IELTS AUSTRALIA

> **Submission No. 155**
> (Overseas Trained Doctors)
> Date: 1/08/2011

Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

5 August 2011

Thank you for your letter dated 6 July 2011 regards the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing inquiry into registration processes and support for Overseas Trained Doctors.

I would also like to acknowledge your letter dated 25 July 2011, and confirm my organisation's interest in participating in the Committee's Public Hearing in Melbourne in late August.

I have read with interest the Terms of Reference, acknowledge your comment regards concerns that have been raised by some overseas trained doctors seeking registration from the Medical Board of Australia regards passing the Board's English language requirements, and am pleased to provide information on the nature of the English language test our organisation provides and an outline of the way in which test results should be interpreted as requested.

We have noticed that there has been some inaccurate evidence given to the committee on IDP:IELTS Australia, and we would like to take this opportunity to correct the record.

Our submission therefore covers the following areas:

- Background to IELTS, including ownership structure, global reach, the role of IELTS and the cost of the test
- Our understanding of the Medical Board requirements and our rationale for a two year validity period
- The nature of IELTS and the way results should be interpreted, including score processing and reporting
- The IELTS Question Paper Production process, test taker performance and the reliability of IELTS results

- Test security
- Research into the test, Stakeholder engagement and the role of IELTS as an exit test

Background to IELTS

IELTS was created 20 years ago to offer a fair and reliable test of English language proficiency for higher education and migration. Since then, IELTS has grown to become one of the world's most popular English language proficiency tests, impacting positively on the life opportunities of millions of candidates who have taken the test in the last two decades. In 2010 over 1.5 million IELTS tests were sat across the globe. The test is administered in over 130 countries and IELTS scores are recognised by over 6,000 universities and colleges worldwide – 3,000 of which are in the USA, including all Ivy League colleges.

IELTS' worldwide success can be attributed to its robust test methodology, strong fit for purpose and the highest levels of test integrity; the highest levels of recognition by governments, employers and education institutions; the geographical accessibility of the IELTS test centre network; and the quality and breadth of the innovative research that underpins the test itself. As a result, IELTS continues year after year to be the preferred choice of both candidates and organisations that seek proof of English language skills.

IELTS is a product owned jointly by three organisations. These organisations are the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia leverage their own individual networks to deliver IELTS to the local markets but develop the IELTS product jointly with the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. In some country's British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia both deliver IELTS to the local market.

IDP Education

Since 1969, IDP Education has played a major role in international education and development. IDP was set up in the time of the Colombo Plan, when development aid was the dominant driver of international education, and we became a leader in delivering education assistance to the Asian region.

In the mid-1980's IDP began recruiting international students for Australian education institutions. Since that time we have become the world's largest international student placement provider and assisted more than 300,000 students to achieve their goal of an international education.

Two decades ago IDP commenced another significant venture, becoming part of the partnership that established IELTS (International English Language Testing System), today the worlds most widely used English language proficiency test. IELTS Australia is a fully owned subsidiary of IDP.

In 2006, SEEK Ltd acquired 50% shareholding in IDP; the remaining 50% continues to be held by Australian university shareholders.

IELTS Australia

IELTS Australia is the foundation partner for the Australian Government in the provision of English language testing services for migration purposes, and in this role has worked with the Government for over 10 years to deliver robust migrant English language testing. IELTS Australia manages a network of approximately 107 IELTS Test Centres across 39 countries. In addition, as a joint owner of IELTS, IELTS Australia also guides the product development and strategies for the future of IELTS.

- 107 test centres managed by IDP: IELTS Australia
- More than 500 test centres together with British Council

Role of IELTS

IELTS is a test of English language proficiency at a given point in time. The role of IELTS is to administer the test according to consistent global standards, ensure the reliability of results and provide necessary information to governments, education institutions, professional associations and employers to help them make informed decisions where English language proficiency is a consideration.

It is up to the government and institutions to determine their English language requirements, which tests they will recognise and what test scores they will set.

