

Guidance on registration language requirements

October 2017

About us

- 1 The NMC exists to protect the public by regulating nurses and midwives in the UK. We set standards of education, training, practice and behaviour so that nurses and midwives can deliver high quality healthcare throughout their careers.
- 2 We maintain a register of nurses and midwives who meet these standards, and we have clear and transparent processes to investigate nurses and midwives who fall short of our standards.

Introduction

- 3 Nurses and midwives play a vital role in the provision of healthcare in the UK. As a registered nurse or midwife it is your responsibility to make the safety and wellbeing of those in your care your primary concern. A key part of this is communication, and the need to be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English.
- 4 In order to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), you must satisfy us that you have the necessary knowledge of English.¹ This means ‘a knowledge of English which is necessary for the safe and effective practice of nursing or midwifery in the United Kingdom’.²
- 5 Article 5A (1) of the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 (‘the Order’) requires the Council to publish guidance about the necessary knowledge of English for all nurses and midwives. The guidance must set out the evidence, information and documents for an applicant to provide in order to satisfy the Registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English, and the process by which the Registrar will assess this evidence, information or documentation.
- 6 The Registrar is required to take account of this guidance published under Article 5A (1) of the Order when determining whether an applicant has the necessary knowledge of English.³
- 7 This document is the guidance published under Article 5A (1) of the Order which will be used by the Registrar when determining whether a nurse or midwife has the

¹ Article 9(2)(ba) of the Order

² Schedule 4 of the Order

³ Article 5A(2) of the Order

necessary knowledge of English. We have consulted on this guidance in accordance with Article 3(14) of the Order.

- 8 This guidance provides details of the English language requirements for registration. The guidance provides information about how you can demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English language when applying for admission and readmission to the register. Information on how to apply for admission and readmission can be found here:
 - 8.1 [For applicants who have completed a pre-registration nursing and midwifery programme in the UK](#)
 - 8.2 [For applicants who have trained in the EU/EEA](#)
 - 8.3 [For applicants who have trained outside the EU/EEA](#)
 - 8.4 [For applicants seeking readmission to the register](#)
- 9 This guidance has been drafted in line with the Council's policy on English language.

Evidence to be provided

- 10 There are different ways in which you may be able to demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise in the UK. In this guidance, we have set out the types of evidence we will accept as demonstrating that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise in the UK.
- 11 If you can supply one of the following types of evidence listed, you will meet our requirements for English language competence.
 - 11.1 You have recently⁴ achieved the required score in IELTS or in one of the other English language tests accepted by the NMC. You must achieve the required score in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking.
 - 11.2 A recent pre-registration nursing or midwifery programme that has been taught and examined in English in a country where English is the first and native language.⁵
 - 11.3 Registration with a nursing or midwifery regulator and one year of registered practice in a country where English is the first and native language

⁴ By recent we mean evidence related to English Language Competence that is less than two years old at the point of making an application to the NMC. The British Council advises two years is the accepted period for an individual to remain proficient in English if the language is used regularly. Proficiency in English deteriorates after two years if it is not used on a regular basis

⁵ We use the UK Border Agency's list of 'majority English speaking countries' (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340583/English_language_v11.0_EXT.pdf). We maintain and update our list on a regular basis. When we are advised that a country's first and native language is English, we contact the relevant Ministry of Health and the nursing and midwifery regulator to seek evidence of this.

Types of evidence that we will accept

Evidence type 1: You have recently achieved the required score in IELTS or in one of the other English Language tests accepted by the NMC. You must achieve the required score in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking

- 12 We will accept a recent overall score of 7 in the academic version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). You must achieve no less than 7 in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- 13 By 'recent', we mean evidence relating to English language competence that is less than two years old at the point of making an application to the NMC. The British Council advises that two years is the accepted period for an individual to remain proficient in English if the language is used regularly. Proficiency in English deteriorates after two years if it is not used on a regular basis.
- 14 You may provide two IELTS test certificates to meet the above requirements, but must not have scored below 6.5 in any categories, in either of the test sittings. The two test sittings should be taken within six months of each other to be considered.
- 15 We may accept other English Language tests which meet the following criteria:
 - 15.1 It tests knowledge of English in either a healthcare or academic context. It must not be a general level test.
 - 15.2 It tests all four domains (reading, writing, speaking and listening).
 - 15.3 The speaking element is tested face to face and not via a computer test
 - 15.4 There are high level security procedures for the test production and delivery.
 - 15.5 There are test score verification systems that allow the NMC to confirm results.
 - 15.6 There is appropriate evidence of the reliability of the test and the dependability of its scores.
 - 15.7 There is evidence that there are test centres widely available.
- 16 If you are relying on another test, the score achieved should be the equivalent to receiving an overall score of 7 in the academic version of IELTS. You should not achieve less than the equivalent of an IELTS academic score of 7.0 in each of the areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- 17 For a list of tests that we currently accept please see our website. This page will be updated on November 1.
- 18 We may accept test results older than two years old, if you can provide evidence to demonstrate that your language skills have not deteriorated in that time.

