

# Manchester English language test scammers have sentences increased

Two men who helped more than 1,000 UK visa applicants to fraudulently pass English language tests will be jailed for longer after Solicitor General Michael Ellis QC MP referred their sentences to the Court of Appeal.

Muhammad Bilal, 36, Mehboob Jilani, 33, and 3 other men ran 3 colleges in Manchester where non-EEA nationals could take an English language test to prove their proficiency when making UK visa applications.

In these colleges, candidates would turn up to have their photograph taken for identification purposes, but Bilal and Jilani would have arranged for an English-speaker to take the test for them. On average, candidates were charged £500 to take part in this scheme, and at least 1,134 tests were considered invalid as a result of cheating at these colleges.

Bilal and Jilani were originally sentenced for conspiracy to defraud to 2 and 4 years' imprisonment respectively at Burnley Crown Court in June 2019 in a case led by Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigations. Today, the Court of Appeal increased Bilal's sentence to 4 years' imprisonment and Jilani's to 6 years. They were also disqualified from being company directors for 4 and 5 years respectively.

Commenting on the increase, the Solicitor General said:

English language requirements help to promote integration, remove cultural barriers and protect public services. Bilal and Jilani helped hundreds of people to flaunt these requirements, justifying more significant custodial sentences.

Anthony Hilton, from Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigations, said:

This ruling recognises the seriousness of the offences and sends a strong deterrent message to those who attempt to commit immigration crimes.

In committing these crimes, Bilal and Jilani were enabling individuals to cheat their way to a qualification – and potentially a visa – to which they were not entitled.