

# Candidate information booklet for the NMC Test of Competence

## Part 1: Pearson VUE

For applicants trained outside the  
European Union and European  
Economic Area

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## Introduction

Since October 2014, nurses and midwives trained outside the European Economic Area who are seeking UK registration must pass the NMC test of competence. This test consists of two parts and measures applicants against current [pre-registration education standards](#). It assesses the essential professional knowledge, skills and attitudes required for safe and effective nursing or midwifery practice in the UK.

Nursing in the UK is made up of separate and distinct fields of practice, each requiring three years of pre-registration undergraduate education.

The distinct nursing fields of practice are:

- Adult nursing
- Children's nursing
- Learning disabilities nursing
- Mental health nursing

In the UK, midwifery is a separate and distinct profession, requiring three years of pre-registration undergraduate education.

## Overview of the test of competence

The test of competence is specific to the appropriate nursing field or midwifery and always consists of two parts. A test blue print is available on our website with links to online resources which will help applicants prepare for the test of competence. We do not endorse any course or training provider which may offer preparation materials for the test.

Part 1 is a computer based test (CBT). The CBT is multiple choice and can be taken at a [Pearson VUE](#) test centre available in most countries around the world.

Candidates will be given a short tutorial on how to use the computer before starting the examination. The CBT comprises 120 multiple-choice questions. All questions are scored as correct or incorrect and there is no partial credit. A small number of questions will not be scored as they are pre-test questions, these questions will not be indicated to candidates.

A proportion of questions will be critical and relate to patient and public safety. Critical questions must be passed.

The time limit for direct testing is four hours and this includes any breaks from testing, which are optional.

Part 2 is a nursing or midwifery objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) – a practical nursing or midwifery examination. The OSCE can only be sat after successfully passing the CBT and is only available in the UK at a designated test centre. The candidate booklet and details for part 2 of the OSCE are available from the test centre website.

## Applying for the test of competence

Nurses and midwives seeking registration in the UK should ensure they have read and understand the requirements for registering as a nurse or midwife in the UK before starting the application process.

The test of competence requires candidates to complete an online application process. You can [register](#) on our website. (A paper based process will also be available on request but will take longer to process.)

## Computer based test

All candidates take the CBT under formal standardised examination conditions in a Pearson VUE test centre.

All candidates are required to adhere to the candidate and test centre rules in the test centre and while sitting the CBT. Please note, that if you do not follow the rules or the instructions of the test administrator (TA), your examination result may be withheld or cancelled, and your examination fee may not be refunded.

The test centre will always inform us if a candidate does not comply with the rules and they may be subject to a misconduct investigation.

## Candidate rules

- ✓ All personal items must be placed in the locker provided at the test centre. The test centre is not responsible for lost, stolen or misplaced items.

The following items are not allowed in the examination room nor can they be accessed during any break from testing.

- ✗ Any educational, test preparation or study materials.
- ✗ Weapons of any kind.
- ✗ Personal items, including mobile phones, hand-held computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), pagers, watches or other electronic devices are not allowed in the testing room. You must store all personal items in the locker allocated to you. Mobile phones, pagers or other electronic devices must be turned off before storing them in the locker. The test centre is not responsible for lost, stolen or misplaced personal items.
- ✗ During any break from testing, you are not allowed to access personal items other than medication or food which are required at a specific time and you must get approval from the test administrator.

The following personal items are not allowed in the testing room and must also be stored in the locker provided.

- ✗ Bags, purses, wallets, watches or smart watches.
- ✗ Coats, hats (or other head coverings), scarves, gloves or other personal items.
- ✗ Books or notes

- ✘ Food, drink, gum or candy.
- ✘ Lip balm.
- ✘ Medical devices/aids. (If these are essential then please inform us during the application process.)
- ✓ If you require access to medical devices and/or medication during the CBT, you must inform Pearson VUE when booking your exam. Please also notify the TA at the test centre on the day of your exam.

## Confidentiality

- ✓ As a registered nurse or midwife you are bound by your current code of professional conduct and ethics.
- ✘ Any cheating or misconduct during the CBT or breaching confidentiality of the examination may bring your profession into disrepute and may raise doubts about your fitness to practise. Such incidents will be reported to us and will be investigated.
- ✘ You must not seek help or attempt to seek help from any other party during the CBT or during any break from testing. This includes in person or by phone, text, messaging, email or any form of social media.
- ✘ You must not disclose or discuss with anyone, including instructors, information about the questions or answers to the CBT. This also includes posting or discussing questions or answers on the internet or any form of social media such as Twitter.
- ✘ You must not copy, reconstruct or remove examination questions or responses (in any format) from the testing room. You must not make notes about the examination.

