

CoHE Makes Major Changes in ALES: It Becomes Simpler and More Functional

Current Situation

The Academic Personnel and Graduate Education Exam (ALES) was first introduced in 1997 under the name of *Graduate Education Exam* (LES). The Council of Higher Education decided to combine this exam with the exam carried out for the appointment of academic staff other than faculty members to permanent positions in higher education and renamed it as *Academic Personnel and Graduate Education Exam* (ALES) in the meeting dated February 2, 2007. There are also international exams such as GRE and GMAT similar to ALES. ALES is more similar to the general GRE test.

The current ALES consists of four topics: Quantitative-1, Quantitative-2, Verbal-1 and Verbal-2. Both sections are distributed to candidates in a single booklet. There are 160 questions in total and the duration of the exam is 180 minutes (three hours). The quantitative section comprises of two tests consisting of 40 questions each (Quantitative-I and Quantitative-II) and the verbal section comprises of two tests consisting of 40 questions each (Verbal-I and Verbal-II). Candidates can answer any questions they want. Instead of measuring the competence and knowledge gained in certain higher education programs, the questions in each test are intended to measure general qualifications in the quantitative and verbal fields. Higher education graduates coming from different fields of study can answer these questions.

The ALES scores are valid for a period of 3 years starting from the date the results are announced. The weights assigned to the sub-tests differ according to score types. The Verbal-II test does not have any effect on the quantitative ALES scores, the Quantitative-II test does not have any effect on the verbal ALES scores and the Verbal-II test does not have any effect on the equally-weighted ALES scores.

Criticism about the Content of ALES

In addition to being prepared for measuring high-level thinking skills of candidates (judgment, analysis, inference and the like) in quantitative and verbal fields, ALES has evolved into an exam consisting of questions based on information. The questions in Quantitative-I and Quantitative-II tests have become questions that mostly measure basic mathematical knowledge and there has been a decline in the number of questions that measure the mathematical reasoning ability which was aimed by the ALES Quantitative test. Similarly, it was observed that the questions that are in the ALES Verbal-I and Verbal-II tests were centered around more on the topics of basic Turkish grammar. This has caused the ALES verbal test to be out of the main aim and scope of the exam as it was in the ALES quantitative test. It was also observed that the questions in Quantitative-I and Quantitative-II, just like the questions in Verbal-I and Verbal-II, showed similarities and that the boundaries between them were not very clear.

Criticism about the Duration and Number of Questions of ALES

Conducting ALES, which is expected to measure high-level thinking skills and to have a high level of difficulty, in a single session has been under criticism for affecting the focus and motivation of candidates negatively. Taken into account the natural human needs, the number of questions in the exam were above the average and the duration of the exam was long.

Criticism about the Calculation of Score Types for ALES

While calculating the quantitative, verbal and equally-weighted ALES scores, the weight given to Quantitative-I, Quantitative-II, Verbal-I and Verbal-II tests was different and one of the tests had no effect on the related score. As a result, candidates had a hard time trying to understand the logic behind the test scores and had difficulties in the application process for graduate education. In addition, it is often mentioned that unequal distribution of verbal and quantitative test results during the calculation of equally-weighted ALES scores (60% of quantitative test results and 40% of verbal test results have an effect on the calculation of equally-weighted scores) was a disadvantage for candidates who studied in a verbal field.

Validity of ALES Scores

Currently, ALES scores are valid for 3 years. When the validity for their ALES scores is over, students, especially those who are doing a master's degree, spend more time on studying for ALES than on their academic studies in order to apply to doctoral programs. This affects academic productivity negatively. The validity of GRE scores—ALES is mostly referenced from GRE—is a period of 5 years and candidates demand the same validity period for ALES scores.

New Arrangements in ALES

1- There has been a reduction in the number of tests in ALES. The new ALES will consist of two tests, a quantitative test and a verbal test. There will no longer be Quantitative-I, Quantitative-2, Verbal-I and Verbal-II tests.

2- New arrangements have been made regarding the content of the tests.

The ALES verbal test will consist of questions on topics such as meanings in words, sentences and parts, sentence and text completion, deduction, irrelevant sentences, and content integrity. It is aimed to measure the verbal reasoning skills as well as the basic grammar skills of candidates.

The ALES quantitative test will consist of questions on topics such as basic mathematical operations, mixed operations, mathematical relations, and geometry. It is aimed to measure the high-level thinking skills of candidates such as sorting, analysis, interpretation and logical reasoning.

3- There has been a decrease in the number of questions. In addition to increasing the time allocated for each question, the total duration of the test has also been shortened.

Previously, the exam consisted of 160 questions and the duration of the exam was 180 minutes (3 hours). With the new arrangement, the exam will have two separate parts, verbal and quantitative tests consisting of 50 questions each. The duration of the new exam, which

has 100 questions in total, is determined as 150 minutes (2.5 hours). It is expected that the new arrangement will also contribute to the reduction of stress caused by the exam.

4- **The equally-weighted ALES scores, which weren't calculated equally before, will be equally weighted.** Although the weights for calculating quantitative and verbal ALES scores were not changed, it was decided that 50% of the quantitative test and 50% of the verbal test would affect the calculation of equally-weighted ALES scores.

5- **ALES scores, which were previously valid for 3 years, will be valid for 5 years.**

STATEMENT OF CoHE PRESIDENT SARAÇ ON THE NEW ARRANGEMENT

"As the new CoHE, we made changes in the content of ALES in order to make the exam as similar as the other equivalent international exams. We also aim to measure and determine the high-level thinking skills of candidates by using the existing knowledge related to quantitative and verbal fields of study instead of knowledge. We have made improvements on topics such as the duration, number of questions, calculation of contents and scores, and the validity of the exam scores.

Before rearranging ALES, we reviewed similar international exams and received the views of relevant stakeholders and field experts. The commission we have set up for the exam has reviewed various alternative tests and, as a result, this arrangement has been made.

The new arrangements will be implemented in the next ALES that will be held in October 2017.

The new arrangements are as follows:

- We reduced the number of tests in ALES.
- We reduced the number of questions. In addition to increasing the time allocated for each question, we also shortened the exam duration.
- We made the equally-weighted ALES scores, which weren't originally calculated equally, as equally-weighted scores.
- We increased the validity of ALES scores from 3 years to 5 years.

The Academic Personnel and Graduate Education Exam (ALES) has become simpler and more functional in the light of the opinions, criticism and suggestions we have received from Turkish academia for many years.

Finally, I would also like to express that, as the new CoHE, we will continue to do our best to make Turkish higher education system simpler, more functional and more transparent."