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Implementation of a new English language requirement for migrant spouses intending to settle in the UK.

The Minister of State for Immigration (Damian Green): On 9 June 2010, My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department announced the introduction of a new English language requirement for migrants applying to come to or stay in the UK as a spouse or partner. I wish to inform the House that I am today announcing that this requirement will come into effect on 29 November this year.

Non-European migrants joining a British citizen or non-European national settled in the UK will have to demonstrate a basic command of English as part of the visa application process unless they are a national of a majority English speaking country. The new language requirement will apply to spouses, civil partners, unmarried partners, same sex partners, fiancé(e)s and proposed civil partners and will be compulsory for people applying from within the UK, as well as visa applicants overseas.

Migrant spouses and partners will have to demonstrate English language ability at A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (speaking and listening), the same level required for skilled workers admitted under the skilled Tier of the Points Based System. Applicants will be required to provide evidence with their application that they have passed an acceptable English test with one of the UK Border Agency's approved test providers.

Speaking English promotes integration into British society and broadens opportunities. The new rules will help ensure that migrant spouses are able to participate in British life from the outset and integrate more easily into wider UK society.

We are reviewing English language requirements across the immigration system with a view to tightening the rules further in the future. We will inform the House of our conclusions in due course.