## Taking the CBT

- ✓ The results of the CBT must be an accurate reflection of the authorised candidate's knowledge and professional skills as a nurse or midwife.
- ✘ You must not take or attempt to take the CBT for anyone else.
- ✘ You must not allow or attempt to allow anyone else to take the CBT for you.
- ✓ You must only use the provided computer for taking the CBT.
- ✘ You must not tamper with or attempt to tamper with the computer or use the computer for anything other than taking the CBT.
- ✘ You must not engage in any behaviour deemed to be disruptive at any time while in the test centre or when taking the CBT or during any break from testing.
- ✓ If you experience any hardware or software problems during the examination, notify the TA by raising your hand immediately.
- ✓ If you need to attract the TA's attention for any reason, raise your hand.
- ✓ You can request earplugs from the TA; it is not acceptable to bring your own earplugs.
- ✓ You will be provided with an erasable note board and marker before you enter

the testing room.

- ✓ You must only write on the erasable note board after the tutorial is complete.
- ✗ Any writing before or during the tutorial is considered 'brain dumping' and will result in an incident report to us and your results being placed on hold, pending an investigation.
- ✓ A clean note board can be requested during your CBT by raising your hand.

This will replace the one you have already used.

- ✗ You must not remove or attempt to remove the erasable note board and marker from the testing room.
- ✓ You must return the erasable note board and marker to the TA after testing is completed.
- ✓ You must only write on the provided erasable note board.
- ✗ You must not write on any materials, including your hands, arms or body. This action will be considered cheating and will result in an incident report to us and your results will be placed on hold pending investigation.

## Grounds for dismissal or cancellation of results

- ✓ All candidates must comply fully with TA instructions and/or the test centre rules and regulations or risk having their CBT results withheld, dismissed or cancelled.
- ✗ Candidates who do not comply with the TA instructions or test centre rules and regulations may be asked to leave the test centre and their exam fees will not be refunded. Such incidents will be reported to us and the CBT result may be withheld or cancelled. We may take disciplinary action such as denial of registration and/or disqualifying you from future attempts at the CBT.

Candidates engaging in disruptive behaviour, misconduct or failing to comply with the TA's warnings to stop inappropriate behaviour will be dismissed from the test centre and their exam fee will not be refunded. Such incidents will be reported to us and the CBT result may be withheld or cancelled. We may take disciplinary action such as denial of registration and/or disqualifying you from future attempts at the CBT.

## Confidentiality and test security

Any disclosure of examination test questions before, during, or after the examination is a violation of law. Violations of confidentiality and/or candidate rules can result in criminal prosecution or civil liability and/or disciplinary actions by the regulatory body including exclusion from registration.

If you become aware of or witness any attempt to compromise the test of competence, please report it to us. You may report any suspicious behaviour to us by email on [overseas.enquiries@nmc-uk.org](mailto:overseas.enquiries@nmc-uk.org)

We require the CBT result to reflect the ability of individual candidates. To facilitate this, standardised procedures and processes for taking the CBT have been developed

to prevent any candidate obtaining an unfair advantage.

To ensure the result of the CBT fairly reflects the ability of individual candidates, we reserve the right to cancel or withhold any CBT results.

CBT results may be withheld or cancelled if we consider a testing irregularity has occurred.

Testing irregularities may be but are not limited to: apparent discrepancies in or falsification of candidate identification; misconduct; or any other behaviour which violates the candidate rules or breaches the confidentiality agreement, or if the CBT results are believed to be invalid for any reason.

## Invalid results

We may cancel or withhold a candidate's results if the validity of the CBT results are questioned for any reason.

If a CBT result is cancelled or invalidated without finding that the candidate engaged in irregular behaviour, the candidate may appeal the decision and/or will be offered a free re-test. An appeal is the only way a candidate can challenge our decision to take this action.

There are procedures to ensure that the operation of the test centre meets our criteria for a standardised testing environment.

