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**Migrants' Experiences of the English
Language Bond**

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EXPERIENCES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

In October 1995, among the adjustments made to immigration policy was the introduction of English language requirements for non-principal applicants, the introduction of the use of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test for assessing English language ability, and the introduction of an English language bond. Under this current policy, all applicants aged 16 and over applying for entry under both the General Skills and Business Investor Categories are required to either provide evidence of having an English language background or pass level 5 of the IELTS test (level 4 for Business Investor migrants). Non-principal applicants who cannot attain this level of English can instead pay a \$20,000 bond, refundable in full if the required level can be achieved in 3 months and 70% refundable if the required level can be achieved in 12 months. Up to October 1997, approximately 236 bonds have been paid by non-principal applicants in and outside New Zealand, with 45 bonds having been refunded or partially refunded.

The primary aim of this project is to explore, in depth, the experiences of a group of migrants who have paid the non-principal applicant English language bond as part of their application requirements. The key objectives of this project are to:

- Document migrants' views about the English language bond (strengths and weaknesses), and its impact (if any) on their immigration decision.
- Assess the effectiveness of the English language bond as an incentive to encourage migrants to learn English.
- Gain a greater understanding of the experiences migrants have in finding and taking part in English language courses.
- Identify difficulties migrants have in living in New Zealand without sufficient English language ability.

2. Methodology

The information contained in this report was obtained from 24 in-depth interviews with non-principal applicants who had paid the English language bond. Contact details of participants were obtained from the New Zealand Immigration Service database which records non-principal applicant bond payments. Participants were selected from lists of those who had either received refunds, or whose language bond had been paid in New Zealand. In selecting participants, care was taken to ensure coverage of a range of participants according to their refund status as well as country of origin. The distribution of the sample by refund status, country of origin and geographic location is provided in the main report.

Interviews were conducted with the non-principal applicant, although, in most cases, the principal applicant was also present and was encouraged to take part in the discussion. For most interviews in Auckland and one in Hamilton, a translating interviewer accompanied the executive interviewer to assist with translation. While a topic guide was used to direct the interview, free discussion was also encouraged in order to pursue issues specific to particular language groups or locations.

3. The English Language Bond

Information Provision

In general it appears that those who applied for permanent residency and paid the language bond in New Zealand were the best informed as to how the language bond operates. These participants had an accurate knowledge of their obligations regarding the bond, and generally did not feel that there was anything they should have been told but weren't. However, for participants who applied for permanent residency overseas, the provision of information was a bigger issue. Some participants commented that, when they first applied for permanent residency, their immigration consultant had not informed them about the language requirement. Participants felt that this was because the consultant did not know about it or did not understand how it operated. Participants who were informed by consultants also reported that the information was not totally objective or accurate.

Impact Of Bond On Immigration Decision

In all cases, participants stated that having to pay the language bond had not detracted from their decision to migrate to New Zealand. In many cases, the reasons for wanting to leave their home country (or not wanting to return if they had already left) were greater than the negative aspects associated with the language bond. However, while all participants commented that the language bond was not a sufficient disincentive to discourage them from immigrating to New Zealand, many could cite cases of others from their home country who had been discouraged from immigrating. This was either because the dollar amount of the bond was prohibitive, or because they believed the bond to be a form of discrimination.

Attitudes To The Language Bond

Positive aspects of the English language bond identified by participants included that the bond:

- acted as an incentive to learn English quickly.
- acted as an indication of the importance of English proficiency in New Zealand for prospective migrants.
- allowed for the provision of extra services for those with language difficulties.

Negative aspects of the English language bond reported by participants included:

- the high dollar value of the language bond, and the impact of exchange rate fluctuations on the language bond.
- the emphasis placed on passing the IELTS test to get the language bond refunded created a disincentive to learn everyday English.
- the belief upon payment that the language bond would be used to fund language training. When it was found that this was not the case, participants were confused as to what the bond was actually used for.
- a perception that the bond was a form of discrimination against Asian migrants as they have had so little exposure to English prior to immigration.
- the perception that the language bond was a form of discrimination against those migrants who are not wealthy and could not gain residency under the Business Migrant category.
- the perception that the policy changed suddenly; some participants feared it could change again.

- the policy requires that migrants sit a formal examination and was perceived to be discriminatory, particularly against older migrants.
- the perception that the bond presented a “money hunting” mentality on the part of the Government (as reflected in the immigration policy) is bad for New Zealand’s image overseas.

Time Restrictions

Almost universally, participants agreed that three months is not a realistic time frame to reach the standard required to pass the IELTS test, especially if the non-principal applicant has had little or no exposure to English prior to arriving in New Zealand. Reasons as to why the three month time frame was considered inappropriate included:

- The time needed to settle in New Zealand gives little time to learn English
- The fact the migrants may return to the home country to wind up their business, thereby precluding them from English language training in New Zealand and making it very difficult for them to attend classes in their own country , given the time required to wind up their businesses and the quality of English language training available in the home country (Russia).
- The test can only be sat once within a three month period (IELTS regulation), so non-principal applicants only have one opportunity to pass to receive a full refund.
- The large financial outlay required to pay the language bond as well as the costs involved in moving to a new country can mean that migrants do not have sufficient funds available for English language courses immediately after arrival in New Zealand.
- In the case of some migrants who arrive in New Zealand with little or no information about the language bond and learning English in New Zealand, it may take more than three months just to find the information they require.

All participants also commented that, due to the perceived high standard of English required to pass the IELTS test , 12 months is too short a timeframe to learn English to a sufficient standard to receive a partial refund, unless there is a strong background of English language speaking prior to arrival. Even those who had strong English skills before arrival commented that, for those arriving without any English, the timeframe would be too short. Assessment of the length of time most appropriate for gaining a refund of the bond should consider the proportions sitting who are able to achieve the required standard and the numbers who do not sit, based on their belief they would be unable to achieve the standard. This is beyond the scope of this project.

4. Learning English In New Zealand

Perceived Importance Of English Proficiency

The majority of participants commented that they knew it would be very important for them to be proficient in English once they arrived in New Zealand. By contrast however, some participants perceived, prior to arrival in New Zealand, that it would not be so important for them to be very proficient in English. Reasons given included perceptions that:

- They were unlikely to want or need to find employment in New Zealand.
- As long as the principal applicant could speak English well, they could translate information and assist the non-principal applicant(s) in the family.
- The size of the ethnic community in New Zealand (and Auckland in particular) would be sufficiently large that there would be no need to interact with the host population and consequently, there would be no need to learn English (particularly for Chinese and Koreans).
- Upon obtaining Permanent Residency, they would continue to work in their home country and consequently, did not need a good working knowledge of English.

Experiences Of Learning English Prior To Applying For Residency

Of the 24 participants involved in the research, 8 had taken part in some form of English language training prior to applying for New Zealand permanent residency - that is, had undertaken English language training outside that learned in school. (In all cases, the participants had not learned English sufficiently well to pass the IELTS test prior to applying for permanent residency, but, since arriving in New Zealand, all but one had obtained a bond refund). Among those who had not undertaken English language training prior to applying for New Zealand permanent residency, reasons included:

- Insufficient time to learn,
- They decided to wait until coming to New Zealand, where they perceived courses would be relatively inexpensive.
- A dissatisfaction with the quality of English language teaching in their home country.
- A perception that their English language ability would be sufficient to pass the test, so they did not need additional training.

- A perception that their English language ability was so poor - or non-existent - that undertaking English language training would not be worthwhile and would add to the stress of the move, particularly for women.
- A lack of knowledge of the language bond requirement.

Perceptions Of Learning English In New Zealand

Prior to paying the language bond, the majority of participants perceived that it would be easy to learn English in New Zealand. Reasons given included:

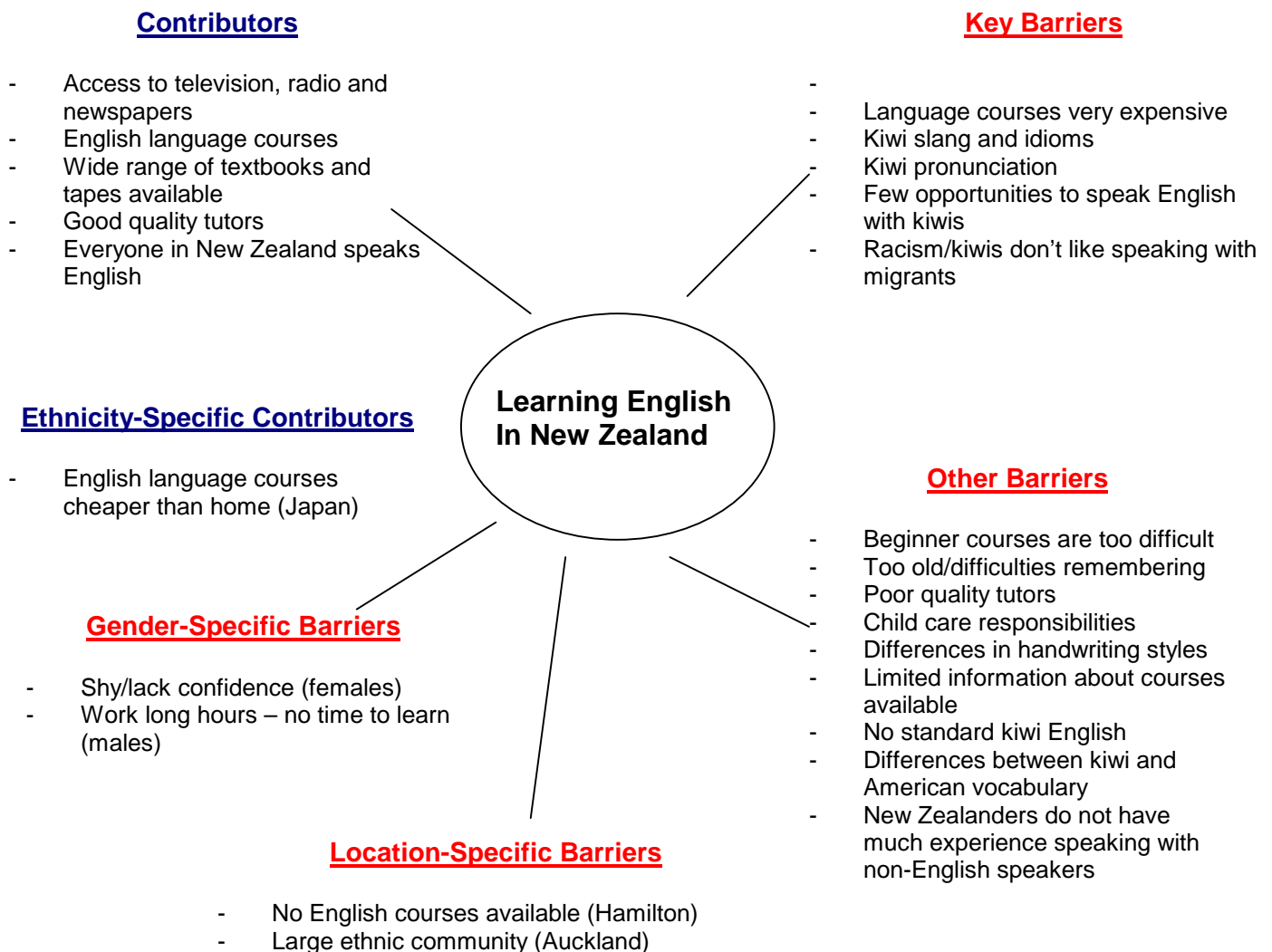
- That English is one of the official languages of New Zealand so they would be exposed to English all the time eg advertising, signs etc.
- The (incorrect) perception that there are few people from their home country in New Zealand so consequently, this would force them to speak English (Japanese, Iraqi and Russian participants in particular).
- Because New Zealand is an English speaking country, English language courses would be readily available and very inexpensive. Some immigration consultants had informed their clients that English language courses were free in New Zealand, while other migrants interviewed believed that, because they had paid the language bond, government funding would be readily available to assist them in learning English in New Zealand.
- A perception that experience in New Zealand, interacting with New Zealanders on a daily basis, would enable them to learn English quickly by learning English from kiwi friends. For young people, being immersed in the New Zealand school environment, and, for migrants intending to work in New Zealand, the perception they would be able to find employment easily in New Zealand, and pick up English from workplace colleagues.
- Because they learned some English in their home country as part of their formal education prior to coming to New Zealand, they would just need to build on this foundation rather than learning the language from scratch.
- Because they have lived in an English-speaking country prior to arrival in New Zealand, they already have basic English language skills.

Unfortunately however, many perceptions that the migrants interviewed had about the ease of learning English in New Zealand, were inconsistent with their experiences once they arrived in the country.

Experiences Of Learning English In New Zealand

Summary Figure 1 outlines the factors which contributed to making English easy to learn, as well as those factors which acted as barriers to non-principal applicants acquiring English skills easily. For the greatest proportion of participants, the general feeling was that it was difficult to learn English in New Zealand. A full description of each of the contributors and barriers identified in the diagram is given in the main report.

Summary Figure 1: Contributors And Barriers To Learning English In New Zealand



Difficulties Associated With Insufficient English

Participants generally agreed that the main difficulty they experienced was understanding New Zealanders, because they speak so fast. Frequently mentioned specific difficulties included:

Settlement Needs

- finding accommodation and communicating with real estate agents and landlords
- getting a telephone installed
- getting Sky TV installed
- making friends with New Zealand neighbours
- knowing where to go and what to do to find employment, difficulties in writing CVs and cover letters and performing well at the job interview
- enrolling children in school

Everyday Activities

- shopping - particularly when asking for information or advice
- reading labels and information on food packages
- banking
- using public transport

Medical And Emergency Services

- going to the doctor or dentist, and communicating with staff while in hospital
- inability to negotiate prices with service providers such as mechanics and tradespeople
- what to do in the case of a traffic accident

5. ESOL Courses

ESOL Course Information Search

Some participants commented that they started looking for information almost immediately after arrival, as they were anxious to get the language bond refunded and realised how time constrained they were. However, other participants did not start looking for information until they had been in New Zealand for some months.

Participants were asked how they found information about language courses. Responses included:

- ethnic community newspapers
- Yellow Pages
- New Zealand Herald
- recommendation/advice of Kiwi friends
- recommendation/advice of ethnic community friends
- immigration consultant
- New Zealand Immigration Service
- local library
- local high schools
- tertiary institutions (universities/polytechnics)

Key Criteria In Selecting A Course

Participants in Auckland and Christchurch generally acknowledged that there were many English courses for them to choose from. By contrast however, participants in Hamilton and Napier reported that there were very few English courses available to them, either IELTS specific or more general English courses.

Those who did have a choice with respect to English language courses available were asked what criteria they used to select their course (Summary Figure 2). Each of the course criteria given are discussed more fully in the main report, along with an explanation of how criteria were allocated to each group.

Summary Figure 2: Criteria For Course Selection

Key Criteria	Secondary Criteria	Other Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course teaches general, not academic English • course teaches things to pass the IELTS test • good quality teachers • home country language staff available • kiwi teachers • cost of course • accessible by public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small classes • full-time courses/part-time courses • day courses • close to home • no waiting list/certainty of classes starting • parking available • suggestion of friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on listening and speaking • emphasis on reading and listening • extra curricular activities • shorter courses • variety of teachers • culturally diverse classes • course content considers interests of students • female teachers available • other students similar age • information easily available

Types Of Course

From discussions with non-principal applicants, those hoping to pass the IELTS exam had undertaken three different types of English language courses:

- community education courses
- IELTS – specific courses at private institutions or tertiary institutions
- language courses for overseas students at private institutions

Community Education Courses

(Typically those provided by high schools.)

Strengths of community education courses included:

- Very inexpensive relative to privately-provided courses.
- Emphasis in course content was on teaching everyday English.
- Classes tended to be practical in nature - role-playing etc.

- Courses could be provided close to student's home.
- Both day and evening courses were usually available.
- Development of confidence in using English in every day situations

Weaknesses of community education courses included:

- Class sizes tended to be larger than those of private institutions – could be up to 20 students.
- Courses are only offered during school term time.
- No entry test – consequently it was difficult for students to find the appropriate class, and the range of abilities within one class tended to be greater than for other course types.
- Courses were seldom full-time, typically only 2 hours a day.
- Little or no assistance was available to those wishing to prepare for the IELTS test.
- Courses did not always have native English speaking tutors.
- Some students may have had different motivations for doing the course – to fill in time, to socialise with others from their home country etc.
- Some evidence of racial tension between migrants and high school students

IELTS Course

Strengths of IELTS courses included:

- Small class sizes - generally between 5 and 10 students.
- Taught skills and techniques necessary to pass IELTS test.
- Both full- and part-time courses were available.
- Range of course lengths were available.

Weaknesses of IELTS courses included:

- Courses tended to be provided in inner city – implications for parking.
- Courses were typically expensive.
- Courses tended to function like a finishing course for those who had been learning English for some time; not suitable for those with no English background
- Could be conflict between those wanting to do general IELTS and those wanting to do academic IELTS test.

Language Courses For Overseas Students

Strengths of language courses for overseas students included:

- Typically well resourced.
- Small class sizes – generally between 5 and 10.

Weaknesses of language courses for overseas students included:

- Overseas students were interested in home country topics and issues, while the migrants interviewed were more interested in New Zealand topics and issues. This indicates some potential for conflict.
- Courses were typically expensive.
- Majority of students tended to be younger.
- Majority of students placed emphasis on grammar, sentence structure etc.
- Little assistance was available for those wishing to prepare for the IELTS test.

Universal strengths of all ESOL courses included:

- Improvement/development in English vocabulary.
- Particularly for women, the feeling of being a student again, and of being independent of their children and husband, even if only for part of the day.
- Positive reinforcement from tutors and other students, resulting in greater confidence in using English.

Universal weaknesses of all ESOL courses identified by participants included:

- The course was too classroom-based.
- The fact that the teachers changed so often. Participants commented that New Zealanders all have different accents and ways of speaking and that it was difficult if the tutor changed too often.
- Some teachers had poor knowledge of the IELTS curriculum and were inexperienced in preparing students for the test.
- Some teachers did not appear to be well qualified and experienced in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Value For Money Of Course

An assessment of whether the course taken could be considered value for money is strongly dependent on whether the student enrolled to learn everyday English, or to pass the IELTS test. Among those who had enrolled in a community education course, almost all considered these to be good value for money to the extent that they taught students everyday English for a very low price. However, the community education courses appeared to do little to directly prepare students to sit the IELTS test, and consequently, they were considered poor value for money by participants whose key objective was to pass the test.

By comparison, among those who had taken an IELTS course, there was a perception that these were poor value for money with regard to learning everyday English. However, attitudes were mixed as to whether IELTS courses were actually good value for money in teaching what was needed to pass the test.

