Written Answers
Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will discuss with the General Dental Council steps to address the disparity in acceptable scores on the International English Language Testing System achieved by dentists and dental hygienists and the scores accepted in such tests by the General Medical Council for doctors from outside the UK who are able to practise in the UK.

Philip Dunne The Minister of State, Department of Health

Both the General Medical Council (GMC) and the General Dental Council (GDC) are able to apply a language test to international applicants wishing to practise in the United Kingdom. Proportionate language controls can also be applied by the GMC and GDC on all applicants from the European Economic Area wishing to practise in the UK to ensure that doctors and dentists have the necessary English language skills to practise safely in the UK.

It is for the GMC and GDC as independent regulatory bodies to decide what constitutes an acceptable knowledge of English to practise safely in the UK including an acceptable score in the International English Language Test.

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, whether his Department plans to respond to the policy briefing from the Royal College of Surgeons on English language testing of EEA healthcare professionals, dated 17 August 2016; and what plans he has to introduce clinical language tests for EEA healthcare professionals working in the UK.

Philip Dunne The Minister of State, Department of Health

Changes to United Kingdom law introduced in April 2014 and March 2015, allow the General Medical Council (GMC), Nursing Midwifery Council, General Dental Council (GDC), General Pharmaceutical Council and the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland to carry out language controls for European Economic Area (EEA) doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in Britain. The regulators are now able to apply proportionate language controls for EEA professionals before registration and admission onto the register ensuring that only those healthcare professionals who have the necessary knowledge of the English language to do their job in a safe and competent manner are able to practise in the UK.

Under the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive (MRPQ) regulatory bodies, including the GMC and GDC, are required to recognise primary and specialist medical qualifications gained in an EEA healthcare professional's home member state.

The people of the UK have voted to leave the European Union, however until exit negotiations are concluded the UK remains a full member of the EU and all the rights and
obligations of EU membership remain in force. This includes implementation of the MRPQ Directive.

A number of concerns have been raised about the constraints that the Directive places on the ability of UK regulators of health professionals to carry out robust checks of both the clinical and language skills of medical professionals from the EEA seeking to practice in the UK. The Government shares these concerns and will review the checks that UK regulators are able to apply in light of the EU exit negotiations.