General Dental Council

# Consultation

## English Language Guidance

November 2026

# Table of contents


Overview ..... 3
Consultation period and deadline for responses ..... 3
Contact us ..... 3
About the GDC ..... 4
Information about the consultation process ..... 5
Analysis ..... 5
Responding to your views ..... 5
About this consultation ..... 5
About your response ..... 5
Ways to respond ..... 6
EDI information section ..... 7
Understanding who is responding ..... 8
Consultation proposal ..... 9
Background ..... 9
Section 1: A recent English language exam at the appropriate level ..... 9
Section 2: A certificate of a recent primary dental qualification, that has been taught and examined in English, from the UK government list of English-speaking countries ..... 10
Section 3: Recent clinical practise in a country where the first language is English ..... 11
Section 4: Other types of evidence ..... 12
Section 5: Further questions ..... 12
Section 6: Equality Impact Assessment ..... 12
EDI monitoring information and link ..... 14
Appendix: list of all questions ..... 15

# Overview

We are consulting on new English language guidance.

This guidance has been updated to reflect changes in the English language and dental workforce landscape, in addition to the new strategic direction of the General Dental Council (GDC). The updated guidance reflects our values and supports our strategic aims.

To produce this guidance, we conducted a thorough review of the policies upon which the guidance is based. This included engagement with a variety of stakeholders, analysing GDC data on English language related fitness to practise cases, and reviewing the current literature on language proficiency and deterioration in healthcare settings.

The changes proposed will impact overseas-qualified dentists and dental care professionals.

The likely impact of these proposed changes will be to improve the English language evidence process for overseas qualified applicants. By provide more testing options we will enable more applicants to use the most robust form of evidence. Removing unclear and unused evidence routes will enable applicants to evidence their English proficiency via a clear, simplified, set of options and documents. These changes will also ensure the GDC can be confident in any English language evidence it accepts, by ensuring all evidence meets the same criteria, is verifiable, and more robust.

This consultation aims to understand if the changes we are proposing are acceptable and the guidance we have produced is easy to understand by all applicants. We would like to hear from overseas-qualified dentists and dental care professionals, stakeholders, and interested parties.

## Consultation period and deadline for responses

This 8-week consultation exercise opened on 11 November 2026.

The closing date, or deadline for responses, is 23:59 on 6 January 2027.

We will be unable to consider responses submitted after that date.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or queries about this consultation, please email stakeholder@gdc-uk.org or phone: 020 7167 6330

## About the GDC

The General Dental Council (GDC) is the UK professional regulator of the dental team. Dental professionals must be registered with the GDC to practise dentistry in the UK.

We regulate the whole dental team across the UK. We seek to ensure patient safety and public confidence in the dental professionals we regulate, which include dental nurses, clinical dental technicians, dental hygienists, dental technicians, dental therapists, orthodontic therapists and dentists.

Our primary objective is to protect the public, and in doing so to:

- Protect, promote and maintain the health, safety, and wellbeing of the public.
- Promote and maintain public confidence in the professions regulated.
- Promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for members of those professions.

All dental patients should be confident that the treatment they receive is provided by a dental professional who is properly trained, qualified, and meets our standards.

To achieve this, we register qualified dental professionals, set standards for the dental team, investigate serious concerns about dental professionals' fitness to practise, and work to ensure the quality of dental education.

# Information about the consultation process

## Analysis

We will use descriptive statistics to analyse the closed questions, including sub-group analysis if appropriate. Responses to the open questions will be analysed thematically to identify key areas of interest. When analysing and reporting on the data we will consider whether responses are from an individual or an organisation.

## Responding to your views

The GDC will respond to views raised during the consultation by producing a consultation outcome report. The report will be published on the GDC website.

## About this consultation

This consultation survey has 17 questions, which start on page 8. We would encourage all respondents to read the information in the consultation before answering the questions.

