognitive burden of balancing test administration with analytic elements of scoring. The remaining criteria being scored remotely enables raters more time for analytic scoring. With IELTS, raters must balance test administration with real-time rating, which can add load and make examination more challenging for raters (Isaacs et al, 2015). For IELTS, the Speaking section is recorded and a second rater could be used in cases where remarking is necessary.

General Speaking comparison

The following table summarises the Speaking skill comparison between LanguageCert General and IELTS (Academic and General Training). Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 2. Speaking test comparison of LanguageCert General and IELTS (Academic and General Training)

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Target Level	A2-C1	A1-C2
Skills focus	Tasks are designed to elicit speaking skills such as communicating opinions and ideas on a variety of topics (e.g. free time, food and drink, daily life) and giving personal opinions on contemporary issues. Test takers will also demonstrate their ability to communicate (targeting real-life settings) using a range of functional language to elicit or respond as appropriate to show the ability to use a wide range of language functions and use of register, to read aloud and answer questions, and to prepare and deliver a presentation in response to a given topic and answer subsequent questions.	Tasks are designed to elicit speaking skills such as communicating personal information, expressing and justifying opinions, explaining, suggesting, speculating, expressing preferences, comparing, summarizing, and narrating.
Skill integration	LanguageCert General Speaking entails an integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing modalities. An examiner (interlocutor) orally explains the tasks and asks questions, requiring the test taker to listen and respond appropriately. In Part 3, the test taker must read a short passage and answer questions from the examiner, and in Part 4 test takers must discuss a given topic. In this task, test takers are able to take notes for preparation, engaging their writing skills.	IELTS Speaking entails an integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing modalities.

| **Task description** | The exam is delivered in person at a distance by the interlocutor. Speaking tests are recorded.

Task 1. (Initial exchange) The examiner introduces himself/herself and confirms the test taker's identity. Test takers give and spell their names and give their country of origin. The examiner then asks up to five general questions on different topics which are expected to be familiar to test takers, such as about study skills or daily life. Questions are scaffolded in advance in the examiner's script sheet. After the test taker replies, the examiner responds and/or comments briefly and thanks the test taker before moving to Part 2.

Task 2. (Role play) Two situations are presented by the examiner (interlocutor) and test takers are required to respond to and initiate interactions. The examiner begins by explaining that this part of the test is a role play and that the test taker is expected to either start or respond to a situation. The examiner then selects the first role play situation from a prepared list on the examiner sheet, and the interaction continues for approximately two turns before stopping and the next situation is introduced. The examiner selects the second topic from a second list of topic options provided on the examiner sheet. Approximately two turns are given for the interaction, and if there is additional time, an additional situation may be introduced.

Task 3. (Read aloud and passage discussion) The examiner provides the test taker with a Task Sheet which contains a reading passage of approximately 100 words. **The examiner allows 30 seconds of preparation time and asks the test taker to read the text out loud.** The examiner further explains that afterward, the examiner will ask the test taker some questions about the topic. One or more questions, taken from a list on the examiner sheet, is then asked dependent upon time. | The Speaking Test consists of an oral interview between the test taker and an examiner. Speaking tests are recorded.

Task 1. (Introduction and interview) The examiner introduces himself/herself and checks the test taker's identity. Then the examiner asks the test taker general questions on some familiar topics such as home, family, work, studies, interests. To ensure consistency, questions are taken from a scripted examiner frame. This part of the test focuses on the test taker's ability to communicate opinions and information on everyday topics and common experiences or situations by answering a range of questions.

Task 2. (Long turn) The examiner gives the test taker a task card which asks the test taker to talk about a particular topic, includes points to cover in their talk and instructs the test taker to explain one aspect of the topic. Test takers are given 1 minute to prepare their talk, and are given a pencil and paper to make notes. Using the points on the task card effectively, and making notes during the preparation time, will help the test taker think of appropriate things to say, structure their talk, and keep talking for 2 minutes. The examiner asks the test taker to talk for 1 to 2 minutes, stops the test taker after 2 minutes, and asks one or two questions on the same topic. Part 2 lasts 3-4 minutes, including the preparation time. This part of the test focuses on the test taker's ability to speak at length on a given topic (without further prompts from the examiner), using appropriate language and organising their ideas coherently. It is likely that the test taker will need to draw on their own experience to complete the long turn.

Task 3. (Discussion) The examiner and the test taker discuss issues related to the topic in Part 2 in a more general and abstract way and – where appropriate – in greater depth. This part of the test focuses on the test taker's ability to express and justify opinions and to analyse, discuss and speculate about issues. |

	Task 4. (Presentation) The examiner explains that the test taker will now be asked to give a presentation based on given topic. The test taker has 30 seconds of preparation time, including note taking, and then must talk about a topic provided by the interlocutor for two minutes. Once the test taker has presented for two minutes or has finished their presentation, the examiner asks follow-up questions for the remaining time.	
Timing	~12 minutes (Part 1: 2-3 minutes; Part 2: 2 minutes; Part 3: 3-4 minutes; Part 4: 4 minutes)	11-14 minutes (Part 1: 4-5 mins; Part 2: 3-4 mins; Part 3: 4-5 minutes)

| Scoring and weighting | Examiners award a raw score of up to 48 points: Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect (8 points x 2), Coherence (8 points), Accuracy and Range of Grammar (8 points), Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary (8 points), and Pronunciation, Intonation and Fluency (8 points). The criterion for task fulfilment and communicative effect is double weighted.

The exam is delivered in person at a distance by the interlocutor. All tests are recorded. The interlocutor awards the marks for Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect in real time. The other examiner listens to the recording and awards marks for the other criteria.

Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect
A measure of the ability to manage the tasks adequately for the level and link the utterances into coherent speech.

Coherence
A measure of the ability to provide coherent responses, particularly over extended speech, and the linking of ideas and contributions.

Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary
A measure of the ability to vary and demonstrate control of lexis and register as appropriate to the task.

Accuracy and Range of Grammar
A measure of the ability to vary and demonstrate control of grammatical structures as appropriate to the task. | Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy and Pronunciation. The four criteria are equally weighted. Scores are reported in whole and half bands. Detailed performance descriptors have been developed which describe spoken performance at the nine IELTS bands.

Fluency and Coherence
The ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech. The key indicators of fluency are speech rate and speech continuity. The key indicators of coherence are logical sequencing of sentences, clear marking of stages in a discussion, narration or argument, and the use of cohesive devices (e.g. connectors, pronouns and conjunctions) within and between sentences.

Lexical Resource
This criterion refers to the range of vocabulary the test taker can use and the precision with which meanings and attitudes can be expressed. The key indicators are the variety of words used, the adequacy and appropriacy of the words used and the ability to circumlocute (get round a vocabulary gap by using other words) with or without noticeable hesitation. |

	Pronunciation, Intonation and Fluency A measure of the ability to produce the sounds of English in order to be understood with appropriate stress and intonation and maintain the flow of speech. **Rating** For Speaking, LanguageCert uses two scoring raters. The interlocutor awards marks on 'Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect' as they are communicating directly with the candidate. The other criteria are marked remotely by a second examiner. Collecting marks from two different examiners allows for information to be gathered on performance from two perspectives. The interlocutor/assessor is directly involved in the interaction with the candidate and is therefore in a strong position to judge task completion and communicative effect (helping prevent prepared answers); however, the interlocutor must also focus on test administration. Having a second examiner who can listen to a recording asynchronously permits greater time and focus to evaluate the more 'analytical' criteria of coherence (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, intonation and fluency). Enabling examiners to focus on their individual assessment tasks helps promote fair assessment. Incongruent scores—where a test taker's performance on the task fulfilment criterion is markedly different from performance on the other criteria—are flagged to be reviewed by a third (and deciding) examiner.	**Grammatical Range and Accuracy** This criterion refers to the range and the accurate and appropriate use of the test taker's grammatical resource. The key indicators of grammatical range are the length and complexity of the spoken sentences, the appropriate use of subordinate clauses, and the range of sentence structures, especially to move elements around for information focus. The key indicators of grammatical accuracy are the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech and the communicative effect of error. **Pronunciation** This criterion refers to the ability to produce comprehensible speech to fulfil the Speaking test requirements. The key indicators will be the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible and the noticeability of L1 influence. **Rating** For Speaking, IELTS uses a single rater. The Speaking is recorded, however, and if there is need for remarking, a second, separate rater will be used for rating.
Cognitive processing: **Levels of speaking**	Conceptualisation	Conceptualisation
	Grammatical encoding	Grammatical encoding
	Phono-morphological encoding	Phono-morphological encoding
	Phonetic encoding	Phonetic encoding
	Self-monitoring	Self-monitoring
	Reciprocal, i.e., direct (face-to-face)	Reciprocal, i.e., direct (face-to-face)
	Planning time allowed	Planning time allowed
Discourse mode	Descriptive, biographical, expository, argumentative	Descriptive, biographical, expository, argumentative
Nature of information	Mix of concrete and abstract	Mix of concrete and abstract
Presentation	Both verbal and textual (e.g., passage)	Verbal and textual (e.g., a cue card)

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Skill integration

The speaking components of both tests require an integration of skill modalities, incorporating listening, reading, and writing with speaking. Integrating speaking with reading and listening provides a functional assessment, simulating real-world language use where language skills and processes are simultaneously engaged (Butler et al., 2000), thereby providing greater generalizability to the target language use domain. For both LanguageCert and IELTS, listening is required to interact with the interviewer, where the test taker listens to the interlocutor, interprets aural instructions and questions, and vocalizes responses accordingly. In LanguageCert General, test takers read and discuss a passage for Task 3, and for Task 4, test takers are aurally introduced to a topic and have 30 seconds to prepare their response. Here participants may prepare using note taking before orally presenting to the interlocutor. Similarly, reading is used in the IELTS exam where participants read a cue card for the long monologue task (Task 2), and participants are able to take notes. As note taking is permitted for parts of both tests, the Speaking sections for each can engage all language skills.

Tasks

LanguageCert Task 1 and IELTS Task 1
The initial tasks are similar for LanguageCert and IELTS, discussing concrete, familiar topics; however, less time (by 2-3 minutes) is spent in introductory exchanges in LanguageCert compared to IELTS. Because test takers have more time in the initial IELTS Speaking task, more time is spent on concrete, common, and personally familiar topics. Topic familiarity and concreteness are associated with ease of understanding, theoretically making this part of the speaking section more accessible to lower-level language users. Conversely, in LanguageCert, more focus is given to sections with less personal familiarity, potentially making it more challenging.

