The big question: What should be on the test to become a citizen of Australia?

The governments of many countries around the world are becoming increasingly strict about migration in the face of growing concerns about, amongst other things, terrorism. In Australia, the federal immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has called for debate about a “tougher” citizenship test that will ensure that people who become citizens of Australia truly share and embrace its values and culture.

Presently, prospective citizens must sit a test which involves twenty question on Australian history, government, geography and traditions. Dutton has said he would like to see the test move away from a simple examination of knowledge about Australia and focus more on prospective citizens’ values and intentions for educating their children, learning English and being employed.

Immigration and citizenship tests are always a hot topic and Dutton’s call for debate on the topic has certainly generated a range of views in response. Peoples’ views on the issue of the test tend to align with their more general attitude about immigration, meaning that if they are anti-immigration, they argue for a tough test which will exclude many people, and if they are pro-immigration, they argue for a test which will be accessible for all.

Quick facts:

- Currently the citizenship test is made up of 20 multiple choice questions randomly drawn from a pool of over 2000 questions
- In order to pass the test, you must answer 15 questions correctly
- Since 2007, over 650,000 people have sat the test with only 7,200 people failing
- If you fail the test three times, you must undergo a 20 hour course in order to gain citizenship
- The test can only be completed in English
Arguments that...we need a new, tough citizenship test

- The current citizenship test is too easy. It is simply a list of Australian trivia that needs to be learnt. It doesn’t in any way test if you appreciate or respect Australian values.
- Becoming a citizenship of Australia is something that should be treasured. We need a test that’s not a walkover to ensure people value becoming part of this country.
- More important than knowing who Don Bradman was, is understanding that we value freedom, education and equality in this country. We need a test that establishes whether prospective citizens share these values.

Snap perspectives

Current test is simply trivia

Mr Dutton yesterday continued to argue for the test to be geared around Australian values rather than what he dubbed “Australian trivia” as a means of ensuring greater scrutiny of those with histories of welfare dependence or criminal behaviour. He said the ability of a permanent resident to work, engage with the community, speak or learn English and pursue a good education for their children should be relevant factors considered when granting citizenship.

“We need to see whether people are abiding by Australian laws, whether they are educating their children, if they are able-bodied and of working age, whether or not they are engaged in work or whether they have had a long period of time on welfare,” he told radio station 3AW.

As reported by the ABC

Tougher test may demonise immigrants

Migration Council chief executive Carla Wilshire challenged a number of assumptions behind Mr Dutton’s push for a shake-up, saying there was already a character test and migrants had higher labour market participation rates. “Our current migration and citizenship system is robust and has a number of safeguards built in, including character checks and security clearances,” Ms Wilshire told The Australian.

“Two-thirds of our permanent migration program are skilled entrants, who must meet strict English language requirements and must have significant qualification and education levels. In this debate, it is important to remember that migrants have higher labour market participation rates and access less welfare payments than Australian-born citizens.

“We need to be careful that we do not demonise or disadvantage people who have come to contribute to Australia.”

As reported by The Australian

- How can you possibly accurately test people on things such as their intentions to learn English, get job or education their children?
- At the moment the test is just one part of a range of procedures that are in place to become a citizen. This includes prospective citizens passing a character test (what is their general conduct like) and security test (do they have a criminal record). Surely we can better just someone possible future actions by these tests than some questions on a citizenship test?