6. The IELTS Test

Timing And Participation Issues

The IELTS test can only be sat once every 3 months. This essentially means that candidates only had one opportunity to get all their money back - and this opportunity may have arisen only two months into their three month "full refund" period. In addition, because the test is offered so infrequently, each sitting was often over-subscribed, particularly in Auckland. Auckland students who did not undertake an IELTS-specific course often found that, when they enrolled to take the test, there were no available places, and they were consequently forced to travel to Hamilton.

Appropriateness Of The IELTS Test

When asked whether they felt the IELTS test was an appropriate means of assessing a migrant's proficiency in English, the general consensus was that it was not. A significant number of participants commented that, while they had passed the IELTS test, they still lacked a good command of everyday English.

Older participants felt that the structure and content of the test discriminated against them because they had not had recent experience in sitting a formal examination. Other participants were critical of the test, stating that it was just too difficult for those who have had little or no prior exposure to English. Participants felt that the test was inappropriately difficult, particularly for those migrants interviewed who did not intend to work in New Zealand.

Inappropriate Topics

One of the greatest criticisms levelled at the IELTS test was the cultural inappropriateness of the topics. Participants commented that the topics tended to be very specific and often required quite an extensive vocabulary in a narrowly defined area. Participants commented that the test topics required candidates to have considerable general knowledge about western concepts and ideas. This could be difficult if the candidate had lived in Asia or Eastern Europe all their lives.

Components Assessment

One common theme was dissatisfaction with the requirement that each of the four components of the test - reading, writing, listening comprehension and speaking - must all be passed to a level of 5.0 in the same test. Participants suggested that a fairer means of assessment would be to allow candidates to re-sit only the components that they had previously failed.

7. The Refund Process

For the most part, those who had applied for, and received refunds from, the Immigration Service were happy with the process. However, one key criticism raised with respect to the refund process was that, in some cases, it had taken up to four weeks to obtain the refund money. Participants felt that this was too long. Other issues raised by a small group of participants with respect to the refund process included:

- The time taken to have enquiries answered if the participant visited the Immigration Service office in person.
- Those who paid the language bond in their home country would have liked to have been able to obtain the refund there as well. This was particularly the case where the husband was still doing business in the home country.

8. Conclusions

The primary aim of this project has been to explore the experience of 24 migrants who had paid the non-principal application English language bond. For non-principal applicants who took part in this discussion, the perceptions and experiences regarding the English language bond were predominantly negative. The following key issues were identified as having negatively impacted on their experience of paying the English language bond as part of their application requirements.

1. The variability in the amount and quality of information supplied to prospective migrants regarding how the language bond operated and learning English in New Zealand.
2. The high dollar amount of the language bond.
3. The perception that the bond discriminated against Asians (who tend to have little or no background in English prior to arrival), older migrants (who are unlikely to have any recent experience in sitting formal examinations), and female migrants (who tend to be more susceptible to stress, due both to the pressures of moving to a new country away from family and friends and of learning English in a short period of time).
4. Difficulties in passing the IELTS test in the time given to gain either a full or partial refund.
5. The time lapse before commencing English language tuition in New Zealand.
6. That IELTS courses did not provide sufficient training in everyday English to be useful, whilst community education courses did not provide sufficient specific skills to pass the IELTS test.
7. The IELTS test could only be sat once every three months.
8. The IELTS tests were often over-subscribed, forcing participants to travel out of town to sit, or wait a further three months.
9. The components and topics in the test were not related to everyday English and were culture-specific.

Addressing even some of these issues is likely to have positive impacts on the experiences of subsequent migrants applying for residency under the General Skills category.

The first key objective of this research was to document the views of the migrants interviewed about the English language bond and its impact on their immigration decision. For the most part, the English language bond requirement appeared to have had no significant impact on participants' decision to move to New Zealand, although, for migrants from some countries, the \$20,000 outlay required could impact on how quickly they could pay for English courses.

Migrants interviewed acknowledged that the bond had some positive aspects in that it encouraged them to enrol in an English course, and the bond may have provided funding for the additional services they and their family required for overcoming language difficulties. However, participants reported a greater number of negative aspects of the bond. The key detractors of the bond were the high dollar amount, the emphasis placed on passing the IELTS test which did not encourage migrants to learn everyday English, and the misconception prior to arrival that the bond was to be used to fund their language training in New Zealand.

The second key objective of this research was to assess the effectiveness of the English language bond as an incentive to encourage migrants to learn English. From the interviews undertaken with non-principal applicants, it was evident that the language bond currently acts as an incentive for migrants to attempt to sit and pass the test so that they might be able to obtain a full or partial refund of their bond. Indeed, of the 24 participants, 17 had attempted to sit the IELTS test at least once.

However, because of the level of difficulty, and academic nature of the test, it cannot be said that the bond acting as an incentive to sit the test is congruous to acting as an incentive to learn English. Indeed, as verbatim comments in the main report have indicated, some participants forwent the opportunity to learn everyday English in favour of learning the skills and techniques required to pass the test. Consequently, while, upon arrival, the language bond was perceived by some migrants as an incentive to learn English, in reality, because of the time requirements to receive a refund, the bond currently acts primarily as an incentive to encourage migrants to pass the IELTS test.

The third key objective of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the experiences a group of migrants have had in finding and taking part in English language courses. The key issues for the migrants interviewed with respect to finding and taking part in English language courses related to the time restrictions for gaining a refund, and the fact that there was such a sharp distinction between everyday English language courses and IELTS-specific courses. While participants commented that they had little difficulty in finding information about English language courses available, the key issue with respect to information search was that many started looking for information too late (because of the time taken to establish in New Zealand). In a number of cases, by the time they had found a suitable course, enrolled, waited for the course to start and taken part in the classes, the three month time limit for a full refund had passed. Consequently, some participants had had to opt for a partial refund only.

The second key issue with respect to finding and taking part in ESOL courses is the clear distinction between everyday English courses and IELTS courses. Because migrants interviewed were anxious to get their language bond refunded, their key objective was to pass the IELTS test and consequently, an IELTS course was the preferred choice for most participants. However, while these students may have learned the skills and techniques needed to pass the test, they were often dissatisfied with the lack of improvement in their everyday English. By contrast, those who had chosen to take an everyday English course - or were forced to take one because IELTS courses were over-subscribed or too expensive - were satisfied with the improvements in their English language proficiency, but generally lacked the skills required to pass the test. As a result of this distinction in course emphasis, few participants were totally satisfied with the English language course they had taken.

Finally, with respect to the fourth objective, the research identified that, where English language skills were insufficient, the migrants interviewed had experienced a wide variety of difficulties upon encountering every day situations. Most participants reported some degree of difficulty with such everyday activities as shopping, banking, using professional services, dealing with tradespeople and using public transport. This result suggests that English proficiency is indeed a key to the successful settlement of new residents, and that a lack of English skills could be costly, both for the migrant and the community they live in (as suggested in the 1995 Immigration Policy changes). Consequently, the use of some form of incentive to encourage migrants to “rapidly acquire basic English language skills”¹ is still warranted.

¹ New Zealand’s Targeted Immigration Policies: Summary Of October 1995 Policy Changes: July 1995

Other issues raised by this research which could warrant further investigation included:

- The appropriateness of the IELTS test as a means of assessing English. Participants commented that the current test should be modified to address the non-principal applicants' competency in using English in every day situations such as shopping, banking, using the telephone etc.
- The frequency of opportunities to sit the IELTS test. Offering candidates the opportunity to sit the test more often than once every three months would ensure candidates have more opportunities to gain a full refund, and that each sitting is less likely to be over-subscribed
- The quality and amount of information provided to those who use immigration consultants. Participants who used an immigration consultant suggested that consultants needed to be more responsible for the information they provide to clients. Participants commented that, had they been more informed about the language bond, the importance of English in New Zealand and learning English in New Zealand, they would have started searching for ESOL course information sooner, and may have been able to get a greater refund

1. INTRODUCTION

In response to New Zealand's poor economic performance in the 1970s, and in line with the Fourth Labour Government's commitment to liberalisation, a comprehensive investigation of New Zealand's immigration policy took place in 1986. As a result, New Zealand dropped its "favoured nation" policy, and migrants with skills to fill New Zealand's labour market gaps were encouraged to move to New Zealand through the use of the occupational priority list. In 1991, the "points system" (General category) was introduced, its focus being on the development of New Zealand's human capital. This scheme emphasised the selection of migrants on the basis of academic qualification, work experience, age and settlement factors. What resulted under both these policies was an influx of well qualified, tertiary educated migrants, a significant proportion of whom emigrated from countries where English is not widely spoken.

However, research in both New Zealand and overseas has identified that language has a key role in determining the extent to which a new migrant is able to successfully integrate into a new culture. Indeed, language has been found to influence the choice of occupation, the type of organisations which are joined, the nature of social and recreational activities participated in, often the place of residence, and ultimately, the friends made.² Consequently, an inability to communicate in the host country language - in this case, English - can result in migrants experiencing difficulties meeting their physical, economic and social needs in New Zealand, as well as having notable cost implications for the New Zealand economy.

The importance of having a good command of English was noted by immigration authorities in 1987, and subsequently integrated into policies.

*"... to understand [the] ... rules and make their place in their new homeland, it is important that [migrants] should have adequate English language skills and thus be able to communicate with the wider New Zealand community."*³

² Boyer, Tania (1996) *Instant Kiwis? A Study Of The Migration And Adaptation Of The Auckland Taiwan's Community*. MA Thesis. Department Of Geography, University Of Auckland: Auckland.

³ Immigration Act 1987, para.3.2.9, cited in Bedford, R.D, RSJ Farmer and A.D. Trlin (1987) *The Immigration Policy Review 1986: A Review*. New Zealand Population Review 13 (1) p.49-70

In 1986, immigration policy stipulated that any migrants over the age of 12, applying under the OPL or Business categories, must have English language skills. In 1991, immigration requirements were modified so that principal applicants only were required to have English language skills. (For those applying under the Business Investment Category, any adult member of the family was required to have English language skills). Immigration Officers made a subjective judgement, based on an interview, as to whether an applicant's English language ability was at least that of an 11-year-old person from an English language background.

In October 1995, among the adjustments made to immigration policy was the introduction of more comprehensive English language requirements for non-principal applicants, the introduction of the use of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test for assessing English language ability, and the introduction of an English language bond. Under this current policy, all applicants aged 16 and over applying for entry under both the General Skills and Business Investor Categories are required to pass level 5 of the IELTS test (level 4 for Business Investor migrants). Non-principal applicants who cannot attain this level of English can instead pay a \$20,000 bond, refundable in full if the required level can be achieved in 3 months and 70% refundable if the required level can be achieved in 12 months of arrival in New Zealand.

The language bond was intended to act as a strong incentive for applicants to learn English offshore or within a short time-frame after their arrival in New Zealand. Up to October 1997, approximately 236 bonds have been paid by non-principal applicants in and outside New Zealand, with 45 bonds having been refunded or partially refunded.

This research explores the experiences of a group of migrants who have paid the non-principal applicant English language bond.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this project is to explore, in depth, the experiences of a group of migrants who have paid the non-principal applicant English language bond as part of their application requirements.

The key objectives of this project are to:

- Document migrants' views about the English language bond (strengths and weaknesses), and its impact (if any) on their immigration decision.
- Assess the effectiveness of the English language bond as an incentive to encourage migrants to learn English.
- Gain a greater understanding of the experiences migrants have in finding and taking part in English language courses.
- Identify difficulties migrants have in living in New Zealand without sufficient English language ability.

Note:

One of the key objectives outlined above is to document migrants' views about the English language bond, and in particular, to assess the impact the bond has had on their immigration decision. However, this research project only includes those who have made the commitment to pay the English language bond. This research does not consult with those potential migrants who may have initially decided to come to New Zealand but were deterred by the language bond and ultimately did not migrate to New Zealand.

In addition, it should also be noted that this research did not consult with those migrants who paid the language bond off-shore if the non-principal applicant(s) have yet to apply for a refund. Consequently, those participants for whom no action has yet been taken towards obtaining a refund, or those from whom the 12 month time restrictions has expired, all paid the language bond in New Zealand. There is also a limitation in our ability to assess the impact of the bond in acting as an incentive to migrants learning English before making their application.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology And Sample Description

The information contained in this report was obtained from a series of in-depth interviews with non-principal applicants who had paid the English language bond. In-depth interviews offer the advantages of being able to address complex issues, such as those related to immigration, and to gain an understanding of the motivations and attitudes which lie behind behaviour. In contrast to other qualitative methodologies such as focus groups, in-depth interviews also offer the advantage of being able to tailor the discussion to the background, experience and concerns of the participants, and participants' responses are less likely to be influenced by the views and behaviour of others present. In addition, where issues of confidentiality may be important (as in this study), participants are more likely to share their views in a one-on-one situation.

The key drawback of in-depth interviews is that participants may be shy and reluctant to contribute fully to the discussion. This is particularly an issue where the participant may experience difficulties communicating in English. However, a reluctance to communicate was overcome in this study through the use of interviewer/translators who are able to speak the participant's native language. These interviewers/translators accompanied the executive interviewer to the interview and provided assistance in translating questions and responses as necessary. The use of multi-lingual recruiters also helped put participants at their ease. Probing was also used throughout the discussion to draw out as much information from participants as possible.

Contact details of participants were obtained from the New Zealand Immigration Service database which records non-principal applicant bond payments by branch. Participants were selected from lists of those who had either received refunds, or whose language bond had been paid in New Zealand. In total, 75 names were supplied. (Appendix 1 outlines the status of the sample). In selecting participants, care was taken to ensure the sample included participants who had different levels of refund status as well as first languages. In total, 24 interviews were undertaken, with the following sample distribution being obtained:

Refund Status

• Full refund obtained	7
• Partial refund obtained	7
• Time expired before refund could be obtained	6
• No action taken yet toward obtaining a refund	4

Country Of Origin

• South Korea	7
• Japan	5
• People's Republic Of China	5
• Iraq	2
• Taiwan	1
• Hong Kong	1
• Thailand	1
• India	1
• Russia	1

The majority of English language bond payments have been made in Auckland consequently, the greatest share of interviews were conducted there. However, experience with migrant groups reveals that settlement experiences can differ significantly by geographic location. Consequently, interviews were also conducted in Hamilton, Napier and Christchurch. The geographic distribution is outlined below:

Geographic Location

• Auckland	17
• Hamilton	4
• Christchurch	2
• Napier	1

Participants were generally interviewed in their own home (2 preferring to be interviewed at Forsyte offices and 1 at an inner city hotel). Interviews took between 45 minutes and one and a half hours to complete, the time being dependent on the participant's language ability and the extent to which they had attempted to obtain a refund. Interviews were conducted with the non-principal applicant, although, in most cases, the principal applicant was also present and was encouraged to take part in the discussion. Eighteen of the non-principal applicants were female while seven were male.

For most interviews in Auckland and one in Hamilton, a multi-lingual interviewer accompanied the executive interviewer to assist with translation. A topic guide was used to direct the interview. However, free discussion was also encouraged in order to pursue issues specific to particular language groups or locations. A copy of the topic guide can be found in the appendix to this report.

Use Of Immigration Consultants

Of the 24 participants interviewed, 12 had used an immigration consultant, either in New Zealand or in their home country, to help them gain New Zealand permanent residency. Reasons for using a consultant include:

- Perception by participant family that their English proficiency was insufficient to be able to understand and complete all the documentation required themselves.
- Friends or family already in New Zealand had used the services of the same immigration consultant.
- Because of work-related requirements, the approval process needed to be sped up.

As will be discussed subsequently, whether a participant family has used an immigration consultant to help them get New Zealand permanent residency has implications for:

- How informed they are about what the language bond actually is, and their requirements with respect to paying the bond.
- How informed they are about the procedures required to get the language bond refunded.
- In some cases, their perceptions of how important it is to have a good command of English in New Zealand.
- In some cases, what English courses participants will ultimately enrol in.

These implications will be discussed more fully in the following sections.

3.2 Report Outline

Section 4: The English Language Bond

This section documents the migrants' views about the English Language bond, and its impact on their immigration decision. The section begins by assessing how informed the migrants interviewed are about the language bond, and where they source their information. The section then investigates the impact the bond had on the migrants' decision to apply for New Zealand permanent residency and their views as to the positive and negative aspects of the bond. The section concludes by assessing the migrants' views to the current time restrictions given for gaining a full or partial refund.

Section 5: Learning English In New Zealand

This section investigates the experiences of the migrants interviewed in learning English in New Zealand. The section begins with a brief analysis of the English background of participants and their perceived importance of English proficiency in New Zealand. The section then contrasts migrants' perceptions of learning English in New Zealand with their actual experiences of learning English here. The section concludes by identifying some of the difficulties migrants have in living in New Zealand without sufficient English language ability.

Section 6: ESOL Courses

This section investigates the experiences migrants have in finding and taking part in English language courses. The section begins by assessing how the migrants interviewed find out about courses and, where there is more than one course available, how migrants interviewed select between courses. The section then moves to investigate migrants' attitudes to the courses undertaken, with an assessment of whether they were considered value for money and useful.

Section 7: The IELTS Test

This section specifically addresses the migrants' view of the IELTS test. The section begins by addressing issues relating to timing, participation and the logistics of actually taking part in the test. The section then assesses the appropriateness of the current test as a means of evaluating migrant's proficiency in English, particularly in relation to the standard required and the appropriateness of the topics. The section concludes with the migrants' suggestions for how the test might be improved to make it more appropriate.

Section 8: The Refund Process

This section investigates the migrants' experiences with the refund process.

A Note On Verbatim Comments

Throughout this report, verbatim comments have been used to illustrate points and to add colour to the text. Whilst these comments have been made by individuals, they have been selected as being indicative of a broader feeling expressed by participants. Each comment has been annotated with the refund status of the participant.

4. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOND

This section documents the interviewed migrants' views about the English Language bond, and its impact on their immigration decision. The section begins by assessing how informed they are about the language bond, and where they source their information. The section then investigates the impact the bond had on the migrants' decision to apply for New Zealand permanent residency and their views as to the positive and negative aspects of the bond. The section concludes by assessing the interviewed migrants' views of the current time restrictions given for gaining a full or partial refund.

4.1 Information Provision

In order to assess how informed the migrants interviewed are about the language bond and where they currently source their information, participants were asked what they knew about the bond and how they found out about it. Participants were also asked if there was anything they had not been told at the time they paid their bond, but felt they should have been.