LanguageCert Task 2
The reduced time in LanguageCert's initial task (compared with IELTS) is transferred to role play. Role play is a unique element to the LanguageCert General intended to engage pragmatic interaction and interactional competence.

LanguageCert Task 3 and IELTS Task 2
The third task in LanguageCert and the second task in IELTS require reading to speaking, and both have similar timings of 3-4 minutes. In IELTS, test takers are presented with a card which contains brief notes on a given topic. Test takers are given 1 minute to prepare and are encouraged to take notes, further engaging a multimodal skillset with writing. This contrasts with LanguageCert where test takers are given a passage to read aloud and subsequently discuss.

LanguageCert Task 4 and IELTS Task 3
The final task for both tests is a longer response of approximately 4 minutes. For IELTS, participants build from responses in the previous section, and, with the help of the interlocutor, are expected to articulate more abstract notions. The final task for LanguageCert General is an independent response intended to reflect the participant's ability to present information, such as in a personal, vocational, or educational setting. To aid preparation and organisation, LanguageCert encourages note taking at this stage. The interlocutor orally states the topic and the test taker is given 30 seconds to plan their response. After giving a presentation of up to 2 minutes, test takers are asked a follow-up question or questions as time permits.

Rating and scoring

Task fulfilment (and rubric misalignment)
LanguageCert General and IELTS (Academic and General Training) both explicitly measure coherence, vocabulary, grammatical range, and pronunciation. There is a difference, however, in how the two tests approach task fulfilment. Task fulfilment assesses a test-taker's ability to meet the specific requirements of a task, such as providing a relevant answer to an interlocutor's question. The ability to complete tasks successfully is an important aspect of language proficiency and indicates the test-taker's ability to use language for real-world purposes. LanguageCert explicitly includes task fulfilment as an assessment criterion. IELTS may implicitly include task fulfilment as part of the test; however, task fulfilment is not explicitly included in the publicly reported grading criteria. Consequently, there appears to be no direct mechanism for markers to address or report in this regard.

Weighting

In LanguageCert, test takers are awarded a mark from 0-8 for each of five criteria (task fulfilment and communicative effect, coherence, accuracy and range of vocabulary, accuracy and range of grammar, and pronunciation, intonation, and fluency). Following the inclusion of task fulfilment, the criteria of Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect is double-weighted, so that the maximum raw marks a test taker can be awarded is 48. This necessarily has an influence on analytic scoring. IELTS is even weighted across descriptors.

Holistic vs analytic scoring

Both Speaking tests are examined by human raters. IELTS has historically been holistically graded, but is now analytically marked. Reporting for the IELTS, however, remains holistic on a scale of 0–9. LanguageCert Speaking is assessed and reported analytically, with subscores for task fulfilment (16 points) along with coherence, vocabulary, grammatical range, and pronunciation (8 points each). Compared with analytical reporting, holistic reporting does not permit detailed feedback on specific areas for improvement. LanguageCert provides feedback on these analytical components, while IELTS simply reports a band score. In addition to indicating a more refined explication of performance which may highlight areas of strength and areas for improvement, an analytic approach to scoring promotes transparency in scoring.

Number of raters

LanguageCert Speaking includes two raters for Speaking assessment opposed to a single rater used in IELTS Speaking. Analytic scoring increases systematicity and transparency of Speaking ratings; however, rating remains subjective. Raters may have varying standards and can vary in their own consistency. While a second rater can be used to enhance the reliability and validity of the marking (Bejar, 1985), LanguageCert does not implement two raters for each criterion. Instead, LanguageCert splits rating duties between the interlocutor and a second rater. The interlocutor rates "Task Fulfilment and Communicative Effect" while the second rater rates the remaining criteria remotely. Splitting the rating in this way permits the interlocutor to rate in real-time (i.e., is the test taker directly responding to the questions being asked) without the cognitive burden of balancing test administration with analytic elements of scoring. The remaining criteria being scored remotely enables raters more time for analytic scoring. With IELTS, raters must balance test administration with real-time rating, which can add load and make examination more challenging for raters (Isaacs et al, 2015). For IELTS, the Speaking section is recorded and a second rater could be used in cases where remarking is necessary.

Listening

Academic Listening comparison

The following table summarises the Listening skill comparison between LanguageCert Academic and IELTS (there is a single Listening module used in both the Academic and General Training tests). Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 3. Listening test comparison of LanguageCert Academic and IELTS (Academic and General Training)

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Target level	B1-C2	A1-C2
Skills focus	Test assesses test taker's ability to: Section 1: identify meaning, purpose and function and understand speaker relationship/context. Conversation completion further tests global comprehension and pragmatic knowledge. Section 2: understand meaning, intention, viewpoint argumentation and speaker relationship Section 3: extract key information from a monologue, synthesise and summarise ideas Section 4: follow a discussion between three speakers	Test assesses test taker's ability to: Understand details- e.g., listen for names, numbers, and locations and complete a form Section 1: understand concrete, factual information (fill-in form; label a map or diagram) Section 2: understand concrete, factual information (complete text; label diagram) Section 3: understand more abstract information (e.g., opinions, arguments, attitudes, inference). Complete comprehension questions or fill in the blank. Section 4: understand more abstract information (e.g., opinions, arguments, attitudes, inference) Complete the summary/fill in the blank.
Skill integration	LanguageCert Academic listening contains an integration of skills which include reading an answer sheet to identify information required (and subsequently preparation time is given to preview), listening to an audio recording, and writing responses. Read forms and texts, predict and identify missing information to listen for, listen and process, then write word(s), label diagrams, or select correct option from MCQ. For gap fill, test takers must select exact words heard, which is a challenge as test takers may provide synonyms based on short term memory and lexical access.	The IELTS listening test contains an integration of skills which include reading an answer sheet to identify information required (and subsequently preparation time is given to preview), listening to an audio recording, and writing responses. Read forms and texts, predict and identify missing information to listen for, listen and process, then write word(s), label diagrams, or select correct option from MCQ. For gap fill, test takers must select exact words heard, which is a challenge as test takers may provide synonyms based on short term memory and lexical access.

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Number of items	30	40
Structure and description	4 sections: MCQ (3 tasks) and cloze listening (1 task) **Task 1**. short conversation completion or continuation. Seven conversations with one 3-option MCQ each- select the option which completes the conversation. **Task 2**. 5 conversations, 2 MCQ each. Ten total 3-option MCQ across 5 conversations. **Task 3**. cloze listening task featuring a monologue (e.g., a lecture, podcast, narrative, presentation, etc.). There are seven information gaps to fill with up to three words. **Task 4**. academic discussion (e.g., podcast) or lecture between up to three people. Six 3-option MCQ, 1 minute preview.	4 sections: mix of MCQ, cloze listening, and labelling **Task 1**. Dialogue (concrete, cloze listening), a conversation between two people set in an everyday social context **Task 2**. Monologue, set in an everyday social context, e.g., a speech about local facilities **Task 3**. Dialogue (Academic and training), a conversation between up to four people set in an educational or training context, e.g., a university tutor and a student discussing an assignment **Task 4**. Lecture, a monologue on an academic subject, e.g., a university lecture.
Timing	40 minutes (with double play) of listening.	40 minutes: 30 minutes listening, (paper-based gets 10 minutes to transfer answers from question paper to answer sheet; computer-based gets 2 minutes for answer review). Question preview time is given for test takers to prepare for the listening. This facilitates contextual understanding as well as focusing attention toward required information.
Weighting	Each item is worth one point. Correct answers receive one point while incorrect answer receive zero points. Tasks have different weights (i.e., each input recording is accompanied by a different number of items). Task 1 and 3 are worth 7 points each, Task 2 has five dialogues worth 2 points each, totalling 10 points, and Task 4 is worth 6 points. Having fewer points on the more difficult task (Task 4) helps mitigate the effect of its difficulty on the overall skill score.	Each item is worth one point. Correct answers receive one point while incorrect answer receive zero points. Tasks are equally weighted at 10 points each (i.e., each input recording is accompanied by 10 items).
Item density	Given 20 minutes of original recording (omitting double play) and 30 items, one item can be expected approximately every 40 seconds. This is more dense than IELTS. However, the item density is mitigated by double playing the audio, which permits more processing time to confirm responses.	Given 30 minutes of audio recordings and 40 items, one item can be expected approximately every 45 seconds.
Presentation	Listening passages are played twice.	Listening passages are played once.

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Cognitive processing: **Targets**	factual information interpretive information related to context In short tasks, overall understanding of the passage (e.g., Task 1, dialogue completion or continuation)	factual information interpretive information related to context
Cognitive processing: **Levels of listening targeted by items**	Word recognition	Word recognition
	Lexical access	Lexical access
	Syntactic parsing	Syntactic parsing
	Identifying the speaker's point	Identifying the speaker's point
	Inference	Inference
	Making referential links	Making referential links
	Inferring the speaker's attitude	Inferring the speaker's attitude
	Integrating meaning to understand key points or meaning in a conversation.	Integrating meaning to understand key points or meaning in a conversation.
Domain	A range of audio sources including academic articles, lectures, podcasts, interviews, discussions.	Recording 1: a conversation between two people set in an **everyday social context**. Recording 2: a monologue set in an **everyday social context**, e.g., a speech about local facilities. Recording 3: a conversation between up to four people set in an **educational or training context**, e.g., a university tutor and a student discussing an assignment. Recording 4: a monologue on an **academic subject**, e.g., a university lecture
Interaction	Monologic and dialogic	Monologic and dialogic
Discourse mode	Expository, analytical, discursive	Historical/biographical, expository, argumentative
Nature of information	Concrete and abstract, in accordance with an introductory lecture topic	Concrete and abstract, in accordance with an introductory lecture topic
Text length	20 minutes (played twice)	30 minutes

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Target levels and timing

Target levels are the first distinguishing feature of the tests. The IELTS Listening test targets CEFR levels A1-C2, which is a broader range than LanguageCert Academic, which target B1-C2. The IELTS Listening test is correspondingly longer than LanguageCert in terms of number of items (40 items for IELTS compared to 30 items for LanguageCert) and duration (30 minutes of listening for IELTS compared to 20 minutes (single played) for LanguageCert Academic.

