

Overseas competency test for United Kingdom registration: consultation

Summary

- 1 This consultation outlines proposals for competency testing for non-European Economic Area (EEA) (overseas) trained nurses and midwives who wish to practise in the United Kingdom (UK). The new tests will replace the current arrangements for the processing of overseas applicants to the register including the Overseas Nurses' Programme (ONP) and Adaptation to Midwifery Programmes.

Background

- 2 We are the nursing and midwifery regulator for England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Islands. We exist to protect the public. We set standards of education, training, conduct and performance for nurses and midwives, and hold the register of those who have qualified and meet those standards. We provide guidance for nurses and midwives, and we have clear and transparent processes to investigate and deal with nurses and midwives who fall short of our standards.
- 3 This consultation document addresses applications from overseas non-EEA trained nurses and midwives (known as overseas nurses and midwives). This consultation does not relate to European Union (EU) and EEA trained nurses and midwives. We receive approximately 1900 number of applications from overseas trained nurses and midwives each year.
- 4 The UK health sector has long benefitted from the skills and expertise of overseas trained nurses and midwives. There are currently over 68,000 overseas trained nurses and midwives registered with us, who provide care in a wide range of locations and settings throughout the UK and who are integral to the delivery of this care.
- 5 We have previously undertaken a number of consultations in relation to the standards that overseas trained nurses and midwives must meet in order to become registered, most notably in relation to the introduction of the Overseas Nurses' Programme in 2004 and in relation to new standards for Adaptation to Midwifery programmes in 2007.
- 6 We are currently undertaking a review of our registration process to reassure ourselves that it is robust, up to date and able to assure the public that overseas trained nurses and midwives are capable of safe and effective practice before being admitted to the UK register. In doing this we are mindful of the changing context of care delivery in the UK and the increased emphasis on the quality of care and the patient experience arising from the Francis Report and other recent health related reports.

- 7 As a result of this we are proposing that the ONP and Adaptation to Midwifery programmes are each replaced by a single holistic process, with a flexible competency test at its core. Each profession would thus continue to be assessed against profession specific requirements.
- 8 These assessments would be undertaken by all overseas trained nurses and midwives once they have proven that they have met our registration and education requirements and have demonstrated the required language competence in English.
- 9 The ONP and Adaptation to Midwifery programmes would cease to be Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) approved programmes and would no longer be used as a route to registration.

Consultation issues

- 10 In this consultation we are seeking your views on:
 - 10.1 the principles underpinning the competency test
 - 10.2 the requirements for entry to the test
 - 10.3 the content and structure of the test
 - 10.4 the delivery and management of the test
 - 10.5 how the test should be funded.

The consultation process

- 11 This consultation will run for two calendar months from Friday 30 August 2013 to Thursday 31 October 2013.
- 12 We welcome the views of all interested parties, including individual nurses and midwives, and in particular are seeking the views of:
 - 12.1 approved education institutions and their practice partners who have experience with overseas trained nurses and midwives
 - 12.2 agencies recruiting or supporting overseas trained nurses and midwives
 - 12.3 Chief Nursing Officers in the four UK countries
 - 12.4 Council of Deans of Health
 - 12.5 employers across all sectors
 - 12.6 NHS organisations with involvement with overseas trained nurses and midwives
 - 12.7 other healthcare regulators
 - 12.8 patient groups

12.9 professional bodies and trade unions

12.10 The Home Office

12.11 UK wide commissioning bodies.

The consultation proposals

- 13 Currently the NMC approves 25 ONP programmes that include a period of supervised practice in practice placement settings. Requirements currently include 20 days of protected learning time and a period of supervised practice. The assessment is determined by the approved education institution (AEI) and subject to NMC quality assurance.
- 14 There is one approved adaptation to the midwifery programme that is delivered against the standards for adaptation to midwifery in the UK (2007).
- 15 We are proposing to move to a different model of delivery for assessing the competence of overseas trained nurses and midwives. This will support greater consistency in how clinical knowledge and competency is identified and assessed and will ensure that all competencies to demonstrate safe and effective practice are tested.
- 16 The proposed competency tests will model approaches that are already in use by both UK and international health regulators.
- 16.1 The General Medical Council (GMC) uses a professional and linguistics assessment board (PLAB test)¹ that consists of an online test which must be passed to enable progression to a simulated test of performance.
- 16.2 The General Dental Council (GDC) requires overseas qualified dentists to undertake an overseas registration exam (ORE)², which consists of a written test (part one) and a clinical test (part two).
- 16.3 In the United States of America, competence of overseas trained nurses is assessed solely through an online examination (the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses or NCLEX-RN).
- 17 We can also draw on our experience of developing a competence test for EU applicants. This uses a similar model to that used by the GMC, testing both theoretical and clinical performance of competence.

