



Title of Project:

Investigating and Revising the Standards Set on the Occupational English Test's (OET) Writing Sub-test

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Project Summary:

Overseas trained health professionals intending to practice in Australia are required to show acceptable English language proficiency as part of the requirement to gain professional registration. Concerns have been raised that the level of written English required on the language tests (including the Occupational English Test (OET), a specific-purpose language test for health professionals) used for this purpose, may be insufficient for effective functioning in the workplace. In response to such concerns, the study will consider the minimum standards of performance on the writing sub-test of the OET. This is via the process of 'standard setting,' a systematic means of eliciting insights from a panel of subject-matter experts (health professionals) about what level of writing proficiency is deemed sufficient for safe professional practice. A thematic analysis of panel discussions will explore the basis for judgments about suitable 'cut scores' between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance thereby illuminating the standard-setting process. In addition to the need to establish defensible standards on the OET, there is a lack of research thus far on what informs judgements about such standards. To investigate the basis for doctors' perceptions, verbal reports in the form of a think aloud protocol (TAP) are utilised. The use of TAPs in standard setting research has received limited attention, particularly in language for specific purpose (LSP) testing contexts. The findings will have implications for the construct validity of the OET standards in particular and for standard-setting in LSP testing more generally.