Weighting

LanguageCert Academic and IELTS have 30 and 40 items, respectively, with each item weighted equally (one correct response is worth one point). Items are presented in the same order that the relevant information occurs in the audio recordings, offering a degree of scaffolding for the test taker and lessening the cognitive load of the listening task (i.e., less short-term memory is needed). Regarding the weighting of tasks, there is a difference between the tests. Whereas IELTS has equal weighting across its four tasks (10 points each), LanguageCert tasks have different weights, with slightly more weight given to Task 2 (five dialogues worth 2 points each) compared to the others, and slightly less on Task 4 (6 MCQ based on a discussion). As Task 4 is the most challenging, given the nature of the content, this ensures lower-level test takers are not unduly penalised for a task which is beyond their present level.

Item density

LanguageCert has a slightly higher item density, but permits double play, meaning test takers hear information twice. Addressing the lack of double play, IELTS repeats or spells out important information (e.g., a long name or number).

Task structure and description

For task structure and description, both LanguageCert and IELTS make use of monologues and dialogues, though there are more dialogues in LanguageCert (12 across the first two tasks opposed to two in IELTS). Dialogues are more extended in IELTS, which tends to make processing more challenging. LanguageCert and IELTS both employ MCQ and cloze listening activities, though in different proportions. In LanguageCert Listening, there are three MCQ tasks and one cloze listening/gap-fill activity. One of the MCQ tasks is unique (there is just one question for each recording) in that the options continue a short conversation, testing global comprehension and pragmatic knowledge. Contrastively, IELTS balances MCQ and cloze listening/gap fill across tasks. Similarly to LanguageCert, one of the MCQ tasks is unique; however for IELTS, the unique task employs information matching (e.g., who says what information, or match descriptions to a list of nouns) opposed to conversation continuation. Theoretically, LanguageCert Academic should have an easier structure to follow and less cognitive processing load compared to IELTS.

Nature of information

Descriptively, nature of information appears more challenging for LanguageCert Academic, with greater emphasis on abstract information compared to IELTS, which is generally more concrete, particularly in Task 1 and 2. This may reflect the use of a single Listening test covering both the Academic and General Training tests, as more concrete information may be needed for the General Training than for the Academic test taking population. Statistical analysis suggests that the Listening component is easier for IELTS than for LanguageCert, indicating that either the simpler structure has little practical effect on results, or that the nature of the content (and perhaps information density, despite double play) counterbalances the effects of structure on performance. Of the two LanguageCert tests, Academic is less directly aligned with IELTS, as it contains less general and familiar topic areas compared with the General version of the test. This can be found in the implementation of lectures opposed to informational talks in Task 3, or in the use of an academic rather than a topical discussion in Task 4.

Cognitive processing

Higher levels of comprehension, which involve interpreting meaning in context and constructing an understanding of a conversation or lecture, are crucial in academic and professional settings. Both tests assess these higher levels to some degree.

LanguageCert and IELTS Listening tasks provide textual support with visual aids, such as a torn piece of paper with writing on it or a notepad with a pencil; however, IELTS additionally offers diagrammatic aids to fill in (e.g., map labelling). This offers additional context for learners, and labelling tasks may benefit or hinder test takers depending on their aptitude for spatial awareness. Some individuals may be disproportionately affected by a given item or task type and having multiple task types helps to mitigate this risk. However, MCQ is a very commonly employed and widely known item type, and LanguageCert's predominant use of MCQ may help to facilitate understanding of the task, permitting participants to focus more on the content than on how to respond to the task.

Comparison limitations: listening difficulty is impacted by numerous factors which have not been described here as we do not have access to the IELTS test specifications. For instance, speech rate, accent, and lexical and grammatical complexity in the audio recordings can all impact a listener's ability to accurately comprehend speech. However, assuming certain industry standards are followed (e.g., speech rate of 150 words/minute; targeting a percentage of B2-level vocabulary for academic texts), LanguageCert and IELTS may be expected to be similar in these respects.

General Listening comparison

The following table summarises the Listening skill comparison between LanguageCert General and IELTS (Academic and General Training). Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 4. Listening test comparison of LanguageCert General and IELTS (Academic and General Training)

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Target level	A2-C1	A1-C2
Skills focus	Tests assesses test taker's ability to: Section 1: identify meaning, purpose and function and understand speaker relationship/context. Conversation completion further tests global comprehension and pragmatic knowledge. Section 2: understand meaning, intention, viewpoint argumentation and speaker relationship Section 3: extract key information from a monologue, synthesise and summarise ideas Section 4: follow a discussion between two speakers (note: contrast with three speakers for the Academic version)	Tests assesses test taker's ability to: Understand details- e.g., listen for names, numbers, and locations and complete a form Section 1: understand concrete, factual information (fill-in form; label a map or diagram) Section 2: understand concrete, factual information (complete text; label diagram) Section 3: understand more abstract information (e.g., opinions, arguments, attitudes, inference). Complete comprehension questions or fill in the blank. Section 4: understand more abstract information (e.g., opinions, arguments, attitudes, inference) Complete the summary/fill in the blank.

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Skill integration	LanguageCert General Listening contains an integration of skills which include reading an answer sheet to identify information required (and subsequently preparation time is given to preview), listening to an audio recording, and writing responses. Read forms and texts, predict and identify missing information to listen for, listen and process, then write word(s), label diagrams, or select correct option from MCQ. For gap fill, test takers must select exact words heard, which is a challenge as test takers may provide synonyms based on short term memory and lexical access.	IELTS Listening contains an integration of skills which include reading an answer sheet to identify information required (and subsequently preparation time is given to preview), listening to an audio recording, and writing responses. Read forms and texts, predict and identify missing information to listen for, listen and process, then write word(s), label diagrams, or select correct option from MCQ. For gap fill, test takers must select exact words heard, which is a challenge as test takers may provide synonyms based on short term memory and lexical access.
Number of items	30	40
Structure and description	4 sections: MCQ (3 tasks) and cloze listening (1 task) **Task 1**. short conversation completion or continuation. Seven conversations with one 3-option MCQ each- select the option which completes the conversation. **Task 2**. 5 conversations, 2 MCQ each. Ten total 3-option MCQ across 5 conversations. **Task 3**. cloze listening task featuring a monologue (e.g., informational talk on a topical or work-related theme such as a podcast or interview) with seven gaps where gaps may be filled with up to three words. Test takers identify specific factual information. **Task 4**. discussion on a topical issue (e.g., at a conference) and identify gist, examples, fact, opinion, contrast, purpose, key ideas, attitude, cause and effect. Six 3-option MCQ with 1 minute preview.	4 sections: mix of MCQ, cloze listening, and labelling. **Task 1**. Dialogue (concrete, cloze listening), a conversation between two people set in an everyday social context. **Task 2**. Monologue, set in an everyday social context, e.g., a speech about local facilities. **Task 3**. Dialogue (Academic and training), a conversation between up to four people set in an educational or training context, e.g., a university tutor and a student discussing an assignment. **Task 4**. Lecture, a monologue on an academic subject, e.g., a university lecture.
Timing	33-34 minutes (with double play) of listening	40 minutes: 30 minutes listening, (paper-based gets 10 minutes to transfer answers from question paper to answer sheet; computer-based gets 2 minutes for answer review). Question preview time is given for test takers to prepare for the listening. This facilitates contextual understanding as well as focusing attention toward required information.

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Weighting	Each item is worth one point. Correct answers receive one point while incorrect answer receive zero points. Tasks have different weights (i.e., each text is accompanied by a different number of items). Slightly more weight is given to Task 2 (five dialogues worth 2 points each) compared to the others (Task 1 and 3 are worth 7 points each). Task 4 has the fewest items (6 points), which helps mitigate its difficulty.	Each item is worth one point. Correct answers receive one point while incorrect answer receive zero points. Tasks are equally weighted at 10 points each (i.e., each text is accompanied by 10 items).
Item density	Given 17 minutes of original recording (omitting double play) and 30 items, one item can be expected approximately every 34 seconds. This is more dense than IELTS, however, the effects of item density are mitigated by double playing the audio, which permits more processing time to confirm responses.	Given 30 minutes of audio recordings and 40 items, one item can be expected approximately every 45 seconds.
Presentation	Listening passages are played twice.	Listening passages are played once.
Cognitive processing: **Targets**	factual information interpretive information related to context. In short tasks, overall understanding of the passage (e.g., Task 1, dialogue completion or continuation).	factual information interpretive information related to context.
Cognitive processing: **Levels of listening targeted by items**	Word recognition	Word recognition
	Lexical access	Lexical access
	Syntactic parsing	Syntactic parsing
	Identifying the speaker's point	Identifying the speaker's point
	Inference	Inference
	Making referential links	Making referential links
	Inferring the speaker's attitude	Inferring the speaker's attitude
	Integrating meaning to understand key points or meaning in a conversation.	Integrating meaning to understand key points or meaning in a conversation.

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS (Academic and General Training)
Domain	A range of audio sources including podcasts, interviews, and discussions.	Recording 1: a conversation between two people set in an **everyday social context**. Recording 2: a monologue set in an **everyday social context**, e.g., a speech about local facilities. Recording 3: a conversation between up to four people set in an **educational or training context**, e.g., a university tutor and a student discussing an assignment. Recording 4: a monologue on an **academic subject**, e.g., a university lecture.
Interaction	Monologic and dialogic	Monologic and dialogic
Discourse mode	Expository, analytical, discursive	Historical/biographical, expository, argumentative
Nature of information	Concrete and abstract	Concrete and abstract
Text length	17 minutes (double play)	30 minutes

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Target levels are the first distinguishing feature of the tests. The IELTS Listening test targets CEFR levels A1-C2, which is a broader range than the individual LanguageCert versions, which target B1-C2 for Academic, and A2-C1 for General. The IELTS Listening test is correspondingly longer in terms of number of items (40 items for IELTS compared to 30 items for LanguageCert) and duration (30 minutes of listening for IELTS compared to 20 minutes (single played) for LanguageCert Academic and 17 minutes (single played) for LanguageCert General.

