



Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service
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Accepting alternative evidence of English language proficiency

Background

All doctors who practise medicine in the UK must have the necessary knowledge of English to communicate effectively so they do not put the safety of their patients at risk.

In order to demonstrate suitable proficiency where required, the academic version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was used. While other evidence would be considered, meeting the overall score of 7.5 and then achieving at least 7 in each of the four domains in IELTS was the typical evidence considered by tribunals to determine if a doctor had the required knowledge of English Language.

From **6 February 2018** an additional test of English language called the **Occupational English Test** – medicine profession version (OET) will also be routinely and automatically accepted. Prior to this date, OET has already been accepted on a case by case basis for the registration of doctors and therefore the system is known and has been subject to a thorough benchmarking exercise that has confirmed that it is as rigorous as IELTS.

The introduction of this additional test is designed to increase flexibility for doctors keen to work in the UK, while maintaining a requirement for a high standard of English. The test is already recognised by the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, and authorities in Australia and New Zealand.

The MPTS makes impartial decisions in doctors' fitness to practise hearings. The MPTS is part of the General Medical Council but it is operationally separate and it is accountable to Parliament.

Test requirements

In order to demonstrate the required proficiency, doctors need to achieve at least a grade B in each of the [four domains tested in the OET](#) in a single sitting, to meet the GMC's language requirements. The OET tests ability in the same four language domains as IELTS but has been developed for 12 healthcare professions (including medicine, dentistry and nursing). The content for the reading and listening domains is the same for all professions. However, the content of the writing and speaking domains is specific to the relevant profession.

How to compare OET & IELTS Results

Where a doctor has completed an IELTS test or OET, and achieved the minimum score the GMC requires, within the last two years^{*}, this will usually be evidence that a doctor has the necessary knowledge of English. However tribunals should consider the most recent evidence provided by or about the doctor when considering impairment by reason of not having the necessary knowledge of English. If a doctor passed OET in September 2017 but failed IELTS in November 2017, this would be evidence in support of concerns about their knowledge of English. If a doctor failed IELTS in December 2017 but went on to pass OET in March 2018, this should be accepted as evidence of competence.

Band Scores

OET Results	IELTS Band Score
A	8.0 - 9.0
B	7.0 - 7.5
C+	6.5
C	5.5 - 6.0
D/E	5 or lower

To date, it had been possible for a doctor to take more than one IELTS test and submit the results to the GMC within the required 90 days. Doctors will not be prevented from taking more than one 'English language assessment' within the 90 day period and this could be IELTS, OET or a combination of the two.

* The British Council advises that proficiency in English deteriorates after two years if it is not used on a regular basis.

Transitional Arrangements

Anyone considering the question of whether a doctor has the necessary knowledge of English on or after 6 February will/should accept a pass in OET as evidence of the doctor having the necessary knowledge of English as long as:

- the doctor achieved the minimum scores in OET as required by the GMC within the 2 year period before the question is being considered; and
- there is no evidence postdating the OET test (generally, but this would also include where the doctor has subsequently failed IELTS) that casts doubt on the question of them having the necessary knowledge of English.

Directing an English language assessment

Currently, when directing an English language assessment, a tribunal will direct a doctor to specifically undergo an IELTS test. From 6 February, they should instead make a general direction to undergo an 'English language assessment'. Details of the tests acceptable to the GMC are in the glossary to the restrictions bank and should be identified to the doctor. The doctor can then choose which test to sit and the GMC will reimburse the cost of that test. Currently, doctors are required to submit their evidence to the GMC within 90 days - this will not change. The Tribunal Directions template has been updated to reflect this.

In order to support this change, the [Undertakings and Conditions banks](#) (including glossaries) have been updated and a revised version of the [Sanctions Guidance](#) released. Within the new version of the Sanctions Guidance, a further change has also been made; you will now note the reference to 'child pornography' has been replaced with 'child sex abuse materials'.

New Cases

There may be some hearings which commence after 6 February where the notice of allegation includes an allegation that the doctor does not have the necessary knowledge of English and only refers to IELTS. At the hearing a tribunal may be presented with evidence that a doctor has achieved the requisite standard in the OET after the dates specified in the allegations (which refer only to IELTS). The tribunal may decide, after hearing the evidence that the doctor has failed to achieve the required IELTS score and find the relevant facts proved. However, at the impairment stage, the tribunal should accept the OET as evidence that the doctor is not currently impaired by reason of not having the necessary knowledge of English, in light of the more recent OET scores (subject to the pass being achieved in the past 2 years and there being no other more recent evidence that casts doubt on the question of them having the necessary knowledge of English).

Review cases

For a doctor who already has English language conditions, their conditions will be amended at the next review (if conditions remain appropriate) to give them the option of taking IELTS or OET.

If a doctor comes to a review hearing and has taken and passed OET whilst the condition (to undertake IELTS) has been in place, a tribunal should accept a pass in OET as evidence that they have the necessary knowledge of English (subject to the pass being achieved in the past 2 years and there being no other more recent evidence that casts doubt on the question of them having the necessary knowledge of English).

A formal announcement on the GMC's acceptance of OET will be made later this week.

Yours sincerely

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