For the most part, it appears that those who applied for permanent residency and paid the language bond in New Zealand are the best informed as to how the language bond operates. For the most part, these participants did not use an immigration consultant; rather they used the information supplied by the New Zealand Immigration Service. These participants have an accurate knowledge of their obligations regarding the bond and generally do not feel that there is anything they should have been told but were not:

“No, I don’t think there is anything [Immigration Service] didn’t tell me. I think they gave me quite good details, yes.” (No Action Taken)

“The information we got was from the leaflets that we got from the [Immigration Service]. I think we got what we needed from that really.” (Partial Refund)

The only complaint those who deal directly with New Zealand Immigration Service have relates to finding information about where to go to sit the IELTS test. Participants comment that they feel the Immigration Service should be able to advise migrants on this:

“We wanted information about the IELTS test, how to apply and how the test was going to be held or where to apply and who is in charge of the test. First we asked the Immigration [Service] but they had no idea. We got told to take our documents to the Immigration Service office and then we went there and the officer told me she had no idea where I should go [to do the test]. She just recommended us to pick up the Yellow Pages.” (Full Refund)

However, for participants who applied for permanent residency overseas, the provision of information is a more significant issue. Some participants comment that, when they first applied for permanent residency, their immigration consultant had not informed them about the language requirement. Participants feel that this is because the consultant did not know about it or did not understand how it operated. In some cases, while participants agree that they would have come to New Zealand anyway, they found out about the language bond too late to take it into consideration:

“When we first applied for immigration, we didn’t need to take the test at first, so we sent all our furniture from Japan to New Zealand. The next day the consultant, she said to me, you have to take the language test, so we had to take it.” (Time Expired)

“We got information from a consultant in Hong Kong. Before we applied for immigration, we didn’t know about the foreign language fee. We actually started applying for immigration and then we got information from the consultant in Hong Kong, you have to pass the English test according to the new policy.” (Full Refund)

Some participants who were supplied with information about the language bond by consultants state that the information they received was not accurate:

“They told me that the language bond is for people who can’t speak English to live in New Zealand. Because these people cause a lot of trouble for other New Zealanders, the bond is like a fine or something. They say the bond is a fine or something, like money for putting a lot of trouble for other people.” (Time Expired)

“I thought the period to get all the money back was six months, so when I sat the test, I thought I would get back all the money, but I only got back \$14,000. I heard in Korea that you have six months.” (Partial Refund)

“When I came to New Zealand, I thought I had two years to prepare my English. I think two years, but I found out no, it’s only one year. If I don’t pass within one year, I get nothing.” (Partial Refund)

One participant family comments that, because their immigration consultant had not been well informed of the operation of the language bond, they had paid the bond unnecessarily, and were now experiencing difficulties in getting the money refunded. Both partners had received Bachelors degrees in the 1970s from a university where the main medium of instruction was English. However, since finishing University, the wife’s English had deteriorated and she was unable to pass the IELTS test and so the language bond was paid by her husband, as the principal applicant. However, upon arrival, while searching for information on an unrelated matter, they found the clause in the immigration policy stating that those who have a tertiary qualification from an institution where the main medium of instruction is English can have the bond waived. Upon finding this information, the family applied to the Immigration Service to have their situation re-evaluated. It was agreed that the family should not have had to pay the language bond. However, four months on, they have still not received a full refund of their language bond. The family are disgruntled, firstly that their consultant was not sufficiently informed to pick up that this clause applied to the family, and secondly, that the Immigration Service had not picked up that they did not have to pay the language bond when they were approving their residency application.

4.2 Impact Of Bond On Immigration Decision

One of the key aims of this research is to gain an understanding of the impact the language bond has had on interviewed migrants' decision to move to New Zealand. While this section addresses the comments made by study participants in response to this question, it is important to acknowledge that this research project only includes those who have made the commitment to pay the English language bond - and have paid the bond in New Zealand. This research did not include those potential migrants who may have initially decided to come to New Zealand but were deterred by the language bond and ultimately did not migrate to New Zealand, or those who paid the language bond offshore and have not yet obtained a refund.

In all cases, those participants interviewed state that having to pay the language bond had not ultimately deterred them from immigrating to New Zealand. In many cases, the reasons for wanting to leave their home country (or not wanting to return if they had already left) were greater than the negative aspects associated with the language bond. If family members were already located in New Zealand, this strongly enhanced the attractiveness of this country and may override the negative aspects of the bond significantly.

“My two daughters really wanted to move to another country so it was easy to make the decision to settle here. My two sisters also live here already. Of course nobody wants to pay the money, but the children were very strong in wanting to move to another country so we decided to come here.” (Partial Refund)

“I think that the bond is quite big money, but compared to the cost of rebuilding our house in Japan, it's OK.” (Earthquake victim, Time Expired)

“If the bond had been twice as much, I would still pay anyway because to bring up my children in New Zealand is the most important thing. Even if it was twice as expensive, I will pay.” (Time Expired)

“The \$20,000 English bond doesn’t affect my decision to come to New Zealand because I had already decided that this country is where I want to stay. It is good for the family so it doesn’t matter whether we have to pay the \$20,000 or not.” (No Action Taken)

“The language bond didn’t make me think about not coming, not at all. After my husband failed the test, we had to pay, but we knew that before we took part in the test so we don’t care a lot about that. We just pay.” (Full Refund)

In the case of some cultures, where the non-principal applicant is female, the fact that the language bond had to be paid does not impact on their decision to move as they feel obliged to follow their husband regardless:

“Because my husband very want to come to New Zealand so I have to obey him.” (Partial Refund)

In some cases, a lack of knowledge about the language bond requirements means that the immigration decision was not impacted. Indeed, in a small number of cases, the non-principal applicant had not been told anything about the language bond prior to immigration, and the bond had been paid without them knowing. Having subsequently found out about the bond, this group feel that their partner initially did not tell them about the bond because they knew they would be likely to resist coming to New Zealand:

“When we were in Korea, [my husband] didn’t tell me about the fee. I think my husband might have been worried about my opposition. My husband thought may be I wouldn’t come.” (Partial Refund)

However, while all participants comment that the language bond was not a sufficient disincentive to discourage them from immigrating to New Zealand, many could cite cases of others from their home country who had been discouraged from immigrating, either because the dollar amount of the bond was prohibitive or because they believed the bond to be a form of discrimination against them:

“There are a lot of migrants who can enter under the General Skills category, they have a Bachelors degree or a master’s degree, but they probably don’t have enough money. I think maybe they cannot afford to come.” (Full Refund)

“I remember when I paid the money in the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing, I met a couple from the north eastern part of China. They were so surprised that I could pay the \$14,000 US dollars for that fee. They were so surprised.” (Full Refund)

“People coming from China, coming to New Zealand cannot pass the test, they just lose the money and because right now I have friends and they can’t come here because they don’t have money and they can’t pass the test.” (No Action Taken)

4.3 Perceived Positive Aspects Of The Language Bond

Participants were able to identify a number of positive aspects of the language bond.

4.3.1 Incentive To Learn English Quickly

Some participants acknowledge that the English language bond acted as an incentive to learn English more quickly than they would have, had they not had to pay the bond:

“When I came here, I did an English course and maybe if I had not paid the bond I wouldn’t have gone and attended that course. When you decide to get back something, you work harder for it. Yes, I think it is better to learn more quickly.” (Partial Refund)

“Honestly I would have studied English hard if I didn’t have to do the exam. If I don’t have to take the exam, I still study, but I would take longer.” (Partial Refund)

“One thing [about the fee] that is good is, through this opportunity, I have had learned English completely so this is good for me because I should learn English and my English has improved, so that is good for me.” (Partial Refund)

4.3.2 Overcome Barrier To Employment

Participants acknowledge that one of the key barriers to obtaining employment in New Zealand is an inability to communicate in English. Consequently, the language bond is seen as an incentive to help migrants overcome this barrier so that they might become self-supporting as quickly as possible.

“I know a lot of Russian people here who get [Government] benefits because they can’t find a job because their English is no good. This is the main problem for them, and so I think people should know the language.” (No Action Taken)

4.3.3 Indication Of Importance Of English Proficiency In New Zealand

Some participants comment that the language bond acts as a signal to potential migrants of how important it is for them to know English when living in New Zealand. Participants comment, that because the bond is so substantial, it forces prospective migrants who do not speak English well to think about whether New Zealand will be suitable for them.

“I think that, if there was no English foreign language bond for those migrants who cannot pass the test, those who cannot speak English very well or cannot understand will come, and how will they live in another country? I think it’s important to tell those migrants, to press on them to improve their English and it will make their lives in another country easier.” (Full Refund)

“There is a good aspect to the fee, it gives migrants the impression that you must have English skills.” (No Action Taken)

4.3.4 Extra Services For Those With Language Difficulties

A small number of migrants interviewed do acknowledge that the language bond is needed to fund some of the additional assistance they and their families receive as a result of the difficulties they experience resulting from limited English proficiency. The most frequently mentioned assistance is ESOL teachers in schools:

“I have got children and, because they can’t speak English, they may have an extra teacher, which costs money for the government. The money goes to help my children in the primary school.” (Time Expired)

4.4 Perceived Negative Aspects Of The Language Bond

All participants were able to identify at least one negative aspect of the language bond.

4.4.1 Cost Of Bond

The most frequently mentioned criticism participants have of the language bond is the actual dollar amount. Most participants feel that \$20,000 is too much:

“Now I have to save to get the money back. I can’t eat, I can’t do anything, just save money at the bank. Even working in New Zealand, you can’t [save] \$20,000 a year. It’s a lot of money. You can’t save that much because you pay tax, pay GST on everything, so maybe it will take me 4 years to save, 10 years, and also I have to support my son too.” (Time Expired)

Some migrants interviewed comment that the high dollar amount required gives prospective migrants the impression that the New Zealand government is encouraging the immigration of wealthy migrants rather than those who can really benefit the country:

“If you have the money, you can come here, if you don’t have the money, no way. That is a very clear kind of message. [The government] don’t care if the people are useful or not useful. Some people come here and they don’t work, they don’t need to work because they have so much money, They can just take some benefit from the government. But we don’t take anything from the government, we work for ourselves, we support ourselves.” (No Action Taken)

Some participants believe (incorrectly) that, if they had been approved under the Business Migrant category, they would not have had to pay the language bond⁴. Some participants comment that this perceived difference in policy essentially discriminates against the less wealthy prospective migrants, and sends a message that New Zealand wants migrants with a lot of money, rather than those who want to start a new life contributing to a new country:

“It is unfair to collect \$20,000 from us when some people, if they have enough money to settle here, \$750,000, they don’t have to sit the English test and they don’t have to pay the fee. It’s not fair. Why do they not need to know English? I think the Government just wants their money, they don’t care if they can’t speak English. But because I don’t have enough money, they make me pay the fee. That’s not fair.” (No Action Taken)

4.4.2 Exchange Rate Impacts On Bond

The 24 participants in the study were also critical of the fact that, if they applied for permanent residency in their home country, they had to pay the language bond in US dollars - but are always refunded in New Zealand dollars. Participants comment that, over the year it may take them to pass the IELTS test, the fluctuations in exchanges rates have meant that they have lost money.

Recent migrants from Asia in the group interviewed also comment that, as a result of the recent financial crisis there, the US dollar is now worth twice as much in their currency as it was a year ago. Consequently, the language bond is now twice as expensive as it would have been had they immigrated one year earlier:

“The bond is too much, especially for Asian people now because of the currency changes. It is double the price now.” (No Action Taken)

⁴ In fact, the English language requirements are the same for Business Investor migrants as for General Category migrants, although a recent change has been that a lower level of IELTS (Level 4) is now required for Business Investor migrants.

4.4.3 Misconceptions About What Bond Is Used For

Some participants comment that, when they initially paid the language bond, they had assumed that this money would be used to cover, or at least to subsidise, their English language training in New Zealand (this group are typically those who used an immigration consultant to assist with obtaining permanent residency). However, as all have subsequently found out, this is not the case. Participants are consequently critical of the government, claiming that it forces migrants to pay the bond but then will not do anything to assist them to learn English. In this way, participants state that the \$20,000 is not really a language “fee” because it is not paying for anything. Rather, it is just another settlement cost they have to pay:

“I don’t know exactly how they spend that money, what the Government uses the money for. They never told us how the Government will use the money. I have no idea. I think they just take it.” (Time Expired)

“I very strongly complain about the \$20,000. It’s called a language fee, but when I failed the examination, I didn’t get any money back, but that is because I didn’t have any support for learning [English] language in New Zealand. I studied for five or six months preparing for the IELTS test but I paid my own money to study. So it’s not a language bond because you don’t get anything back.” (Time Expired)

“The brochure told me it was just a bond or something, but I felt after one year that bond is gone so now I think it was a kind of payment or charge or something.” (Time Expired)

“If they are going to take the \$20,00, the money should be used to improve, to help migrants. The Ministry should use it for these kinds of purposes, like having free courses, free English courses. The bond should be to help [migrants] pass, and not to punish them.” (No Action Taken)

“I thought that the \$20,000 is to help the migrant to study English, but later I find it is not the case. The \$20,000 is just collected by the government. If you have to study English you have to pay for that as well. To me, because you already pay \$20,000 this \$20,000 should [enable] you to study English in New Zealand for free, but it’s not the case. I had to pay \$7,000 for the last year to study English. If the government is going to take \$20,000 for the migrant to get English skills, they should be able to provide the resources for him to study freely in New Zealand.” (No Action Taken)

Some migrants interviewed comment that perhaps the government need the money for something else, and are using migrants as a quick way to generate revenue:

“For me, I don’t know the aim of the \$20,000. Maybe they want the money for something else so they force us to get the test quickly so they can have the money.” (No Action Taken)

4.4.4 Discrimination Against Asian Migrants

Some Asian migrants interviewed comment that they feel the language bond is essentially a discriminatory tax used to keep those who can’t speak English out of New Zealand. Asians comment that, because they had only had limited exposure to English in their home country, the tax directly discriminates against them in particular:

“The new immigration law adding the English language bond is aiming to control the number of Asian migrants coming here.” (Time Expired)

“For the South Africans and the British, the test is no problem. That is why I think the test should be in Maori and that way, it would be equal. To test us in English, it’s not fair and it’s a bad welcome for Asians.” (No Action Taken)

“I am very curious how the government use that amount of money. As far as I know, the regulation is to protect immigration or to stop immigration, I heard the New Zealand government doesn’t want to increase new migrants from Asia.” (Full Refund)

Those Asians interviewed who have lived in other countries prior to coming to New Zealand comment that in no other country did they need to sit an English test to gain entry or pay a language bond.⁵ Participants feel that this is further evidence that the language bond requirement is based on any rational reasoning:

“When I got the news I would have to pay the fee, I was upset and I wanted to go back to the United States. I didn’t want to stay here, it’s racial discrimination. I have got my green card in the United States and nobody asked me for a language test and I stayed there for 8 years and I can make money there. My English is OK and they can understand it and we can communicate.” (No Action Taken)

⁵ However, it should be noted that Australia does indeed have an English language test requirement for prospective migrants

4.4.5 Impact On Impressions Overseas

Participants comment that the negative aspects of the language bond component of New Zealand's immigration policy not only have detrimental effects on migrants, but the policy could be harming New Zealand's tourism industry. Participants feel that, through comments made to family and friends in their home country, potential visitors may get the impression that the New Zealand government is money-hungry, and discriminates against those who do not speak English:

“For New Zealand tourism, the language bond is a bad message. It says to [visitors] oh, I won't come. It's a terrible message. I think the government is losing a lot. I think the government is losing more than it is getting. Think about the bad [publicity] in the international world. It is a terrible message that the government is a money hunter, and also that it discriminates against Asian people.” (No Action Taken)

4.4.6 Disincentive For Learning Everyday English

Participants all comment that the IELTS test is not a realistic test of an migrants' command of everyday English; rather, success in the test is related more to exam technique. Consequently, as will be discussed in Section 6, when selecting an English language course, non-principal applicants will opt for a course which teaches them the skills and examination techniques they need to pass the test, rather than a course which builds on their everyday vocabulary. Consequently, participants acknowledge that, in this way, the use of the IELTS test actually acts as a disincentive to learn everyday English, the English migrants need for everyday situations such as shopping, going to the doctor, banking etc:

“If I hadn't had to pay the fee, I think I would have learned more about everyday things, everyday English.” (Partial Refund)

“If I had not had to pay the English fee, I would have still paid the money to learn English, but there would be no pressure for me to learn. Because I paid the bond and I wanted to get the money back, there was a lot of pressure to learn English to pass the test, but I only learned English to pass the test, it wasn't living English.” (Partial Refund)

Some participants recall experiences of migrant friends who had decided that, because they thought the test would be so difficult, that they would just write off the language bond as an additional settlement expense and consequently, not make any effort to learn English:

“We had a friend from Singapore, she just found the test too hard. Her husband is very rich so he said, don’t worry any more, I will pay the money.” (Partial Refund)

“I know people who just gave up study and they stay inside their house and use their old language. They will just pay the money if they are rich enough. I think some people will just pay the money and not bother to try to pass the test.” (Full Refund)

4.4.7 The Requirement For Migrants To Sit An Examination

Particularly for the older women interviewed, the fact that getting the language bond refunded requires sitting a formal examination, acts as a strong disincentive to trying to get the money back. For this reason, motivation to learn English is also reduced. In one or two cases, fear of the examination plus the perception that learning English was not really necessary to them had resulted in a complete lack of any attempt to learn English. Older women comment that they have not sat an examination for 30 years or more, and the thought of having to sit an examination where failure essentially costs between \$6,000 and \$20,000 is too stressful for them:

“I think the English test system is good, but for older people, it is difficult to learn English and to sit the test. I think the system is good for young people, they are sitting tests all the time, but I think I would recommend the old people don’t have to sit the test.” (Partial Refund)

“When I decided to come to New Zealand, I found I would have to pay \$40,000. I expected my eldest daughter to pass within three months, she is young, so then half the amount would be paid back. But I have to donate the other \$20,000. My wife is just too frightened [to sit the test].” (Full Refund)

4.4.8 Perceived Sudden Change In Policy

For some migrants interviewed, their dissatisfaction with the language bond component of New Zealand's immigration policy arose from the perception that the bond was introduced suddenly and without warning. Some participants comment that they had already begun immigration proceedings when the policy was introduced, and their immigration consultant had not informed them of the new requirements until it was really too late to withdraw their application. The perceived sudden change in policy may have contributed to the finding that consultants were not considered well informed about the language bond requirements. (It should be noted here that information about the policy change was disseminated to Immigration consultants and NZIS branch staff (amongst others) several months before implementation, and that when implemented, the intention of the change was that those applications which had already been submitted to NZIS would not be affected. Based on the interviews conducted in this research it appears that, in some cases, those who had applications with Immigration Consultants were told they were subject to the new requirements.)