Weighting

LanguageCert General and IELTS have 30 and 40 items, respectively, with each item weighted equally (one correct response is worth one point). Items are presented in the same order that the relevant information occurs in the audio recordings, offering a degree of scaffolding for the test taker and lessening the cognitive load of the listening task (i.e., less short-term memory is needed). Regarding the weighting of tasks, there is a difference between the tests. Whereas IELTS has equal weighting across its four tasks (10 points each), LanguageCert tasks have different weights, with slightly more weight given to Task 2 (five dialogues worth 2 points each) compared to the others, and slightly less on Task 4 (6 MCQ based on a discussion). As Task 4 is the most challenging, given the nature of the content, this ensures lower-level test takers are not unduly penalised for a task which is beyond their present level.

Item density

LanguageCert has a slightly higher item density, but permits double play, meaning test takers hear information twice. Addressing the lack of double play, IELTS repeats or spells out important information (e.g., a long name or number).

Task structure and description

For task structure and description, both LanguageCert and IELTS make use of monologues and dialogues, though there are more dialogues in LanguageCert (12 across the first two tasks opposed to two in IELTS). Dialogues are more extended in IELTS, which tends to make processing more challenging. LanguageCert and IELTS both employ MCQ and cloze listening activities, though in different proportions. In LanguageCert Listening, there are three MCQ tasks and one cloze listening/gap-fill activity. One of the MCQ tasks is unique (there is just one question for each recording) in that the options continue a short conversation, testing global comprehension and pragmatic knowledge. Contrastively, IELTS balances MCQ and cloze listening/gap fill across tasks. Similarly to LanguageCert, one of the MCQ tasks is unique; however for IELTS, the unique task employs information matching (e.g., who says what information, or match descriptions to a list of nouns) opposed to conversation continuation. Theoretically, LanguageCert General should have an easier structure to follow and less cognitive processing load compared to IELTS.

Nature of information

Descriptively, nature of information appears more challenging for LanguageCert General, with greater emphasis on abstract information compared to IELTS, which is generally more concrete, particularly in Task 1 and 2. This may reflect the use of a single Listening test covering both the Academic and General Training tests, as more concrete information may be needed for the General Training than for the Academic test taking population. Statistical analysis suggests that the Listening component is easier for IELTS than for LanguageCert, indicating that either the simpler structure has little practical effect on results, or that the nature of the content (and perhaps information density, despite double play) counterbalances the effects of structure on performance. Of the two LanguageCert tests, General is more directly aligned with IELTS, as it contains more general and familiar topic areas compared with the Academic test. This can be found in the implementation of informational talks opposed to lectures in Task 3, or in the use of a topical rather than academic discussion in Task 4.

Cognitive processing

Higher levels of comprehension, which involve interpreting meaning in context and constructing an understanding of a conversation or lecture, are crucial in academic and professional settings. Both tests assess these higher levels to some degree.

LanguageCert and IELTS Listening tasks provide textual support with visual aids, such as a torn piece of paper with writing on it or a notepad with a pencil; however, IELTS additionally offers diagrammatic aids to fill in (e.g., map labelling). This offers additional context for learners, and labelling tasks may benefit or hinder test takers depending on their aptitude for spatial awareness. Some individuals may be disproportionately affected by a given item or task type and having multiple task types helps to mitigate this risk. However, MCQ is a very commonly employed and widely known item type, and LanguageCert's predominant use of MCQ may help to facilitate understanding of the task, permitting participants to focus more on the content than on how to respond to the task.

Comparison limitations: Listening difficulty is impacted by numerous factors which have not been described here as we do not have access to the IELTS test specifications. For instance, speech rate, accent, and lexical and grammatical complexity in the audio recordings can all impact a listener's ability to accurately comprehend speech. However, assuming certain industry standards are followed (e.g., speech rate of 150 words/minute; targeting a percentage of B2-level vocabulary for academic texts), LanguageCert and IELTS may be expected to be similar in these respects.

Writing

Academic Writing comparison

The following table summarises the Writing skill comparison between LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic. Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 5. Writing test comparison of LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Target Level	B1-C2	A1-C2
Response format and Genre	Task 1: Continuous writing; Information transfer from visual or textual input (e.g., a chart, graph, or table) Task 2: A longer piece of continuous writing; Essay	Task 1: Continuous writing; Information transfer from multiple non-verbal inputs Task 2: A longer piece of continuous writing; Essay
Task description	The LanguageCert Academic Writing test is designed to assess a wide range of writing skills, including how well test takers: • write a response appropriately • organise ideas use a range of vocabulary and grammar accurately Task 1. Test takers explain a visual input (e.g., a graph) in 150-200 words with the intended reader specified. Test takers might describe and explain data, express a stance, opinion, justification, or argument in accordance with the provided prompt. Task 2. Test takers explain opposing views of a given topic and express their own opinion in 250 words. Test takers read two opposing opinions, discuss both views, and write their personal perspective.	The IELTS Writing test is designed to assess a wide range of writing skills, including how well test takers: • write a response appropriately • organise ideas • use a range of vocabulary and grammar accurately In Task 1 test takers are presented with a graph, table, chart or diagram. Test takers are asked to describe, summarise or explain the information in their own words. This might involve describing and explaining data, describing the stages of a process or how something works, or describing an object or event. In Task 2 test takers are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. Students should find the issues interesting and easy to understand.
Domain	Academic, social	Academic, social

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Purpose	Task 1: • To demonstrate the ability to understand and synthesise visual or textual inputs • To show the ability to write a report, argument or article using a written, graphic or visual input with the intended reader specified expressing stance, opinion, justification, argumentation. Task 2: • To write a formal piece of writing for a specified reader which may compare and contrast, persuade, argue, hypothesise, evaluate, analyse, or present solutions.	Task 1: • To transfer information from multiple inputs • To collate different pieces of information in order to describe, summarise or explain the information. Task 2: • To write a persuasive essay • To defend or attack a particular argument or opinion, compare or contrast aspects of an argument, and give reasons for the argument.
Timing	50 minutes. No explicit instruction is provided to divide time, but an expected word count is indicated for Task 1 (150-200 words) and Task 2 (250 words).	60 minutes. Students should spend 20 minutes on Task 1, and 40 minutes on Task 2. Students need to manage their own time.
Text length of expected response	Task 1: 150-200 words Task 2: 250 words	Task 1: at least 150 words Task 2: at least 250 words
Weighting	Task 1: 40% Task 2: 60%	Task 1: 33.3% Task 2: 66.6%
Skills assessed	In both tasks, test takers are assessed on their ability to write a response which is appropriate in terms of content, the organisation of ideas, and the accuracy and range of vocabulary and grammar. Task fulfilment is an explicit part of the marking criteria.	In both tasks, test takers are assessed on their ability to write a response which is appropriate in terms of content, the organisation of ideas, and the accuracy and range of vocabulary and grammar. Task fulfilment is an explicit part of the marking criteria.

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Cognitive processing	**Task 1:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Transforming ideas from verbal and non-verbal inputs • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision • Comprehending non-graphic task instructions • Comprehending (and interpreting) the components of graphs • Re-presenting or re-producing the non-graphic and graphic information as continuous discourse in written form in English as a foreign language **Task 2:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Generating ideas • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision	**Task 1:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Transforming ideas from non-verbal inputs • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision • Comprehending non-graphic task instructions • Comprehending (and interpreting) the components of graphs • Re-presenting or re-producing the non-graphic and graphic information as continuous discourse in written form in English as a foreign language **Task 2:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Generating ideas • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision
Discourse mode (rhetorical task)	Descriptive, expository, argumentative/persuasive	Descriptive, expository, argumentative/persuasive
Scoring approach	Analytic	Analytic (reported holistically)
Scoring and marking	Test takers are assessed on their performance on each task by trained examiners according to four criteria: Task Achievement, Accuracy and Range of Grammar, Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary, and Organisation (Coherence). Scores are reported both holistically and analytically. A holistic score is provided using the Global Scale (out of 100), and additional feedback is provided based on performance on individual marking criteria (i.e., task achievement, accuracy and range of grammar, accuracy and range of vocabulary, and organisation (coherence)). Marking is double blind between two examiners. If a large discrepancy exists between the two examiners, the writing response is passed to a third senior examiner whose marks are final.	Test takers are assessed on their performance on each task by certificated IELTS examiners according to the four criteria of the IELTS Writing Test Band Descriptors (task achievement/response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy). Scores are reported holistically in whole and half bands. Between two and four examiners mark IELTS Writing assessments to ensure the highest level of accuracy and fairness in the marks awarded. Marking is done between two and four examiners for accuracy and fairness.

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Timing

Less time is devoted to the writing section for LanguageCert (50 minutes) compared to IELTS (60 minutes). The expected word counts are similar across tasks, however, and test takers taking the LanguageCert exam will likely experience more time pressure compared to test takers taking IELTS.

Tasks

Task 1
The initial tasks are similar for LanguageCert and IELTS, where test takers are prompted to discuss a visual input (e.g., graph, table, diagram) for a minimum of 150 words. The writing is formal in register. LanguageCert Task 1 differs from IELTS Task 1 in how it supports responses. LanguageCert provides a response scaffold through the prompt. For instance, a chart is provided with the instruction to write a report which describes the main trends, gives reasons for the trends, and predicts likely changes over a given period of time. Contrastively, IELTS instructions are more open to interpretation on the part of the test taker: for example, asking test takers to summarise a chart and "make comparisons where relevant".

Task 2
The second task for both tests is a longer response, argumentative essay, with a recommended minimum of 250 words. As with Task 1, the writing is formal in register. For LanguageCert, test takers are asked to read two opposing opinions, summarise them, and offer their own perspective on the topic. For IELTS, one opinion is offered, and the test-taking test takers must explain the extent to which they agree or disagree with the given perspective. The opposing view (e.g., "children who are brought up in families that do not have large amounts of money are better prepared to deal with the problems of adult life than children brought up by wealthy parents is inferred" (IELTS online test preparation)). Because only one perspective is offered to an argumentative topic, the prompts may more strongly elicit a personal or emotional reaction than LanguageCert, which may foreseeably influence results.

Rating and scoring

Task fulfilment (and rubric alignment)
The Writing section rubrics for LanguageCert and IELTS are more strongly aligned than in the speaking section, with a direct correspondence in each rubric component. Similar to Speaking, markers score coherence, grammatical and vocabulary accuracy and range, but distinct for IELTS for Writing, task fulfilment is an explicit criterion.

