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**Abstract**

There is an established, if weak, inverse relationship between levels of English language proficiency and academic performance in higher education. In response, higher education institutions (HEIs) insist upon minimum entry requirements concerning language for international applicants. Many HEIs now also offer pre-sessional English courses to bring applicants up to the designated language requirement. This paper revisits the research into language proficiency and academic performance using data on all full-time students (17,925) attending a major UK HEI in the academic year 2011–2012, 4,342 of whom were non-native English speakers. The findings confirm that while higher International English Language Testing System (IELTS) marks at entry translate into higher grade point averages (GPAs), students who undertake pre-sessional courses do notably worse in GPA terms than students who arrive with acceptable (for the course) IELTS scores. These findings suggest HEIs (and, by extension, international students) could benefit from a review regarding the appropriateness of current pre-sessional English language proficiency programmes. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)