This consultation is structured in 6 different sections:

**Section 1:** A recent English language exam at the appropriate level
**Section 2:** A certificate of a recent primary dental qualification, that has been taught and examined in English, from the UK government list of English-speaking countries
**Section 3**: Recent clinical practise in a country where the first language is English
**Section 4**: Other types of evidence
**Section 5:** Further questions
**Section 6:** Equality Impact Assessment

## About your response

Summary and direct quotes of individual responses may be included in our consultation outcome report, and responses from organisations may be attributed to them.

We ask for contact details from individuals and those responding to the consultation on behalf of an organisation only for the purposes of asking questions about your response. The need to do this is rare. The names and personal contact details of those responding will not be included in our outcome report and will not be published as part of a Freedom of Information (FOI) release.

At the end of this consultation, we will ask you to tell us about yourself by completing an anonymised survey. This information will not be connected to your responses to this consultation. We will use the data you provide us for overall analysis and insight into the fairness and inclusivity of our processes. Providing this data is extremely helpful, and we would like to encourage you to complete this step.

For details of how we collect, store and process information, please see our privacy notice.

Information held by the GDC is subject to FOI requests, so please do not provide any information you would not want to be disclosed.

## Ways to respond

Please respond to this consultation by using the online response form.

You can also submit your response by email, please include the name of the consultation in the subject line of your email to stakeholder@gdc-uk.org.

## EDI information section

The GDC's core purpose is to protect patients and the public, and to maintain trust in the dental profession. One way we do this is by setting clear standards for all dental professionals in the UK.

We want every patient to be treated as an individual, with respect for their culture and values, and without discrimination. We believe dental professionals give better care when they work in safe, fair, and inclusive environments—free from discrimination or bias. This isn't just a legal duty; it's also the right thing to do for professionals, patients, and the public. In putting together these proposals, we have thought about how the way that we provide guidance to the dental team can support this important aim.

To stay trusted as a regulator, we put equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) at the heart of our work. We explain how we do this in our 2026-28 Strategy, which aims to support a profession that is inclusive and focused on patient-centred care for everyone.

We have considered how our proposals may affect people with protected characteristics. More detail on this can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment.

In Section 6, we ask you to consider whether our proposals have the potential to impact people based on their protected characteristics, whether we have missed anything, and to share your views on how these groups might be impacted.

# Understanding who is responding

**ORGANISATION OR INDIVIDUAL**

1. **Does your response represent your personal views, or are you providing the official response of an organisation?**
   - Personal response [Go to Q.4]
   - Organisation response [Go to Q.2]

**ORGANISATION QUESTION FOLLOW UP**

2. **Please tell us the name of your organisation.**

[text box]

3. **Occasionally we may need further information about your organisation's response (the need to do this is rare). Please provide a contact email address. [Go to main consultation questions]**

[text box]

**INDIVIDUAL MULTIPLE QUESTION FOLLOW UP (delete where necessary)**

4. **Please tell us if you are (Select all that apply):**
   - A UK registered dental professional [Go to Q.5]
   - A Dental student or trainee [Go to main consultation questions]
   - A Qualified dental professional not currently registered with the GDC [Go to main consultation questions]
   - Employed by a UK dental education or training provider [Go to main consultation questions]
   - Employed by a UK healthcare regulator [Go to main consultation questions]
   - None of the above [Go to main consultation questions]

5. **Please tell us your registered title and if you are on a specialist list (Select all that apply):**
   - Dentist
   - Dental nurse
   - Dental hygienist
   - Dental therapist
   - Dental technician
   - Orthodontic therapist
   - Clinical dental technician
   - Specialist list

# Consultation proposal

## Background

To practise safely in the UK and to be entitled to be registered under the Dentists Act 1984, all dentists and dental care professionals must satisfy the registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English. The evidence required to satisfy the GDC that an applicant meets this requirement was last updated in 2017. Restrictive or unclear evidential requirements may result in unnecessary barriers for applicants and creates operational burden when reviewing evidence on a case-by-case basis.  Our new guidance aims to overcome these challenges.

