

18 June 2014

To: Fitness to Practise Panellists
Interim Orders Panellists

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Knowledge of English

Further to our circular in April providing information regarding the new category of impairment - 'not having the necessary knowledge of English' – which came into force on 29 April 2014, we wish to provide you with information regarding the changes that will come into effect this month.

From 18 June 2014, the GMC are increasing the minimum International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores accepted as evidence of knowledge of English¹. Previously scores accepted were:

- A score of at least 7.0 in each of the four areas tested (speaking, listening, reading and writing)
- And an overall score of at least 7.0.

From 18 June, accepted scores will be:

- A score of at least 7.0 in each of the four areas tested (speaking, listening, reading and writing)
- And an overall score of at least 7.5

The conditions and undertakings banks will be updated to reflect this change.

From 25 June 2014, there will be a new power to direct a language assessment.

Panels may receive Language Assessment reports as part of the evidence presented by the GMC where an assessment has been directed as part of the investigation and forms part of the case to be considered by the panel.

¹ IELTS Band explanation below

Additionally in accordance with rule 17(4)(c) GMC (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2004, panels will be able to direct a language assessment where they have serious concerns about a doctor's knowledge of English. Where a doctor does not meet the scores considered acceptable by the GMC or fails to comply with a direction of the panel, the GMC may then consider whether additional allegations are required which would then be considered by the panel.

While doctors can be given up to 90 days to comply with a direction to complete a language assessment, panels should give careful consideration to the period of adjournment required when a direction for an assessment is made. Consideration should be given to the time required to prepare the case in respect of any new allegation, and to the notice period required to be served by the GMC should an additional allegation be added and to any other factors the panel consider relevant.

Please find attached Guidance for MPTS panels dealing with concerns about a doctors knowledge of English. The General Medical Council (Fitness to Practise Rules) 2004 which will be amended to reflect these changes can be accessed here <http://www.mpts-uk.org/about/1607.asp> from 25 June 2014.

Kind Regards

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The IELTS 9-band scale

Each band corresponds to a level of English competence. All parts of the test and the Overall Band Score can be reported in whole and half bands, eg 6.5, 7.0, 7.5, 8.0.

Band 9: Expert user: has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.

Band 8: Very good user: has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.

Band 7: Good user: has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

Band 6: Competent user: has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

Band 5: Modest user: has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.

Band 4: Limited user: basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.

Band 3: Extremely limited user: conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.

Band 2: Intermittent user: no real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.

Band 1: Non-user: essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.

Band 0: Did not attempt the test: No assessable information provided.