“Before, they didn't have anything like this, they didn't have to pay the fee, but then they quickly made a new rule. It was all very fast.” (Time Expired)

“In the past, if I have a job, my wife can automatically follow me and my wife didn't have to take a language test or anything, but the policy just changed without notice. I didn't know that.” (No Action Taken)

Because the migrants interviewed perceive that the current language bond component of the immigration policy was introduced so quickly, some fear that the policy may change again so that subsequent migrants arriving will no longer have to pay the fee. Those who have paid already consider this unfair:

“I am not sure, it might be a rumour, but I heard from somebody that the immigration [policy] is going to change so that people don't have to pay the bond any more so it's easier for them than before. I think it's good that they don't have the bond but it's not fair because I have lost all my money.” (Time Expired)

“I think that it is not fair for us if the Government changes the policy next year or in the coming future. We will have wasted the fee. It's not fair for us.” (No Action Taken)

4.5 Time Restrictions

Almost universally, participants agree that three months is not a realistic time frame to expect migrants to have reached the standard to pass the IELTS test, especially if the non-principal applicant has had little or no exposure to English prior to arriving in New Zealand:

“In my husband’s situation, three months is all right because his foundation [in English] is all right, he started to study English when he was in the Middle School, so, as long as he spends some time reviewing, he will be all right. But for those who cannot understand English at all, it’s hard for them, I don’t think three months is enough for them.” (Full Refund)

Reasons as to why the three month time frame is considered inappropriate include

- The time and effort required to find employment upon arrival in New Zealand, and the time taken to learn a new skill if this is required often means that there is not sufficient time to learn English:

“If my husband had a normal, ordinary job, he could study at home, but his job has quite long hours because he works in a restaurant. He comes home at about 3 o’clock in the morning or something like that so he doesn’t have enough time [to learn English].” (Time Expired)

“I’ve just got a job and the job occupies a lot of my time.” (No Action Taken)

- Particularly if the non-principal applicant is male, within the first three months they may return to the home country to wind up their business, thereby making it difficult for them to undertake English language training, either due to time constraints or availability of courses of appropriate calibre:

“I go backwards and forwards between New Zealand and Thailand. I will be going back again soon. I cannot pass [the test] because the time is just too short. The level of English required is just impossible.” (No Action Taken)

“It is not that I don’t want to pass the test, but my English is not good enough because I must do work in Russia at the present time. My business is there and it is very difficult to close everything and cut off and come here.” (No Action Taken)

- The time taken to settle in New Zealand. It can take some migrants several months to find a suitable house, enrol their children in school etc:

“I knew that the first three months I couldn’t get my money back because, when we came and settled, we had to find a house to rent so I didn’t have the time to sit [the test], but after the next three months, for the second test I had more time.” (Partial Refund)

“The children, they go to school and so I need to help them and my husband needs to find a house to live in and get many suitable things for the house. It all takes time” (Partial Refund)

- The fact that the test is only offered once every three months, so non-principal applicants only have one opportunity to pass:

“We just get one test you know. If we fail that test, we cannot get another one. We must wait another three months.” (No Action Taken)

“Three months is too short because, as you know, when you take the IELTS test, you can’t take it again for three months, so if you try in the first three months and you fail, then the next attempt is outside the time limit. That’s the reason why three months is much too short - you can get only one chance in that time. If you had two chances to sit the test, that would be better, at least two.” (Partial Refund)

- The large financial outlay to pay the language fee, as well as the costs involved in moving to a new country, can mean that migrants do not have sufficient funds available for English language courses immediately after arrival in New Zealand:

“After paying the \$20,000, we have got no money left to go for language training, so I have to wait. I had to wait for a community [course] to come up. I couldn’t enrol in a course until the fourth month.” (Partial Refund)

- In the case of some migrants who arrive in New Zealand with little or no information about the language bond and learning English in New Zealand, it may take more than three months just to find the information they require:

“For me, when I came here, I didn’t know what to do to get the money [back].” (Partial Refund)

Participants were also asked whether they feel 12 months is an adequate time frame for non-principal applicants to obtain at least part of their language bond back. Once again, most participants feel that this time frame is inadequate, particularly if the test is to remain in its current format. Participants feel that, particularly for those migrants who have had little exposure to English prior to coming to New Zealand, a time frame of two to three years is more realistic:

“If you are starting from the beginning, one year is not enough really, it’s not enough. You need at least two years. I think it should be about three or four years. I think that’s better.”

(No Action Taken)

However, some participants comment that, if the test was made easier, and concentrated more on everyday English and common vocabulary, a time frame of one year to eighteen months would be realistic:

“One year is not long enough because the test is very difficult because it’s not everyday conversation English. If it was, one year might be OK.” (Time Expired)

Participants also comment on the inflexibility of the time restrictions:

“I think it’s not fair that you have to pass the test within three months. It’s not fair. It’s not fair that you have to pass within one year to get some money back. What would happen if I pass the test after fifteen months, I cannot get even a single cent back. That’s not fair.”

(Partial Refund)

In the case of one participant family, the non-principal applicant had attempted the IELTS test once but had failed, and was to be away on holiday when the final opportunity to sit the test before the 12 month expiry date came around. The family had applied to the Immigration Service to get an extension to the time allowed to get the money back, but this had been declined. The family were frustrated at the Immigration Service’s decision as the family proved they had even looked into the possibility of taking the test overseas. The family questions why the time restrictions need to be so strict and inflexible.

“We asked for help at the Ministry Of Immigration Office and we asked them to extend the deadline for us because we were going to the United States and there’s no centre to sit the test in the United States and the reply was no, no extension at all. They were so strict, so they obviously just want to take the money.” (Time Expired)

In another case, the non-principal applicant had fallen pregnant soon after arrival in New Zealand and had been in hospital with the baby during the time she was to sit the IELTS test, her last opportunity to sit the test. She too had applied to the Immigration Service explaining her circumstances and asking for an extension, but had been declined.

5. LEARNING ENGLISH IN NEW ZEALAND

This section investigates the experiences of the migrants interviewed in learning English in New Zealand. The section begins with a brief analysis of the English background of participants and their perceived importance of English proficiency in New Zealand. The section then contrasts the interviewed migrants' perceptions of learning English in New Zealand with their actual experiences of learning English here. The section concludes by identifying some of the difficulties many of the migrants interviewed have in living in New Zealand without sufficient English language ability.

5.1 English Language Background Of Participants

There is considerable variation among participants with respect to their background in learning English prior to arrival. Almost all participants comment that they had learned some English as part of their formal education in school (the only exception being those from mainland China who had been educated during the Cultural Revolution where English was temporarily removed from the curriculum).

Asian Experience

Those from Asia report that English is taught from Middle School (Intermediate) until (and including) University. However, the emphasis is strongly on reading and grammar, with perhaps some writing in University, depending on the course of study. Participants acknowledge that little, if any, emphasis is given to listening and speaking to English as many of the English teachers are Asian themselves. Participants comment that British English is most commonly taught in Middle and High School, although exposure to Western movies and music means that some participants had become more familiar with the sound of American English. Only one Asian participant had used English in their home country since leaving school or university:

“In school we learned a little bit of English, but it was only grammar and reading. Writing, listening and speaking, no. We did English for about four hours a week, but when I started working, I didn't use English so I forget it.” (Partial Refund)

“We started to learn English when we were in the Middle School, at the end of the 1970s, but at that time, China is not open enough to the outside world so we just studied the grammar. We didn’t have a lot of chance to speak English, to practice speaking and listening.” (Full Refund)

Some Asian participants feel that the English language they learned in their home country was so poor and so incorrect that it was actually a hindrance to them when they came to New Zealand in that they had to spend time “unlearning” the inaccuracies:

“I studied English in Korea, but, at that time, I studied only English grammar. Now I think about what I did in Middle School and High School, that English I think is terrible. It’s very different from speaking or writing in English. Usually we learn grammar, only grammar which is no use for me to live in New Zealand.” (Partial Refund)

“We’ve been learning English for six years at school, which wasn’t English at all. It was so useless, no speaking or listening, just reading and spelling correctly and grammar use. Not useful for every day.” (Full Refund)

The one participant from South East Asia comments that, because the overall standard of education in these countries is lower than that in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea, they receive even less English tuition, and consequently arrive in New Zealand with even greater English difficulties.

Iraqi Experience

The two participants from Iraq had perhaps the greatest exposure to English prior to coming to New Zealand of all the participants interviewed. English is the second language of Iraq, and consequently, it is widely taught in schools. The two participants interviewed are relatively wealthy, and comment that, when in Iraq, they often travelled overseas to English speaking countries for their holidays so there was an opportunity to practice their spoken English with native speakers. However, during the Iran-Iraq war, travel was forbidden, and consequently, the participants lost much of the vocabulary they had acquired:

“Actually in Iraq, English is the second language, we learn it at school. I was better [at English] when I was in Iraq because every year we were travelling abroad so in the summer I could use my English. I was very good at that time. However, travelling was forbidden for a while because of the wars, and so, for about ten years, we didn’t travel and the language, you know, if you don’t practice, you lose it. I lost so many vocabularies. So when I came here first, I found it difficult to speak. I could understand everything well but I can’t reply.”
(Partial Refund)

Russian Experience

As with Asian participants, the participant from Russia had had English tuition in both High School and University study. The main criticism this participant has of the English learned is that the teachers were not particularly competent themselves in speaking English and consequently, students could not advance.

Like Asian participants, the Russian couple comment that they didn’t use English once they start working and consequently, they lost their English language skills quickly. However, they comment that their English background acted as useful foundation for re-learning the language when they arrive in New Zealand.

“I learned [English] at school and at University and I think I had good English, I mean in Russia in Russian level you understand. But it was long time ago for me and I almost forgot. I don’t know how many years passed but I actually had good English but I forgot it. But when I studied it again it helped me that I have a foundation for studies, to study, so it helped me.” (No Action Taken)

Indian Experience

The general comment made by the Indian participant was that the extent of knowledge and command of English they had was largely a result of the type of school they had attended. For those who attend a Christian-based school in India, all instruction is likely to be in English and so consequently, their command of all forms of English is likely to be good. However, for those educated in non-Christian schools, the command of English is likely to be poor, especially if the non-principal applicant worked in an organisation where English was not spoken. However, the Indian participant comments that, irrespective of the type of school one attends, all Indians are generally exposed to British classical English, and may experience some difficulties with New Zealand's more colloquial, informal style of English.

5.2 Perceived Importance Of English Proficiency

All participants were asked whether, during the immigration process, they had thought about how important it would be for them to have a good working knowledge of English once they arrived in New Zealand. Responses to this question were mixed.

The majority of participants comment that they knew it would be very important for them to be proficient in English once they arrived in New Zealand. Reasons given for this perception include:

- The fact that some ethnic groups in New Zealand are small in number and therefore, there is a necessity to interact with the host population:

“I knew that New Zealand is an English-speaking country and there are very few Japanese. There are a lot of things for Chinese, a lot of Chinese newspapers available, [but] for the Japanese, there is very little, so we have to know English.” (Time Expired)

- An acknowledgment that, without strong English skills, a migrant is unlikely to be able to find employment.

When asked how they knew English would be so important, most had derived this perception from common sense - that because New Zealand is an English-speaking country, a knowledge of English will necessarily be essential. However, some had heard from friends already living in New Zealand that English is important. When asked, no participants report that their immigration consultant had told them anything about needing to know English or how important a good level of English language proficiency would be.

By contrast however, some participants perceived, prior to arrival in New Zealand, that it would not be so important for them, as non-principal applicants, to be proficient in English.

Reasons given include

- The fact that they are unlikely to want or need to find employment in New Zealand, and consequently, English skills would not be necessary:

“My age is too old to get a job here. I don’t think it is important for me to know English. For my children in the future, it is very important, but not for me.” (Partial Refund)

“If you want to work here, [English] is very important, but for somebody like us, if you want to retire, to come here and retire, that is not so necessary. It’s not so important to know English.” (No action taken)

“For my husband, English is very important, but for me, I don’t think so. My husband will get a job here, but I don’t think I need to get a job here so it is not so important for me.” (Partial Refund)

- The perception that, as long as the principal applicant can speak English well, they can translate information and assist the non-principal applicant(s) in the family.
- The perception that the size of the ethnic community in New Zealand (and Auckland in particular) is sufficiently large that there is no need to interact with the host population and consequently, no need to learn English:

“To me, [learning English] is not so important because there is a lot of Chinese, a big Chinese community here. I thought I could manage to find work in the Chinese community. I got a job working on a Chinese newspaper.” (Partial Refund)

- An acknowledgment that, upon obtaining Permanent Residency, they will continue to work in their home country and consequently, do not need a good working knowledge of English.

“My wife is the principal applicant so she lives and works here. I still have a business relationship with my law firm and so I have to spend a lot of time in Beijing.” (Full Refund)

- When they first arrived in New Zealand, they hadn't planned to stay permanently.

5.3 Experiences Of Learning English Prior To Applying For Residency

Of the 24 participants involved in the research, eight had taken part in some form of English language training prior to applying for New Zealand residency (that is, English language training outside that learned in school).

In the case of two of these participants, the language training had been taken in an English-speaking country where they had been living prior to coming to New Zealand (UK and USA), with this training being essentially every day conversation or “survival English for housewives”.

Four other participants had undertaken formal English language training in their home country - or in the case of the Iraqi participants, in an intermediary country - in an attempt to pass the test so that the language bond would not have to be paid. The first two Iraqi participants who undertook English language training comment that they found this training worthwhile, even though they did not reach the standard required to pass the IELTS test. Both participants credit their positive attitudes to the course to the fact that it was provided by British teachers who were familiar with both the IELTS test requirements and with teaching English to adults. By contrast, the second two participants who had undertaken English language training prior to coming to New Zealand found that this had not been worthwhile. Both these participants had undertaken additional training in Korea, where the American system of English is taught. These participants comment that the courses were very expensive and the teachers were unfamiliar with the IELTS curriculum and could not offer any advice on what should be learned for the test.

The remaining two participants - one Japanese and one Russian - had learned English in New Zealand prior to applying for permanent residency. In both cases, the participants knew about the English language bond requirements and had decided to come to New Zealand on a student visa to study English here prior to attempting to take the test. In the case of the Japanese participant, the decision to study in New Zealand was made because he felt English courses in Japan are so expensive, and he wanted to study in a less stressful environment. In the case of the Russian participant, the decision to come to New Zealand was made as a result of dissatisfaction with the ability of Russian English teachers and a perception that that the IELTS test is not available in Russia.-(Please note that according to the IELTS handbook there is an administrative office in Russia for testing.)

Among those who had not undertaken English language training prior to applying for New Zealand permanent residency, reasons include:

- Insufficient time to learn, often because they found out about the English language bond requirement so far into the immigration process and/or had to organise moving, winding up of business etc.

“I just didn’t have time to learn. When I decided to migrate, the time factor was very important so I didn’t have time to study English to pass the test.” (No Action Taken)

- Because language courses are so expensive in their home country, they decided to wait until coming to New Zealand where they perceived courses would be relatively inexpensive.
- A dissatisfaction with the quality of English language teaching in their home country.
- A perception that their English language ability would be sufficient to pass the test so, they did not need additional training.
- A perception that their English language ability was so poor - or non-existent - that undertaking English language training would not be worthwhile, and would add to the stress of the move, particularly for women.
- A lack of knowledge of the language bond requirement.

5.4 Perceptions Of Learning English In New Zealand

Prior to paying the language bond, the majority of participants perceived that it would be easy to learn English in New Zealand. Reasons given include:

- The fact that English is one of the official languages of New Zealand so consequently, they would be exposed to English all the time eg; advertising, signs etc.
- The (incorrect) perception that there are few people from their home country in New Zealand so consequently, this would force them to speak English.
- Because New Zealand is an English speaking country, English language courses would be readily available and very inexpensive. Some immigration consultants had informed their clients that English language courses are free in New Zealand, while other migrants believed that, because they had paid the language bond, government funding would be readily available to assist them in learning English in New Zealand.
- Experience in New Zealand, interacting with New Zealanders on a daily basis, would enable them to learn English quickly by learning English from kiwi friends. For young people, being immersed in the New Zealand school environment, and for the migrants intending to work in New Zealand, the perception they would be able to find employment easily in New Zealand, and pick up English from the workplace or work colleagues.
- Because they learned some English in their home country as part of their formal education prior to coming to New Zealand, they will just need to build on this foundation rather than learning the language from scratch.
- Because they have lived in an English-speaking country prior to arrival in New Zealand, they already have sufficient English language skills.

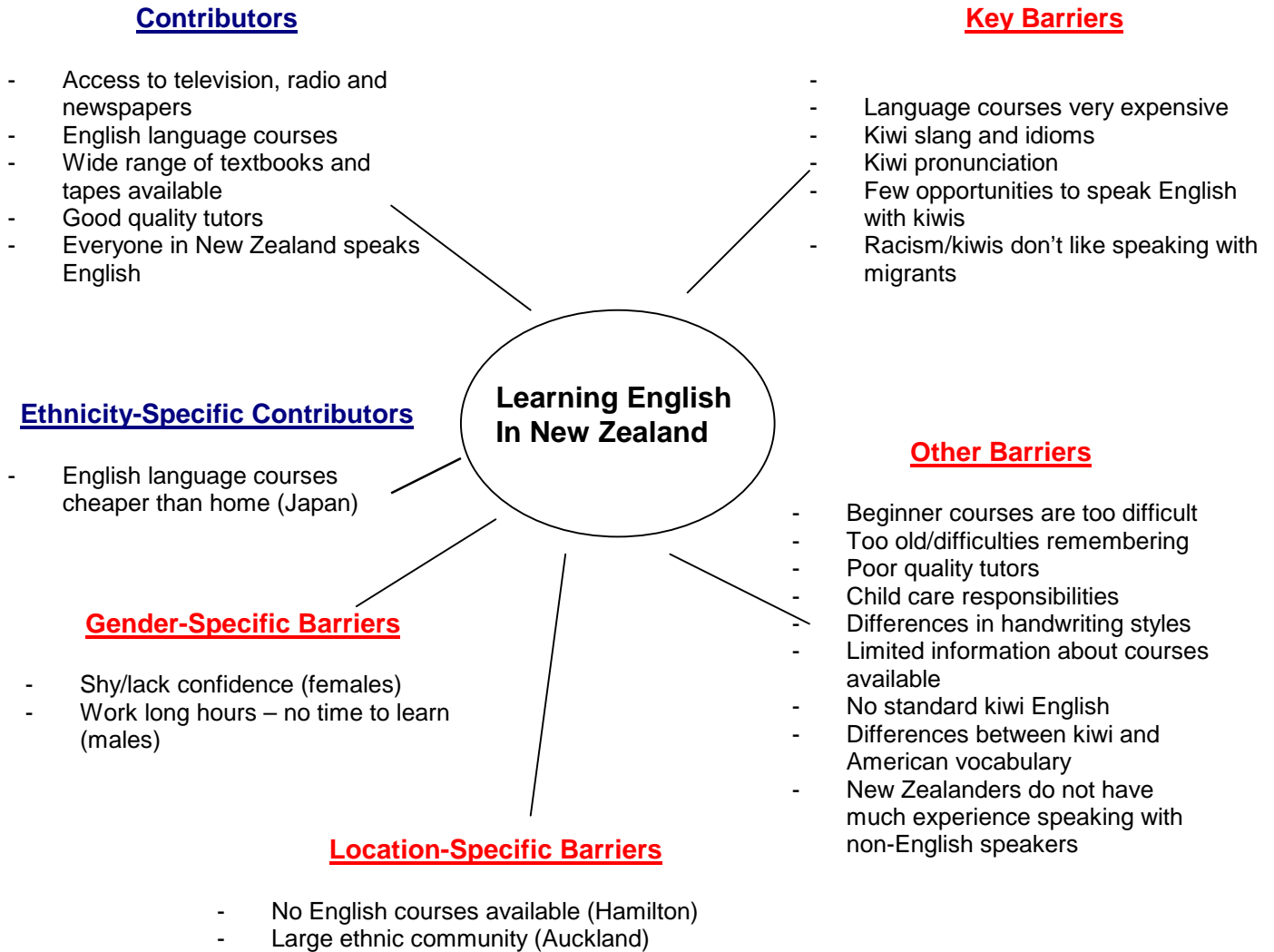
As the following section identifies, unfortunately, many of the perceptions that the migrants interviewed had about the ease of learning English in New Zealand, upon arrival, were found to be incorrect.