Our new guidance sets out the criteria any evidence must meet:

**a.** **Skills**: your evidence must demonstrate your ability to listen, read, speak and write in English.

**b.** **Recent**: your evidence must be no more than two years old at the time the application is submitted.

**c.** **Verifiable**: your evidence must be from a source that the GDC can readily verify.

d. **Robust**: your evidence must demonstrate a level of English sufficient for safe practice in a clinical setting, equivalent to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) C1.

The guidance also provides the types of evidence we will routinely accept as demonstrating that a dental professional has the necessary knowledge of English. These have been designed to meet our criteria while remaining proportionate to the needs of overseas qualified applicants.

## Section 1: A recent English language exam at the appropriate level

We are proposing to change the English language tests we accept by using a criteria-based approach. These criteria will be used to assess the suitability of an English test, and the scores required.

We propose that exams that meet the following criteria will be acceptable:

- **Skills**: listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills are tested.
- **Recent**: no more than two years old at the point of submission.
- **Verifiable**: the GDC must be able to verify scores directly with the test provider.
- **Robust**: the exam must test a sufficient level of English for use in a clinical setting, equivalent to CEFR C1.
- **Secure**: biometric registration of test takers, protocols against cheating and fraudulence.
- **Objective**: standardised, publicly available, assessment criteria.
- **Independent**: not owned or run by any one organisation that may have a conflict of interest with the GDC.

We will provide a list of tests, and scores, that meet these criteria on our website.

6. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the criteria proposed to assess the suitability of English language tests?**

    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat agree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

**Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).**

[text box]

We have assessed a variety of English language tests currently available against these criteria. We concluded the follow exams meet the criteria and should be accepted:

- Occupational English Test (OET) Dentistry [including OET on paper, OET on computer, OET@Home]
- IELTS Academic [including IELTS One Skill Retake, IELTS Online]
- Cambridge C1 (Advanced) [Digital only]
- TOEFL iBT [including TOEFL iBT at home]
- PTE Academic

7. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the tests we propose accepting?**

    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat agree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

**Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).**

[text box]

## Section 2: A certificate of a recent primary dental qualification, that has been taught and examined in English, from the UK government list of English-speaking countries

We are proposing to retain this evidence type, but to ensure we can be confident in the robustness of the evidence we will only accept it from those who have achieved their primary dental qualification, which has been taught and examined in English, in a country that is included in the UK government list of English-speaking countries, as per this list: www.gov.uk/english-language/exemptions.

8. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?**

    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat agree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

**Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).**

[text box]

## Section 3: Recent clinical practice in a country where the first language is English

We are proposing to retain this evidence type, but to ensure we can be confident in the robustness of the evidence we will only accept it from those who have recent clinical practise in English in a country that is included in the UK government list of English-speaking countries, as per this list: www.gov.uk/english-language/exemptions.

9. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?**

    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat agree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

**Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).**

[text box]

We suggest the following must be provided as evidence of recent clinical practice:

- A reference from an employer over the preceding two years detailing practice in English.
- A recent employment contract for a clinically relevant role in a country on the UK government list of English-speaking countries, alongside proof of registration in the country you have been working in.

10. **Do you think either of these forms of evidence are not necessary, or not suitable? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).**

[text box]

## Section 4: Other types of evidence

We are proposing to continue to accept other, non-specified, evidence. The evidence must meet the criteria laid out in para 3.1 of the guidance.

**11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with maintaining this evidence type?**

a. Strongly agree
b. Somewhat agree
c. Neither agree nor disagree
d. Somewhat disagree
e. Strongly disagree

**Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).**

[text box]

## Section 5: Further questions

**12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the English language guidance is clear and easy to understand?**

a. Strongly agree
b. Somewhat agree
c. Neither agree nor disagree
d. Somewhat disagree
e. Strongly disagree

We have considered the right time to ask for English language evidence for those applying to sit the Overseas Registration Examination (ORE). We are proposing that the right time is when applying to sit the exam, as is our current practice. This is because the ORE is conducted in English, and we want to be sure you have sufficient English language skill to be able to complete the exam.

