

Evidence of English language competence: Guidance for applicants

Contents

Background	4
When we will request evidence of knowledge of English Registration	4
Applicants from the European Economic Area (EEA)	5
Non EEA-qualified applicants	5
Temporary registrants	6
Restoration to the GDC registers	6
Factors we will take into account when considering whether to request further evidence of knowledge of English	6
Criteria for assessing whether applicants have the necessary knowledge of English	7
Types of evidence we are likely to accept	7
Evidence type 1: An International English Language Testing System (IELTS) certificate at the appropriate level	7
Evidence type 2: A recent primary dental qualification that has been taught and examined in English	8
Evidence type 3: A recent pass in a language test for registration with a regulatory authority in a country where the first and native language is English	9
Evidence type 4: Recent experience of practising in a country where the first and native language is English	9
Other evidence	9

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Background

1. To practise safely in the UK, all dental professionals must have the necessary knowledge of English.
2. Necessary knowledge of English is defined as “a knowledge of English which, in the interests of the person and the person’s patients, is necessary for the practice of dentistry in the UK”. We are elaborating this general definition in accordance with our standards, which state:

‘You must be sufficiently fluent in written and spoken English to communicate effectively with patients, their relatives, the dental team and other healthcare professionals in the United Kingdom.’¹

3. The Standards for the Dental Team also highlight the need for dental professionals to be able to document their work clearly and accurately. If dental professionals do not have the necessary knowledge of English, they are unlikely to fulfil these requirements. Communication is speaking, reading, writing and listening.
4. The Dentists Act 1984 requires the GDC to be satisfied that all applicants have the necessary knowledge of English prior to entry to our registers and also at the point of restoration to the register.
5. In this guidance we set out the criteria we will apply to determine whether the evidence provided by an applicant satisfies us that they have the necessary knowledge of English.

When we will request evidence of knowledge of English

Registration

6. This section describes how and when we will request evidence or information to determine whether you have the necessary knowledge of English and the process we will follow.

There are a number of opportunities for you to demonstrate your knowledge of English:

7. If we are satisfied about your knowledge of English from your initial application for registration or restoration we will not request further evidence or information.
8. If we are **not** satisfied that you have produced sufficient evidence that you have the necessary knowledge of English we will request further evidence and/or information.
9. If this further evidence still does not satisfy us, we will direct you to undertake a test before we register you. The test that we will direct you to undertake is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, which is recognised by the UK Home Office. You must achieve the pass scores which are set out in Table 1 below.

¹ A link to the Standards for the Dental Team can be found on our website here:

<http://www.gdcuk.org/Newsandpublications/Publications/Publications/Standards%20for%20the%20Dental%20Team.pdf>

Applicants from the European Economic Area (EEA)²

10. If you are an applicant from the European Economic Area (EEA) and your qualifications and training meet the requirements for ‘automatic recognition’ as set out in the EU Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications³ but we do not have sufficient evidence of your knowledge of English on the basis of your initial application, we will recognise your qualification and write to you informing you of this.
11. We will then ask you to provide evidence that you have the necessary knowledge of English before we register you.
12. If your application is being assessed under the EU Directive’s ‘General Systems provisions’⁴ and we decide that your qualification or training does not meet our minimum requirements, we will set out in a letter the shortfall in your training and require you to undertake appropriate compensation measures before we can register you.
13. Compensation measures are considered as part of the recognition process therefore, if necessary, any language controls will be applied after the compensation measures.
14. Even if you do not provide evidence that you have the necessary knowledge of English but you meet our qualification and training requirements we will issue a letter recognising your qualification.

Non EEA-qualified applicants

15. If you are an applicant who qualified from outside the EEA you must provide evidence of your language competence when you submit your application.
16. We will assess your English Language competence at the same time we assess your qualifications, knowledge and skill. If we require you to sit the ORE you must provide satisfactory evidence of your knowledge of English before we will allow you to sit the exam.
17. If you are a non EEA-qualified applicant you must satisfy the GDC that you have the requisite knowledge and skill for registration before you can be registered. How this requirement can be satisfied differs according to your circumstances as follows:
 - for dentists who do not have European nationality this requirement may be demonstrated by passing the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE).
 - for dentists who hold European nationality (or who have the same rights as a European national)⁵ this requirement may be demonstrated by an individual assessment of qualifications, knowledge and skill.

² Please see the link for more details of groups that fall under this category
<http://www.gdcuk.org/Dentalprofessionals/Applyforregistration/Pages/Exempt-persons.aspx>

³ Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications (the Directive) as amended

⁴ Articles 10 to 14 of the Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications

⁵ People who fall into this category are known under EU law as “exempt persons”. An exempt person is one who has European nationality, or who is entitled to be treated no less favourably than a national of such a State under the provisions of EU Directive 2004/38/EC.

- for DCPs this requirement may be demonstrated through an individual assessment of qualifications, knowledge and skill.

Temporary registrants

18. If you are a non EEA-qualified applicant seeking to join the register as a temporary registrant we will assess your English Language competence at the same time we assess your qualifications. You must provide evidence of your language competence when you submit your application

Restoration to the GDC registers

19. If you have been registered by the GDC and then you leave the register for whatever reason, including if you have failed to pay the Annual Retention Fee, we must be satisfied that you have the necessary knowledge of English before we can restore your name to the register. In these circumstances we will apply the criteria for determining whether you have the necessary knowledge of English which is set out in this guidance.

