



20 December 2016

Administrative instruction

Language proficiency and language allowance

The Under-Secretary-General for Management, pursuant to section 4.2 of Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2009/4](#), promulgates the following:

Section 1

General principles

Staff members are strongly encouraged to become proficient in two or more official languages of the United Nations in order to achieve and maintain linguistic balance in the Organization. Language proficiency for the purposes of the present instruction shall be established in accordance with the conditions set out in sections 2 and 3 below. Once a staff member has established such proficiency, he or she may receive a language allowance, under conditions set out in section 4 below.

Section 2

Language proficiency

2.1 For the purposes of the present instruction, adequate and demonstrated knowledge in one of the official languages of the United Nations shall be established by means of a language proficiency certificate awarded by the United Nations upon the staff member's successfully passing the United Nations language proficiency examination in that language.

2.2 The language proficiency examination requirement shall be waived, however, in the following cases:

(a) Staff members whose mother tongue¹ is one of the official languages of the United Nations need not take the examination in that language. They may demonstrate adequate knowledge in another official language by passing the examination in any of those languages, including that in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment;

¹ The determination of the staff member's mother tongue is officially recorded at the time of recruitment and noted in his or her official status file. Only one language can be officially recognized as the staff member's mother tongue. Once recorded, staff members are not permitted to change the officially recognized mother tongue.



(b) Staff members whose mother tongue is not one of the official languages of the United Nations need not take the examination in the language in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment. They may demonstrate adequate knowledge in another official language by passing the examination in any of those languages, except that in which they are required to be proficient by the terms of their appointment.

Section 3

Conditions governing language proficiency examinations

Eligibility to take the language proficiency examination

3.1 The language proficiency examination is open to all individuals who were admitted to participate in a United Nations language course, after they have completed the highest level of that course.

3.2 In addition, and for staff members only, the language proficiency examination may be taken by staff members who have not attended or completed a United Nations language course but can document that they possess an equivalent knowledge of the language in which they wish to be tested. Such equivalent knowledge may be demonstrated by language study outside the United Nations for at least two years or use of the language on a regular basis for school or work.

3.3 Staff members serving on a temporary or a fixed-term appointment expiring prior to the date of the language proficiency examination for which they are applying may take the examination only with authorization from their Executive Officer or the head of administration at offices away from Headquarters and field offices.

3.4 The office responsible for administering the language proficiency examination at each duty station shall ensure that the eligibility requirements above are met.

Applications

3.5 Candidates for the language proficiency examination who meet the conditions set out above in the present section shall complete the appropriate application form and submit it with all required documentation in accordance with procedures set out in the information circular announcing upcoming examinations.

Requirements for passing the language proficiency examination

3.6 The language proficiency examination shall consist of a written part and an oral part, which shall be taken at the same session.

3.7 A minimum score of 65 per cent in both parts shall be required for a passing grade. Where candidates receive a score of 80 per cent or more on the written part but fail the oral part, the Board of Examiners shall review the case and may allow candidates to retain their written score for the following examination session. In this event, the candidate shall receive written notification of the Board's decision and shall be required to apply to retake the oral examination only at the following session.

3.8 Candidates who receive 80 per cent or more on the oral part but fail the written part and candidates who have taken only one part of the examination at one session shall retake both the written and oral parts at a subsequent session.

Section 4

Language allowance

4.1 Staff members appointed to posts in the General Service, Security Service or Trades and Crafts category, or in the Field Service category up to and including level FS-5, holding a fixed-term or a continuing appointment shall be paid a language allowance in accordance with staff rule 3.8 after they have established proficiency in at least two official United Nations languages in accordance with section 2 of the present instruction, unless the entitlement is specifically excluded from the salary scale for locally recruited categories of staff applicable to the duty station.

4.2 The language allowance shall be paid to a staff member who has met the conditions of section 4.1 of the present instruction as of the first of the month following the month in which the staff member successfully passed the language proficiency examination.

Section 5

Final provisions

5.1 The present administrative instruction shall enter into force on 1 January 2017.

5.2 Administrative instruction [ST/AI/1999/2](#) of 13 May 1999 is hereby abolished.

(Signed) Yukio **Takasu**
Under-Secretary-General for Management
