

Tough new citizenship test

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MIGRANTS will have to wait for at least four years before becoming Australian citizens under a Government proposal expected to be announced today.

They also will have to take an English language test. Failure in that will prevent them from becoming Australians.

The measures are expected to be listed in a discussion paper by parliamentary secretary for immigration Andrew Robb. Prime Minister John Howard said yesterday the English language requirements would feature "prominently" in the package.

"I am keen on everybody learning the English language as soon

as possible," he said. "It is absolutely essential."

The Advertiser understands the proposals also include an increase in the waiting period for people to become citizens from three years to four years.

A Government source told *The Advertiser* there had been high-level discussions about lifting the eligibility requirements from three years, to four or even five years. He said there was likely to be public consultation over the changes but there would be a short time frame for people to make their concerns known.

Mr Robb has been working on the proposal since April, when he said knowing the date of the Melbourne Cup was a cultural value everyone hoping to become

a citizen should know.

The English language component was flagged by the Prime Minister, as he called on all Muslims to learn and speak English to better integrate into Australian society. "Fully integrating means accepting Australian values, it means learning as rapidly as you can the English language, if you don't already speak it," Mr Howard said.

Skilled migrants, who make up about 70 per cent of all immigration, are tested before being granted a visa. The remaining 30 per cent, generally refugees, family reunion or family members of skilled migrants, have no requirement to speak English.

“I am keen on everybody learning the English language

- PRIME MINISTER
JOHN HOWARD

