

**F**oreign footballers and managers now have to pass an English test before they can show their skills in the UK under new immigration rules.

Football stars from outside the European Union are considered skilled workers. They need to demonstrate they have a basic knowledge of English before they receive work visas lasting up to three years. However, their wives and girlfriends do not need to pass a language test.

Liam Byrne, the immigration minister, said the Government thought 'long and hard' about not including South American and African stars in the rules, but decided that would be 'un-British'. He added, 'Most of them will be well-off enough to afford a decent language teacher.'

Top English teams have taken many non-EU players. The Argentine Carlos Tevez was said to have had problems with the language when he joined his first English club. The Brazilians Alfonso Alves and Elano also appear to be less than fluent in English.

Meanwhile, the Government has

They will receive short visas to cover the period of their visit. This visa also applies to sports stars in competitions such as the Olympic Games.

The restrictions on skilled workers, including teachers, nurses and engineers, form part of the Government's points-based immigration system. They follow new rules already announced for 'highly-skilled' migrants such as surgeons, computer specialists and top businessmen and women.

As well as using the English tests, companies now need to show they could not find British workers to do the job by advertising in Job Centres. They also have to show that the employees they take on are qualified and earn more than £24,000 a year.

Some people think that the new points system will be good because it will give British job-seekers the first chance to apply for jobs and only the skilled migrants the country actually needs will be able to come.

However, others warn that Britain must not shut its borders to those people who can help the country's economy diversify and