Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that overseas qualified genetic counsellors seeking certification 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 seeking certification in Australia and New Zealand 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 of genetic counsellors certified in Australia and New Zealand (FHGSA) 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 FHGSA certified genetic counsellors have the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully engage with their practice and successfully participate in their professional work environments
- that certification recognises 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 FHGSA genetic counsellors to participate effectively in their practice and professional work environments.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Censors (BoC) for Genetic Counselling that oversees genetic counsellor certification, to assess the genetic counsellor’s English language proficiency through sighting evidence of successful completion of one of the named internationally recognised tests.

**Cost**

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

**Exemptions**

Genetic counsellors who completed their relevant tertiary qualification in English in any of the following countries are exempt:

- Australia
- New Zealand
- Canada
- Republic of Ireland
- South Africa
- United Kingdom
- United States of America.

**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 submission for certification.
- 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 one of the recognised countries where English
was the primary language of practice

- the certification application date 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 the Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling with a clear
framework from which to consistently govern and assess the English language proficiency of overseas-
qualified genetic counsellors applying for certification in Australia and New Zealand.

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 – Guideline

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 the an original or a certified copy of
the test results as part of their submission to the Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling.
The Governing Body

The Chairperson 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 applying for certification 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 certification process and has oversight of maintaining professional regulation of genetic counselling. This will include the BoC ensuring there is up to date and accessible information available to the profession about this competency requirement (e.g., on the HGSA website).