Medical Board requirements

Each Australian health profession that is part of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme is represented by a National Board. While the primary role of the Boards is to protect the public, the Boards are also responsible for registering practitioners and students, as well as other functions, for their professions.

The Medical Board has introduced a standard which has been approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council on 31 March 2010 pursuant to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (2009) with approval taking effect from 1 July 2010. According to the standard, all internationally qualified applicants for registration must demonstrate that they have the necessary English language skills for registration purposes by achieving an IELTS Academic level of 7 or

equivalent, and achieve the required minimum score in each component of the IELTS Academic module, OET or specified alternatives. The results must be obtained within two years prior to applying for registration, though the Board may grant an extension in specified circumstances (source: http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards.aspx)

The requirement of a 7 or equivalent in each component of the IELTS Academic module is consistent with a number of other health and non health related professions in Australia, such as Engineering and Accounting.

The requirement that results only obtained within two years is consistent with IELTS advice, which states that results are valid for a two year period only.

Two year validity

IELTS continuously reviews the validity of its results to ensure that the highest standards are maintained. As part of this process IELTS reviews the validity of test score results over time, and factors which may lead to a reduction in language ability. IELTS recommends that a Test Report Form which is more than two years old should only be accepted as evidence of present level of language ability if it is accompanied by proof that a candidate has actively maintained or tried to improve their English language proficiency. This recommendation is based upon IELTS research into second language loss or 'attrition', a topic which is well covered and documented in the literature.

The level of second language competence gained and the extent of opportunity for subsequent practice both affect how much language is retained or lost over a period of time. Research points to two types of attrition. At lower proficiency levels, rapid language loss occurs soon after the end of language training/exposure (for approximately two years) and then levels off leaving a residual competency (Bahrick 1984; Weltens 1989); at higher proficiency levels the reverse pattern can be observed (Weltens and Cohen 1989) – a few years of non-attrition (an 'initial plateau') followed by steady loss. It appears that a critical period exists after disuse; although the nature of this may differ for high and low proficiency users, a two-year limit has been selected as a reasonable 'safe period'.

The nature of the English language test IELTS provides

IELTS is a test of international English, which sets communicative tasks developed by an international team of item writers.
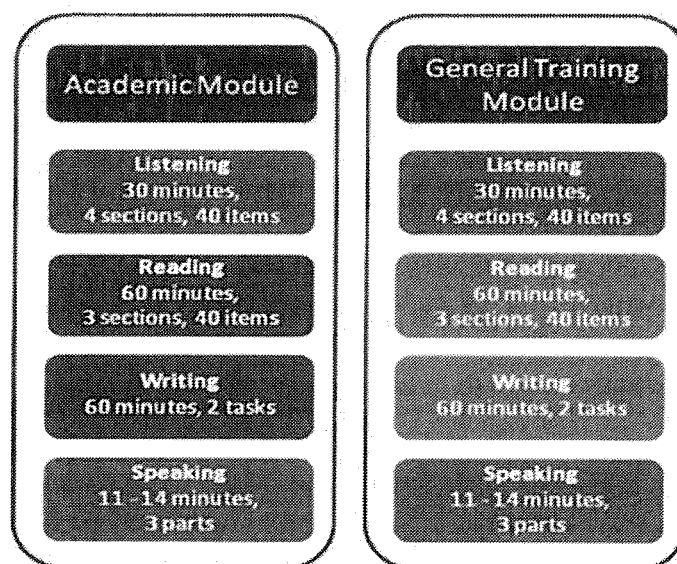
IELTS is a measure of English language proficiency at a given point in time, and not a test of grammar or workplace success.

IELTS is not designed to be a barrier to genuine candidates gaining opportunities which they deserve, rather it provides a robust assessment of language standards against the required benchmarks.

Two types of test

IELTS is available in two formats, namely Academic or General Training. All candidates take the same Listening and Speaking modules but different Reading and Writing modules. Every test version is unique and a candidate will never sit the same test twice.