## On the day of the CBT

### Arrival procedures at the test centre

- ✓ Arrive at the test centre, 30 minutes before your booked examination time.
- ✗ If you arrive more than 15 minutes after your booked examination time, you may not be able to take the CBT and will have to book and pay another CBT fee. Failure to take the examination will be reported to us, but will not count as an attempt.
- ✓ You will be required to present a valid passport with picture for authentication purposes.
- ✓ You must provide your digital signature and have your photograph taken. The photograph and signature are sent to us.
- ✗ Hats, scarves and coats must not be worn in the testing room or while your photograph is being taken. They must be placed in the secure storage facility provided at the test centre. Candidates must not access any prohibited personal items during their stay at the test centre. Storage space is small, and the test centre assumes no responsibility for candidates' personal belongings.
- ✓ You must remove any large jewellery or other accessories before entering the testing room, if asked to do so.
- ✓ You must place all electronic devices in your allocated locker.

- ✘ Friends, relatives or children are not allowed to wait in the test centre while candidates take the CBT.
- ✓ The TA will give you a short orientation and will then escort you to a computer terminal and you will complete a short tutorial. You must remain in your seat during the examination, except when authorised to leave by test centre staff. You may not change your computer terminal unless a TA directs you to do so.

Exam regulations for the CBT are also available on our website.

## Communication during the CBT

Standard examination rules apply during the CBT. Candidates sit the CBT in silence and must not communicate with others. Raise your hand if: any problems with the computer occur; you need a new note board; you need to take a break; or you need the TA for any other reason.

Please raise your hand when you have finished the CBT.

## Breaks

Direct testing will last a maximum of four hours. It is important that you pace yourself during the CBT. Breaks are not scheduled during this time.

Raise your hand to request an unscheduled break, or to exit the testing room for any other reason. The TA must escort you out of the testing room. You must leave the testing room during any break from testing and you are advised to remain in the test centre during any break from testing.

If you take a break from testing, all personal items accessed (including purses and wallets) must be inspected by the TA. Any tampering of the electronic device bag provided will be reported to us. Accessing any prohibited personal items during a break from testing may result in the cancellation of your CBT results.

A palm vein scan may be taken when you leave, and again when you re-enter the testing room. If this is requested, you must comply with the TA request. When you return to the testing room the TA must resume the CBT on your computer.

## After the CBT is completed

After you have completed the CBT, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire about your testing experience. When you have finished the questionnaire, raise your hand to summon the TA.

The TA will collect any erasable note boards and escort you from the testing room.

If you have any electronic devices in a Pearson VUE-provided bag, a TA must take the bag to be inspected and opened. Removal of devices by the candidate will result in an incident report and could lead to your examination result being cancelled.

The TA will dismiss you when all requirements are fulfilled.



If you believe there was an irregularity in the administration of your exam or that the testing conditions adversely affected your CBT result, you should notify the TA before you leave the test centre. The test centre will send an incident report to us.

Exam data is encrypted and transferred electronically to us. Do not ask the TA about exam content and/or results. If you have questions about the exam, please contact us. If you have questions about your testing session, please contact us within one week of your exam appointment.

You may ask the TA for a confidential comment sheet to provide any information about your CBT appointment at the test centre or experience of using Pearson VUE candidate services.

## Results of the CBT

Once the exam is completed the result is then submitted and calculated. Test centre staff do not have access to the examination results.

Examination results will be emailed to candidates within 48 hours after taking the examination. You can also obtain your results within 48 business hours by logging in to your Pearson VUE account which you will have created when booking your exam.

Candidates will receive a Pass or Fail result. Any further feedback on test results cannot be disclosed to candidates. This is to ensure that the integrity of the test is protected and any future attempts to sit the test are not aided.

## Retake policy

Candidates must wait a minimum of 28 days between the first and second attempt of the examination.

