

To:

NHS Board Chief Executives  
NHS Board Directors of Human Resources  
NHS Boards Directors of Finance  
NHS Scotland Counter Fraud  
SSSC Chief Executive  
Care Inspectorate Chief Executive

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For information

Medical & Nursing  
Directors  
NSS Intelligence  
Team  
NHS Counter Fraud  
Services

Dear Colleague,

## **INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING SYSTEM (IELTS) CERTIFICATES – POTENTIAL FRAUD RISK – ACTION FOR BOARDS**

1. A potential fraud risk has been highlighted following the identification of fraudulently acquired International English Language Testing (IELTS) certificates presented by a small number of internationally trained healthcare professionals to a number of Trusts in England and Wales.
2. Individuals applying for a UK visa to work, study or live in the UK are required to prove knowledge of English by passing a Secure English Language Test. Those applying for registration with a UK health and social care regulatory body (NMC, HCPC and GMC) also require evidence of English language such as an IELTS at the required level.
3. Employers should note that it is their responsibility as the sponsor to ensure that overseas workers have the necessary skills, qualifications or professional accreditations to do their jobs, and to keep all copies of documents showing this. UKVI do not check documentation for staff who are recruited to roles which require registration, whether upfront or whether registration is finalised once the recruit is 'in-country', this is the responsibility of the sponsor to check the validity of documents presented.
4. In addition the NMC do not verify any documentation upon application to join the register. This verification is not undertaken until a candidate has completed all parts of the test of competence for registration including passing OSCE by which point they will already have a visa and be in employment.

### **Enquiries to:**

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5. Whilst many employers have relied on third party assurances (such as NMC or UKVI), in order to minimise the risk of sponsoring or employing internationally trained staff who provide fraudulent IELTS certificates, **it is strongly recommended that employers register with the [IELTS verification service](#) to check the veracity of documents, provide assurance and support effective governance.**
6. This check applies to international staff without pre-existing registration being recruited with the intention of joining the registered workforce (eg. internationally trained nurses who will be employed and undertaking their OSCE training in country) where proof of [Knowledge of English](#) is required as part of their UK visa application and where IELTS is the certification provided as that evidence.
7. This check does not apply to those recruited from overseas who have completed a pre-registration programme that was taught or examined in English, have previously practiced for one year in a country where English is the majority spoken language or are existing staff already registered in the UK.
8. Whilst it is not explicit in the [Safer pre and post-employment checks PIN policy for NHS Scotland](#) it is recommended that this IELTS verification check is undertaken by the sponsoring employer. The PIN policy is currently under review and this advice will be referenced in the revised policy and in the supporting guidance for managers and employees.
9. If you appoint a recruitment agency to undertake pre-employment checks on your behalf you should satisfy yourself that they undertake these checks.
10. Any instances of fraudulent activity should be reported to NHS Counter Fraud liaison contacts, any statutory regulatory body such as [HCPC](#), [GMC](#), [NMC](#) and to UK Visas and Immigration ([UKVI](#)).
11. Further information is available to you at [Identifying fraudulent pre-employment documentation: recruitment from outside the UK | NHS Employers](#). For those providing OET certificates there is also a similar portal at [OET Test Results Verification Portal](#).

Yours sincerely



Gillian Russell

Director of Health Workforce