**13. Do you think continuing to request English language evidence at the time of applying for the exam is the right time during the registration process to do so?**

a. Yes
b. No

**14. Do you have any other comments on the English language guidance that are not covered by your answers to the previous questions?**

[text box]

## Section 6: Equality Impact Assessment

As part of these considerations and in order to meet requirements associated with the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). We have considered the equality and diversity implications of these proposals through an Equality Impact Assessment, and we are seeking to gather further information on the impact of the proposals from respondents.

We would like you to consider whether our proposals have the potential to impact people based on their protected characteristics. Please note, you do not need to provide us with any information regarding your protected characteristics to answer this question. The protected characteristics identified by the Equality Act 2010 are:

- Age.
- Disability.
- Gender reassignment.
- Marriage and civil partnership.
- Pregnancy and maternity.
- Race.
- Religion or belief.
- Sex.
- Sexual orientation.

**15. Would any people in the above groups face increased inequalities, challenges or difficulties as a result of these changes, that have not already been identified in the Equality Impact Assessment?**

**Please specify which groups you think would be impacted and how. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for how these issues could be addressed.**

[Text box]

**16. Would these changes address any existing equality issues, challenges or difficulties that you are aware of?**

**Please specify which groups you think would be impacted and how. If applicable, please let us know if you have any suggestions for how these issues could be better addressed.**

[Text box]

**17. Would these changes have any positive equality impacts?**

**Please specify which groups you think would be impacted and how.**

[Text box]

## EDI monitoring information and link

Thank you for taking the time to share your views as part of this consultation.

To help us better understand who we are reaching and improve future consultations, we would appreciate it if you could complete our optional short Equality, Diversity and Inclusion questionnaire linked below.

EDI monitoring information questionnaire

## Appendix: list of all questions

1. Does your response represent your personal views, or are you providing the official response of an organisation?
2. Please tell us the name of your organisation.
3. Occasionally we may need further information about your organisation's response (the need to do this is rare). Please provide a contact email address. [Go to main consultation questions]
4. Please tell us if you are (Select all that apply):
5. Please tell us your registered title and if you are on a specialist list (Select all that apply):
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the criteria proposed to assess the suitability of English language tests? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the tests we propose accepting? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).
8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).
9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).
10. Do you think either of these forms of evidence are not necessary or not suitable? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).
11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with maintaining this evidence type? Please explain your answer (including any suggestions for changes).
12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the English language guidance is clear and easy to understand?
13. Do you think continuing to request English language evidence at the time of applying for the exam is the right time during the registration process to do so?
14. Do you have any other comments on the English language guidance that are not covered by your answers to the previous questions?
15. Would any people in the above groups face increased inequalities, challenges or difficulties as a result of these changes, that have not already been identified in the Equality Impact Assessment?
    Please specify which groups you think would be impacted and how. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for how these issues could be addressed.
16. Would these changes address any existing equality issues, challenges or difficulties that you are aware of?
    Please specify which groups you think would be impacted and how. If applicable, please let us know if you have any suggestions for how these issues could be better addressed.
17. Would these changes have any positive equality impacts?
    Please specify which groups you think would be impacted and how.

General Dental Council

This information is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0

When you use this information under the Open Government Licence, include the following attribution: Consultation on English Language Guidance.

This publication is available in clear print, large print, or audio formats on request.

This publication is available in Welsh and other languages on request.

Published November 2026
© Copyright General Dental Council 2026
The General Dental Council is a public body created by statute.

**General Dental Council**
**Fifty Paddington**
**50 Eastbourne Terrace**
**London W2 6LG**
**020 7167 6000**