Weighting

For both tests, greater scoring weight is given to Task 2, the extended writing task, than Task 1. For LanguageCert, Task 1 given a weight of 40% of the total marks for Writing, and Task 2 given a weight of 60% of total marks. For IELTS, slightly more weight is given to Task 2, with approximately 2/3rds of the weight allocated to Task 2 compared to 1/3rd for Task 1. Given the weighting, test takers in IELTS are instructed to divide their time accordingly across tasks, with 20 minutes devoted to Task 1 and 40 minutes to Task 2. On the test form, LanguageCert does not explicitly advise test takers on which component should receive more time, though it does state the suggested number of words should be devoted to the task.

Holistic vs analytic scoring and reporting

Both Writing tests are examined by human markers. IELTS writing is assessed analytically and reported holistically on a scale of 0–9, whereas LanguageCert Writing is assessed and reported analytically, with subscores (worth a maximum of 8 points each) for Task Achievement, Accuracy and Range of Grammar, Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary, and Organisation (Coherence). Holistic score reporting does not provide detailed feedback on specific areas for improvement, and this is seen in the final reports for IELTS and LanguageCert. LanguageCert provides feedback on these analytical components, whereas IELTS simply reports a band score. In addition to indicating a more refined explication of performance which may highlight areas of strength and areas for improvement, an analytic approach to scoring promotes transparency in scoring.

Number of markers

Both LanguageCert and IELTS attempt to ensure reliability and validity of marking through multiple markers. LanguageCert and IELTS employ a minimum of two markers for the Writing tasks. LanguageCert will use a third (who holds the final decision) if discrepancies exist, while IELTS can use up to four.

General Writing comparison

The following table summarises the Writing skill comparison between LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training. Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 6. Writing test comparison of LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS General Training
Target Level	A2-C1	A1-C2
Response format and Genre	Task 1: A comparatively short piece of continuous writing (e.g., a review of a recent visit to a given place, addressing three pieces of prompted information) Task 2: A longer piece of continuous writing; an essay, creative writing (e.g., a short story which describes how characters feel about a given situation)	Task 1: A comparatively short continuous writing task on a familiar topic (e.g., a letter discussing a situation according to three pieces of information provided in the prompt) Task 2: A longer piece of continuous writing; an essay
Task description	The test is designed to assess a wide range of writing skills, including the extent to which test takers: • write a response appropriately • organise ideas • use a range of vocabulary and grammar accurately • write and express a stance, opinion, justification, or argument Task 1. Test takers write a neutral/formal short letter, email or report with a reader specified covering three required pieces of information, in response to a short input text. Task 2. Test takers write an informal email to a friend/colleague, or a narrative/descriptive composition or informal article describing experience, ideas on a topic, future plans or explaining feelings.	The IELTS Writing test is designed to assess a wide range of writing skills, including how well test takers: • write a response appropriately • organise ideas • use a range of vocabulary and grammar accurately Task 1. Test takers are presented with a prompt about a familiar situation and asked to write a letter addressing three points of information. Task 2. Test takers are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. Topics are of general interest such as whether it is better to homeschool children, whether the drinking age should be raised, who is responsible for the care of the elderly or how families could be brought closer together.
Domain	Social	Social, academic

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS General Training
Purpose	Task 1: • To demonstrate the ability to respond appropriately to a given input related to a common task to produce a neutral/formal response (e.g., write a neutral/formal short letter, email or report covering three required pieces of information, in response to a short input text) Task 2: • To demonstrate the ability to produce a piece of informal writing for a specific purpose and audience (e.g., write an essay for your college magazine entitled 'Some useful advice I was given about my studies'. Describe some advice you received about your studies and say why this advice was useful to you).	Task 1: • To demonstrate the ability to respond appropriately via writing to everyday situations (e.g., a letter requesting information or explaining the situation) Task 2: • To write a persuasive essay • To defend or attack a particular argument or opinion, compare or contrast aspects of an argument, and give reasons for the argument (e.g., In Britain, when someone gets old, they often go to live in a home with other old people where there are nurses to look after them. Sometimes the government has to pay for this care. Who do you think should pay for this care, the government or the family?).
Timing	45 minutes. No explicit instruction is provided to divide time, but an expected word count is indicated for Task 1 (100-150 words) and Task 2 (150-200 words).	60 minutes. Students should spend 20 minutes on Task 1, and 40 minutes on Task 2. Students need to manage their own time.
Text length of expected response	Task 1: 100-150 words Task 2: 150-200 words	Task 1: at least 150 words Task 2: at least 250 words
Weighting	Task 1: 40% Task 2: 60%	Task 1: 33.3% Task 2: 66.6%
Skills assessed	In both tasks, test takers are assessed on their ability to write a response which is appropriate in terms of content, the organisation of ideas, and the accuracy and range of vocabulary and grammar. Task fulfilment is an explicit part of the marking criteria.	In both tasks, test takers are assessed on their ability to write a response which is appropriate in terms of content, the organisation of ideas, and the accuracy and range of vocabulary and grammar. Task fulfilment is an explicit part of the marking criteria.

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS General Training
Cognitive processing	**Task 1:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Transforming ideas from non-verbal inputs • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision • Comprehending non-graphic task instructions • Comprehending (and interpreting) the components of graphs • Re-presenting or re-producing the non-graphic and graphic information as continuous discourse in written form in English as a foreign language **Task 2:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Generating ideas • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision	**Task 1:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Transforming ideas from non-verbal inputs • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision • Comprehending non-graphic task instructions • Comprehending (and interpreting) the components of graphs • Re-presenting or re-producing the non-graphic and graphic information as continuous discourse in written form in English as a foreign language **Task 2:** • Macro-planning: goal setting and task representation • Generating ideas • Organising ideas • Translating • Micro-planning • Monitoring and revision
Discourse mode (rhetorical task)	Descriptive, expository, argumentative/ persuasive	Descriptive, expository, argumentative/ persuasive
Scoring approach	Analytic	Analytic (reported holistically)
Scoring and marking	Test takers are assessed on their performance on each task by trained examiners according to four criteria: Task Achievement, Accuracy and Range of Grammar, Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary, and Organisation (Coherence). Scores are reported both holistically and analytically. A holistic score is provided using the Global Scale (out of 100), and additional feedback is provided based on performance against the individual marking criteria (i.e., task achievement, accuracy and range of grammar, accuracy and range of vocabulary, and organisation (coherence)). Marking is double blind between two examiners. If a large discrepancy exists between the two examiners, the writing response is passed to a third senior examiner whose marks are final.	Test takers are assessed on their performance on each task by certificated IELTS examiners according to the four criteria of the IELTS Writing Test Band Descriptors (task achievement/response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy). Scores are reported holistically in whole and half bands. Between two and four examiners mark IELTS Writing assessments to ensure the highest level of accuracy and fairness in the marks awarded. Marking Marking is done between two and four examiners for accuracy and fairness.

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Timing

Less time is devoted to the writing section for LanguageCert at 45 minutes compared to IELTS at 60 minutes. Correspondingly fewer words are expected for LanguageCert, which may mitigate the additional time pressure test takers would otherwise experience.

Tasks

Task 1
For LanguageCert and IELTS, the first task asks participants to write a short letter. The target word count is lower for LanguageCert (100-150 words compared to 150+ words for IELTS), but less time is given overall, making for a more demanding task.

Task 2
The second task for both tests is a longer response than Task 1, but LanguageCert requires a lower word count (150-200 words) compared to IELTS (250 words). Task 2 of IELTS mirrors the Academic version, which requires test takers to write an argumentative essay. For LanguageCert, the topic is intended to target broader contexts and in addition to essays, may involve writing short stories.

Rating and scoring

Task fulfilment (and rubric alignment)
The Writing section rubrics for LanguageCert and IELTS are more strongly aligned than in the Speaking section, with a direct correspondence in each rubric component. Markers score coherence, grammatical and vocabulary accuracy and range, and task fulfilment. In Speaking, only LanguageCert has an explicit criterion for task fulfilment; however in Writing, both LanguageCert and IELTS (through "Task Response") include task fulfilment in their marking rubrics. With this addition to IELTS Writing criteria, the scoring rubrics for LanguageCert and IELTS descriptively congruent for Writing.

Weighting

For both tests, greater scoring weight is given to Task 2, the extended writing task, than Task 1. For LanguageCert, Task 1 is given a weight of 40% and Task 2 60% of the total marks for Writing. For IELTS, slightly more weight is given to Task 2, with approximately 2/3rds of the weight allocated to Task 2 compared to 1/3rd to Task 1. Given the weighting, test takers in IELTS are instructed to divide their time accordingly across tasks, with 20 minutes devoted to Task 1 and 40 minutes to Task 2. On the test form, LanguageCert does not explicitly advise test takers on which component should receive more time, though it does state the suggested number of words for each task.

Holistic vs analytic scoring and reporting

The LanguageCert and IELTS Writing tests are examined by human markers. IELTS is marked analytically, but scores are reported on a single holistic scale with scores ranging from 0 to 9. Holistic reporting does not permit detailed feedback on specific areas for improvement and no feedback is provided to test takers other than this single score. LanguageCert Writing is both assessed and reported analytically, with subscores (worth a maximum of 8 points each) for Task Achievement, Accuracy and Range of Grammar, Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary, and Organisation (Coherence). LanguageCert provides feedback on each of the scoring criteria. In addition to indicating a more refined explication of performance which may highlight areas of strength and areas for improvement, an analytic approach to scoring promotes transparency.

Number of markers

Both LanguageCert and IELTS attempt to ensure reliability and validity of marking through multiple markers. LanguageCert and IELTS employ a minimum of two markers for the Writing tasks. LanguageCert will use a third (who holds the final decision) if discrepancies exist, while IELTS can use up to four.