5.5 Experiences Of Learning English In New Zealand

Having discussed their perceptions of how easy or difficult they perceived it would be to learn English in New Zealand, participants were asked to identify the factors which had made learning English in New Zealand easy or difficult. Figure 1 outlines the factors which contribute to making English easy to learn in New Zealand, as well as those factors which act as barriers to non-principal applicants acquiring English skills easily. For the greatest proportion of participants, the general feeling is that it is difficult to learn English as a language, but further complications are added by trying to learn English in New Zealand. It should be noted in this section that, although some participants had managed to obtain full or partial refunds, they acknowledge that they still found it difficult to learn English and to learn English in New Zealand.

Note: The allocation of barriers between 'key' and 'other' is based on the frequency with which each was mentioned and the relative importance given to each where participants were asked to rank the barriers.

Figure 1: Contributors And Barriers To Learning English In New Zealand



5.5.1 Contributors To Learning English

While the majority of participants comment that they have found it difficult to learn English in New Zealand, some positive contributing factors to acquiring English were identified.

Some participants acknowledge that media is a particularly useful means of learning English, with television and radio being mentioned as particularly useful as they provide an opportunity for migrants to hear English spoken with a New Zealand accent:

“It’s not difficult to learn English because you can listen to the radio, you can hear what English sounds like and try to understand it.” (Partial Refund)

In Auckland, opportunities have been arranged for migrants and native kiwi speakers to meet together and to speak to one another in order to provide an opportunity for migrants to improve their every day conversation. These “English language corners” are becoming increasingly common in Auckland.

At least initially, some non-principal applicants will attempt to improve their English by teaching themselves. For those who have undertaken this option, it is reported that there is a wide range of textbooks and listening tapes available, both for sale and from local libraries.

Finally, among Japanese migrants interviewed, the low cost of English language courses in New Zealand relative to those in Japan is seen as a contributor to helping Japanese migrants learn English:

“It’s hard to learn English in Japan, but it’s easy in New Zealand because there are a lot of community courses available and it is also cheaper. It’s cheaper to learn in New Zealand than in Japan.” (Time Expired)

5.5.2 Key Barriers To Learning English

One of the key barriers identified by most participants is the cost of English language classes. Because they knew that New Zealand is an English-speaking country, many participants had assumed that English language courses would be readily available and cheap. Most are quite surprised at the high cost of language courses, particularly those provided by private institutions. Participants comment that, in addition to tuition fees, the cost of travelling to the course, textbooks, stationery and, in some cases, child care can make some courses prohibitively expensive:

“I thought, when I was in Korea, when I live in New Zealand, the English [course] fees will be cheap, but now I don’t think so. Because [New Zealand] is an English country, I think, in New Zealand, the courses will be cheap, but it’s not true.” (Partial Refund)

“Before I took the exam, I studied in Auckland University. The class was only four weeks and for each week it is \$350 I think, so it’s too expensive, and every day I drive my car so parking is also expensive at Auckland University.” (Partial Refund)

“The tuition fees were so high, around \$400 to \$500 a week, so I cannot afford to enrol.”
(Full Refund)

The issue of the high cost of courses is further compounded. Some participants had assumed that, when they paid the language bond, this money would be held in a fund for them to use to undertake language training and so consequently, no additional financial outlay would be necessary upon arrival.

As mentioned earlier in this section, most non-principal applicants have learned English to some extent as part of their formal education in their home country. However, English tuition tends to be based on either American or British English and consequently, all migrants interviewed experience difficulties in becoming familiar with kiwi slang and idioms and getting used to kiwi pronunciation. For those who received American English tuition, differences in vocabulary can also be a barrier to learning English in New Zealand:

“Listening to English is difficult for me. New Zealand English pronunciation is quite different if you have got used to hearing American English. The grammar is a bit different too.” (Time Expired)

“The first few months were not very easy because the words they use in the United States were different, they say elevator not lift. In the United States, they say “best” but here, people say “beast” and a beast is something different, an animal or a monster, it’s much different. I took two months to get adjusted to the kiwi accent.” (No Action Taken)

“The biggest problem we had was that we learned English from an American teacher and so we had difficulty in listening, it’s quite hard. We tried to make ourselves understand, but our English is still different to yours.” (Full Refund)

As previously discussed, for many migrants interviewed, acquiring proficiency in speaking is the most difficult of the four language components. Many participants comment that it can be difficult to improve this component of their English because they have so few opportunities to converse with native kiwi speakers. Some migrants interviewed appear to be caught in a Catch 22 situation in that they lack English speaking skills and so are reluctant to try to communicate with New Zealanders, but, because they are not regularly listening to English and trying to speak it, their communication skills do not improve. The difficulties associated with obtaining employment in New Zealand illustrate this issue well - because migrants lack English language skills, they are unable to find employment; however, many of the migrants interviewed acknowledge that interacting with native kiwi speakers in the workplace is one of the best ways to learn English. (However, it should be noted that, in almost all cases, these migrants were not working in New Zealand). (Indeed, as will be discussed subsequently, a small number of migrants interviewed opted to leave an English course in favour of just part-time employment as they felt the latter was more beneficial in helping improve their English).

“I would like to make friends more so I would have an opportunity to learn English.” (Time Expired)

“There is a lack of speaking opportunity. If you don’t work, if you don’t mix around with a lot of people, you don’t have a chance to learn English.” (Partial Refund)

Those migrants interviewed who have made an effort to converse in English with New Zealanders feel that some New Zealanders will not talk with migrants, either because they are not patient enough to take the time to listen or they dislike migrants:

“The kiwi students at my school just don’t talk. They are not friendly. They don’t want to talk to strangers.” (No action taken)

“Kiwis don’t like Asian migrants. To learn English I need to have contact with New Zealanders, people living in New Zealand, but I know they don’t like me and so it is really hard to approach [them].” (Time Expired)

“Usually kiwi students do not accept other Asian students. Kiwi students want only themselves so they reject Asian students. If the Korean students mix with the kiwi students, it is good [so we can] speak English, but kiwi students usually don’t want to accept the Asian students so we don’t learn English.” (Partial Refund)

5.5.3 Other Barriers

Some of the older non-principal applicants interviewed comment that remembering English is difficult for them:

“English is easy to forget, just memorising things is hard. I forget things quite easily.”
(Time Expired)

“The problem is, I am too old to learn English compared with the young person. It is difficult to remember everything. English words, vocabulary is difficult to remember. Every time I read the newspaper, some words I might [look up] in the dictionary ten times.”
(Partial Refund)

The lack of the extended family support experienced in their home country, and a lack of familiarity with New Zealand systems of childcare, can create a barrier to learning English. Non-principal applicants with pre-school children comment that child care responsibilities precludes them from taking part in any English language courses, while those with school-aged children tend to enrol in locally-provided part-time courses so that they can pick up their children after school.

For some migrants from cultures where information search skills are not well developed (particularly China), a further barrier to learning English in New Zealand is a lack of knowledge about where to go for information about courses available, and other language training options:

“If a person had done very little English language training in China, it would be very difficult for them. They wouldn’t know how to start learning English, they wouldn’t know where to go.” (No Action Taken)

Other migrants interviewed feel that a lack of standardisation with respect to New Zealand English makes it difficult for them to learn the language. Similarly, participants comment that the huge variation in handwriting styles in New Zealand means that hand-written documents can be difficult to decipher:

“Everyone in New Zealand speaks in a different way. I think this country doesn’t have a certain standard English, so when I watch the TV news, everyone speaks differently. To us, the people on the TV would speak the same standard Japanese, but on TV here, everyone has different accents, expressions. Yes, it’s quite hard.” (Full refund)

“When we speak or listen, there is no trouble at all, but when we get a letter to read, the handwriting is so different. Everyone here has different handwriting and it looks different from typing. We were told to sign something, but we couldn’t read it. People don’t seem to take a lot of care with their writing.” (Full Refund)

With respect to the English language courses, Asian women in particular comment that they found it difficult to find a course which taught English from the very basics - that is, for those who have had no experience with English at all. In some cases, these women had enrolled in “beginner” courses, but found these too difficult:

“The course I enrolled in was the community course at the high school. Even the beginners course was very hard, I couldn’t catch up even in the beginners course.” (Full Refund)

Finally in this section, some migrants interviewed comment that most New Zealanders do not have a lot of experience in speaking with those for whom English is a second language and consequently, are unsure as to the techniques required to assist migrants:

“Kiwis tend to speak fast and use a lot of slang when they talk. Unfortunately most kiwis don’t have a lot of experience talking to people with poor English. They don’t make allowances. Some of them just yell.” (Partial Refund)

5.5.4 Location-Specific Barriers

Because of the large number of migrants now living in Auckland, a further barrier to learning English is the ability to undertake everyday activities such as shopping, going to the doctor and reading the newspaper in ones’ home country language. Migrants from some ethnic groups - particularly the Chinese, Koreans and Iraqis - acknowledge that the fact that the home country language is so widely used in New Zealand can be a disincentive to learning English. Young people still at school acknowledge that it is easier to make new friends within their own ethnic group, which results in them speaking their home country language in the playground:

“When I was on the course, it was only two hours a day and, you know, when I come back, I didn’t use it because our friends, all of them are Iraqis, so I didn’t use [English] enough. The teacher said I needed to practice more, but I didn’t use it enough.” (Partial Refund)

“I thought it would be easy to learn English in New Zealand. I thought there are not many Asians here so, if we get to New Zealand, I will make many kiwi friends and I will learn good English - but it is very different because there are so many Asians here. It is easier to make Asian friends so I speak Korean.” (Partial Refund)

“My children have some difficulties in their school. Four years ago, people from other countries were few and there were many kiwi students and they pay attention to the new migrants. But now, in their school, 40 percent are migrants from overseas, so there’s not enough chance to talk to each other, they have their own groups.” (Full Refund)

5.5.5 Gender-Specific Barriers

For some Asian women in particular, shyness and a lack of confidence is a barrier to learning English. These women tend to be very self-conscious of their limited English skills and consequently, are reluctant to even try to speak English in front of kiwi speakers:

“The reason for me is my character, I am very shy and I don’t want to try to practice English to others. Most New Zealand people are very kind but I am too shy.” (Partial Refund)

“English is difficult for me because I feel nervous talking in English and my pronunciation is not good. I’m used to American English and so I am shy when I speak.” (Full Refund)

In some cases, the male non-principal applicant is still conducting business in the home country, and consequently, is not in New Zealand long enough to acquire a good knowledge of English or to enrol in English classes:

“I spend a lot of time in Beijing. Maybe I should go stay in New Zealand to study at the University, sometimes I think it is very necessary for me, but it’s not good for the development of the firm if I leave. Maybe several years’ later, I will come here to live, you know, permanently, forever or study something at University, but not now. That’s why it is not easy for me to improve [my English].“ (Full Refund)

5.6 Difficulties Associated With Insufficient English

Participants were asked to identify what difficulties they had had in New Zealand as a result of having insufficient English. Participants generally agree that the main difficulty they experience is understanding New Zealanders because they speak too fast for the migrants to understand. Frequently mentioned specific difficulties include:

Settlement Needs

- finding accommodation and communicating effectively with real estate agents and landlords

“When we came to New Zealand, we should buy a house. We needed many things when we got here but we couldn’t speak fluent English so it is quite hard for us. We don’t understand the kiwi sayings so it is hard for us to ask our neighbours for help.” (Partial Refund)

- getting a telephone installed
- getting Sky TV installed
- difficulties in making friends with New Zealand neighbours
- knowing where to go and what to do to find employment, difficulties in writing CVs and covering letters and performing well at the job interview
- enrolling children in school - understanding and completing forms, understanding newsletters etc.

Everyday Activities

- shopping - particularly when the participant needs to ask for information or advice about a particular product or service
- reading labels and information on food packages to find out what to do with them/how they should be used correctly
- banking - particularly using an automatic teller machine, setting up more complicated accounts and organising foreign exchange transfers
- using public transport - in particular reading where the bus is going and paying the fare

Medical And Emergency Assistance

- going to the doctor or dentist - particularly not having a sufficient vocabulary to describe different kinds of pain and nausea

“When the children get sick, it’s harder to find the right word to explain how they feel.” (Time Expired)

- communicating with staff while in hospital - this difficulty being cited by women who have had babies since arriving in New Zealand. In one case, the husband was required to be in attendance at all times
- inability to negotiate prices with service providers such as mechanics and tradespeople

“The prices they charge me are too expensive. If I could explain more, I think I can negotiate a price better.” (Time Expired)

- what to do in the case of a traffic accident - asking for necessary information, responding to questions from others involved, filing an insurance claim

“When my husband was in a traffic accident, the person who did it, he tried to make it hard on my husband by speaking English so quickly and it made my husband feel bad and upset because he couldn’t understand.” (Time Expired)

6. ESOL COURSES

This section investigates the experiences the migrants interviewed have had in finding and taking part in English language courses. The section begins by assessing how the migrants find out about courses and, where there is more than one course available, how they select between courses. The section then moves to investigate the migrants' attitudes to the courses undertaken with an assessment of whether they were considered value for money and useful.

6.1 ESOL Course Information Search

Participants were asked how soon after arrival in New Zealand they had looked for information about English language courses in New Zealand.

Some participants comment that they started looking for information almost immediately after arrival as they were anxious to get the language bond refunded, and were conscious of their time constraints:

“I started looking quite soon after I arrived. I had an obligation to pass the exam, so I started to look straight away.” (Full Refund)

By contrast however, more than half of the participants did not start looking for information until they had been in New Zealand for some months. Reasons include:

- Needing time to settle in New Zealand and get family established.

“I started looking after 5 months. I had to unpack everything and find a house. I had to unpack my things from Korea and after that was done, our family settled down in New Zealand and I was ready to try for the test.” (Partial Refund)

“We didn't start looking as soon as we came because, at first, we should buy our house and a car and my father had to get a driver's licence and we don't know the laws so we can't find the way to get somewhere.” (Partial Refund)

- Not knowing what to do to get the language bond refunded.

Participants were asked where they had looked or who they had contacted to find information about language courses. Responses include:

- ethnic community newspapers
- Yellow Pages
- New Zealand Herald
- recommendation/advice of Kiwi friends
- recommendation/advice of ethnic community friends

“First of all I asked my Korean friends living in Hamilton and later, some of my friends, New Zealand friends, that I met in the church.” (Time Expired)

- Immigration consultant
- New Zealand Immigration Service
- local library
- local high schools

“I phoned Glenfield College, Northcote College and Birkenhead College and they told me, go to Northcote College. I phoned them immediately and applied for the course, so I didn’t find it a problem or difficult.” (Partial Refund)

- tertiary institutions (universities/polytechnics)

Participants are particularly critical of the fact that the Immigration Service does not appear to be aware of the language courses which are available in their area, or, particularly, courses suitable for those hoping to have their language bond refunded.

“New Zealand Immigration Service was short of information about where to apply and where to go or something. What we think is, we wish we could have more information or a certain place to ask for help. That information should be part of the Immigration Service because they themselves told us to take the test, and they didn’t have any idea of where to go to do it. It was so confusing.” (Full Refund)

Participants were also asked if, during their information search, there was anything they hadn't been able to find out. Responses include:

- Finding out whether there are any English courses available which directly address the language issues involved in seeking and obtaining employment in New Zealand.
- Course content. Some participants comment that, in hindsight, they should have questioned the course provider to find out the balance between everyday English and IELTS preparation.
- How many students are in each class, and what proportion of students are from the migrants' home country.
- Whether IELTS specific courses are available, and where.

"I couldn't find out about English courses, the IELTS courses. I can find out easy about other language courses but it's difficult to find IELTS courses." (Partial Refund)

- Where non-principal applicants can go to get free English courses. As mentioned in Section 4, some migrants interviewed assume that the language bond is to cover the English courses they will require upon arrival in New Zealand.

"I was looking for the Government facilities where I can study English. Free courses is very important. I understand that, if I pay the fee, then the Government should arrange for us to attend classes free like in Australia." (No Action Taken)

Taking into account their own experience, participants were asked when they would advise other prospective migrants to start looking for information about English language courses. In response, most comment that, if possible, the migrant should start looking for information prior to coming to New Zealand. Advantages of looking prior to migration include:

- The fact that there is less to worry about once you arrive in New Zealand.
- Migrants can join waiting lists prior to arrival and time their move to New Zealand to coincide with course starting.
- Migrants can coincide their move to New Zealand with school term times.

"If I had a friend coming to New Zealand, I think, before she comes to New Zealand, she had better know some information on English schools. If she knows beforehand, it's less worry." (Time Expired)

6.2 Key Criteria In Selecting A Course

Participants in Auckland and Christchurch generally acknowledge that there are a lot of English courses for them to choose from. By contrast, however, participants in Hamilton and Napier report that there are very few English courses available, - either IELTS specific or more general English courses, with the participant in Napier commenting that there is currently only one English language course provider in the Hawkes Bay. For those living outside the main cities, a lack of course providers can be an issue, particularly if the non-principal applicant is financially and/or time constrained in their choice of courses.

“There weren’t a lot of courses to choose from, not a lot. There was one at the University and one at the Polytech, just one and a few private courses. Not so many.” (No Action Taken - Hamilton)

Those who did have a choice of English language courses available were asked what criteria they used to select their course. These criteria are depicted in Figure 2.

Note: A sorting exercise conducted by participants forms the basis for the allocation of criteria. All the criteria identified by participants were written on cards. Participants were then asked to sort the cards by importance - that is, to put them in order from the criterion which most influenced their decision on which course to take, through to those which had little or no influence on their decision. The consequent allocation provided in Figure 2 is derived by assessing how often participants mentioned each criterion, and how important each was ranked. Key criteria are those which were mentioned by all or almost all participants, and consistently rated among the top six to eight most important criteria.