The principles underpinning the competency test

- 18 The NMC must be assured that overseas trained nurses and midwives meet the current NMC standards for safe and effective practice in order to enter the register.
- 19 The current standards to be met are those related to competence in the standards for pre-registration nursing education (2010)³ and the standards for pre-registration midwifery education (2009)⁴

¹ <http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/plab.asp>

² <http://www.gdc-uk.org/Dentalprofessionals/ORE/Pages/default.aspx>

- 20 The assessment methodology must enable:
- 20.1 overseas trained nurses to demonstrate competence as outlined in the pre-registration nursing education standards
 - 20.2 overseas trained midwives to demonstrate competence as outlined in the pre-registration midwifery education standards.
- 21 Applicants must be able to demonstrate clinical and theoretical skills and knowledge and the appropriate professional values required of nurses and midwives to enable them to deliver patient centred compassionate care.
- 22 The test must offer a valid, reliable and secure measure of competence and must be proportionate in terms of costings and timeliness.
- 23 The assumption underpinning a competency test is that it demonstrates an individual nurse or midwife's suitability to register. Whilst the test will assess the applicant's understanding of nursing or midwifery practice in the UK healthcare context, the employer is still required to satisfy themselves that the individual is safe and effective in the role in which they are employed, following an induction period.

The requirements for entry to the test

- 24 Prior to being offered an opportunity to undertake a competency test, nurses and midwives must have fulfilled the requirements for an application for registration. These currently remain unchanged and include:
- 24.1 have met the NMC requirements for provision of personal identification documents
 - 24.2 have met our language requirements through completion of the academic version of the International English Language Test (IELTS) test at level 7.0
 - 24.3 have met the education requirements for entry to the nursing or midwifery parts of the register
 - 24.4 have met the prescribed requirements for good health and good character
 - 24.5 have met our current requirements for completion of practice and continuous professional development hours within a set time period
 - 24.6 have provided evidence that they are not, or have not been, subject to fitness to practise procedures in their home country
 - 24.7 are in receipt of a decision letter from the NMC informing them that they are eligible to proceed to the assessment stage.

³ <http://standards.nmc-uk.org/Pages/Welcome.aspx>

⁴ http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/nmcStandardsforPre_RegistrationMidwiferyEducation.pdf

The content and structure of the test

The standards to be achieved

- 25 The content of the competency test will need to reflect the appropriate part of the register for which the applicant is applying. For nursing it will need to additionally reflect the field of practice (adult, child, learning disability, mental health).
- 26 In the pre-registration nursing education standards, the competency framework⁵ describes the four domains to be achieved. These are:
- 26.1 professional values
 - 26.2 communication and interpersonal skills
 - 26.3 nursing practice and decision making
 - 26.4 leadership, management and team working.
- 27 Any test would also need to address the essential skills clusters which are integrated into assessment of practice for both pre-registration nursing⁶ and midwifery⁷ programmes.
- 28 In the pre-registration midwifery standards, competency requirements are outlined in Standard 17⁸. These are also divided into four domains:
- 28.1 effective midwifery practice
 - 28.2 professional and ethical practice
 - 28.3 developing the individual midwife and others
 - 28.4 achieving quality care through evaluation and research.

Methods of assessment

- 29 The assessment will consist of online theoretical testing components accompanied by clinical skills and performance assessment through the use of objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs).
- 30 It is anticipated that applicants will be given the opportunity to access appropriate learning resources and practice test materials to help support them in their preparation for the competency tests.
- 31 The chosen assessment process will be subject to our quality assurance mechanisms.

⁵ <http://standards.nmc-uk.org/PreRegNursing/statutory/competencies/Pages/Competency-Framework.aspx>

⁶ http://standards.nmc-uk.org/Documents/Annexe3_%20ESCs_16092010.pdf

⁷ http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/nmcStandardsforPre_RegistrationMidwiferyEducation.pdf (page 36 onwards)

⁸ http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/nmcStandardsforPre_RegistrationMidwiferyEducation.pdf (pages 23 -35)

Online testing

- 32 Web based computer assessment systems can use a variety of methods to test a range of different skills, knowledge and understanding⁹. The methods used can include multiple choice questions, factual and technical problems (such as drug calculation) and short answer questions.
- 33 Online assessments must be designed appropriately to match the type of knowledge they intend to test. For the competence test, the online assessment will be mapped against the pre-registration education standards to ensure they address the range and depth of knowledge required.
- 34 It is anticipated that the online test will comprise of a range of online testing methods and offer a robust testing process within a secure testing environment.

The OSCE

- 35 The OSCE is a means of assessing the application of theory to practice through performance in a simulated environment. It can be defined as an activity where '*students demonstrate their competence under a variety of simulated conditions*' (Watson et al, 2002 p.424).¹⁰
- 36 The OSCE has been used to assess medical students since the 1970s and is now in widespread use in both national and international programmes for doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. Its use has been documented in over 50 countries across five continents.¹¹
- 37 Literature exploring the contribution OSCEs can make in assessing competence in nursing¹², midwifery¹³ and medical education¹⁴ indicates that they offer the potential to contribute meaningfully to an assessment of performance. However, there is also recognition that, as with any form of practice assessment, there are limitations for this assessment method.
- 38 Each new OSCE would be subject to rigorous scrutiny and piloting as part of the development of any competence testing for overseas trained nurses and midwives.

