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Albanese Government Slashes English Visa Standards

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The Australian Labor Party (ALP) government, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, has quietly reduced English language proficiency standards for certain visa categories. This is the first adjustment to these requirements in more than ten years. The change affects applicants for select temporary and working holiday visas and lowers the minimum test scores required to demonstrate functional English.

For the TOEFL iBT exam, the minimum required score has been reduced from 32 to 26 out of 120. The PTE Academic test requirement has also been lowered, from 30 to 24 out of 90. The IELTS threshold for functional English, however, remains unchanged at 4.5 out of 9. These lowered standards apply to visa subclasses that include the Training Visa (Subclass 407), the Temporary Skill Shortage Visa (Subclass 482), and the Work and

Holiday Visa (Subclass 462). These visas are primarily granted to individuals who are not required to have high levels of English but still need to demonstrate basic proficiency to live and work in Australia.

The ALP government has stated that the changes are based on a new concordance study that sought to align score ranges across various English proficiency testing systems. Officials claim that the adjustment ensures fairness among applicants who choose different test formats. However, the decision has sparked criticism from the opposition and raised concerns among immigration advocates and members of the public.

Opposition members argue that lowering the standard may compromise the integrity of the immigration system. They believe the change could result in an increase in the number of applicants with minimal English skills, making it harder for them to fully participate in Australian society and the workforce. Some also suggest that relaxing language requirements sends the wrong message at a time when the country is grappling with housing shortages, rising cost of living, and increased pressure on public services.

On the other hand, some business groups and regional employers have cautiously welcomed the change. They argue that many industries, especially in regional and rural areas, are facing labor shortages and that the change could help fill roles that require basic communication but not advanced English proficiency.

The ALP government maintains that the reform targets only specific visa classes and does not alter requirements for higher-skilled migrants. More stringent English criteria for student and graduate visas, introduced in early 2024, remain in place. The government insists that it is focused on balancing economic demand with fair and responsible migration policy.