Figure 2: Criteria For Course Selection

<p>Key Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• course teaches things to pass the IELTS test• course teaches general, not academic, English• good quality teachers• home country language staff available• New Zealand teachers• cost of course• accessible by public transport
<p>Secondary Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• small classes• full-time courses/part-time courses• day courses• close to home• no waiting list/certainty of classes starting• parking available• suggestion of friends
<p>Other Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• emphasis on listening and speaking• emphasis on reading and listening• extra curricular activities• shorter courses• variety of teachers• culturally diverse classes• course content considers interests of students• female teachers available• other students similar age• information easily available

6.2.1 Key Criteria

Course Teaches Things to Pass The IELTS Test

The key criteria when non-principal applicants are choosing an English course is that the course will teach what is needed to pass the IELTS test:

“I should take the IELTS exam, so the IELTS course is good for me to learn. After my husband took the test in Korea, he told me to do the IELTS course and not the every day [English] course. He took the exam and told me I needed more skills for the exam.” (Partial Refund)

“It was important that the course [covered] things to pass the test. That was the most important thing, rather than everyday English. The test is the most important.” (Time Expired)

Upon completing their course, participants comment that it is also very important that the course concentrates on general English rather than academic English (This issue will be discussed in Section 6.3).

Good Quality Teachers

Also mentioned as a key criteria for course selection is good quality teachers. When asked how they would define a “good quality” teacher, typical characteristics include:

- experience and awareness of issues in teaching students from different cultures

“You know, some teachers know the way how to teach some people, they know how to encourage the student to talk. Most of the Asian people are shy to speak English. A good teacher gets the class to talk.” (No Action Taken)

“The customs of teaching are very different and the teacher never knows Asian countries’ customs. The teaching way is very different and we are very confused, always confused in the class.” (Full Refund)

- some formal qualification in teaching ESOL to adults
- approachable
- friendly
- patient
- encouraging
- well versed in IELTS test requirements

However, participants acknowledge that, when they are selecting an English school and course, it is almost impossible to evaluate the quality of the teachers.

“You can’t really find out about the teachers before the course. It’s just luck, because when you ask, everyone says all of the teachers are good, they will not tell you if they have any who are not so good. It’s just luck.” (Partial Refund)

Administration Staff Who Speak Home Country Language

Many of those who have enrolled in courses at language institutes comment that one of the key strengths is the availability of administration staff who speak their home country language. These staff are seen to have an important role in providing counselling for students and offering practical assistance for such things as finding accommodation and child care. Participants also comment that these staff are useful if they have questions or problems with the course material, as they often find it difficult to ask questions in English, especially early on in the course.

New Zealand Teachers

A further key criteria is the use of native New Zealand speakers as teaching staff. New Zealand teachers are considered necessary to enable students to become familiar with the New Zealand accent, and they are also believed to have a greater knowledge of New Zealand culture. Participants agree that having a teacher fluent in their home country language could mean that they would resort to speaking the home country language in the classroom rather than persevering with English:

“I want a kiwi teacher because I want to listen to the accent actually, how the kiwis use it because, when I get a job, I will need to keep in touch with kiwi people so I want to learn their accents so I can understand very well. Iraqi [teachers] they can’t speak with a kiwi accent, even if they are very good, very fluent, it’s not the same.” (Partial Refund)

“When you reach the intermediate standard, you should be able to listen to the teacher. When the teacher says something to you, he or she should speak English to you. If you are learning from a Chinese teacher, you rely on them too much to translate into Chinese for you, that’s the drawback.” (Partial Refund)

Cost Of Course

A further key criteria mentioned by almost all participants is the cost of the course. The extent to which this is a constraint on course choice is generally dependent on the participants’ country of origin. Participants from mainland China appear most constrained by cost, while those from Japan are least likely to consider cost an issue. Cost is particularly an issue if the family have bought little money with them from their home country and have been unable to find employment in New Zealand:

“I didn’t really think about the cost. I knew I had to get into a class anyway so I didn’t think about it.” (Japanese; Time Expired)

“Compared to Japan, all the courses in New Zealand are cheap so I didn’t think about cost much.” (Japanese; Time Expired)

“The cost was very important, how much I would have to pay. It’s important for me right now because I can’t make any money, I don’t have a job.” (Chinese; No Action Taken)

The extent to which cost is an issue for the migrant is also a strong determinant in the type of course they will ultimately take, with those who are cost-constrained more likely to learn English through a community education course. As will be discussed in the following section, the type of course taken has a direct impact on the extent to which the course concentrates on teaching everyday English, or the skills and techniques required to pass the IELTS test.

All participants comment that cost is a key determinant in their decision to learn English in a classroom situation rather than via private tuition. While some participants had undertaken one-on-one tuition, this tended to be short-term only, as participants found the return on their investment insufficient to warrant the high cost.

Public Transport Accessibility

Finally, particularly among female and young participants in Auckland, the fact that a language school is accessible by public transport is a key selection criteria:

“We can’t afford two cars to drive, we have no money so I have to use the bus.” (Partial Refund)

6.2.2 Secondary Criteria

Full Time/Part Time

The intensity of the course is also a criteria used in selecting a course, with most participants agreeing that, ideally, a full-time course is best as it allows more opportunities to learn. Participants acknowledge that, as they are often time-constrained in learning English, full time study ensures that they can fit as much English language training into the time they have available.

“If you want to pass, it’s better to be a full time course. We have already paid the fee, and we should study hard in the time left to get our money back.” (No Action Taken)

A full time course is also considered most desirable in that it forces students to use English every day:

“Every day is best, the continuity is important because you just cannot learn for two evenings. You might forget what you learned. It’s very important to go every day.” (No Action Taken)

“I don’t use English with my family so it’s important to go to study every day to learn English.” (Partial Refund)

Participants also comment that full-time courses are better value for money, particularly if there are parking, public transport or child care costs involved. However, because of commitments such as child care, employment or other education, some participants are forced to look for English training which is offered part-time only. All these participants acknowledge that part-time study is really not adequate to reach the level required to pass the IELTS test. In a small number of cases, participants who initially enrolled in a part-time course have opted to abandon their employment, or leave school for some time to pursue a full-time English course:

“I prefer full time but, because of my children and at that time my husband was looking for a job so if he gets job it’s a problem to have a full time course so part time is better for me.”
(Partial Refund)

“Full time is better, but in my case, I have no time to study a full time course because I have a job so it is difficult to study English in a full time course. But full time is much better than a part time course for learning English. You get five or six hours a day so every day you can concentrate on English.” (Partial Refund)

Day/Evening Courses

Day time courses are generally preferred over evening courses as the students are fresher, and for those who have child care responsibilities, morning classes allow them to be available to collect their children from school:

“The morning is better because I am quite free in the morning because my children go to school and my husband the same.” (Time Expired)

“I think a morning class is better - nine until twelve - because, in that period, all of my children go to school and study and afterwards, I can take care of them and the house and buy some food and do the cooking.” (Partial Refund)

“Because in the morning you are fresh, you can understand more. In the evening I would be too tired.” (No Action Taken)

However, where the non-principal applicant is a male, evening classes are likely to be preferred, particularly if the non-principal applicant is working full time.

Proximity To Home

For some migrants interviewed, particularly those living in Auckland, it is important that the course be provided close to their home. This may be because they have child care responsibilities, they are unable to drive, or they lack the confidence to travel to other parts of the city:

“It’s quite important that it’s close to my home. The school distance is a factor because I can’t go to Unitech. It’s too far away for me, it’s also too far to the city.” (Partial Refund)

As will be discussed in Section 6.3, a desire for courses to be close to home often results in participants opting for community education courses provided at local high schools, rather than language institute courses, which are typically provided in the inner city. This has implications for whether the emphasis of the course will be on everyday English or teaching strategies to pass the IELTS test.

However, those living outside Auckland comment that proximity to their home is not such an important course pre-requisite, as distances to travel anywhere are not so great:

“How close the school is to my home is not important because, in Hamilton, we can arrive in five minutes from anywhere.” (No Action Taken)

Length Of Waiting List And Certainty Of Course Starting

For some participants, the length of a waiting list for a particular course is significant in their decision to look for an alternative course. While participants may have preferred one course, they were forced to take another, perhaps less desirable, course because they are often so time constrained:

“The school where I enrolled didn’t have any waiting list. If it had a waiting list, I would try to find another course. That’s why we didn’t go to the Polytech, because of their waiting list.” (Full Refund)

Typically, it is the IELTS-specific courses which have a long waiting list and, consequently, some participants are forced to take general English courses instead:

“There was an IELTS course at the time and it would have been good for me to develop, but at the time it was not available to me because it was already booked fully. So I had to change to another course and the level was very low. It was just basic grammar.” (Full Refund)

One Auckland participant cites an experience where he had enrolled in an English course some time before it was to start, only to be informed closer to the starting date that, because they had insufficient numbers to fill the class, the course would not be starting. The participant comments that this was not only inconvenient in that he had to look for another course, but he had wasted a number of weeks that he could have been learning English.

Parking

For those who do drive to their courses, the availability and cost of parking is important. The importance placed on parking can result in participants preferring to enrol in English language courses provided at universities as they typically have more parking available:

“It’s good to have parking. I prefer to have the course at University because there is lots of parking. It’s better than going to the Polytech or somewhere else. The parking is not so good at the Polytech.” (No Action Taken)

6.2.3 Other Criteria

Other criteria used by participants in selecting their course include:

- Emphasis on listening and speaking (particularly among those from Asian countries where English language teaching does not cover these components).
- Emphasis on reading and writing.
- Extra curricular activities available (such as field trip visits and guest speakers, as well as facilities offered by the institution such as child care services).
- Shorter, more intensive courses (particularly for those who are very time constrained).

- Variety of teachers (to overcome the concern that some teachers may not be good, and to take advantage of the opportunity to capitalise on each teacher's teaching strengths).
- Culturally diverse classes (see Section 6.3).
- Course content considers the interests of students (that is, students have input into course content design before the course starts).
- Female teachers available (Asian women in particular comment that they feel more comfortable with female teachers whom they consider to be more friendly, approachable and patient).
- Other students are of similar age (see Section 6.3).
- Information on course is easily available (where a non-principal applicant is particularly time constrained and/or they have no friends available to ask for information, they will select a course which has the most information available).

6.3 Attitudes To Course Taken

6.3.1 Strengths And Weaknesses Of Course Types

From discussions with non-principal applicants, those hoping to pass the IELTS course undertake three types of English language courses:

- community education courses
- IELTS-specific courses at private institutions or tertiary institutions
- language courses for overseas students at private institutions

The strengths and weaknesses of each of the course types from the participants' perspective, will be discussed in turn.

Community Education Courses

(Typically those provided by high schools.)

Strengths of community education courses include:

- Very inexpensive relative to privately-provided courses.
- Emphasis in course content is on teaching everyday English.
- Classes tend to be practical in nature - role playing etc.
- Courses can be provided close to students' home.
- Both day and evening courses usually available.

Weaknesses of community education courses include:

- Class sizes tend to be larger than those of private institutions - can be up to 20 students.
- Courses only offered during school term time.
- No entry test - consequently it can be difficult for students to find the appropriate class and the range of abilities within one class tends to be greater.
- Courses are seldom full-time, typically only 2 hours a day.
- May not have native English speaking tutors.
- Some students may have different motivations for doing the course - to fill in time, to socialise with others from their home country etc.
- Where courses are provided at local high schools there can be some racial tension between migrants and school students.
- Little or no assistance is available to those wishing to prepare for the IELTS test.

IELTS Course

Strengths of IELTS courses include:

- Small class sizes - generally between 5 and 10 students.
- Teaches skills and techniques necessary to pass the IELTS test.
- Both full and part-time courses are usually available.
- Range of course lengths available.

Weaknesses of IELTS courses include:

- Courses tend to be provided in inner city - implications for parking.
- Courses typically expensive.
- Can be a conflict between those wanting to do general IELTS and those wanting to do the academic IELTS test.

Language Courses For Overseas Students

Strengths of language courses for overseas students include:

- Typically well resourced.
- Small class sizes – generally between 5 and 10.

Weaknesses of language courses for overseas students include:

- Overseas students tend to be interested in home country topics and issues, while migrants interviewed are more interested in New Zealand topics and issues. This can result in conflict.
- Courses are typically expensive.
- Majority of students tend to be younger.
- Majority of students place emphasis on grammar, sentence structure etc.
- Little assistance is available to those wishing to prepare for the IELTS test.

Across all course types, a number of additional strengths were noted:

- Improvement/development in English vocabulary.
“I learned a lot of words that I never knew before.” (Time Expired)
- Particularly for women, the feeling of being a student again, and to be independent of their children and husband, even if only for part of the day:
“For a while, I was just bringing up children, just staying at home. So it feels nice to feel like a student, to be learning something and being with other people.” (Time Expired)
- Positive reinforcement from tutors and other students, resulting in greater confidence in using English.

A number of further weaknesses universal to all course types were also perceived:

- Courses tend to be too classroom-based.
“I really wanted to get some more practice, like, if we are learning about banking, just go to the bank with the tutor and show the students about the teller or writing the forms or something.” (Time Expired)
- The fact that the teachers change so often. Participants comment that New Zealanders all have different accents and ways of speaking and that it can be difficult if the tutor changes too often.

“The teachers change often, we get different teachers, I got used to the first teacher and then they changed to a different teacher, and it was harder to get used to another teacher’s accent, they all have different accents.” (Time Expired)

- Perception that some teachers are inexperienced in their knowledge of the IELTS curriculum and preparing students for the test.

“The second teacher was not good for me. I didn’t learn anything from her. I think she had no experience about the exam skills. She had no experience about the IELTS course, no knowledge. She couldn’t teach anything about the IELTS.” (Partial Refund)

- Some teachers do not appear to be well qualified and experienced in teaching English to speakers of other languages:

“Compared to the English teachers in England, most of the New Zealand teachers are not so experienced, and they have short term courses to get a certificate to teach English here. Some lack the teaching method to reach the level the students need. They just repeat the same thing over and over. In England, most of the teachers are qualified and have graduated from University and so are better experienced to handle students.” (Partial Refund)

- In some cases, favouritism shown by the teacher.

“We had a class of 8 and among them, one was outstanding. Mostly during the class the tutor had personal contact with one student and not the rest of us. The teacher didn’t share her time around.” (Full Refund)

Participants were also asked to identify any areas or topics they feel should have been covered in the English language course but were not, or aspects of the course they would like to see modified. Responses include:

- Greater emphasis placed on preparation for the interview component of the course.

“They didn’t really prepare us for the interview part. For me, the interview was the hardest part of the IELTS test - I failed the first time - but we didn’t really practice that or prepare for it during the class.” (Full Refund)

- Greater opportunity to speak English with native New Zealand speakers:

“We didn’t get much opportunity to learn to speak English with kiwis, We only speak among ourselves.” (Partial Refund)

- Greater emphasis to be placed on writing.

“The test has four different ways of testing, but the school is focussed on speaking and listening, not reading and writing. Reading is my strong point, but writing is quite hard, it’s quite difficult for us Asians.” (Full Refund)

6.3.2 Usefulness Of Course

Participants were asked whether they feel the English language course they took part in was useful. Participants made a clear distinction between the usefulness of their courses in teaching them the everyday English they need to know to live in New Zealand and the usefulness of their course in teaching them the skills and techniques necessary to pass the IELTS exam. This distinction is interesting in itself in that it indicates that participants do not see the IELTS test as a test of everyday English.

Usefulness Of IELTS Course

For those who had taken specific IELTS courses, they consider them useful for providing the techniques and strategies to successfully sit the exam. This is particularly important for older non-principal applicants who may not have taken a formal exam for 30 years or more:

“For example, they told me [in the comprehension exercise] to read the questions first then the [text]. That really saves time. And for the essay, I should try to do 250 words.” (No Action taken)

Those younger non-principal applicants who hope to go on to University study feel that the academic nature of the IELTS course is appropriate to them:

“What I learned, it helps me study in school. It’s not that helpful for everyday life, but it helps you for your study in school.” (Full Refund)

However, those who took part in an IELTS course almost universally comment that the course did little to improve their everyday English as the IELTS test does not focus on this:

“[The course] didn’t really teach us English, it was only for the test, only the skills on how to read the essays and how to write the letter.” (No Action Taken)

The IELTS course was not useful, because [I] need to know about going to the bank and that, but the IELTS course just concentrated on passing the test. I learned difficult vocabulary but I don’t need it, I don’t need it to talk to people.” (Time Expired)

“The course was not useful in helping me to live in New Zealand. What I learned on the course was not helpful for everyday living. The level is too high for you to use it everyday.” (No Action Taken)

Some participants comment that the IELTS course is more like a finishing course for those who have been studying English for some time; that it is not suitable for those who have little or no background in English. However, participants comment that, because they are so time constrained, they essentially have to take the ‘finishing course’ first:

“I felt that my English was not really good enough when I joined that course, it was really a finishing course for IELTS for students who had already studied English for quite a long time. I thought my English should have been better before I joined the course, but I had no choice.” (Partial Refund)

Other participants who had taken part in the IELTS course comment that, while the course may have been useful in building their vocabulary and improving their spoken English, they were so focussed on doing just what was needed to pass the test, they failed to concentrate on what they considered at the time to be superfluous information:

“The things I learned on the course may have useful for everyday, they may have helped with everyday English, but I wasn’t concentrating on the course. I was concentrating on passing the test.” (Full Refund)

Usefulness Of General English Courses

For those who had enrolled in general English courses, these were viewed positively as a means to teaching students the English they need to use on an everyday basis and also to develop greater confidence in using English.

“When I finished the course I could speak a little bit, I can understand what other people say I don’t need a translator with me all the time.” (Time Expired)

“The course at [.....] high school was quite good for the daily life and I am now able to communicate with people in daily life, daily conversation.” (Full Refund)

However, all participants comment that community education courses do little to teach about the content and strategies for the IELTS test.

6.3.3 Value For Money Of Course

An assessment of whether the course is considered value for money is strongly dependent on whether the student enrolled to learn everyday English, or enrolled to pass the IELTS test.

Among those who had enrolled in community education courses, almost all consider these to be good value for money to the extent that they teach students everyday English for a very low price:

“The high school course was good value for money, it was very cheap, very reasonable I think. We paid about \$300 for one week for the IELTS courses and the same amount of money, \$300, for 3 months, 10 weeks at the college, both full-time. The high school course has been most useful in helping me live in New Zealand.” (Full Refund)

However, as already discussed, the community education courses do little to directly prepare students to sit the IELTS test, and, consequently, they are considered poor value for money by participants whose key objective is to pass the test.

By comparison, among those who had taken an IELTS there is a perception these are poor value for money with regard to learning everyday English:

“The value for money is not good. The class is not for migrants, it doesn’t help us. It’s just for people who want to learn English to pass the test, mainly to go to university. It’s not to teach migrants.” (No Action Taken)

However, attitudes are mixed as to whether IELTS courses are actually good value for money in teaching what is needed to pass the IELTS test. Some participants report that the courses are just too expensive, particularly as most are relatively short (one to two months in duration). Other participants comment that the variable quality of the teachers - both in their knowledge and ability to teach those from different cultures - results in some courses being considered poor value for money. Other students comment that the courses appear under-resourced, with insufficient teaching materials.