Listening, Reading and Writing must be completed in one day. Depending on the test centre, the Speaking test may be offered on the same day or up to a week before or after the other parts. See below for a diagram of the test format.

Academic Module	General Training Module
Listening 30 minutes, 4 sections, 40 items	**Listening** 30 minutes, 4 sections, 40 items
Reading 60 minutes, 3 sections, 40 items	**Reading** 60 minutes, 3 sections, 40 items
Writing 60 minutes, 2 tasks	**Writing** 60 minutes, 2 tasks
Speaking 11 - 14 minutes, 3 parts	**Speaking** 11 - 14 minutes, 3 parts

Note: The Listening and Speaking components are the same for both modules.

The Academic format is, broadly speaking, for those who want to study or train in an English-speaking university or Institutions of Higher and Further Education. Admission to undergraduate and postgraduate courses is based on the results of the Academic test.

The General Training format focuses on basic survival skills in broad social and workplace contexts. It is typically for those who are going to English-speaking countries to do secondary education, work experience or training programs. People migrating to Australia, Canada and New Zealand must sit the General Training test.

An increasing number of professions, including the Medical Board, require an Academic test result for registration and migration purposes.

Non discipline specific

Unlike the Occupational English Test (OET), IELTS is not a discipline specific test. However, when IELTS first made its appearance as ETS in 1980, it offered a choice of six modules covering five broad areas of study of UK tertiary education, plus one non-specific area. The six modules were:

- Life Sciences
- Social Studies
- Physical Sciences
- Technology
- Medicine
- General Academic

Each candidate was required to take three sections in their subject area or module and two common tests in the General section. At this time, there was also a Non-Academic test for vocational candidates.

Over time, there has been a number of revisions to the design and construction of the test, which have been informed by developments in applied linguistics, measurement theory and teaching practice. The reduction and ultimately the removal of subject-specific modules is informed by the conclusion that the different subject modules did not appear to improve the ability to effectively assess the English language proficiency skills of specialists.

Not a modular test

IELTS is designed to assess a candidate's overall English language proficiency within a specified time-frame. This is achieved by asking candidates to provide evidence of their reading, listening, writing and speaking abilities at a certain point in time: the Listening, Reading and Writing modules are administered on the same day; for logistical reasons the Speaking module can be administered up to 7 days before or after the other components. The four component modules are not offered as separate tests to be taken at different times; in this sense IELTS is not a modular test.

Performance in the four skill areas is combined to provide a maximally reliable composite assessment of a candidate's overall language proficiency at a given point in time. Scores on the four component modules are computed to provide an overall band score; the four component scores are also reported separately for their diagnostic value, to indicate a candidate's relative strengths and weaknesses.

An outline of the way in which test results should be interpreted

There is no pass or fail in IELTS. Candidates are graded on their performance in the test, using scores from 1 to 9 for each part of the test – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Results from the four parts then produce an Overall Band Score.

This unique 9-band system measures scores in a consistent manner – wherever and whenever the test is taken. It is internationally recognised and understood, giving candidates a reliable international currency.

The IELTS 9-band scale

Each band corresponds to a level of English competence. All parts of the test and the Overall Band Score can be reported in whole and half bands, eg 6.5, 7.0, 7.5, 8.0.

9	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Non user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

Score processing, reporting and interpretation

All IELTS marking takes place at the test centre by trained markers and examiners. Listening and Reading is undertaken by Clerical markers and Speaking and Writing is undertaken by Examiners, both of whom are recruited according to global and stringent minimum professional requirements.

Clerical Markers are trained to understand the IELTS marking policy and are required to demonstrate that they are marking to standard before they are allowed to mark Listening and Reading papers. Markers are re-tested every two years to ensure that their marking remains up to standard. Systematic monitoring and double marking of a proportion of answer sheets is carried out at each administration.

