

U.K. introduces English test for immigrants

By the CNN Wire Staff

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Britain introduces language test for all non-European immigrants
- Test is for all those applying to join their spouses or partners
- Language test is in addition to existing test on laws and culture
- British government hoping to tighten rules even further

London, England (CNN) -- All non-European immigrants to the United Kingdom must pass a basic English language test before being granted a visa under new rules announced by the government Wednesday.

The rules will apply to anyone wanting to join their spouse or partner in the United Kingdom, and they will come into effect in autumn this year, the government said.

"I believe being able to speak English should be a prerequisite for anyone who wants to settle here," Home Secretary Theresa May said. She said the new requirement will "help promote integration, remove cultural barriers, and protect public services."

Anyone wishing to come to the United Kingdom as a partner must demonstrate a basic command of conversational English by proving they have passed the test at an approved testing center, the Home Office said.

"It is a privilege to come to the U.K., and that is why I am committed to raising the bar for migrants and ensuring that those who benefit from being in Britain contribute to our society," May said in a statement.

She said the change is just a first step, and that the government is hoping to tighten the English-language requirements even further.

"Today's announcement is one of a wide range of measures the new government is taking to ensure that immigration is properly controlled for the benefit of the U.K., alongside a limit on work visas and an effective system for regulating the students who come here," May said.

Under current rules, people applying for visas to join their partners must first meet a range of criteria, including showing that their marriage or partnership is genuine, and that they can support themselves financially.

They must first apply for a two-year settlement visa. After that, they can apply for permission to settle in Britain -- known as indefinite leave to remain, which is similar to a U.S. green card -- but they must first take a test on British

culture, politics, and laws.

The new English test will be in addition to that test, the Home Office said.