6.3.4 Organisational Issues

Emphasis Of Course

Some participants comment that, because there are currently so few IELTS courses available, particularly outside Auckland, those sitting the IELTS test to get their language bond refunded and those sitting the test to gain university entry tend to be put into the same class. Participants comment that this can create some conflict in the classroom, and can adversely affect the students’ learning, particularly for the group which is under-represented - which currently tends to be those working to get their language bond refunded.

Participants comment that those students hoping to gain university entrance tend to be more focused on tertiary study and are anxious to learn about, for example, writing essays and assignments, taking lecture notes. By contrast, those hoping to get their language bond back are more focused on learning everyday English, and improving particularly their spoken English. Because students’ needs are not met, this can lead to frustration:

“Different attitudes, different concerns, different interests, For example, one student, she was preparing to enter University so she was taking the test and she was really wanting to know about university study in New Zealand. What we wanted to know was quite different.”
(Time Expired)

“My husband actually complained to the teacher, he said, you’re not paying enough attention to my wife, because most of the classmates are doing the academic test because they want to come in to University, but in my class they mixed the two kinds into one class and it wasn’t good for me.” (No Action Taken)

“I was the only one doing the general [IELTS test] so the teacher aimed the class at those taking the academic [modules]. But I only wanted general IELTS so it was quite difficult for me.” (Partial Refund)

“There were a few people in the class doing general [IELTS] but most people are doing the academic. In the general group, most people can’t understand at all and they have the same problem as me. They teach us too high so I still have a lot of problems.” (No Action Taken)

Class Size

Currently, most privately provided language courses appear to have class sizes of between 7 and 10. By comparison, community education courses are more likely to have large class sizes - between 10 and 20. For the most part, participants perceive the ideal class size to be between 6 and 10. The key advantage of a relatively small class size is that it provides greater opportunity for students to interact directly with the teacher, and consequently, for the teacher to be aware of the needs of each of the students:

“I think 8 is a good number. If you have over 8 in the class, I don’t get an opportunity to speak to the teacher.” (Partial Refund)

“If the class is big, maybe the teacher cannot be concerned with all the students. If there are too many students there, the teacher cannot know all the students.” (Partial Refund)

However, participants believe that an ideal class should have at least 6 students. Participants comment that, if a class is too small:

- The cost of the course is likely to increase further.

“I would like to have one-on-one teaching, but that is just too expensive.” (Partial Refund)

“I think I had ten in my class. That number is OK. I don’t want much more or much less. Too [many] and they can’t teach, and too less and they won’t make any money.” (No Action Taken)

- It may be difficult to generate a good list of topics to talk about.
- They fear the tutor may not take the class seriously and plan lessons adequately.

“If it’s not enough, like five students, sometimes, if somebody is absent, the teacher doesn’t feel motivated to teach.” (Time Expired)

Ethnic Diversity Of Class

Currently, most English language courses appear to be ethnically diverse with respect to the country of origin of participants. When asked how they feel about this diversity, all participants view it favourably. Participants acknowledge that, if there was a predominance of migrants from their home country in their class, they would be tempted to speak their home country language rather than trying to speak English:

“It’s good to have lots of different countries in the class. I actually felt happy that there are no Iraqis because, if there are other Iraqis there, we would speak Arabic, so [the class] would not be so useful.” (Partial Refund)

“That’s good to have a mix of people from different countries. It pushes people to talk in English. If [the class] was all Chinese, they may speak Chinese when they cannot understand and they’ll discuss everything in Chinese, but if people come from different countries and speak different languages, then the only way you can communicate is in English.” (No Action Taken)

“Everyone in my class spoke either Mandarin or Cantonese, so it was not so good. Because we couldn’t speak English we just spoke Chinese instead.” (Time Expired)

Other participants comment that, having a mix of ethnic groups in one class allows students to become familiar with other accents, as well as providing an opportunity to share settlement experiences and strategies with one another. In addition, some women comment that, if there were other people from their home country in the class, they would be more reluctant to try to speak English for fear of embarrassment in front of home country compatriots. Finally, the Japanese women interviewed comment that it is important for them to have a mix of ethnic groups in their class to act as motivation to encourage them to learn English:

“Japanese people, they don’t try so hard to get the money back. They have a lot of money and they are quite happy living in Japan. [By comparison], those from other countries, Korea or other countries, they really want to come to New Zealand. Having Koreans and Chinese in my class makes me work harder because they are all working hard.” (Time Expired)

Age Distribution Of Students

For the most part, participants comment that their classes had a broad distribution of students according to age. In some cases, participants view this broad distribution favourably, with strengths including:

- For older students, the fact that the younger students often learn faster and pick up things more quickly encourages them to keep learning and practising their English.

“Because they are younger, they can speak English better than me. It’s good, it encourages me and they give me, they make it a challenge.” (Partial Refund)

“If it was all older people you wouldn’t learn anything with them. You really can’t improve there because everyone forgets. The teacher would have to teach again and again.” (Time Expired)

- Because young people typically learn faster than older people, older students comment that the younger students are available to help them with any difficulties they are having.

However, some younger participants comment that they would be reluctant to take part in classes with migrants over 50 as they fear they may be very slow at picking up English, and may consequently hold the class back:

“Between 20 and 40 I think is OK, people can understand each other, but some people are too old so that is probably not good. If people are too old, their accent is really difficult to understand and their minds don’t concentrate.” (No Action Taken)

Younger participants also comment that the topics and issues they wish to discuss - such as movies and music - can be different to those of older classmates, which can result in some conflict in the classroom.

Younger Asian participants also comment that, if they are in a class with older people, the Asian cultural trait of showing respect for one’s elders could mean that the class becomes over-conservative, with younger students being reluctant to correct the mistakes of the older students.

Level Of Ability Of Students

Some students comment that, within their class, there was a range of English language abilities. This arises, at least in part, from the fact that there are currently so few IELTS courses available, and there is currently no separation between courses for those sitting the general IELTS test and those sitting the academic test.

For those whose English is of the lower standard, excessive stress and feelings of inadequacy are common, while students with a higher level of English comment that the classes can be boring and frustrating:

“When we speak in class, some of the other people, their English is very bad. When they speak to me, they expect me to help them, but I want to speak to the teacher more. I want to speak to the teacher, but she has no time so I have to speak with [the other students] and it’s not very useful for me. It is not so good because their English is not better than mine so I am not improving.” (Partial Refund)

Waiting Time

While no participant could recall having been put on a formal waiting list for a course, some participants comment that they had had to wait some time between when they enrolled and when the course actually started. Because many non-participant applicants are often so time-constrained, even a few weeks' waiting can result in frustration and stress, particularly if the migrant is hoping to gain a full refund.

“I had to wait for three weeks. It’s a long time because I have no time to wait to study English. The time I needed to pass is very short.” (Partial Refund)

Some migrants interviewed comment that they first applied for their language course in December and January and the course did not start until the new academic year in February. This is particularly an issue for participants living in Hamilton where the only IELTS course available is provided by Waikato Polytechnic which closes over the Christmas and summer holiday period:

“We arrived here in the holidays, not at the beginning of the term, and so the classes were not open . We had a wait a few weeks.” (No Action Taken)

“I had to wait two months. We did not feel good because, you know, the time passes and we have a very short time to prepare ourselves.” (No Action Taken)

6.4 Why ESOL Course Not Taken

Three participants report that, when they first arrived in New Zealand, they had not intended to undertake formal English language training. One participant was continuing to conduct business in their home country and consequently had no time to learn English sufficiently well to pass the test. The two remaining participants had some experience in speaking and writing English in their home country and their partners spoke good English. Both participants anticipated that this background would be sufficient for them to pass the test. However, one participant subsequently found that the writing component of the test was very difficult so she later enrolled in an IELTS course. The remaining participant spent two months revising English from textbooks and tapes, including working through a book of previous IELTS exam papers, and sat and passed the test:

“I just spent some time listening to the tapes and reviewing the textbooks. There is a book about the test that I just reviewed and I had to listen to some tapes and then I passed.” (Full Refund)

In addition, four participants had started an English language course but had withdrawn part way through. In the case of the two male participants, they withdrew because they had found full time employment and considered this to be more important than completing the course and sitting and passing the test. The two female participants had withdrawn from the course because they were pregnant. Because of child care responsibilities once the child was born, and the inflexibility of the time restrictions, they had consequently been unable to sit and pass the IELTS test within the given time period.

7. THE IELTS TEST

This section specifically addresses the views of the migrants interviewed towards the IELTS test. The section begins by addressing issues relating to timing, participation and the logistics of actually taking part in the test. The section then assesses the appropriateness of the current test as a means of evaluating a migrant's proficiency in English, particularly in relation to the standard required and the appropriateness of the topics. The section concludes with suggestions made by the migrants interviewed as to how the test might be improved to make it more appropriate.

7.1 Timing, Participation And Organisational Issues

7.1.1 Timing Issues

One of the most distressing aspects of the test for non-principal applicants interviewed is that they are only able to sit it once every three months. This essentially means that candidates only have one opportunity to get all their money back - and this opportunity may arise only two months into their three month "full refund" period.

Participants comment that the test should be offered at least once a month. This would ensure that each sitting is not over-subscribed, and would also provide candidates with a chance to do a "dummy run", that is, to become familiar with the format of the test, and the test surroundings.

"I think they should have the test every month. Then you would know what was going to be in the test. You could practice, especially for the listening part, see how quickly you have to do everything to finish." (No Action Taken)

"I sat the test twice after finishing my course. I sat the test first and failed but I really wanted the experience of what the test was about, so after that, I could pass the test myself." (Partial Refund)

7.1.2 Participation Issues

Participants comment that, because the test is offered so infrequently, each sitting is often over-subscribed, particularly in Auckland. Auckland students interviewed who did not undertake an IELTS-specific course often found that, when they enrolled to take the test, there were no available places, and they were consequently obliged to travel to Hamilton to take the test within the necessary time period.

“Around the end of the three month period, I went to enquire about the test, but they said there are no vacancies for the test. I explained to them that I will have to postpone the three month expiry date, but they replied, sorry, you have to go to Hamilton. I got angry at the Immigration Service because they replied, sorry, it’s not their business.” (Full Refund)

Having to travel to Hamilton, the cost of overnight accommodation, the unfamiliar surroundings of the test venue, and being away from the support of one’s family was found to be very stressful for the migrants interviewed, who were already nervous about having to sit the test:

I had to go to Hamilton to sit the test. I was so nervous. My son took the test with me and he was so nervous he got diarrhoea. There was just too much tension. I had to drive down to Hamilton myself the day before and stay the night.” (Time Expired)

The participant in Napier reports that, because there are so few people in Napier who need to sit the test, she was required to travel to Palmerston North to sit the test. This participant reports that the pressure of the test was compounded by the fact that she had to drive to Palmerston North when she had never driven outside Napier before.

“It was very hard. We had just come from Japan three months ago. I had to drive my car on a strange road. It was the first time for me to drive all the way to Palmerston North so it was very hard for me.” (Full Refund)

Most participants comment that, if the Government requires them to pass the IELTS test, they should provide every opportunity, for them to sit the test. By not providing adequate opportunity some participants feel that the Government is trying to make it as difficult as possible for them to get their money back.

Some participants comment with dissatisfaction at the cost of the test - \$200 for each sitting. This can be a constraint on some families, particularly if there is more than one non-principal applicant, and no-one in the family is working.

7.1.3 Organisational Issues

Some participants report dissatisfaction with having to move to different buildings to sit different components of the test. Candidates state that they find this disconcerting:

“The place for the speaking test and reading, writing and listening test is different, so at the first time, we got to some English block and then we had to move to some test place and after we sit the writing and reading test, we have to move back to the first place. It’s better to do it all in one place.” (Partial Refund)

Other participants comment that the rooms used for the test are really not suitable for English language testing, particularly for the listening component:

“The test was in the law building at Auckland University. When I went into the classroom, I thought I wanted to hear better so I sat beside the speaker, but the speaker is broken so the [examiner] had to repeat some things, and it’s too hard. It’s too hard to listen. The sounds are very small.” (Partial Refund)

“The listening comprehension test was held by tape so the position of the tape makes a difference. The test was held in the Polytechnic building and other people are talking outside the classroom so it prevents us from concentrating.” (Full Refund)

Finally, a small group of participants comment that the test is too long, taking up to six hours to complete. Participants comment that they were both physically and mentally exhausted by the end:

“It’s too long. It usually starts at 12 o’clock so I don’t have time for lunch because I am too nervous, but by the time the exam has finished, I am too hungry. The parking fees is also very expensive - 6 hours is about \$16.00 at the Victoria Parking centre, it’s expensive.” (Partial Refund)

7.2 Appropriateness Of The IELTS Test

When asked whether they feel the IELTS test is an appropriate means of assessing an migrants' proficiency in English, the general consensus among those interviewed is that it is not.

Among many of the participants, the comment is made that, while they have passed the IELTS test, they still lack a good command of everyday English:

“The main problem is, to improve someone’s daily communication skills, the IELTS test is still of no use.” (Full Refund)

“In the test there are separate questions to be answered. The questions are quite standard and you can prepare for them. You can prepare for the IELTS test, but for everyday English, you can’t prepare.” (Partial Refund)

“I’ve had a lot of English training, but it’s just for the IELTS test. For the test you must read very fast, even though you don’t know its meaning, you just read it. You can’t understand what it means, but if you read the questions, they can help. See, I can pass the test, but I don’t always know the meaning of what I read.” (Partial Refund)

Older participants feel that the structure and content of the test discriminates against them because they have not had recent experience in sitting a formal examination. This is particularly a problem for those who do not attend an IELTS-specific course:

“Some of my friends are quite good, they can speak a lot of English and I think they might be better than me, but they fail at the test because they don’t get used to taking tests.” (Full Refund)

“I have had experience taking exams and still, it is very stressful for me, so sometimes I want to give up this exam, but it’s OK. I don’t think older people should have to do this exam. It is just too stressful for them, too much pressure.” (Partial Refund)

“The test is not good for adults because the stress, too much stress. We have to pass the examination. My friend got sick because of the exam, headache and his chest hurt.” (Partial Refund)

Some participants are critical of the test, stating that it is just too difficult for those who have had little or no prior exposure to English prior to arrival in New Zealand. Participants feel that the test is inappropriately difficult, particularly for those migrants who do not intend to work in New Zealand:

“I think the test is just so difficult I wonder if the Government don’t want Asian migrants here, that’s why they make that test such a high level. I think that the Government are trying to stop Asians coming here.” (Time Expired)

“There are too many questions. I mean, the test is good if you are a doctor. If you are a doctor, it’s OK, but not if you are a housewife.” (Full Refund)

“I feel cheated. I feel the IELTS test is too high a standard to ask people to meet in a short time after arriving in New Zealand, it’s too difficult. English is difficult, and that standard in three months or even twelve months is too high - and it’s really not necessary if the person is not going to find a job in New Zealand. For housewife it’s too hard, she doesn’t need to have it and the standard is too high.” (Partial Refund)

Appropriateness Of Topics

One of the greatest criticisms levelled at the IELTS test by those interviewed is the cultural inappropriateness of the topics. The test is currently British-based and uses concepts and vocabulary which may be unfamiliar to someone who has studied English in New Zealand. Participants comment that the topics tend to be very specific, and often require quite an extensive vocabulary in a narrowly defined area.

“It’s really hard to predict what will be in the test because the test, every time is different and also the vocabulary is quite specific. It’s hard to know all the vocabulary within a short time. It’s almost impossible for me to pass the reading.” (No Action Taken)

Participants comment that the test topics require candidates to have a considerable general knowledge of western concepts and ideas. This can be difficult if the candidate has lived in Asia or Eastern Europe all their lives:

“The topics, the subjects are beyond English, some are history, some geography, some science, a lot of other things. If you don’t have a good education, you wouldn’t know how to answer. It’s beyond language requirements. It’s testing general knowledge. Some of the words I couldn’t understand.” (No Action Taken)

“The reading test should be a reading test. We have difficulties in the background of the reading article. Sometimes we have no idea what it means.” (Full Refund)

“For example, my examination is about a conversation on a boat, a big boat, like somebody going on holiday on a big boat, so they are talking about where to enjoy themselves today on the boat. How can I do this? I have never been on a big boat. What can I say about it?” (No Action Taken)

“I had to do the test two times, and the second time they want us to write an essay about what we think about people who smoke cigarettes. This is a difficult question for a person who does not have a lot of interest in smoking. I don’t know about smoking because I don’t smoke. Because I am not smoking, I don’t have a lot of things to say about it, so it’s difficult for me.” (No Action Taken)

“Here is my topic - Fashion and clothing changes all the time. Some people are slaves to fashion while others insist they wear whatever they feel comfortable and suitable and disregarding fashion. What opinion do you support and why? - That’s hard, very hard. I have lived all my life in China. I don’t know the vocabulary for fashion. I don’t know about fashion. How can I answer?” (No Action Taken)

Components Assessment

One common theme raised by participants is a dissatisfaction with the requirement that each of the four components of the test - reading, writing, listening comprehension and speaking - must all be passed to a level of 5.0 in the same test. Some participants - particularly female - comment that, the first time they sat the test, they may have passed some components but not others. When they prepared to sit the test again, they placed so much emphasis on the components that they had failed that, when they re-sat the test, they failed the components they had earlier passed.

“The first time I did the speaking I got six points but on the second time, I thought I did better and I only got four points so I missed out.” (Time Expired)

Participants suggest that a fairer means of assessment would be to allow candidates to re-sit only the components that they have previously failed:

“I wonder why the test needs to be so difficult. Why do you have to pass all four? If you pass three, why can't you just do the other one next time?” (Time Expired)

Other participants feel that the current requirement that each component must be passed to a level of 5.0 is unfair and inappropriate. Participants feel that it is inappropriate to place equal emphasis on each of the four components, as speaking and listening comprehension are considered to be much more important to a migrant than reading and writing. Participants feel that an average score of 5.0 across all four component areas would be fairer.

“I don't think IELTS is a fair test. The listening and the speaking are quite helpful, but the writing and the reading, no, I don't think those things are helpful for Asian migrants.”
(Time Expired)

Relationship To Course Content

As might be expected, those who had taken a community education English course found that the IELTS test did not relate to what they had learned on their course. However, among those who had taken an IELTS course, there is some criticism that the actual test was quite different to what they had covered on the course, and what was in the textbooks they had used. A small number of participants are unhappy that the course and test were not consistent, stating that this was the main reason they decided to take an IELTS course. Some participants who have taken the test more than once comment that they feel the test gets harder each time they sit. (However, this could be due in part to being under more and more pressure as they near the 12 month expiry period, each time they sit).