Examiners for the Writing and Speaking sub-tests are recruited and trained in line with agreed standards. They are required to demonstrate that they are marking to standard every two years in addition to on-going monitoring of their performance.

Candidates receive scores on a Band Scale from 1 to 9. A profile score is reported for each skill. The four individual scores are averaged and rounded to produce an Overall Band Score. Overall Band Scores and scores for each sub-test (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) are reported in whole bands or half bands.

Overall Band Score

Candidates receive a Test Report Form setting out their Overall Band Score and their scores on each of the four sub-tests: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each of the sub-test scores is equally weighted. The Overall Band Score is calculated by taking the mean of the total of the four individual sub-test scores.

Overall Band Scores are reported to the nearest whole or half band. For the avoidance of doubt, the following rounding convention applies; if the average across the four skills ends in .25, it is rounded up to the next half band, and if it ends in .75, it is rounded up to the next whole band.

Thus, a candidate achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.0 for Writing and 7.0 for Speaking would be awarded an Overall Band Score of 6.5 ($25 \div 4 = 6.25$ = Band 6.5).

Likewise, a candidate achieving 4.0 for Listening, 3.5 for Reading, 4.0 for Writing and 4.0 for Speaking would be awarded an Overall Band Score of 4.0 ($15.5 \div 4 = 3.875$ = Band 4.0).

On the other hand, a candidate achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.5 for Writing and 6.0 for Speaking would be awarded band 6 ($24.5 \div 4 = 6.125$ = Band 6).

Listening and reading

IELTS Listening and Reading papers contain 40 items and each correct item is awarded one mark; the maximum raw score a candidate can achieve on a paper is 40. Band scores ranging from Band 1 to Band 9 are awarded to candidates on the basis of their raw scores.

Although all IELTS test materials are pretested and trialed before being released as live tests, there are inevitably minor differences in the difficulty level across tests. In order to equate different test versions, the band score boundaries are set so that all candidates' results relate to the same scale of achievement. This means, for example, that the Band 6 boundary may be set at a slightly different raw score across versions.

The Academic and General Training papers are graded to the same scale. The distinction between the two modules is one of genre or discourse type. Academic papers may contain source texts featuring more difficult vocabulary or greater complexity of style. It is usual that, to secure a given band score, a greater number of questions must be answered correctly on a General Training Reading paper.

Writing and speaking

When marking the Writing and Speaking sub-tests, examiners use detailed performance descriptors which describe written and spoken performance at each of the 9 IELTS bands.

Writing

Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas: Task Achievement (for Task 1), Task Response (for Task 2), Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The four criteria are equally weighted.

Speaking

Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy and Pronunciation. The four criteria are equally weighted.

Versions of the band descriptors for Writing and Speaking have been developed to help stakeholders better understand the level of performance required to attain a particular band score in each of the criterion areas. IELTS examiners undergo intensive face to face training and standardisation to ensure that they can apply the descriptors in a valid and reliable manner.
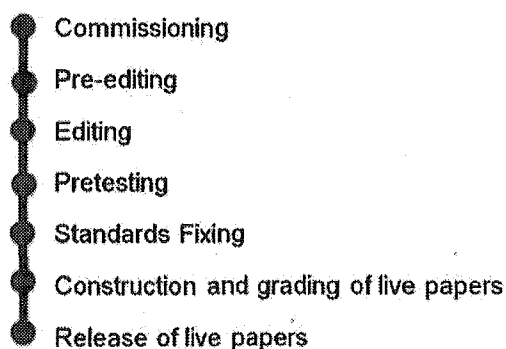
Question paper production process

The production of IELTS question papers is a lengthy process which includes a number of quality checks. The objective of these checks is to ensure that the material in each test is suitable for the test purpose in terms of topics, focus, level of language, length, style and technical measurement properties.

IELTS applies both qualitative standards for the production of test material involving the judgement of qualified professionals, and quantitative, statistical standards for the selection of suitable test material and the maintenance of consistent levels of test difficulty over time.