Reading

Academic Reading comparison

The following table summarises the Reading skill comparison between LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic. Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 7. Reading test comparison of LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic: Task Features

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Target Level	B1-C2	A1-C2
Skills focus	To test students' ability to comprehend academic texts and to extract important information from those texts. The test is designed to assess a wide range of reading skills, including how well test takers: • read for the general sense of a passage • read for the main ideas • read for detail • understand vocabulary used in academic texts, identify synonyms and use vocabulary in context • understand lexico-grammatical features in academic texts • understand inferences and implied meaning • understand how meaning is built up in discourse and show awareness of text organisation and discourse features • understand long complex texts, including discourse, opinion, purpose argumentation, exemplification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect and locate specific information	To test students' ability to comprehend academic texts and to extract important information from those texts. The test is designed to assess a wide range of reading skills, including how well test takers: • read for the general sense of a passage • read for the main ideas • read for detail • understand inferences and implied meaning • recognise a writer's opinions, attitudes and purpose • follow the development of an argument

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Task description	There are 30 questions. A variety of question types is used, chosen from the following types: multiple choice, gap fill, identifying information, identifying writer's views/claims, matching information to source texts, sentence and text completion, synonym identification. **Task 1a.** (4-option synonyms) Six sentences written in an academic style with one word highlighted. Test takers choose a synonym for highlighted word from a list of four words. **Task 1b.** (3-option cloze) An authentic academic text that may include academic ideas, arguments and opinions with five words removed. Test takers choose the correct word from a choice of three to full each gap **Task 2.** (Gapped sentences) An academic text with 6 sentences removed. Test takers choose from 8 sentences to complete the text. **Task 3.** (Short text comprehension with multiple matching) Test takers match seven questions to four texts. Texts may be reviews, reports, articles, journals, opinion pieces, etc. with a linked theme, but with a different purpose. **Task 4.** (Long text comprehension with 4-option MCQ) An extended text (e.g. narrative, descriptive, explanatory, expository, biographical, instructive) with 6 MCQs.	There are 40 questions across three parts (three passages). A variety of question types is used, chosen from the following types: multiple choice, identifying information, identifying writer's views/ claims, matching information, matching headings, matching features, matching sentence endings, sentence completion, summary completion, note completion, table completion, flow-chart completion, diagram label completion, short-answer questions. Sometimes one-word answers are required, sometimes a short phrase, and sometimes simply a letter, number or symbol. Mainly receptive, some limited writing involved in short answer questions, but only brief answers are required; no more than a given number of words. Test takers lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar.
Number of items	30	40
Timing	50 minutes to answer 30 questions on 7 passages (across 4 tasks.)	60 minutes to answer a total of 40 questions on 3 passages. Individual tasks are not timed.
Weighting	All items equally weighted. Each correct answer receives one mark. Tasks have different weights (i.e., each text is accompanied by a different number of items). Scores out of 30 are converted to the Global Scale out of 100 for reporting purposes.	All items equally weighted. Each correct answer receives one mark. Scores out of 40 are converted to the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported in whole and half bands

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Cognitive processing Goal setting	**Expeditious reading: local** (scan/search for specifics) **Expeditious reading: global** (skim for gist/search for key ideas/detail) **Careful reading: local** (understanding sentence) **Careful reading: global** (comprehend main idea(s)/overall text(s))	**Expeditious reading: local** (scan/search for specifics) **Expeditious reading: global** (skim for gist/search for key ideas/detail) **Careful reading: local** (understanding sentence) **Careful reading: global** (comprehend main idea(s)/overall text(s))
Cognitive processing Levels of reading	Word recognition	Word recognition
	Lexical access	Lexical access
	Syntactic parsing	Syntactic parsing
	Establishing propositional meaning (cl./sent. level)	Establishing propositional meaning (cl./sent. level)
	Inferencing	Inferencing
	Building a mental model	Building a mental model
	Creating a text level representation (disc. structure)	Creating a text level representation (disc. structure)
	Creating an intertextual representation (multi-text)	Creating an intertextual representation (multi-text)

Table 8. Reading test comparison of LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic: Features of the Input Text

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Word count	There are 7 passages to read, plus questions, across 4 sections. Given provided texts, test takers must read approximately 2750-2800 words, including source text and questions. Long and short texts are provided to elicit different skills. Longer texts permit an assessment of skimming and scanning for information, and discriminate between important and secondary details. Shorter texts are used to assess vocabulary (synonyms) and lexico-grammatical knowledge.	Three different passages to read, each with accompanying questions. Officially test takers have to read 2,150 - 2,750 words in total. There are three sections to the IELTS Academic Reading test, and each contains one long text. Green, Weir and Unaldi (2010) analysed 42 texts making up 14 IELTS reading tests. The passages in their study contained 854 words on average (maximum 1063 words, minimum 589 words).

Test	LanguageCert Academic	IELTS Academic
Average sentence length	16.32 words per sentence on average across all sentences.	21.89 words per sentence on average across all sentences.
Domain	Academic	Academic
Discourse mode	Narrative, descriptive, explanatory, expository, biographical, instructive	Historical/biographical, expository, argumentative
Nature of information	Mix of concrete and abstract	Mostly concrete
Presentation	Verbal (textual)	Both Verbal (textual) and Non-verbal (i.e., graphs)
Lexical Level; further criteria	The cumulative coverage reaches 95.6% at the K3 level. 75.2 K1, 12.3 K2, 8.1 K3. Lexical Density 0.58	The cumulative coverage reaches 92% at the K3 level. 76.4 K1, 11.36 K2, 3.26 K3. Lexical Density 0.57
Readability	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 10.27	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 12.64
Topic	A range of topics which may reasonably reflect introductory coursework and texts at the university level are employed. Sample topics include controversial technology in sport, animal domestication, language preservation, and wildlife and deep-sea mining.	A broad range of subject areas were represented among the 42 IELTS texts examined by Green et al (2010) with the categories of *Social studies* (10 or 11 texts), *Engineering & technology* (6 or 7) and *Business & administrative studies* (4 or 5) emerging as the most popular topic areas for the test.
Text genre	The seven reading texts are appropriate to the general academic genre, including vocabulary and topic content. Longer texts mimic introductory texts (e.g., textbook excerpts, academic reports) which cover a range of concrete and abstract information. Given the nature of the test and the lack of assumed technical knowledge, text excerpts are potentially less difficult than course content which is both extended and domain specific.	There are three reading texts with a variety of question types. Texts are appropriate to, and accessible to, test-takers entering undergraduate or postgraduate courses, or seeking professional registration. The kinds of text used in IELTS are those that introduce academic topics to a general audience, often in the form of articles sourced from newspapers or magazines presenting research findings to a general audience. These include self contained reports on developments in science and technology and overviews of academic debates. The IELTS texts often present solutions to problems that are likely to be of interest to the general reader. Texts come from books, journals, magazines, newspapers, reports and online resources, written for a non-specialist audience. While IELTS passages are at a level of difficulty appropriate to university study, they are not as challenging as some of the texts encountered in the more linguistically demanding areas such as the law textbook analysed by Green et al. (2010).

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Target levels and timing

Targeted proficiency levels are the first distinguishing feature of the tests as they impact test design. The IELTS Academic Reading test targets CEFR levels A1-C2, a broader range than LanguageCert Academic, which targets B1-C2. The IELTS Academic Reading test is correspondingly longer than LanguageCert in terms of number of items (40 items for IELTS compared to 30 items for LanguageCert) and duration (60 minutes of Reading for IELTS compared to 50 minutes for LanguageCert Academic).

Weighting

Reading components for LanguageCert Academic and IELTS have 30 and 40 items, respectively, with each item weighted equally (one correct response is worth one point). Items are presented in the same order that the relevant information occurs in the passages, offering a degree of scaffolding for the test taker and lessening the cognitive load of the reading task (i.e., less short-term memory is needed). Regarding the weighting of tasks, there is a difference between the tests. Whereas IELTS has equal weighting across its four tasks (10 points each), LanguageCert tasks have different weights across tasks. Tasks 1A and 1B combine for 11 points, Task 2 is worth 6 points, Task 3 is worth 7 points, and Task 4 is worth 6 points. As Task 4 is the most challenging, given its length and the nature of the content, this ensures lower-level test takers are not unduly penalised for a task which is beyond their present level.

Task description

LanguageCert has more reading passages compared to IELTS, but fewer questions. Longer texts are associated with greater levels of difficulty; however, an increased number of passages may also increase difficulty. LanguageCert includes components which more directly assesses elements of vocabulary and grammar (Task 1). The structure of LanguageCert is more predictable than IELTS, as tasks and item types are largely uniform in the Reading test. Contrastively, IELTS Reading can have different numbers of items per passage and there are at least 14 question types which may be given (as shown in the Comparison Table). LanguageCert's test, therefore, may permit greater scaffolding and targeted preparation. However, it does so at the cost of response type coverage. Further, offering different item types can help prevent individuals from being unduly influenced by specific item types, whether due to relative strength or weakness.

Passages

Passages are similar in genre as both tests target the academic domain. However, the Passages in IELTS were longer and somewhat more difficult overall compared with LanguageCert, with a readability score of 12.64 compared to 10.27 (readability is associated with grade level according to the US school system), and fewer words at the K3 level or below (92% for IELTS compared to 96% for LanguageCert).

Cognitive processing

Though IELTS offers more diversity in option types, both of the tests appear to engage similar levels of processing, including word recognition, lexical access, syntactic parsing, establishing propositional meaning, inferencing, building a mental model, creating a text level representation of discourse structure, and creating an intertextual representation across texts.

General Reading comparison

The following table summarises the Reading skill comparison between LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training. Key similarities and differences are summarised subsequently.