20. If you are a UK-qualified applicant returning to the register, you may not need to provide additional evidence or information if we are satisfied about your knowledge of English from your application.

Factors we will take into account when considering whether to request further evidence of knowledge of English

21. We will review the information you provide as part of your application for registration and based on that may ask for further information in relation to your knowledge of English.

22. We are unlikely to ask you for further evidence if you:

- have a recent primary dental qualification that has been taught and examined entirely in English; or
- you have qualified in a country where English is the first and native language; or
- you have recent and continuous experience of practising in a country where English is the first and native language.

23. By 'recent' we mean evidence relating to English language competence that is less than two years old at the point of submitting your application to the GDC. Two years is considered the accepted period for an individual to remain proficient in English if the language is used regularly. If you are unsure about whether the evidence you have meets this standard, we recommend that you contact the GDC to discuss prior to making an application.

24. When we refer to a country where English is the first and native language we mean any country which is on the UK government's list of countries that are exempt from proving knowledge of English in relation to British citizenship and settling in the UK.

The list can be found here: www.gov.uk/english-language/exemptions

Criteria for assessing whether applicants have the necessary knowledge of English

25. We will apply the following criteria for determining whether any evidence that you provide is sufficient to satisfy us that you have the necessary knowledge of English. Any evidence:

- must clearly demonstrate that you have a good command of the English language that should suffice to fulfil the requirements of the Dentists Act in relation to English language competency;
- must be recent, objective, independent and robust;
- must be readily verifiable by the GDC.

26. Readily verifiable means that we must be able to verify it without too much difficulty, for example through contact with recognised dental institutions, healthcare employers, regulators, relevant ministries or government departments.

Types of evidence we are likely to accept

27. There are different ways in which dental professionals can satisfy us that they have the necessary knowledge of English. We will consider all types of credible evidence which meet the criteria set out above. We will review our English language evidence requirements on a regular basis to ensure they remain suitable. We will give full consideration to new sources of evidence that can demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English.

28. Set out below are the types of evidence we will routinely accept as demonstrating that a dental professional has the necessary knowledge of English.

Evidence type 1: An International English Language Testing System (IELTS) certificate at the appropriate level

29. We will accept a certificate in an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam which demonstrates that you have passed the exam according to the scores set out below in Table 1.

30. IELTS tests all four key English language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking.

31. You must provide a single, original, stamped and signed IELTS Test Report Form of your results. This form must usually be no more than two years old at the point of submission.

32. We may accept IELTS test scores that are more than two years old if you can provide evidence that your language skills have not deteriorated in that time, for example by having subsequently undertaken a postgraduate course of study which has been taught and examined in English, or evidence that you have subsequently practised your profession in a country where English is the first and native language.

Table 1: Required IELTS pass scores for dental professionals

Registrant Group	IELTS type	Reading (minimum)	Writing (minimum)	Listening (minimum)	Speaking (minimum)	Overall average
Dentist	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7
Dental Nurse	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7
Dental Therapist	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7
Dental Hygienist	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7
Dental Technician	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7
Clinical Dental Technician	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7
Orthodontic Therapist	Academic	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	7

33. The IELTS test is designed to be a fair and objective measure of English language ability. If you have dyslexia or another disability that you think might affect the outcome of the test, please contact the GDC before applying to discuss what arrangements can be made.

Evidence type 2: A recent primary dental qualification that has been taught and examined in English

34. We will normally accept evidence that you have a recent primary dental qualification that has been taught and examined in English. We define recent as no more than two years old.

35. We require your primary dental qualification to have been taught and examined in English so that we can be assured that you have the necessary knowledge of English. Communication and interaction are key components of safe practice in the UK. To assure us that you have experience in these areas at least 75% of your clinical interaction, including personal contact with patients, relatives and other healthcare professionals must have been conducted in English.

36. Where a primary dental qualification meets the above criteria but is not recent, we may ask for evidence that you have practised dentistry for the preceding two years in a country where English is the first and native language.

37. We may require references from employers covering the preceding two years, which detail your practice in English. This provides assurance that your English language skills are up-to-date.
38. To understand what we mean by practice our [Scope of Practice guidance](#) sets out the skills and abilities each registrant group should have.

Evidence type 3: A recent pass in a language test for registration with a regulatory authority in a country where the first and native language is English

39. If you choose to provide this evidence you will be required to provide supporting evidence from the regulatory authority detailing which language test was used and its requirements. We define recent as no more than two years old.
40. Where the pass in another regulator's language test is older than two years we may ask for evidence that demonstrates that you have practised for the preceding two years in a country where English is the first and native language.
41. We may require employers over the preceding two years to provide original references confirming that the practice you undertook was in English.

Evidence type 4: Recent experience of practising in a country where the first and native language is English

42. We define recent in this context as no more than two years old. If you choose to provide this evidence you must provide original references from employers over the preceding two years detailing your practice in English. This provides assurance that your experience of practising the profession in an English speaking dental environment is recent and your language skills are up to date.

Other evidence

43. There are many ways in which you may be able to satisfy us that you have the necessary knowledge of English for registration. If you provide evidence other than those we have listed they must meet the criteria we have set out i.e. the evidence must be robust, recent and readily verifiable by the GDC.