



Policy and Procedure: English language proficiency

1.0 Purpose and Scope of Policy

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to define the Board's standard for accepting evidence to demonstrate an applicant's proficiency in the English language, in accordance with the requirements for an application for registration.
- 1.2 This policy applies to applicants for all categories of registration, except mutual recognition.
- 1.3 This policy applies to applications received on or after 1 October 2009.

2.0 Introduction and relevant legislation

- 2.1 The Board has a statutory responsibility to protect the public and to maintain public confidence in the health professions. Implicit in this responsibility is the need for the Board to have confidence in the applicant's command of the English language.
- 2.2 Section 45(1)(b) of the Optometrists Registration Act 2001 (the Act) gives the Board the discretion to consider an applicant's command of the English language in deciding whether an applicant is **fit to practise** the profession.
- 2.3 The Board employs the Occupational English Test (OET) model for testing proficiency in the English language.
- 2.4 The Board accepts the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as an alternative or approved equivalent.

3.0 Requirements for Applicants

- 3.1 The Board requires all applicants born in a country other than Australia or New Zealand to:
 - a) submit evidence of speaking and communicating in English as demonstrated by having completed the OET examination (or approved equivalent) in accordance with the minimum standards in paragraph 4, or
 - b) if eligible, seek an exemption from the Board, providing relevant supporting evidence (see paragraph 5).

4.0 Minimum standards

- 4.1 The Board will require the applicant to have achieved a minimum score of:
- A or B in each of the four components of the OET examination; or
 - 7 in each of the four components of the IELTS examination.
- 4.2 The results of each component of the English language proficiency test must be obtained at the one sitting, i.e. pass results in a module from a previous attempt at either examination cannot be carried forward to a subsequent sitting which, when combined, would give an overall pass in the examination.
- 4.3 Results must have been obtained within two years prior to applying for registration (unless exempted see below).
- 4.4 An OET (or approved equivalent) Test Report Form more than two years old, will be acceptable as evidence of present level of ability if accompanied by proof that the applicant has
- a) actively maintained employment as a health practitioner in a country where English is the native or first language¹, or
 - b) undertaken an undergraduate university program in their profession in Australia or New Zealand.

5.0 Exemptions

- 5.1 An exemption from the requirements in paragraph 4 is available for those who have successfully completed secondary education, of at least one year (not university training), in a country where English is the native or first language, not merely an official language².
- 5.2 Applicants seeking this exemption must do so in writing and provide certified copies of documentary evidence of the completion of secondary education as defined in 5.1. For those educated in the Republic of South Africa or the province of Quebec in Canada, evidence must also be provided that the secondary school was an English speaking school.'
- 5.3 At the Board's discretion, and with the imposition of appropriate conditions, the following exemptions may also apply:
- a) perform clinical demonstrations; or
 - b) undertake research which involves limited or no patient contact; or

¹ The Board recognises certain countries where English is the dominant language, including: United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Republic of South Africa

² A country's official language does not necessarily correlate with the number of English speakers in that country

- c) undertake postgraduate study or training

while working in an appropriately supported environment which does not involve patient contact or will ensure patient safety is not compromised.

6.0 Responsibilities

- 6.1 Applicants are responsible for contacting the appropriate body on all matters relating to the administration of English testing, examination dates and associated procedures. Approved English tests are held throughout Australia and overseas. The contact details for coordinating bodies are:

OET Australia
Tel: +61 3 9825 3800
Website: www.occupationalenglishtest.org
Email: oet@oet.com.au

IELTS Australia
Tel: + 61 2 6285 8222
Website: www.ielts.org
Email: ielts@idp.edu.au

7.0 Fees

- 7.1 The applicant is responsible for all costs associated with testing of proficiency in the English language.

8.0 Timeframes

- 8.1 If evidence of English Language proficiency is not received, or does not meet the requirements detailed above, the Board will forward a letter of incomplete application to the applicant outlining the further information required. No further processing of the application will occur until the outstanding information is provided. (See policy *Incomplete applications*.)

9.0 Policy review

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed annually from the date of endorsement, with amendments to be proposed to the Board as required.
- 9.2 The Director, Registration Services Program will be responsible for conducting the review of the policy and recommending amendments to the Board.

Commencement date: 1 October 2009
Review date: July 2010