Table 9. Reading test comparison of LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training: **Task Features**

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS General Training
Target Level	A2-C1	A1-C2
Skills focus	To test the ability to comprehend academic texts and to extract important information from those texts. The test is designed to assess a wide range of reading skills, including how well test takers: • read for the general sense of a passage • read for the main ideas • read for detail • understand vocabulary used in everyday contexts, identify synonyms and use vocabulary in context • understand lexico-grammatical features in academic texts • understand how meaning is built up in discourse and show awareness of text organisation and discourse features • understand the purpose of different texts, scan and locate specific information • understand long complex texts, including discourse, opinion, purpose argumentation, exemplification, comparison and contrast and cause and effect and locate specific information	To test the ability to comprehend academic texts and to extract important information from those texts. The test is designed to assess a wide range of reading skills, including how well test takers: • read for the general sense of a passage • read for the main ideas • read for detail • understand inferences and implied meaning • recognise a writer's opinions, attitudes and purpose • follow the development of an argument
Task description	There are 30 questions. A variety of question types is used, chosen from the following types: multiple choice, gap fill, identifying information, identifying writer's views/claims, matching information to source texts, sentence and text completion, synonym identification. Mainly receptive with some limited writing involved, but only brief answers are required.	There are 40 questions. A variety of question types is used, chosen from the following types: multiple choice, identifying information, identifying writer's views/claims, matching information, matching headings, matching features, matching sentence endings, sentence completion, summary completion, note completion, table completion, flow-chart completion, diagram label completion, short-answer questions. Sometimes you will need to give one word as your answer, sometimes a short phrase, and sometimes simply a letter, number or symbol.Mainly receptive, some limited writing involved in SAQ, but only brief answers are required; no more than couple of words. Test takers must be careful when writing answers on the answer sheet because they will lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar.
Number of items	30 items	40 items

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS General Training
Timing	50 minutes to answer 30 questions across seven passages (not including sentences in Part 1a).	60 minutes to answer a total of 40 questions on 3 passages. Individual tasks are not timed.
Weighting	All items equally weighted. Each correct answer receives one mark. Tasks have different weights (i.e., each text is accompanied by a different number of items). Scores out of 30 are converted to the Global Scale and reported out of 100.	All items equally weighted. Each correct answer receives one mark. Scores out of 40 are converted to the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported in whole and half bands
Cognitive processing Goal setting	**Expeditious reading: local** (scan/search for specifics) **Expeditious reading: global** (skim for gist/search for key ideas/detail) **Careful reading: local** (understanding sentence) **Careful reading: global** (comprehend main idea(s)/overall text(s))	**Expeditious reading: local** (scan/search for specifics) **Expeditious reading: global** (skim for gist/search for key ideas/detail) **Careful reading: local** (understanding sentence) **Careful reading: global** (comprehend main idea(s)/overall text(s))
Cognitive processing Levels of reading	Word recognition	Word recognition
	Lexical access	Lexical access
	Syntactic parsing	Syntactic parsing
	Establishing propositional meaning (cl./sent. level)	Establishing propositional meaning (cl./sent. level)
	Inferencing	Inferencing
	Building a mental model	Building a mental model
	Creating a text level representation (disc. structure)	Creating a text level representation (disc. structure)
	Creating an intertextual representation (multi-text)	Creating an intertextual representation (multi-text)

Table 10. Reading test comparison of LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training: **Features of the Input**

Test	LanguageCert General	IELTS General Training
Word count	Including questions, test takers have to read approximately 1950-2000 words across four sections (source text with questions). There are four sections to the LanguageCert General Reading test, with texts getting progressively longer (i.e., multiple individual sentences for Part 1a, a short text for Part 1b, a medium length text in Part 2, four short texts with a common theme for Part 3, and an extended text in Part 4).	Including questions, test takers have to read approximately 2750-3050 words across three sections (source text with questions), or 2150-2375 for the passages alone (according to IELTS.org). There are three sections to the IELTS General Training Reading test, and each contains one long text. Green, Weir and Unaldi (2010) analysed 42 texts making up 14 IELTS reading tests. The passages in their study contained 854 words on average (maximum 1063 words, minimum 589 words).
Average sentence length	13.56 words per sentence across all reading passages. (This is an average figure. Individual sentences will span a range above and below the average.)	21.89 words per sentence across all reading passages. (This is an average figure. Individual sentences will span a range above and below the average.)
Domain	Social, work, study/academic	Social, work
Discourse mode	Narrative, descriptive, explanatory, expository, biographical, instructive	Historical/biographical, expository, argumentative
Nature of information	Mix of concrete and abstract	Mostly concrete
Presentation	Primarily verbal/textual	Both verbal/textual and non-verbal (i.e., graphs)
Lexical Level; further criteria	The cumulative coverage reaches 97.5% at the K3 level. 82.6 K1, 8.9 K2, 6.0 K3. Lexical Density 0.55	The cumulative coverage reaches 94.7% at the K3 level. 76.3 K1, 11.5 K2, 6.9 K3. Lexical Density 0.59
Readability	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 7.3	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 10.25
Topic	Topics include daily life, home, travel, free time, interpersonal relations, shopping, food and drink, services, language(s), weather, measures and shapes, places, education, the environment, beliefs, arts, science and technology, and society.	A broad range of subject areas were represented among the 42 IELTS texts examined by Green et al (2010) with the categories of *Social studies* (10 or 11 texts), *Engineering & technology* (6 or 7) and *Business & administrative studies* (4 or 5) emerging as the most popular topic areas for the test.
Text genre	Texts are appropriate for personal, occupational and vocational contexts, and include content inspired by advertisements, articles, websites, reports, articles, journals, and opinion pieces among others.	Texts are authentic and are taken from notices, advertisements, company handbooks, official documents, books, magazines and newspapers.

Summary of key similarities and distinguishing features

Target levels and timing

Targeted proficiency levels are the first distinguishing feature of the tests as they impact test design. The IELTS General Training Reading test targets CEFR levels A1-C2, a broader range than LanguageCert General, which targets A2-C1. The IELTS Reading test is correspondingly longer than LanguageCert in terms of number of items (40 items for IELTS compared to 30 items for LanguageCert) and duration (60 minutes of Reading for IELTS compared to 50 minutes for LanguageCert General).

Weighting

Reading components for LanguageCert General and IELTS General Training have 30 and 40 items, respectively, with each item weighted equally (one correct response is worth one point). Items are presented in the same order that the relevant information occurs in the audio recordings, offering a degree of scaffolding for the test taker and lessening the cognitive load of the listening task (i.e., less short-term memory is needed). Regarding the weighting of tasks, there is a difference between the tests. Whereas IELTS has equal weighting across its four tasks (10 points each), LanguageCert tasks have different weights across tasks. Tasks 1A and 1B combine for 11 points, Task 2 is worth 6 points, Task 3 is worth 7 points, and Task 4 is worth 6 points. As Task 4 is the most challenging, given its length and the nature of the content, this ensures lower-level test takers are not unduly penalised for a task which is beyond their present level.

Task description

LanguageCert has more reading passages compared to IELTS, but fewer questions. Longer texts are associated with greater levels of difficulty; however, an increased number of passages may also increase difficulty. LanguageCert includes components which more directly assesses elements of vocabulary and grammar (Task 1). The structure of LanguageCert is more predictable than IELTS, as tasks and item types are largely uniform in the Reading test. Contrastively, IELTS Reading can have different numbers of items per passage and there are at least 14 question types which may be given (as shown in the Comparison Table). LanguageCert's test, therefore, may permit greater scaffolding and targeted preparation. However, it does so at the cost of response type coverage. Further, offering different item types can help prevent individuals from being unduly influenced by specific item types, whether through relative strength or weakness.

Passages

Passages are similar in genre as both tests target the general reading domain. However, the passages in IELTS were longer and more difficult overall compared with LanguageCert, with a readability score of 10.25 compared to 7.3 (readability is associated with grade level according to the US school system), and fewer words at the K3 level or below (95% for IELTS compared to 98% for LanguageCert).

Cognitive processing

Though IELTS offers more diversity in option types, both tests appear to engage similar levels of processing, including word recognition, lexical access, syntactic parsing, establishing propositional meaning, inferencing, building a mental model, creating a text level representation of discourse structure, and creating an intertextual representation across texts.

Statistical analyses and results

Test taker populations and the current sample

Academic cohort

Target test takers for the Academic versions of LanguageCert and IELTS consist of individuals wishing to undertake studies in higher learning institutions where English is the medium of instruction, such as university in the United Kingdom. For the present study, 654 participants have thus far taken part. The average (mean) test taker age was 24.20 with a standard deviation of 6.22 years, meaning most test takers were between 18 and 30 years old. This reflects a typical range expected for undergraduate and postgraduate study (House, 2010). There were 390 (60%) female participants and 262 (40%) male, which is a skewed population compared to the publicly available, IELTS reported gender populations of 52% female and 48% male (note: the gender split was reported as a combined figure for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training). The present research also aimed at including a broad swath of test taker language backgrounds, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Test taker first language background		
First language (mother tongue)	Number of test takers	Percent of sample
Chinese	323	49.39%
Punjabi	83	12.69%
Malayalam	60	9.17%
Greek	31	4.74%
Tamil	31	4.74%
Hindi	21	3.21%
Turkish	17	2.60%
Thai	16	2.45%
Spanish	15	2.29%
Telugu	15	2.29%
Urdu	9	1.38%
Arabic	5	0.76%
Farsi	4	0.61%
Portuguese	4	0.61%
Japanese	3	0.46%
Mandarin	3	0.46%
Bahasa Indonesia	1	0.15%
English	1	0.15%
Italian	1	0.15%
Kannada	1	0.15%
Korean	1	0.15%
Mongolian	1	0.15%
Nepali	1	0.15%
Pashto	1	0.15%
Ukrainian	1	0.15%

missing	5	0.76%
Total	654	100%

Self-identified proficiency levels had a distribution across CEFR, including A1 (44), A2 (19), B1 (90), B2 (212), C1 (208), and C2 (70), along with 11 non-disclosed. The bulk of proficiency levels being at B1-C2 reflect the target range of the LanguageCert Academic test.

General cohort

Target test takers for the General versions of LanguageCert and IELTS consist of individuals wishing to demonstrate their language proficiency for immigration purposes. For the General versions of the study, 181 participants have taken part. The average test taker was older than found for Academic, with a mean age of 31.07 years old (compared to 24.20 with Academic) and a standard deviation of 6.49 years, meaning most test takers were roughly between 25 and 37 years old (compared to 18-30 with Academic). The gender constitution was more balanced compared to the Academic versions, with 104 female participants (57%) and 76 male (42%). Relative to Academic, this more closely resembles the publicly available, IELTS reported gender populations of 52% female and 48% male.

The present research also aimed at including a diverse sample of test taker language backgrounds, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Test taker first language background		
First language (mother tongue)	Number of test takers	Percent of sample
Chinese	74	40.66%
Greek	48	26.37%
Spanish	18	9.89%
Malayalam	8	4.40%
Tamil	8	4.40%
Japanese	5	2.75%
Thai	3	1.65%
Turkish	3	1.65%
Arabic	2	1.10%
English	2	1.10%
Korean	2	1.10%
Slovak	2	1.10%
Albanian	1	0.55%
French	1	0.55%
Italian	1	0.55%
Macedonian	1	0.55%
Portuguese	1	0.55%
Telugu	1	0.55%
Total	181	100%

Self-identified proficiency levels had a distribution across CEFR, including A2 (4), B1 (9), B2 (42), C1 (69), and C2 (57). The estimated range for General is more concentrated than found in the Academic cohort, which also had 44 participants identifying at the A1 level. Recruitment is ongoing and a greater number lower proficiency level test-takers are expected for the General version.