The stages in the process of producing question papers are shown in the figure below. The first three stages of commissioning, pre-editing and editing involve gathering and choosing appropriate test content that reflects the aims of the Academic and General Training modules.

Question Paper Production Process

- Commissioning
- Pre-editing
- Editing
- Pretesting
- Standards Fixing
- Construction and grading of live papers
- Release of live papers

Once the best material has been selected, it is then given to representative groups of language learners to check that each question — or item - is at an appropriate difficulty level for IELTS; that candidates will be able to understand the questions and that each question can help us to

differentiate between more and less able candidates. This stage is known as pretesting. Approved material is stored in an item bank and can then be introduced to live tests — tests that are used as the basis for awarding official IELTS certificates — through a process known as standards fixing.

Test taker performance

IELTS regularly monitor data on test taker performance, by country of origin, age, gender, etc. See below for a mean average band score of Academic test candidates in 2010.
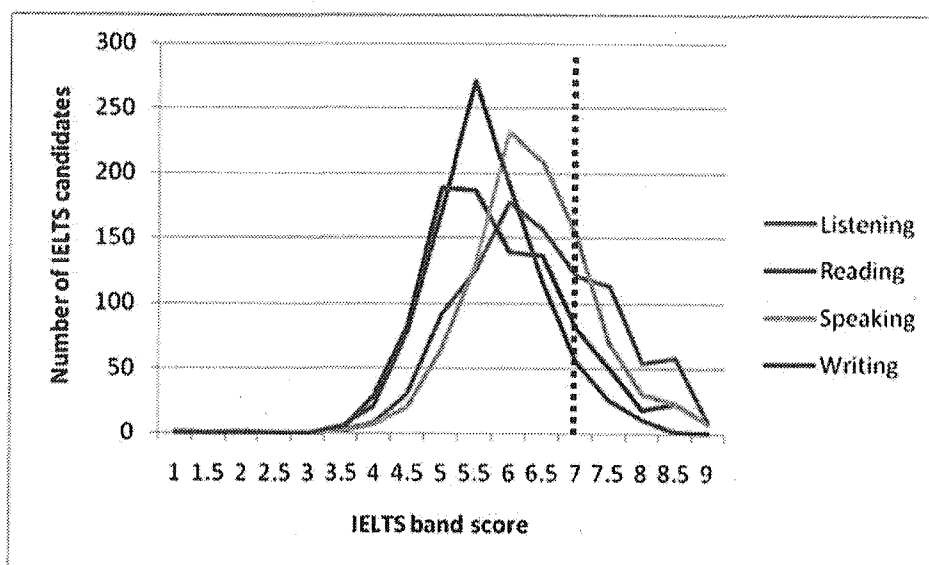
Country	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
China	5.7	5.9	5.2	5.3	5.6
India	6.3	5.8	5.7	6.0	6.0
Germany	7.5	7.3	6.5	7.2	7.2
Hong Kong	6.8	6.7	5.8	6.0	6.4
Philippines	7.0	6.6	6.2	6.8	6.7
UAE	5.0	4.8	4.7	5.4	5.1
Korea	6.1	6.1	5.3	5.7	5.9

The following table illustrates test taker performance for those candidates who have sat the Academic test in Australia, by Nationality, over a three month period. Together, this represents a sample size of 1,892 candidates.