⁹ Kendle, A. And Northote, M.(2000) The struggle for balance in the use of quantitative and qualitative online tasks. [online] Available from:

¹⁰ Watson, R. et al (2002) 'Clinical competence in nursing: a systematic review of the literature'. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 39 (5)pp 421-431

¹¹ Partico, M.F. et al (2013) 'Is the OSCE a feasible tool to assess competencies in undergraduate medical education?' *Medical Teacher* 35 pp 503-514

¹² Rushforth, H. (2007) 'Objective structured clinical examination (OSCE): Review of literature and implications for nursing education.' *Nurse Education Today* 27 pp 481-490

¹³ Smith, V. Muldoon, K. and Biesty, L. (2012) 'The objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) as a strategy for assessing clinical competence in midwifery education in Ireland: A critical review.' *Nurse Education in Practice* 12 pp 242-247

¹⁴ Partico, M.F. et al (2013) 'Is the OSCE a feasible tool to assess competencies in undergraduate medical education?' *Medical Teacher* 35 pp 503-514

Supervised practice

- 39 The current adaptation programmes include a requirement for overseas trained nurses and midwives to undertake a period of supervised practice in a clinical setting. Supervised practice offers a potentially useful measure of an individual's competence because they have to perform within a real life clinical setting. However, reliance on supervised practice as an indicator of competence also has limitations.^{15 16}
- 40 If a period of supervised practice is to continue to be a requirement for overseas applicants to demonstrate competence, this will be undertaken following successful completion of an OSCE.

The options

- 41 Two options are currently under consideration to test competence of overseas trained nurses and midwives:

Option one: A two part examination of theory and performance.

- 42 Part one - an online assessment of competency which will assess a range of different knowledge, skills and values using a variety of web-based assessments.
- 43 On successful completion of part one of the test, applicants can progress to part two.
- 44 Part two – assessment of practice through the use of an OSCE, which would incorporate a number of different stations to test a range of knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- 45 Successful completion of part two of the test will enable the applicant to register with the NMC.

Option two: A three part examination of theory and performance.

- 46 Part one – an online assessment of competency which will assess a range of different knowledge, skills and values using a variety of web-based assessments.
- 47 On successful completion of part one of the test, applicants can progress to part two.
- 48 Part two – assessment of practice through the use of an OSCE, which would incorporate a number of different stations to test a range of knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- 49 Successful completion of part two of the test will enable the applicant to progress to a period of supervised practice.

¹⁵ Konno, R. (2006) 'Support for overseas qualified nurses in adjusting to Australian nursing practice: a systematic review.' *International Journal of Evidence –Based Healthcare* 4 (2) pp83-100

¹⁶ Allan, H. (2010) 'Mentoring overseas nurses: Barriers to effective and non-discriminatory mentoring practices.' *Nursing Ethics* 17 (5)pp 603-613

- 49.1 This will take place in an approved setting over a specified time period (of no less than four weeks).
 - 49.2 The applicant must have a named sign-off mentor for support over the period of supervised practice.
 - 49.3 The mentor will be responsible for signing to say that the applicant can demonstrate safe and effective practice within the four competency domains and across the essential skills clusters.
- 50 Successful completion of the period of supervised practice will enable the applicant to register with the NMC.

The delivery and management of the test

- 51 To meet EU requirements, we currently have a model of competence testing for EU nurses and midwives. This is delivered through an approved education institution. Learning from this initiative can offer valuable insight to inform the development of the competence testing models for overseas trained nurses and midwives.
- 52 External expertise would be sought to support the development and design of both online tests and tests of performance.
- 53 It is envisaged that the tests would be delivered in a designated test centre. For part one of the test, this could be delivered in approved overseas test centres. This would reduce the burden (time, financial and travel) on the overseas trained nurse or midwife. Part two (OSCE) and any supervised practice requirements would only be facilitated in United Kingdom settings.
- 54 The development and management of the competency tests would have to meet NMC quality assurance requirements.

Responding to the consultation

- 55 You can now respond to this consultation on our webpage:
<http://www.nmc-uk.org/overseas-test>
- 56 This consultation will run from Friday 30 August 2013 to noon on Thursday 31 October 2013. Any responses received after this time may not be read.
- 57 All questions are optional except for the question which asks whether you are responding as an individual or an organisation because we will analyse these responses separately.
- 58 Where you are invited to comment, there is a limit of up to 300 words.

- 59 If you would like further information about this consultation, or information in an alternative format, please contact Anne Trotter by email: Anne.Trotter@nmc-uk.org or telephone 020 7681 5779.
- 60 If you would prefer not to submit your response using the online survey you may post or email it directly to the NMC at the following address:
- 60.1 NMC 23 Portland Place London W1B 1PZ
- 60.2 consultations@nmc-uk.org

What we will do next

- 61 Analysis of the responses we receive will be undertaken internally. To offer additional assurance an independent external evaluator will oversee the analysis process, checking it for bias at the analysis and reporting stages.
- 62 We will publish the findings and use these to inform our decisions on how we develop and implement the new test. We anticipate that any changes arising in response to this consultation will come into effect from autumn 2014.