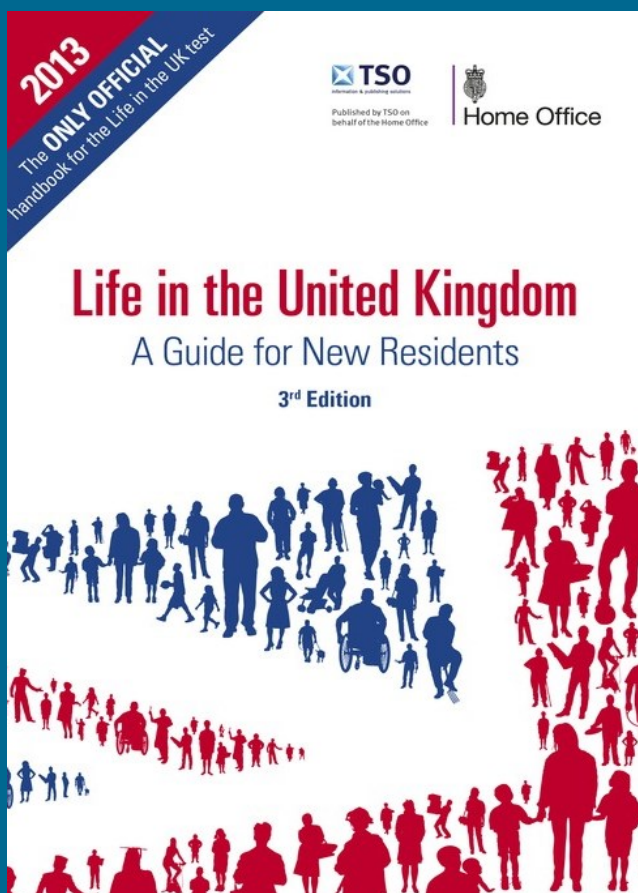


# The *Life in the UK* citizenship test: Is it unfit for purpose?

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The *Life in the UK* citizenship test was launched in 2005 and revised in 2007. The test must be passed by anyone applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) or naturalisation. Past editions were criticised for factual inaccuracies and their failure to include much information about British history and culture.

The third edition was published in March 2013. It is a comprehensive departure in form and content from past tests that raises several serious concerns about the construction of the test. **Its inability to meet its central goal as a test of knowledge about life in the United Kingdom renders it unfit for purpose and it is in need of urgent reforms.**



‘We’ve stripped out mundane information about water meters, how to find train timetables, and using the internet. The new test rightly focuses on values and principles at the heart of being British. Instead of telling people how to claim benefits it encourages participation in British life’.

Mark Harper MP, Minister for Immigration

‘*In fact*, the new 3rd edition test does the opposite: it removes requirements for new citizens to know how to phone an ambulance, contact the police, register with a doctor or how the education system works: precisely what any citizen should be expected to know. The test might *encourage* participation, but it offers few clues about how this can be achieved’.

Dr Thom Brooks, Durham Law School

# What is the purpose of the *Life in the UK* citizenship test? What kinds of information should be included?

The *Life in the UK* citizenship test is an integral part of British immigration policy.

Since 2007 every applicant for Indefinite Leave to Remain or naturalization must pass a test of citizenship knowledge, such as the *Life in the UK* citizenship test. Around 150,000 people took the test in 2012. About 70% pass the test each year.

The *Life in the UK* test has 24 multiple

choice questions selected randomly. Applicants have 45 minutes to answer 18 or more correctly to pass. The test costs £50 and can be taken no more than once a week until passed. The cost of study materials and the test have risen over 60% since 2009. The first edition had only a handbook. The second edition had a handbook and a second book with practice questions. The third edition has revised both at increased costs and added a new

'official study guide' for purchase. About one-third of the questions test British history. Other questions cover British politics, British values, culture, places of interest, sport and information about volunteering in local communities.

Further information can be found on the UK Border Agency website for the *Life in the UK* test: <http://lifeintheuktest.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>.

'Passing the *Life in the UK* test is part of demonstrating that you are ready to become a permanent migrant to the UK. This handbook is designed to...help you to integrate into society and play a full role in your local community. It will also help ensure a broad general knowledge of the culture, laws and history of the UK'.

*Life in the United Kingdom: A Guide for New Residents, 3rd edition*

## Unfit for purpose

### Impractical

The *Life in the UK* handbook claims it will help applicants 'integrate into society and play a full role in your local community' including 'a broad general knowledge' of British laws. However, the test removes information available previously about the NHS, educational qualifications and what subjects are taught in schools, how to report a crime or contact an ambulance. Candidates must instead know the age of Big Ben and height of the London Eye.

### Inconsistent

The test no longer requires

citizens to know the number of MPs in Westminster, but continues to require knowledge of the number of members in the Welsh government, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly. Candidates are required to know about all lower courts in the judiciary including youth courts, but there is no mention of the UK Supreme Court.

### Trivial Pursuits

The test includes facts that are purely trivial, such as the following dates in the life of Sake Dean Mahomet: birth (1759), first came to UK (1782), eloped to Ireland (1786), opened first curry house (1810), and death (1851).

### Gender Imbalance

The historical chapter gives dates of birth for 29 men, but only 4 women. Neither of the Queen's birthdays are included. No women artists, musicians or poets receive any mention. The Home Office announcement of the new test celebrated the inclusion of artistic and cultural heritage in the test by naming 9 men. No women were mentioned.

### Already Outdated

Some information is already outdated. The handbook states that former PM Margaret Thatcher is alive although she died about a fortnight after its publication.

## English language proficiency test

- \* All applicants for Indefinite Leave to Remain or naturalisation must demonstrate satisfactory English proficiency by passing the *Life in the UK* citizenship test **or** completing an ESOL with citizenship course
- \* From October 2013, the *Life in the UK* must be passed **and** a new test of English
- \* One problem is that anyone taking **the same test** from October 2013 will no longer meet the language proficiency requirement which is arbitrary and unfair
- \* Second problem is this requirement is subject to nearly a dozen exemptions that may render it impractical and ineffective

Thom Brooks is Reader in Law in Durham Law School and founding editor of the Journal of Moral Philosophy. He has held visiting positions at Oxford, St Andrews and Uppsala.

**Recent publications include:**  
Brooks, Thom (2012) 'The British Citizenship Test: The Case for Reform', *The Political Quarterly* 83: 560-566.

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