Evidence type 2: A recent pre-registration nursing or midwifery programme that has been taught and examined in English.

- 19 If you have completed a NMC approved pre-registration nursing or midwifery programme at a NMC approved educational institution you shall be able to satisfy the Registrar that you have the necessary knowledge of English.
- 20 If you are seeking to rely on a pre-registration nursing or midwifery programme which has been taught and examined in English, the following applies:
 - 20.1 The course must have been composed of at least 50 percent clinical interaction. At least 75 percent of the course's clinical interaction with patients, service users, their families and other healthcare professionals must have taken place in English.
 - 20.2 We need to ensure the training that you have undertaken provided you with an opportunity to demonstrate ability in reading, writing, speaking and listening in a range of environments. We may ask you to provide further evidence to demonstrate to us that you satisfy us that you have the necessary knowledge of English, for example a transcript from the university or Higher Education Institution (HEI) where you completed your course detailing the content of the training including how the clinical interaction in English was achieved.

Evidence type 3: Registration and one year's practice with a nursing or midwifery regulator in a country where English is the first and native⁶ language and a language assessment was required for registration.

- 21 We will ask for further information on the language assessment or examination you have completed.
- 22 We may require employment references from each of your employers confirming that the practice you undertook was in English.

Further evidence

- 23 If we are not satisfied that you have the necessary knowledge of English, we may ask for further evidence, information or documents.⁷
- 24 We may also ask you to complete an examination or assessment and provide evidence that you have done so.⁸
- 25 If you are an EU/EEA trained nurse or midwife seeking to join the register, we will not ask for further information until your qualification has been recognised. However, we recommend that you provide your evidence of meeting the English

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⁷ Article 5(4) of the Order

⁸ Article 5(6) of the Order

language requirement as early as possible to allow your application to be processed more quickly.

- 26 In order to meet our obligations under EU Directive 2005/36/EC EU/EEA nurses and midwives will be able to submit other evidence as alternatives to the evidence types above.

Criteria for assessing evidence

- 27 The criteria the Registrar will use for assessing evidence and information in relation to knowledge of English are set out below. They reflect our objective of public protection⁹ and will provide us with adequate assurance that you have the necessary knowledge of English before we can register you.
- 28 You must demonstrate competence in the four areas of:
- 28.1 reading
 - 28.2 writing
 - 28.3 listening, and
 - 28.4 speaking.
- 29 We will consider the evidence we receive against the following criteria:
- 29.1 whether the evidence is recent, objective and independent
 - 29.2 whether it clearly demonstrates that you can read, write, communicate and interact with patients, service users, relatives and healthcare professionals effectively in English, and
 - 29.3 whether we can readily verify the evidence.
- 30 If you fail to provide further information and evidence which meets our English language requirements, you will be asked to pass an English language assessment or examination and to provide evidence of doing so.

Readmission

- 31 If you are applying for readmission to the register, you will need to demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English for safe and effective practice and the following additional criteria will be used:
- 31.1 the length of time since you last practised in the UK
 - 31.2 whether you completed your nurse or midwifery training in an English speaking environment
 - 31.3 whether you have practised as a nurse or midwife in an English speaking environment

⁹ Article 3(4) of the Order

- 31.4 whether you have previously demonstrated English language competence in your initial application for registration, and
 - 31.5 other information as may be appropriate.
- 32 We will accept the following types of evidence:
- 32.1 if you undertook your pre-registration nursing or midwifery training on a NMC approved programme or course and at a NMC approved education institution
 - 32.2 if you have met the practice requirements of either 750¹⁰ hours in the previous five years or 450¹¹ hours in the previous three years. If you have completed your pre-registration nursing or midwifery training outside the UK and the practice hours being relied upon were not undertaken in the UK or in a country where English is the first or native language, then this will not satisfy the Registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English
 - 32.3 if you have undertaken and successfully completed a return to practice programme
 - 32.4 successful completion of an English language test that has been approved by the NMC for admission to the register.

Right to appeal

- 33 If you are asked to undertake an English language assessment or examination, you may be able to appeal that decision to a Registration Appeal Panel.¹²

Fitness to practise

- 34 Once you are admitted to the register, you must uphold the professional standards that are set out in the *The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses and midwives* (the Code).
- 35 Paragraph 7.5 of the Code states that you must 'be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English'.
- 36 If we receive a concern that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English after you have joined our register,¹³ you may be subject to fitness to practise proceedings.

¹⁰ Rule 3(4)(b) of the Registration Rules

¹¹ Rule 3(4)(c) of the Registration Rules

¹² Article 37(1)(za) of the Order

¹³ Article 22(1)(a)(iva)