Thirty-one percent (or 590) of the total candidates achieved a minimum of a 7 or above. The proportion of candidates who achieve a 7 or above varies by nationality. For example, of the 51 candidates who come from Hong Kong, 53% achieved a 7 or above. Of the 44 candidates who come from the Philippines, 64% achieved a 7 or above. This data shows that a reasonably significant proportion of candidates are able to achieve a minimum band score requirement of 7.
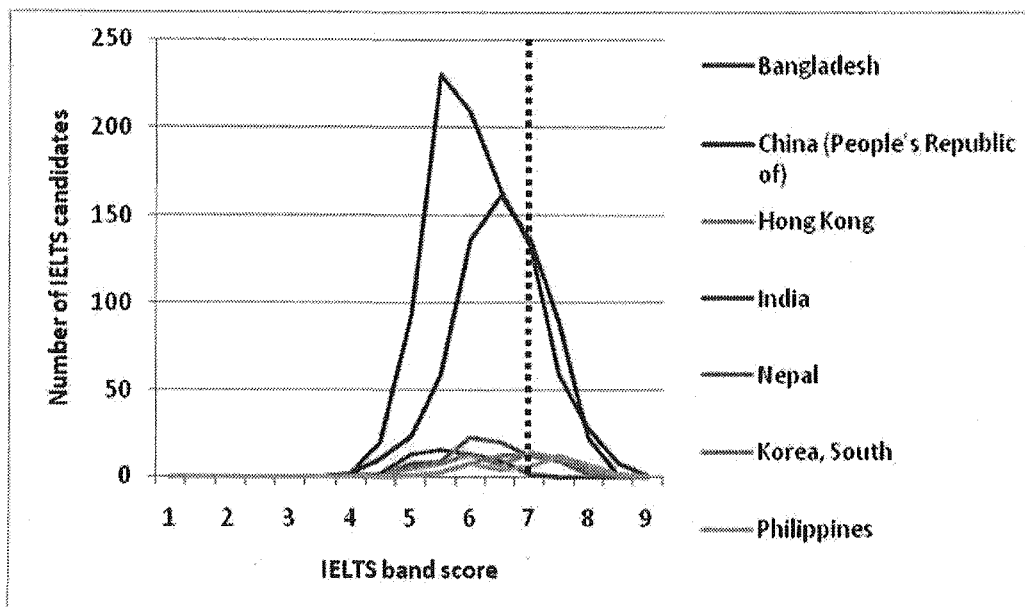
As mentioned, the Medical Board of Australia requires a minimum band score of 7 in each component of the Academic test. Our data confirms that candidates will vary by nationality, as well as other factors, in their ability to gain a minimum of 7 or above in each of the four components. The graph below is based on a sample size of 947 candidates of Indian nationality, and illustrates their band scores by component. In this instance, 37% of candidates achieved a band 7 or above in Listening, compared to 10% of candidates in Writing.

Reliability of IELTS results

Each year, multiple versions of each of the six IELTS modules (Listening, Academic Reading, General Training Reading, Academic Writing, General Training Writing, and Speaking) are released for use by centres testing IELTS candidates. Reliability estimates for the objectively and subjectively scored modules are reported on the www.ielts.org website.

Reliability of objectively-scored modules (Reading and Listening)

The reliability of Listening and Reading tests is reported using Cronbach's alpha, a reliability estimate which measures the internal consistency of the 40-item test.

Reliability of subjectively-scored modules (Writing and Speaking)

The reliability of the Writing and Speaking modules cannot be reported in the same manner as for Reading/Listening because they are not item-based; candidates' writing and speaking performances are rated by trained and standardised examiners according to detailed descriptive criteria and rating scales. The assessment criteria used for rating Writing and Speaking performance are described in the IELTS 2006 Handbook. Benchmarked example writing performances and CD-based speaking performances at different levels can be found, along with examiner comments, in the IELTS official practice materials which can be ordered from the IELTS website. User-oriented band descriptors describing levels of Writing and Speaking performance are also available on the website. In addition, a new DVD "IELTS Scores Explained" provides information specifically tailored to organizations

wanting a detailed description of IELTS scores. This information helps in setting appropriate standards of English proficiency.