Inferential analysis

Correlations

Correlations were conducted as a starting point (Saville et al., 2021) and were followed with regression modelling (Zheng and DeJong, 2011). A baseline correlation comparison was identified in accordance with Taylor and Chan (2015), who found reported correlations between selected tests (i.e., CAE, CPE, TOEFL iBT, OET and PTE-A) and IELTS ranged from 0.73 to 0.87. A strong, positive correlation between tests (i.e., above .7) suggests that performing well on one test would translate to performing well on the other, while performing poorly on one test would tend to mean performing poorly on the other. Because these tests attempt to measure language skills, a strong correlation can be expected, as reported by Taylor and Chan (ibid). For the present study, the correlation between LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic was .87, while for the General versions it was .89. Both cases indicate a strong, positive correlation between the tests. Correlations between subskills were also examined, with results shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13. Correlations (Round 3)	Overall r	Reading r	Writing r	Listening r	Speaking r
Academic (n = 654)	.87	.79	.69	.70	.73
General (n = 181)	.89	.77	.76	.79	.74

Note: r = correlation. All correlations were statistically significant at the p < .001 level

As shown in Table 13, indices display similar, or somewhat higher correlations with IELTS than other tests used for similar purposes. Such strong, direct correlations suggest the tests share similar constructs (Saville et al., 2021).

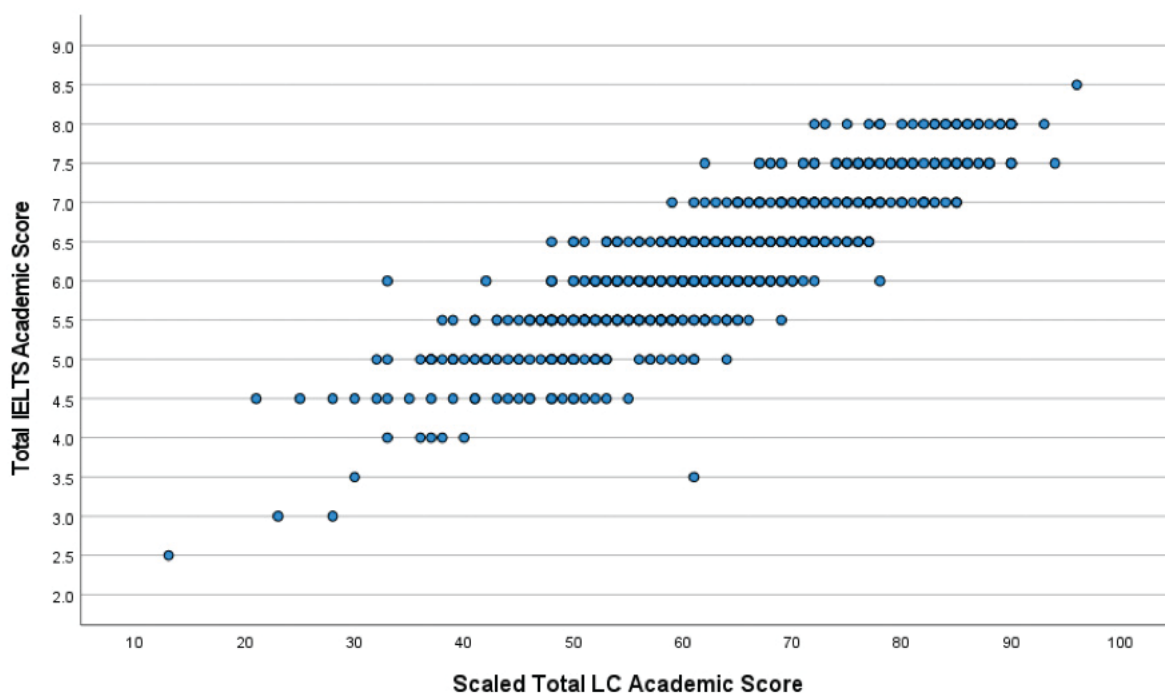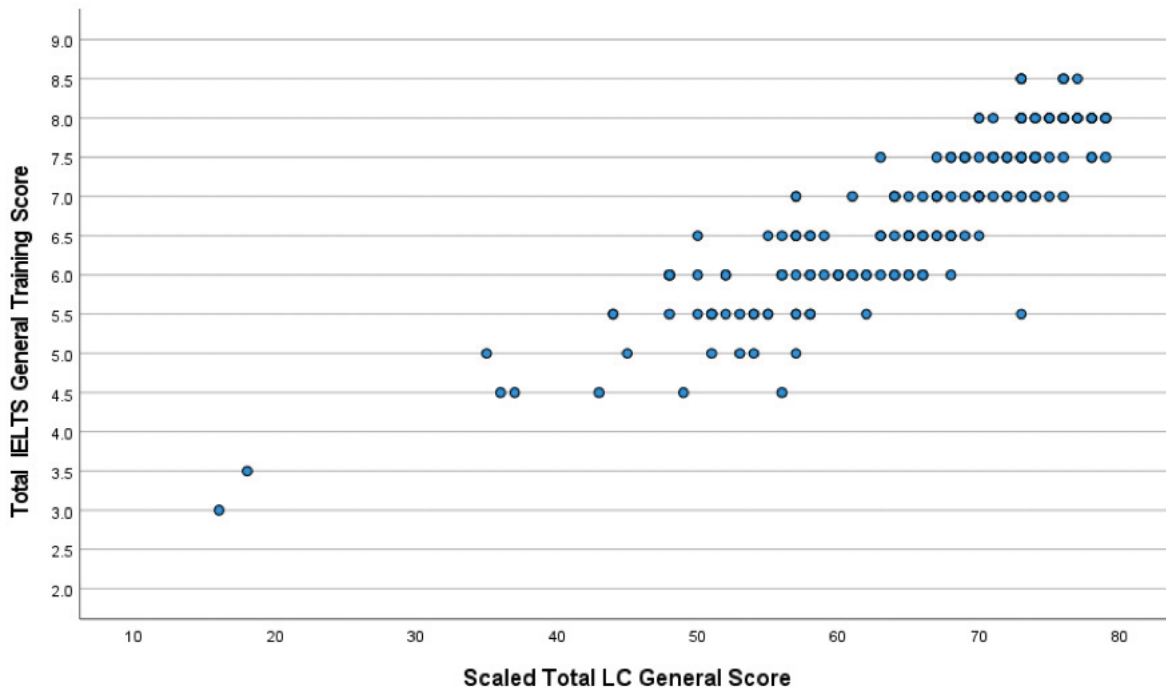## Figure 1. Overall score relationship between LanguageCert Academic and IELTS Academic

Figure 2. Relationship scatterplot for LanguageCert General and IELTS General performance

Linking and equating the assessments

Correlations alone are insufficient to establish a link between examinations. Rather, it is crucial to demonstrate what a given score on a LanguageCert test translates to on an IELTS test. There are different statistical methods for determining the numerical relationships between scores on different tests. In early versions of this report, we used a method of prediction based on linear regression. Regression has the advantage that it can be done with relatively small numbers of test takers. However, it also has the disadvantage that it does not give symmetrical results. For instance, using regression, if a LanguageCert score is used to predict an IELTS score, the resultant IELTS score would not necessarily equal the score on which the original calculation was based. For this reason, an equipercentile linking approach, which does generate symmetrical results, is generally preferred. Hence, a given score on a LanguageCert exam can be interpreted as a specific band score on an IELTS exam, and vice versa. Theoretically, equipercentile measures will provide the same score regardless of test form, permitting decision makers with a more reliable means of identifying comparable levels across tests. This requires larger numbers of test takers so did not offer a practical option for early iterations of the study.

Going forward, the principal means of comparison will be the equipercentile method. However, at present, data collection is ongoing and results are expected to change, particularly at the lower levels of proficiency where more data are required. Because data collection is in progress and the analysis is ongoing, concordance tables have been omitted from this iteration of the report.

References

Bejar, I. I. (1985). Test speededness under number right scoring: An analysis of the Test of English as a Foreign Language. ETS Research Report Series, 1985(1), i-57.

Butler, F. A., Eignor, D., Jones, S., McNamara, T., & Suomi, B. K. (2000). TOEFL 2000 speaking framework. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Chapelle, CA, Cotos, E., & Lee, J. (2015). Validity arguments for diagnostic assessment using automated writing evaluation. Language testing, 32(3), 385-405.

Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe (2009). Relating language examinations to the common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR). Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.

Green, A., Ünaldi, A., & Weir, C. (2010). Empiricism versus connoisseurship: Establishing the appropriacy of texts in tests of academic reading. Language Testing, 27(2), 191-211. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532209349471

House, G. (2010). Postgraduate Education in the UK. HEPI Analytical Report 1. Higher Education Policy Institute.

Isaacs, T., Trofimovich, P., Yu, G., & Chereau, B. M. (2015). Examining the linguistic aspects of speech that most efficiently discriminate between upper levels of the revised IELTS pronunciation scale. IELTS research reports online series, 4.

Lam, R. (2021). Using eportfolios to synergise assessment of, for, as learning in EFL writing. European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL, 10(1), 101-120.

Mayordomo, R. M., Espasa, A., Guasch, T., & Martínez-Melo, M. (2022). Perception of online feedback and its impact on cognitive and emotional engagement with feedback. Education and Information Technologies, 27(6), 7947-7971.

Mežek, Š., McGrath, L., Negretti, R., & Berggren, J. (2022). Scaffolding L2 academic reading and self regulation through task and feedback. TESOL Quarterly, 56(1), 41-67.

Saville, N., O'Sullivan, B, & Clark. T. (Eds.) (2021). Investigating the relationship between IELTS and PTE-Academic. IELTS Partnership Research Papers: Studies in Test Comparability Series, No. 2. IELTS Partners: British Council, Cambridge Assessment English and IDP: IELTS Australia.

Taylor, L., & Chan, S. (2015). IELTS Equivalence Research Project (GMC 133).

Zheng, Y., & De Jong, J.H.A.L. (2011). Research Note: Establishing construct and concurrent validity of Pearson Test of English Academic. London: Pearson.

Language
Cert

To find out more about LanguageCert Academic and LanguageCert General, access online exam preparation materials, visit: **www.languagecert.org**

LanguageCert is a business name of PeopleCert Qualifications Ltd, UK company number 09620926

✉ info@languagecert.org