## How many times can I sit the CBT?

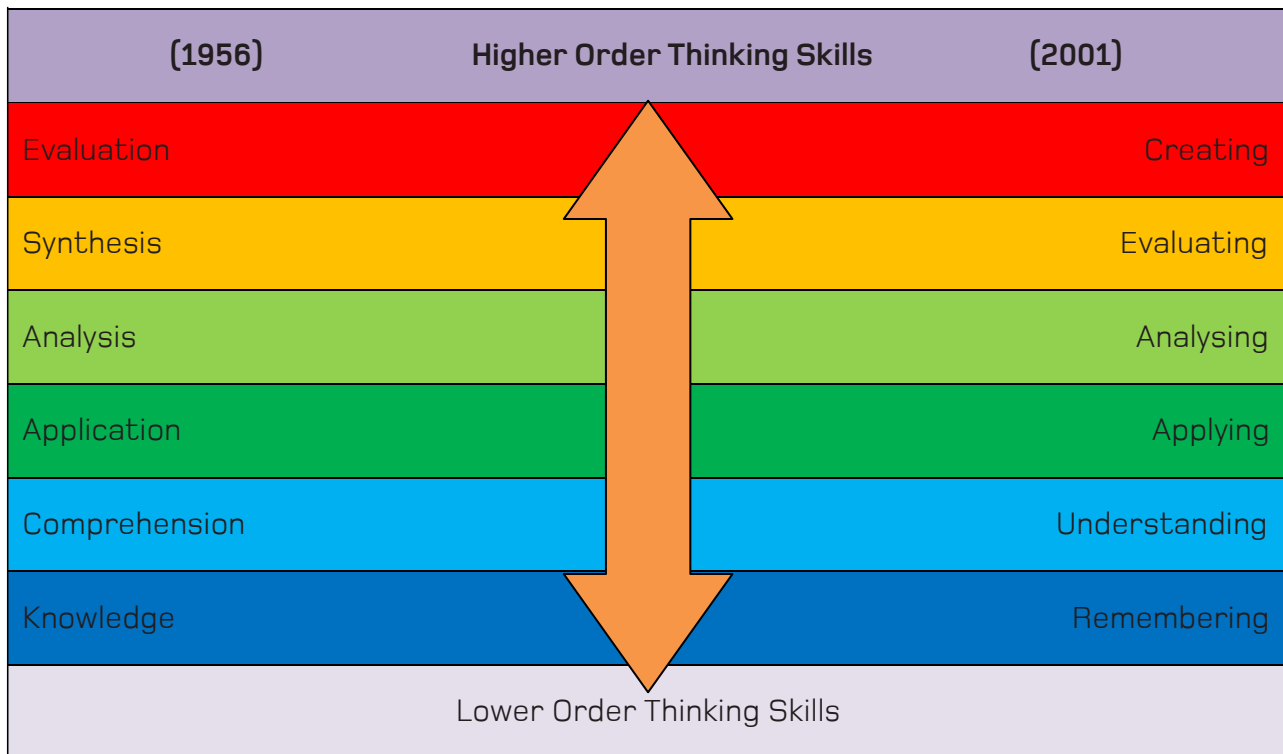
You must receive authorisation (ATT) to take the test from us before you can book and pay for your exam with Pearson VUE. We initially allow two attempts of the CBT at separate sittings.

We encourage candidates to carefully consider their ability to pass the CBT if more than two attempts are required. Candidates should take this time to reflect on their previous CBT performance and to effectively plan future learning and revision around the CBT.

Further attempts may be allowed but we require a period of six months to have elapsed to ensure adequate preparation and revision time. You may also need to take the self-assessment again to see if you are eligible for further attempts.

## Content and development of the CBT

The practice of nursing or midwifery requires knowledge of the health needs of patients as well as an understanding of integrated holistic processes fundamental to professional practice. The CBT includes items written at various cognitive levels, which are designed to test your knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of professional nursing and midwifery practice.



The majority of items tested in the CBT are written at the level of knowledge, comprehension and application. Higher order skills are tested more comprehensively in part 2 of the test of competence, the OSCE.

The entry-level domains, competencies and essential skills clusters from pre-registration nursing and midwifery UK education standards, along with [The Code: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives](#) (NMC,2015) were used to develop the test blue print.

Question writers are academic and practising nurses and midwives. These questions are then reviewed and quality assured by an expert editorial panel to ensure each item reflects current entry-level nursing or midwifery practice and that each item is accurate and valid.

A proportion of questions must be passed and these are known as critical questions. Critical questions relate to patient and public safety, for example, medication calculations which must be passed.

All items used in the CBT for assessing competence have been pre-tested as valid and reliable. The test of competence will also contain a small number of items which are being tested for reliability and validity of such items will not contribute to the results of the CBT.

Each CBT will be standardised in overall level of difficulty to ensure an equal experience for all candidates taking the test.

We strongly advise all candidates to spend time preparing for the test of competence. All professional examinations require in-depth preparation, revision and reflection on current skills and knowledge which may require further development.

The test of competence blue print also provides some useful links to materials available online which may help you prepare for the CBT. Our website is a useful resource and candidates should explore it. We do not recommend a specific text book or endorse any preparation materials, training or educational establishment offering such courses or materials.