Reliability of rating is assured through the face-to-face training and certification of examiners and all must undergo a retraining and recertification process every two years. A Professional Support Network (PSN) manages and standardizes the examiner cadre, including face to face examiner monitoring as well as distance monitoring (using recordings of the Speaking tests). A 'jagged profile' system maintains a further check on the global reliability of IELTS performance assessment. Routine targeted double marking identifies the level of divergence (i.e., jagged profile) between Writing and/or Speaking scores and Reading and Listening scores. This process allows for the identification of possible misclassified candidates. The jagged profile system is also combined with 'Targeted sample monitoring' to further identify possible faulty ratings by examiners. Selected centres worldwide are required to provide a sample of examiners' marked tapes and scripts. Tapes and scripts are then second-marked by a team of IELTS Principal Examiners and assistant Principal Examiners. Principal Examiners monitor for quality of both test conduct and rating, and feedback is returned to each test centre. The outcomes that emerge from these reliability measures feed back into examiner retraining and continually build on quality management and assurance systems for IELTS.

Experimental generalisability studies were also carried out as part of the IELTS Speaking Revision Project (1998-2001) and the IELTS Writing Revision Project (2001-2005). The study conducted for the Speaking Revision produced an inter-rater correlation of 0.77, and a g-coefficient of 0.86 for the operational single-rater condition (see article in Research Notes 4); the Writing Revision study produced an inter-rater correlation of 0.77 and g-coefficients of 0.85-0.93 for the operational single-rater condition (see Research Notes 16: IELTS writing: Revising assessment criteria and scales, Phase 3).

These reliability figures are regularly published on the IELTS.org website and are comparable to those published by other English language test providers.

Reporting IELTS Composite Reliability

The IELTS exam contains four components upon which an overall band score is awarded. Thus an estimate of composite reliability offers a useful measure for overall test reliability. Approaches to estimating the reliability of a composite test are discussed in Feldt & Brennan (1989: 117)[1] and Crocker & Algina (1986: 119-121)[2].The method used here is taken from Feldt & Brennan (1989).

Composite reliability estimates were carried out from the period 1st January to 20 December, 2004. To generate an appropriately cautious estimate, minimum alpha values were used for the objectively marked papers; and g-coefficients for the single rater condition on subjectively marked scores. The composite reliability estimate for the Academic module was 0.95 and produced a

[1] Feldt L.S & Brennan R. L. (1989) Reliability. In Linn (Ed): Educational Measurement, 3rd Edition. American Council on Education: Macmillan

[2] Crocker L. & Algina J. (1986) Introduction to classical and modern test theory. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch

composite SEM of 0.21. This finding shows a 95% probability for a candidate's true score to fall within less than half a band (0.41) of the observed score.

Please refer to the research section of the IELTS website for further details on reliability (http://www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis_of_test_data).

Security

The reliability of IELTS results is further informed by IELTS multi-layered approach to test security, with procedures addressing risk across all three stages of the test (pre and post testing as well as on test day) and training arrangements to ensure that all test centre staff are appropriately skilled to identify imposters and detect fraudulent behaviour.

Given the high stakes nature of English language testing, IELTS recognises that despite best efforts, people will attempt to breach security procedures. Our security systems and processes are designed to mitigate against this risk.

See below for an example of our security features.

Audit

All IELTS test centres must be audited at least once every two years by personnel assigned by each IELTS test partner. Auditors will identify themselves to the IELTS centre and provide appropriate proof of their status as representatives of British Council and IELTS Australia. Once their status has been verified in accordance with verification procedures all staff and others associated with the particular IELTS centre must lend their full co-operation to the audit process.

To preserve the quality and integrity of the IELTS test, IELTS centres are subjected to random audits from time to time. These audits are conducted by the British Council or IELTS Australia depending on the management of the centre. *Centre audits* may be undertaken at any time and without notice. A *special audit* may be triggered if a sufficient number of irregularities are perceived by the test partners in relation to any particular IELTS centre. Audits are an essential quality assurance compliance tool that promotes continuous improvement. In addition to external audits, the IELTS test partners require centres to conduct their own internal audit programmes.