Improvements

Where participants consider the current IELTS test to be inappropriate, they were asked to suggest how it might be improved to make it fairer. Participants generally agree that the test needs to concentrate more on every day situations where English might be needed:

“It should test everyday English. The object of the test should be to promote my English, so it’s important to ask questions about every day things, not things you can just prepare for the test.” (Partial Refund)

“They should test going to the bank, answering on a form, things about New Zealand, things like that.” (Time Expired)

“It should be something concerning us. Maybe for writing maybe you can describe your home country. That’s a good way to test English because we use that when we talk to somebody here. When we are invited to have dinner with a kiwi person, most questions are about our country, so that’s more useful. Ask about our home country and the things that concern us so that we can use our knowledge.” (No Action Taken)

“I think the test should be closer to daily life because I don’t have a lot of time to deal with scientific things. I think it should pay more attention to general things, you know, common things.” (Full Refund)

Some participants even go so far as to suggest that the test should have a greater practical component so that migrants can show their level of English ability in actual every day situations:

“If I was in charge [of the test], I would spend two or three days with migrants in their house and go out for shopping and watch them answer the telephone. They can do all the necessary things and I would just watch. Sometimes we are too nervous to do the test. We need time to connect with the examiner because, at first, conversation is not so smooth, Once we get to know each other, we can easily communicate.” (Full Refund)

Participants also comment that they feel an essay is inappropriate for migrants as they are unlikely to ever write such a long, formal document while in New Zealand. Participants agree that a series of questions and answers is a more appropriate format of the test.

8. THE REFUND PROCESS

This section investigates the experiences the migrants interviewed have had with the refund process.

8.1 The Refund Experience

For the most part, those who have applied for and received refunds from the Immigration Service are happy with the process.

When asked how they knew where to go and what to do to apply for a refund, those who had used an immigration consultant said that their consultant had told them what to do. Those who had applied for permanent residency directly through the Immigration Service had gone back once they had passed the test and asked what they needed to do to get the money back. Some participants who had taken IELTS courses report that they had asked their teachers how to apply for their refund. In only one case had a participant found it difficult to find out where to obtain their refund:

“Because the Government wants to keep our money they don’t let people know the places to get the money back.” (Partial Refund)

One key criticism that some participants have about the refund process is that it currently takes migrants up to four weeks to obtain the refund money. Participants feel that this is too long, with some suggesting that the money should be obtainable immediately upon presentation of their IELTS test results.

“I think it is unfair to have to wait. If I pass the test, they should automatically give me the money back.” (Partial Refund)

Other issues raised by a small number of participants about the refund process include:

- The time taken to have enquiries answered if the participant visits the Immigration Service office in person

“I went to the Immigration Service and I had to wait for about two hours in a queue. Th Immigration Service was very busy and crowded and there were lots of different people there.” (Partial Refund)

- Those who pay the language bond in their home country would like to be able to obtain the refund there as well. This is particularly the case where the husband may still be doing business in the home country:

“I think the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing should be able to handle the money. Unfortunately, they are not able to handle it so that is why I had to do it in New Zealand. Because they are paid there I think you should be able to get the money back from there.” (Full Refund)

9. CONCLUSIONS

The primary aim of this project has been to explore the experience of 24 migrants who have paid the non-principal application English language bond. For non-principal applicants who took part in this discussion, the perceptions and experiences regarding the English language bond were predominantly negative. The following key issues are identified as having negatively impacted on their experience of paying the English language bond as part of their application requirements.

1. The variability in the amount and quality of information supplied to prospective migrants regarding how the language bond operates and learning English in New Zealand.
2. The high dollar amount of the language bond.
3. The perception that the bond discriminated against Asians (who tend to have little or no background in English prior to arrival), older migrants (who are unlikely to have any recent experience in sitting formal examinations), and female migrants (who tend to be more susceptible to stress, due both to the pressures of moving to a new country away from family and friends and of learning English in a short period of time).
4. Difficulties in passing the IELTS test in the time given to gain either a full or partial refund.
5. The time lapse before commencing English language tuition in New Zealand.
6. That IELTS courses do not provide sufficient training in everyday English to be useful whilst community education courses do not provide sufficient specific skills to pass the IELTS test.
7. The IELTS test can only be sat once every three months.
8. The IELTS tests are often over-subscribed, forcing participants to travel out of town to sit or having to wait a further three months.
9. The means of assessing non-principal applicants' English proficiency - via a formal examination - is seen to discriminate against older migrants.
10. The components and topics in the test are not related to everyday English and are culture-specific.

Addressing even some of these issues is likely to have positive impacts on the experiences of subsequent migrants applying for residency under the General Skills category.

The first key objective of this research was to document the views of a group of migrants about the English language bond and its impact on their immigration decision. For the most part, the English language bond requirement appears to have had no significant impact on participants' decision to move to New Zealand, although, for migrants from some countries, the \$20,000 outlay required can impact on how quickly they can pay for English courses.

Migrants interviewed acknowledge that the bond has some positive aspects in that it encourages them to enrol in an English course, and the bond may provide funding for the additional services they and their family requires for overcoming language difficulties. However, participants report more negative aspects of the bond. The key detractors of the bond are the high dollar amount, the emphasis placed on passing the IELTS test which does not encourage migrants to learn everyday English, and the misconception prior to arrival that the bond would be used to fund their language training in New Zealand.

The second key objective of this research was to assess the effectiveness of the English language bond as an incentive to encourage migrants to learn English. From the interviews undertaken with non-principal applicants, it is evident that the language bond currently acts as an incentive for migrants to attempt to sit and pass the test so that they might be able to obtain a full or partial refund of their bond. Indeed, of the 24 participants, 17 had attempted to sit the IELTS test at least once.

However, it should be recognised that, because of the level of difficulty, and academic nature of the test, it cannot be said that the bond acting as an incentive to sit the test is congruous to acting as an incentive to learn English. Indeed, as verbatim comments in the main report have indicated, some participants have overlooked the opportunity to learn everyday English in favour of learning the skills and techniques required to pass the test. Consequently, while, upon arrival, the language bond is perceived by some migrants interviewed as an incentive to learn English, in reality, because of the time requirements to receive a refund, the bond currently acts primarily as an incentive to encourage migrants to pass the IELTS test.

The third key objective of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the experiences the migrants included in the research have in finding and taking part in English language courses. The key issues for migrants with respect to finding and taking part in English language courses relate to the time restrictions for gaining a refund and the fact that there is currently such a sharp distinction between everyday English language courses and IELTS-specific courses. While participants comment that they had little difficulty in finding information about English language courses available, the key issue with respect to information search is that many started looking for information too late (because of the time taken to establish themselves in New Zealand). In a number of cases, by the time they had found a suitable course, enrolled, waited for the course to start and taken part in the classes, the 3 month time limit for a full refund had passed. Consequently, some participants had had to opt for a partial refund only.

The second key issue with respect to finding and taking part in ESOL courses is the clear distinction between everyday English courses and IELTS courses. Because migrants are anxious to get their language bond refunded, their key objective is to pass the IELTS test and consequently, an IELTS course is the preferred choice for most participants. However, while these students may learn the skills and techniques to pass the test, they are often dissatisfied with the lack of improvement in their everyday English. By contrast, those who choose to take an everyday English course - or are forced to take one because IELTS courses are over-subscribed or too expensive - are satisfied with the improvements in their English language proficiency, but generally lack the skills required to pass the test. As a result of this distinction in course emphasis, few participants are totally satisfied with the English language course they have taken.

Finally, with respect to the fourth objective, the research has identified that, where English language skills are insufficient, migrants interviewed experience a wide variety of difficulties upon encountering every day situations. Participants report difficulties with such everyday activities as shopping, banking, using professional services, dealing with tradespeople and using public transport. This result suggests that English proficiency is indeed a key to the successful settlement of new residents, and that a lack of English skills can be costly, both for the migrant and the community they live in (as suggested in the 1995 Immigration Policy changes). Consequently, the use of some form of incentive to encourage migrants to “rapidly acquire basic English language skills”⁶ is still warranted.

⁶ New Zealand’s Targeted Immigration Policies: Summary Of October 1995 Policy Changes: July 1995

Other issues raised by this research which could warrant further investigation include:

- the appropriateness of the IELTS test as a means of assessing English. Participants comment that the current test should be modified to address the non-principal applicants' competency in using English in every day situations such as shopping, banking, using the telephone etc.
- the frequency of opportunities to sit the IELTS test. Offering candidates the opportunity to sit the test more often than once every three months would ensure candidates have more opportunities to gain a full refund, and that each sitting is less likely to be over-subscribed
- the quality and amount of information provided to those who use immigration consultants. Participants who used an immigration consultant suggest that consultants need to be more responsible for the information they provide to clients. Participants comment that, had they been more informed about the language bond, the importance of English in New Zealand and learning English in New Zealand, they would have started searching for ESOL course information sooner, and may have been able to get a greater refund.

APPENDIX

Status Of Sample

Topic Guide

Summary Of Participants' Activities

STATUS OF SAMPLE

The following table outlines the status of the sample supplied. The sample supplied by New Zealand Immigration Service contained the names of 75 non-principal applicants who had either received refunds or who had paid the language bond in New Zealand. As the table identifies, the greatest difficulty encountered was the number of non-principal applicants who had moved from their given address and could not be traced (43% of the names supplied).

Appendix Table 1: Status Of Sample

	Number	Share Of Sample (%)
Completed Interviews	24	32
Refused - not interested in taking part	3	4
Refused - not available over study period/too busy	8	11
Fax number supplied; no response to fax	1	1
Telephone constantly engaged	4	5
Moved, couldn't trace	32	43
Quota full (enough interviews completed in area)	3	4

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR/NZIS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOND RESEARCH
TOPIC GUIDE

1. INTRODUCTION

- Nature and purpose of study
- Explanation of Forsyte Research as independent researchers, working on behalf of DOL/NZIS
- Roles of those attending the interview
- Confidentiality
- Explanation of audio tape and agreement on use

- Brief discussion of family/living situation
- Brief discussion of reasons for coming to New Zealand
- Determine where application to come to New Zealand was made (Branch/Country)
- Assessment of use of immigration consultant/agent in assisting with immigration
- Determine how application was made (consultant/themselves)

2. ATTITUDES TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOND

- How did you find out about the English language bond? Who told you?
- How long before you were due to come to New Zealand did you find out about the language bond? How did this affect your plans of moving to New Zealand?
- What were you told about the language bond? Was there anything you felt you were not told but should have been?
- When you first heard about the bond, did you think you would have to pay it? Why/Why not?

- How did having to pay the English language bond influence your decision to immigrate to New Zealand?

If not mentioned:

- How do you feel about the fact that you have to pass the test within three months to get a full refund? How do you feel about the fact that you have to pass the test within twelve months to get any money back? *Probe:* Is this time frame sufficient? *If not:* What would the ideal time frame be?
- What do you think are the good things about having to pay the language bond? *Probe:* for yourself/your family; for New Zealand
- What are the not so good things about having to pay the language bond? *Probe:* for yourself/your family; for New Zealand
- When you first paid the bond, did you think you would try to get the money back?

If not, Why not?

If yes, How quickly did you think you would be able to get the money back?

3. LEARNING ENGLISH

- Did you learn English before you came to New Zealand? *Assess whether “school English”, university etc.*
- Before you came to New Zealand, how important did you think it would be to know English? Why/Why not?
- Did the Immigration Service/your immigration consultant/agent supply you with information about needing to know English in New Zealand? (or tell you anything about needing to know English)

If yes, what did they tell you?

If no, what do you think they should have told you?

- Did you try to sit the English test before you came to New Zealand?

If yes:

- Tell me about what happened when you sat the test?

If no,

- Why did you not try to sit the test before you came to New Zealand?

- Do you think it has been difficult or easy to learn English in New Zealand, and to take part in English language courses?

If difficult, ask:

- What things have made it difficult for you to learn English in New Zealand and in particular, to take part in English language courses? *Probe:* US versus British English spoken in NZ, NZ accent, lack of friends/networks in NZ, cost of courses, time, child care responsibilities, transport, confidence, knowledge of courses available etc. *Respondents to generate spontaneously and write on cards. Sort by importance.*

4. INFORMATION SEARCH AND SELECTION OF ESOL COURSE

If not already covered:

- Before you came to New Zealand, what did you think it would be like trying to learn English?
Probe: Why did you think that?
- Before you came to New Zealand, what did you think it would be like finding a suitable class?
Probe: Why did you think that?
- Have you taken part in an English language course in NZ, or looked for information about courses available?

If no, Why have you not looked for a course?

How do/did you intend to learn English in New Zealand?

Now skip to next section

- When did you start looking for information about English language classes? *Probe:* Before/after arriving in New Zealand, how long before/after arriving?
- Why did you start looking for information when you did? If you had a friend coming to New Zealand, when would you tell them to start looking for information about English language courses? Why?
- Where did you go to find information about English language courses? How did you know to go to these places? Which places were useful? Which were not?
- Was there any information you could not find about English language courses? *If yes,* what information was this?

- Were there a lot of English language courses to choose from?
- What things did you take into account when deciding which English language course to take?
Probe: Cost, length of course, full-time versus part-time, day versus evening, location of course provider, parking, length of waiting list, ethnicity of teachers, recommendation of friends, size of classes, course content, relationship to test, other facilities available etc. Discuss criteria of each separately. *Respondent to generate as many ideas as possible unprompted. Write these on cards. Probe with ideas mentioned by other respondents. Sort full list by importance*
- Is there anything about the English courses you wanted to find out about, but couldn't? *If yes, what?*
- Which course did you finally choose? Why?

5. EXPERIENCE OF ESOL COURSE TAKEN TO PASS TEST

- Did you actually take part in an English language course?
- *If no, Why did you not take part in an English language course?*

Skip to next section.

- How long did you have to wait between the time you enrolled and the time the course started? How do you feel about this? What did you do during this time to improve your English?
- Before you started the course, what things did you think you would learn on the course?
Probe: All forms of English, grammar, NZ culture and history etc.
- What difficulties did you experience in actually taking part in the ESOL course? *Probe:* transport, child care responsibility, work/study commitments etc.
- What were the good things about the course, or the things you found useful?
- What were the not so good things about the course, or the things you did not find useful?
- Is there anything you thought you would learn on the course, but didn't? *If yes, what?*
- Did the course meet your expectations? (Refer to earlier question on what they thought they would learn). *If not, why not?*

If not already mentioned:

- How many students were in your class? How did this affect your learning? How did this affect your enjoyment of the course? Ideally, how many students do you think there should have been in your class? Why?
- Did everyone in your class come from the same country/speak the same home country language? How did this affect your learning? How did this affect your enjoyment of the course? Ideally, what do you think the ethnic mix of your class should have been? Why?
- What was the age distribution of the people in your class? How did this affect your learning? How did this affect your enjoyment of the course? Ideally, what do you think the age mix of your class should have been? Why?
- Did everyone in your class start with a similar level of English? How did this affect your learning? How did this affect your enjoyment of the course? Ideally, what do you think the ability mix of your class should have been? Why?
- Thinking about how much you paid for the course, and how much you learned on the course, do you think it was good value for money? Why/Why not?
- What was the main focus of the content of the course? ***Probe:*** *teaching everyday English versus helping students to pass the English test?*
- How do you feel about this? ***If dissatisfied, ask:*** What was it you didn't like about the everyday English/preparation for the test? What do you think the most useful focus of the course would have been?
- Do you feel the course has been useful to helping you live in NZ? ***If not:*** How do you feel the course could be improved to make it more useful?

6. THE TEST, AND APPLYING FOR A REFUND

- Have you sat the English test?
- ***If no,*** Why did you not sit the test?

Skip to next section

- How soon after you finished the course did you sit the English test? Why this period of time?
- Where was the test held? Did you have any difficulties in attending the test?
- Thinking about the things you learned on the course, do you think the test was fair/appropriate? Why/Why not?

- Thinking about the kind of English you need to use every day in New Zealand, do you think the test was fair/appropriate? Why/Why not?
- How long after you sat the test did you find out the results? How do you feel about this length of time?

If not passed:

- What will you do now with respect to getting the English language bond back?

If passed:

- Since passing the test, have you applied for a refund? *If no*, why not?
- How did you know what to do to apply for your refund? Where did you find this information?
- Did you have any difficulties in getting your refund?
- How long did it take for you to get your refund back? How do you feel about this?
- Do you have any ideas as to how the refund process could be improved?

7. DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED DUE TO LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

- Moving to another country involves many changes, both good and bad. What experiences have you had in living in New Zealand because of English language issues? *Probe:* job search, shopping, public transport, use of services such as banking, doctor, schools and educational institutions, understanding laws, entertainment etc. *If time, write on cards and sort by importance*

8. FINAL COMMENTS

- Thinking about the experience you have had, if you had a friend wanting to immigrate to New Zealand, what advice would you give them about the English language bond and learning English in New Zealand?
- Other comments not covered by topic guide/discussion
- Thank and close

Summary Of Participants' Activities Regarding The Language Fee																								
	Indian Int. 1	Japanese Int.1	Japanese Int.2	Japanese Int.3	Japanese Int.4	Japanese Int.5	Chinese Int.1	Chinese Int.2	Chinese Int.3	Chinese Int.4	Chinese Int.5	Hong Kong Int.1	Thai Int.1	Taiwan Int.1	Iraqi Int.1	Iraqi Int.2	Russian Int.1	Korean Int.1	Korean Int.2	Korean Int.3	Korean Int.4	Korean Int.5	Korean Int.6	Korean Int.7
Location	A	A	A	A	C	N	H	A	A	A	A	H	H	A	A	A	A	H	A	A	A	A	A	C
Relationship to principal applicant ¹	W	W	W	H	H	W	W	H	W	W	W	W	H	H	W	W	H	W	W	D	D	S	W	W
Lived in an intermediate country	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y (USA)	N	N	N	Y (France)	N	Y (Jordan)	Y (Jordan)	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y (UK)	N
Used an immigration consultant	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	?	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
English course taken prior to arrival	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Test taken prior to fee paid	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Where fee paid ²	N	F	N	N	N	N	?	F	N	N	?	F	N	F	F	N	N	F	F	N	N	F	N	N
Type of course(s) taken in NZ ³	I	L	I,C	L	I,C	L	C	-	I	L,I	I	I,C	-	C	I	I,P,L	-	I	I,C	I,L	C,I	L	I	C,I
Course completion status ⁴	C	C	C	I	C	C	I		C	C	I	C	C	I	C	C		C	C	C	C	C	C	C
				(Job)			(Pregnant)				(Pregnant)			(Job)										
Number of times test sat for refund	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	4	0	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
Current refund status ⁵	P	T	T	T	F	F	T	F	N	P	T	P	N	N	P	P	T	T	P	P	F	P	P	F
Level of assistance required for interview ⁶	2	2	3	3	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	1	2	1	1	2
¹ W=Wife, H=Husband, S=Son, D=Daughter ² N=Onshore, F=Offshore ³ I=IELTs specific, C=Community education, L=Language institute, P=Private tuition ⁴ C=Complete, I=Incomplete ⁵ F=Full refund, T=Time expired, P=Partial refund, N=No action taken yet ⁶ 1=Little or no assistance required, 2=Some translation/assistance required, 3=Almost complete translation required																								

