



# HUMAN GENETICS SOCIETY OF AUSTRALASIA

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## Policy

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## Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that genetic counsellors in Australia and New Zealand have a required minimum English language proficiency to provide safe and effective genetic counselling practice.

## Scope

The Policy applies to genetic counsellors who have undertaken a genetic counselling qualification in which English was not the first language of instruction and assessment.

English language proficiency is demonstrated through the successful completion of an internationally recognised test.

## Definitions

### *English language proficiency*

The ability to demonstrate proficient use of the English language to make and communicate meaning appropriately in spoken and written forms in the context of their genetic counselling practice.

### *Internationally recognised test*

English language proficiency is demonstrated through successful completion of any of the following internationally recognised tests:

- International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
- Occupational English Test (OET)
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
- another internationally recognised test that is deemed suitable by the governing body (e.g., Pearson Test of English, Cambridge English: Advanced).

The test must be successfully completed in no more than two sittings within a six-month period. All four components of reading, writing, listening, and speaking must be successfully completed and meet the stated minimum.

## Policy Principles

The principles that underpin this Policy are:

- that genetic counsellors have the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully engage with their practice and successfully participate in their professional work environments.
- that demonstration of English language proficiency is integral to the development of discipline-based knowledge and that language use varies according to context, audience, and purpose.

## Policy Statements

English language proficiency is set at a level that allows genetic counsellors to participate effectively in their practice and professional work environments. The [HGSA Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors](#) rely on effective listening, written, and oral communication skills in the language of service, which in Australia and New Zealand is primarily English.

In serving **clients** whose first language is not English, the [HGSA Code of Ethics for Genetic Counsellors](#) requires that they are provided access to qualified interpreters as appropriate.

It is the responsibility of the [Board of Censors \(BoC\) for Genetic Counselling](#) that oversees genetic counsellor regulation, to assess the genetic counsellor's English language proficiency by sighting evidence of successful completion of one of the named internationally recognised tests.

### **Cost**

The cost of applying for and completing an English language test, whether successful or not, is to be met in full by the genetic counsellor.

### **Exemptions**

An exemption applies to genetic counsellors who completed a relevant tertiary genetic counselling qualification

- at an institution where English is the primary language of instruction, AND
- where language requirements for admission to the course (which may be different to the requirements for the institution) meet or exceed the minimum requirements described below.

**Any genetic counsellor not meeting this exemption is required to evidence English Language Proficiency through the recognised testing pathways below.**

### **Evidence and Recency**

- English language proficiency is evidenced through submission of the original copy of the test results from the testing body, or a certified copy of the English language test results, at the time of application to the [Professional Practice Committee](#) for MHGSA status.
- The results of the English language test must show that the test was completed no more than two years prior to the application date for certification. In the event an applicant relies on test results from two sittings, the two years begins on the date of the earlier sitting.
- If more than two years has passed, the applicant must be able to demonstrate that:
  - they have been in continuous employment as a genetic counsellor (which commenced within 12 months of the date of the test) in a country where English is the primary language of practice.
  - the date of application to the [Professional Practice Committee](#) is within 12 months of finishing the last period of employment.

## English Language Proficiency – Operational Guide

### Purpose

The purpose of this Operational Guide is to provide a clear framework from which to consistently govern and assess the English language proficiency of overseas-qualified genetic counsellors regulated by the HGSA.

Overseas-qualified genetic counsellors must demonstrate the required minimum English language proficiency as set out below in order to provide safe and effective practice in Australia and New Zealand.

### Minimum Requirements

**For the International English Language Testing System (IELTS):** an overall score of 7 and a minimum score of 7 must be achieved in all four components (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

- Test results will only be accepted from one test sitting, or a maximum of two test sittings in a six-month period only if the applicant achieves:
  - a minimum score of 7 in each sitting, and
  - a minimum score of 7 in each component across the two sittings.

**For the Occupational English Test (OET):** a minimum of B in each of the four components must be achieved.

- Test results will only be accepted from one test sitting or a maximum of two test sittings in a six-month period only if:
  - the applicant is tested in all four components in each sitting, and
  - a minimum score of B in each component is achieved across the two sittings.

**For the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):** the applicant must meet the following requirements within the 24 months preceding application:

- *Paper based test* - a score of 577 or higher, including a score of 4.5 in the Test of Written English (Note that the paper-based test is being phased out).
- *Internet based test* - a score of 79 and scores of:
  - Writing: 21
  - Speaking: 18
  - Reading: 13
  - Listening: 13.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### The Applicant

The genetic counsellor who is applying for certification in Australia and New Zealand is fully responsible for organising and paying for their English language test(s) and for supplying an original or certified copy of the test results as part of their application to the [Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling](#).

### The Governing Body

The [Professional Practice Committee](#) of the [Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling](#) is responsible for ensuring this Policy and Operational Guide is followed in the assessment of English language proficiency for practitioners who are overseas qualified.

The [Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling](#) is not responsible for any employment decisions that relate to English proficiency.

### Implementation

The [Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling](#) is responsible for the implementation and oversight of this Policy through the regulatory process and has oversight of maintaining professional regulation of genetic counsellors. This will include ensuring there is up to date and accessible information available to the profession about this competency requirement (e.g., on the HGSA website).