Test construction

Test construction is also critical to the overall integrity and security of English language testing. The IELTS partners make continuous major investment in trialling new material in order to generate sufficient new versions of tests to meet demand securely. IELTS has a large item bank which is constantly refreshed for both the Academic and GT tests. A large item bank minimises the frequency with which any single question will be used.

Each IELTS test is unique, appearing only on one date, and only in those countries to which a particular version has been allocated by IELTS. Unique tests are undertaken in different time zones. This means that the test undertaken in time zone A will be different to the test undertaken in time zone B. Thus candidates cannot communicate test answers to others.

Identity Authentication Management (IAM)

The implementation of IAM is an important part of the IELTS approach to security, and involves the capture of a photo of the candidate at registration as well as an additional biometric (finger scan) from candidates to support identity resolution.

Cost of IELTS

The recommended price of an IELTS test is a fair reflection of the cost to administer the test in each country. The costs of labour and venues vary significantly across the world. These factors are taken into account when developing the local price for an IELTS test, which is priced in local currency and is, by way of example, AUD$330 in Australia.

Research into the test

All IELTS research activities are co-ordinated as part of a comprehensive and coherent framework for research and validation of the test. As part of their ongoing commitment to IELTS-related validation and research, IELTS Australia and the British Council make available funding for research projects that reflect current concerns and issues relating to the IELTS test in the international context. A complete set of research studies which have received grant funding since 1995 is available in the Research section of the ielts website (www.ielts.org). Such research makes an important contribution to the monitoring and test development process for IELTS; it also helps IELTS stakeholders (e.g. English language professionals and teachers) to develop a greater understanding of the test.

Stakeholder engagement

IELTS Australia has a dedicated Stakeholder Relations team which works closely with stakeholders throughout the language teaching profession, higher education, professional registration bodes, immigration authorities and other users of the test to ensure that stakeholders have adequate information and IELTS remains fit for purpose. Stakeholder activities include:

- Public information sessions for education providers and assessing authorities who are involved in setting policy and processing applications;
- Individual presentations to policy makers such as AHPRA and DIAC;
- Sponsorship of key events, which enable stakeholders to speak directly with the IELTS partners about the purpose of the test
- An e-newsletter which is distributed 11 times a year to a rapidly expanding audience and offers update and advice to stakeholders
- The IELTS Scores Explained DVD, which provides information specifically tailored to organisations wanting a detailed description of IELTS scores.

IELTS as an exit test

One of the areas this inquiry will need to focus on has been identified as the loss of language ability over time. This is particularly addressed by the provision which requires that test scores only remain valid for two years. This is not a phenomenon which is solely related to medical graduates, with many students losing language ability throughout the duration of their studies. This can mean that a student who had the required English language ability at the time of course entry no longer meets

these standards at the time of graduation and accreditation. IELTS strongly supports a move to greater language support throughout the life of a student's studies combined with robust exit testing to ensure standards are maintained. In this regard IELTS is an ideal test of language skills at both course entry and graduation.

Independent research into student language abilities has identified that the English language proficiency of a student upon entry into a university degree in Australia can differ from their performance on exit. The extent to which they improve, maintain or lose their proficiency is dependent on a range of factors, including their ability to seek out part time employment, home stay and social opportunities which require that they utilise their English (Arkoudis, O'Loughlin, IELTS Research Report Volume 9).

IELTS is a strong advocate of the use of IELTS as an exit test, as it affords universities a way of determining what the pattern of language acquisition / attrition is within their institution and can be used to inform course entry requirements and English language development programs. Exit testing has been introduced at both Griffith University and University of Queensland, and has been noted in the DEEWR Good Practice Principles.

Should the House of Representatives inquiry extend to the ability of applicants who qualified for registration in Australia but did not complete their secondary education in English, you may wish to consider the role of exit testing.

I trust this information is useful. Please contact Louise Dunn, IELTS Australia Stakeholder Relations Manager on tel 03 9612 4508 or at louise.dunn@idp.com if you have any further queries.

Kind Regards,

Andrew Thompson
Chief Executive & Managing Director