

# Guidance on registration language requirements

## About us

- 1 We're the independent regulator for nurses, midwives and nursing associates. We hold a register of all the 690,000 nurses and midwives who can practise in the UK, and nursing associates who can practise in England.
- 2 Better and safer care for people is at the heart of what we do, supporting the healthcare professionals on our register to deliver the highest standards of care.
- 3 We make sure nurses, midwives and nursing associates have the skills they need to care for people safely, with integrity, expertise, respect and compassion, from the moment they step into their first job.
- 4 Learning does not stop the day nurses, midwives and nursing associates qualify. To promote safety and public trust, we require professionals to demonstrate throughout their career that they are committed to learning and developing to keep their skills up to date and improve as practitioners.
- 5 We want to encourage openness and learning among healthcare professionals to improve care and keep the public safe. On the occasions when something goes wrong and people are at risk, we can step in to investigate and take action, giving patients and families a voice as we do so.

## Why do we ask for evidence of English language?

- 6 Nurses, midwives and nursing associates play a vital role in the provision of healthcare in the UK. As a person on our register 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.
- 7 In order to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), you must satisfy us that you have the necessary knowledge of English.<sup>1</sup> This means 'a knowledge of English which is necessary for the safe and effective practice of nursing or midwifery in the United Kingdom'.<sup>2</sup>
- 8 Our legislation requires the Council to publish guidance about the necessary knowledge of English for all nurses, midwives and nursing associates,<sup>3</sup> and the Registrar must have regard to this guidance when determining whether you have the necessary knowledge of English.<sup>4</sup>
- 9 This document is our guidance, and in accordance with the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 ('the Order') it set out the evidence, information and documents for you to provide in order to satisfy the Registrar that you have the necessary knowledge of English, and the process by which the Registrar will assess this evidence, information or documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 9(2)(ba) of Order

<sup>2</sup> Schedule 4 of the Order

<sup>3</sup> Article 5A(1) of the Order

<sup>4</sup> Article 5A(2) of the Order

- 10 This guidance has been drafted in line with the Council’s policy on English language, and we have consulted on this guidance in accordance with our legislation.<sup>5</sup>
- 11 We will regularly review our English language evidence requirements to ensure they remain effective and proportionate.
- 12 This 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.
- 13 Further information about the other requirements for [admission](#) and [readmission](#), and details of how to apply, can be found on our website.

## Criteria for assessing language competence

- 14 The criteria that the Registrar will use for assessing evidence and information in relation to knowledge of English are set out below. They reflect our overarching objective of public protection<sup>6</sup> and are required to satisfy the Registrar that you have the necessary knowledge of English to be capable of safe and effective practice.
- 15 You must demonstrate competence in:
  - 15.1 reading;
  - 15.2 writing;
  - 15.3 listening, and
  - 15.4 speaking.
- 16 We will consider the evidence we receive against the following criteria:
  - 16.1 whether it is recent, objective and independent;
  - 16.2 whether it clearly demonstrates that you can read, write, communicate and interact with patients, service users, relatives and healthcare professionals effectively in English as a nurse, midwife or in a role comparable to that of a nursing associate; and
  - 16.3 whether we can readily verify it.

## Types of evidence we will accept

- 17 There are several types of evidence we will accept to demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise in the UK:

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<sup>5</sup> Article 3(14) of the Order

<sup>6</sup> Article 3(4) of the Order

- 17.1 Evidence type 1: Recent achievement of the required score in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or in one of the [other English language tests accepted by the NMC](#). You must achieve the required score in reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- 17.2 Evidence type 2: Completion of a pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme that was taught and examined in English, composed of at least 50 percent clinical interaction, and at least 75 percent of the clinical interaction with patients, service users, their families and other healthcare professionals took place in English.
- 17.3 Evidence type 3: Recent practice for one year in a majority English-speaking country.<sup>7</sup>

## Evidence type 1

- 18 **Evidence type 1: Recent achievement of 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 reading, writing, listening and speaking.**
- 19 We will accept an overall score of 7 in the **academic** version of IELTS. IELTS tests reading, writing, listening and speaking. You must achieve a score of no less than 7 in reading, listening and speaking, and no less than 6.5 in writing.
- 20 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. You must take the two test sittings within six months of each other.
- 21 By recent we mean you must have achieved the required score within the last two years at the point we are considering your complete application.<sup>8</sup>
- 22 We may accept other English language tests that meet the following criteria:
  - 22.1 it tests knowledge of English in either a healthcare or academic context. It must not be a general test;
  - 22.2 it tests reading, writing, listening and speaking;
  - 22.3 the speaking element is tested face-to-face and not via a computer test;
  - 22.4 there are high level security procedures for the test production and delivery;

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<sup>7</sup> See our list of accepted English speaking countries:  
<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/registration/accepted-english-speaking-countries.pdf>.  
We maintain and update our list on a regular basis.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

- 22.5 there are test score verification systems that allow the NMC to confirm your results;
  - 22.6 there is appropriate evidence of the reliability of the test and the dependability of its scores; and
  - 22.7 there are test centres widely available.
- 23 If you are relying on another test, the score achieved should be the equivalent of the IELTS requirements for reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- 24 For a [list of the tests that we currently accept](#) please see our website.