## Domains tested in the nursing CBT

Nursing in the UK is organised around specific and distinct professional fields of practice. Individuals are usually registered in a single specialist field and have undertaken three years of pre-registration education and training in their specific field. These fields are:

- Adult nursing
- Children's nursing
- Learning disabilities nursing
- Mental health nursing

Each of these fields is specifically tested by a distinct CBT and candidates will only sit the CBT for the professional field of practice in which they are seeking UK registration.

The standards for competence which identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for entry into each field of nursing are organised around four generic nursing domains. Each of these domains is represented proportionally in the CBT. These domains are identified in the test blueprints for each nursing pathway. Please select the appropriate nursing pathway from the [NMC website](#).

## Nursing CBT plan

Generic nursing domains, generic competencies and essential skill clusters	
Domains	Percentage of items from each domain included in the CBT
1. Professional values	Approximately 27%
2. Communication and interpersonal skills	Approximately 10%
3. Nursing practice and decision making	Approximately 33%
4. Leadership, management and team working	Approximately 13%
Unique and specific nursing field competencies within each domain	Approximately 17%

## The structure of the nursing CBT

The nursing CBT is made up of 120 multiple choice questions. These questions must be completed in a maximum of four hours.

50 questions will relate to generic nursing competencies found in each domain of nursing.

50 questions will be the application of generic nursing competencies to the specific field of nursing being applied for, for example, as applied to the adult, child, person with a learning disability or person with a mental health problem.

20 questions will focus solely on the specific competencies required for the field of nursing being applied for.

There are 20 critical questions within the exam which focus on patient or public safety.

## Answering the questions

Maintain a reasonable pace, spending a maximum of two minutes on each item.

Always select the answer you believe to be the 'most' correct from the options offered.

You can review answers and change them if you wish. The CBT does not use negative scoring if a question is not answered, so randomly selecting answers or guessing answers will not improve your result.

## Domains tested in the midwifery CBT

In the UK, midwifery is a unique and separate area of practice which requires three years of specific higher education and training. Midwives seeking registration in the UK will sit the specific CBT for midwifery.

The CBT is based on the [Standards for pre-registration midwifery education](#) (NMC, 2009) and [The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses and midwives](#) (NMC, 2015) and both were used to develop the test blueprints. The test blueprints are listed under the [midwifery pathway](#) on the NMC website.

The four domains, associated competencies and essential skill clusters were used to develop the blue print. Each of the domains is represented proportionately in the CBT.

## Midwifery CBT plan

Domains with associated competencies and essential skills	
Domains	Percentage of items from each domain included in the CBT
1. Effective midwifery practice	Approximately 50%
2. Professional and ethical practice	Approximately 28%
3. Developing the individual midwife and others	Approximately 7%
4. Achieving quality care through evaluation and others	Approximately 15%

## Structure of the midwifery CBT

The midwifery CBT is made up of 120 questions and these must be completed in a maximum of four hours.

60 questions will focus on general theoretical and technical instruction for midwives.

60 questions will assess subjects specific to the activities of midwives.

There are 20 critical questions within the exam which focus on patient or public safety.

## Answering the questions

Maintain a reasonable pace by spending no more than two minutes on each item. Always select the answer you believe to be the 'most' correct from the options offered.

The CBT does not use negative scoring if a question is not answered, so randomly selecting answers or guessing answers will not improve your result.

## Passing or failing

The decision as to whether a candidate passes or fails the CBT is governed by both critical questions and an overall pass mark. A candidate must answer 90 percent of critical questions correctly.

The overall score must meet the pass score which is set at 60 percent. This pass mark was benchmarked against nurses and midwives at the point of entry to the UK register.

## Alternate item formats

Candidates may be administered multiple-choice items as well as items written in alternate formats. These formats may include, but are not limited to: multiple responses, fill-in-the-blank calculation, ordered response, and/or hot spots. All item types may include multimedia such as charts, tables, graphics, sound and video.

The short tutorial at the beginning of the examination will explain how to answer each of the alternate types of items. An online version of this tutorial can be found on our website.

## Reviewing the passing standard

We will formally re-evaluate the passing standard once every three years. The criteria that we use to set the standard is the level of ability required for safe and effective entry-level nursing or midwifery practice.

We are provided with information on the results of a standard setting exercise performed by a panel of experts and the historical record of the passing standard with summaries of the candidate performance associated with those standards. Once the passing standard is set, it is imposed uniformly on every examination according to the procedures laid above.