## Evidence type 2

- 25 **Evidence type 2: Completion of a pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme that was:**
- 25.1 **taught and examined in English;**
  - 25.2 **composed of at least 50 percent clinical interaction; and**
  - 25.3 **at least 75 percent of the clinical interaction with patients, service users, their families and other healthcare professionals took place in English.**
- 26 If you have completed an NMC-approved pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme, we will accept this as evidence that you have the necessary knowledge of English.
- 27 If you did not complete an NMC-approved pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme we need to be satisfied that your programme demonstrates that you have the necessary knowledge of English.
- 27.1 If you completed your pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate<sup>9</sup> programme in a majority English-speaking country<sup>10</sup> you will need to demonstrate that the programme meets the requirements set out in paragraph 25 by providing evidence that meets the criteria set out in paragraph 16, such as a transcript from the University or Higher Education Institution where you completed your course.
  - 27.2 If you completed your pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme in a non-majority English-speaking country,<sup>11</sup> you will need to demonstrate that the programme meets the requirements set out in paragraph 25. We will consider evidence

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<sup>9</sup> If you are applying for the nursing associate part of the register then we will accept the qualification that we considered eligible as part of your registration application.

<sup>10</sup> See our list of accepted English speaking countries:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/registration/accepted-english-speaking-countries.pdf>.

We maintain and update our list on a regular basis.

<sup>11</sup> As above.

that meets the criteria set out in paragraph 16, but please be aware that it is likely that you will need to provide an alternative type of evidence such as a language test.

### **Evidence type 3**

**28 Evidence type 3: Recent<sup>12</sup> practice for one year in a majority English-speaking country.**

**Registered practice**

- 29 You must have successfully completed a language assessment as part of your registration. We will ask for further information on the language assessment you undertook.
- 30 We may require confirmation from each of your employers that the practice you undertook was in English and that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely and effectively in the UK.

**Nursing associate applicants whose practice was not registered**

- 31 If you are applying to the nursing associate part of the register and have recently been practising in a role comparable to that of a nursing associate that is not regulated, to assure us that you have the necessary knowledge of English you must have one year of recent practice in the UK or in a majority English-speaking country that was:
- 31.1 in a role comparable to that of a nursing associate in which you relied on your skills, knowledge and experience gained from the qualification that we considered eligible as part of your registration application; and
  - 31.2 the qualification that we considered as eligible as part of your registration application must have been taught and examined in English in a majority English-speaking country.
- 32 You must provide supporting evidence that meets the criteria in paragraph 16.

### **Readmission**

- 33 If you are seeking to return to the register through our readmission process we need to be satisfied that you still have the necessary knowledge of English since you were last on our register. We will accept the following as evidence of this:

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<sup>12</sup>By recent we mean that the end of the period of practice you are relying on must be within the last two years at the point we are considering your complete application.

### **34 Evidence type 1: English language test**

34.1 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 reading, writing, listening and speaking, and you must have achieved the required score within the last two years at the point we are considering your complete application.

### **35 Evidence type 2: relevant qualification in English**

35.1 You have completed an NMC-approved return to practice programme that was taught at an NMC-approved educational institution and on which you relied on as part of your readmission application to the NMC; or

35.2 You have completed a pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme that was taught and examined in English in a majority English-speaking country (see evidence type 2 for further details)

### **36 Evidence type 3: Recent practice in a majority English-speaking country**

36.1 You have been registered with us within the last two years; or

36.2 You have met the practice hours requirements of either 450 hours in the previous three years or 750 hours in the previous five years in a majority English-speaking country

## **EU/EEA-trained applicants**

37 If you are an EU/EEA-trained nurse, midwife or nursing associate applicant seeking to join the register, we will not ask for further information until your qualification has been recognised.<sup>13</sup> However, we recommend that you provide your evidence of meeting the English language requirement as early as possible to allow your application to be processed more quickly.

## **Language assessment**

38 If we are not satisfied that you have the necessary knowledge of English, we may ask for further evidence, information or documents.<sup>14</sup> We may also ask you to complete an examination or assessment and provide evidence that you have done so.<sup>15</sup>

39 If you are an EU/EEA-trained nurse, midwife or nursing associate applicant we will only ask you to undertake an assessment or examination after having considered any further information,

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<sup>13</sup> Article 5A(5) of the Order

<sup>14</sup> Article 5A(4) of the Order

<sup>15</sup> Article 5A(6) of the Order

evidence or documents you provide that meet the criteria set out in paragraph 16.<sup>16</sup>

- 40 If you are asked to undertake an English language assessment or examination, you have a right of appeal against that decision to a Registration Appeal Panel.<sup>17</sup>

## **Fitness to practise**

- 41 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, midwives and nursing associates* ([the Code](#)).
- 42 Paragraph 7.5 of the Code states that you must 'be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English'.
- 43 If we receive a concern that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English after you have joined our register,<sup>18</sup> you may be subject to fitness to practise proceedings.
- 44 In cases considering a nurse, midwife or nursing associate's knowledge of English, decision-makers will base their decision about whether they have the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely primarily on language test results. For more information please see our online fitness to practise guide to [not having the necessary knowledge of English](#).

**Last updated: 28 July 2020**

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<sup>16</sup> Article 5A(7) of the Order

<sup>17</sup> Article 37(1)(za) of the Order

<sup>18</sup> Article 22(1)(a)(iva) of the Order