

Test of Competence 2021 for nursing associates

CBT information booklet

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Introduction

We use the Test of Competence (ToC) to assess the skills and knowledge of people wanting to join our register from overseas or rejoin our register after a long period away from practice. A new version of the test will be introduced for nursing associates from January 2022.

The Test of Competence measures candidates against the current UK standards of proficiency for nursing associates¹. It assesses the essential professional knowledge, skills and attitudes required for safe and effective nursing associate practice in the UK.

Overview of the Test of Competence

The Test of Competence is specific to nursing associates and always consists of two parts. Test blueprints are available on our website with links to online resources, which will help applicants to prepare for the Test of Competence. We do not endorse any course or training provider offering preparation materials for the test.

Part 1 is a computer-based test (CBT). The CBT contains a numeracy test (which consists of short-answer questions requiring a numerical answer) and objective questions and a theory test of clinical knowledge and skills (which is multiple choice). The CBT 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 115 questions. All questions are scored as correct or incorrect, and there is no partial credit. Part A will comprise a 15-mark numeracy assessment. Part B will be a 100-mark theory assessment.

The length of the CBT is 3 hours, and this includes any breaks from testing, which are optional.

Part 2 is a nursing associate objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) – a practical nursing associate examination. The OSCE is available in the UK only, at a designated test centre. The candidate booklet and details for the OSCE are available from the test centres' websites.

The CBT and OSCE can be taken in any order.

Applying for the Test of Competence

Nursing associates seeking registration in the UK should ensure that they have read and understood the requirements for registering as a nursing associate 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. Once the NMC has told you that you need to take the Test of Competence, you can book your CBT with Pearson VUE.

Booking your CBT

We've made some changes to the CBT booking process for nursing associates as part of the launch of the new ToC.

¹ <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/standards-for-nursing-associates/standards-of-proficiency-for-nursing-associates/>

If you're a new applicant, we'll send you an email telling you that your Pearson Vue account has been created.

Once you get this email from us, you can log in, book and pay for your exam with Pearson VUE.

When you log into your Pearson Vue account, you must:

- click on the 'view exams' button
- select the correct exam that matches your application type
- select both modules (Part A and Part B) for your first attempt.

You will be shown the individual prices for each module at first, however you will be charged a final fee of £83 at checkout when you book both modules.

Selecting the right exam and modules

The exam codes for the nursing associate CBT is NAR.

For example, if you're applying to the nursing associate part of our register you should select:

- Exam: NAR 2021:
- Module 1: NAR 2021: Part A: Numeracy only
- Module 2: NAR 2021: Part B: Clinical only

Candidate rules

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 the candidate may be subject to a misconduct investigation.

- ✓ 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. 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.
- ✗ During any break from testing, you are not allowed to access personal items. You must get approval from the test administrator if you require medication or food at a specific time.

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 (unless worn for religious or cultural reasons), scarves, gloves or other personal items.
- ✘ Books or notes.
- ✘ Food, drink, gum or candy.
- ✘ Lip balm.
- ✘ Medical devices/aids (unless these are essential, in which case 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 test administrator (TA) at the test centre on the day of your exam.

Confidentiality

As a registered nursing associate, you are bound by your current code of professional conduct and ethics.

- ✘ Any cheating or misconduct during the CBT or any breaching of the 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 nursing associate.

- ✗ 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 use only the computer provided 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, 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 permitted to bring your own earplugs.
- ✓ You will be provided with an erasable note board and marker before you enter the testing room.
- ✓ You must write on the erasable note board only after the tutorial is complete.
- ✗ Any writing before or during the tutorial is considered 'brain dumping', which will result in an incident report being sent 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 write only on the erasable note board provided.
- ✗ 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 being sent to us and your results being placed on hold, pending investigation.

Answering the numeracy questions

Maintain a reasonable pace, spending a maximum of 2 minutes on each numeracy question.

Do your calculations on the erasable note board, then type in the answer you wish to provide on-screen.

You can review answers and change them if you wish. The CBT does not use negative scoring if a question is not answered or is answered incorrectly.

Answering the multiple-choice questions

Maintain a reasonable pace by spending a maximum of 1.5 minutes on each multiple-choice question.

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 or is answered incorrectly.

Grounds for dismissal or cancellation of results

- ✓ All candidates must comply fully with the TA's instructions and/or the test centre rules and regulations; otherwise, they risk having their CBT results withheld, dismissed or cancelled.
- ✗ Candidates who do not comply with the TA's 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 denying your 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 denying your registration and/or disqualifying you from future attempts at the CBT.

Invalid results

We may cancel or withhold a candidate's results if the validity of the CBT results are called into question 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 for a candidate to 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. (Please note that this must be the passport you provided on your NMC account. If you have a new passport, please make sure that you update your NMC account at least 48 hours before your CBT appointment date.)
- ✓ 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. (Head scarves worn for religious and cultural reasons are allowed but will be inspected.)
- ✗ 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, where 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.

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

The test will last a maximum of 3 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 1 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.

Getting your CBT results

Once the test is completed, your result is then submitted and calculated. You will receive a pass or fail result for each part of the test: Part A (Numeracy) and Part B (Clinical).

You can check your CBT results in:

- the exam report given to you directly after your CBT
- your Pearson Vue account within 48 hours of your CBT - click on relevant exam entry in the 'Exam history' section to see a further break down of results for Part A and B.

Your NMC Online account will update within 48 hours of your CBT too, but it will only show an overall exam result for each attempt:

- For example, if you have passed Part A but failed Part B on your first attempt, the overall CBT result in NMC Online will show 'Fail'
- Once you pass both Part A and B, your NMC Online will be updated to show 'Pass'.

We cannot give you further feedback on your test results. This is to protect the integrity of the test and to make sure that any of your future attempts to sit the CBT are not aided.

The passing standard

An initial standard will be set, and statistical techniques will be used to maintain the standard across different versions of the test over time.

Re-sits and exceptional circumstances

Part A and Part B of your CBT are taken together in a single sitting but are passed or failed independently.

You only need to re-sit the part that you've failed.

Each sitting counts as an attempt. You have three attempts as part of one application, with a minimum of 10 days between each sitting.

After three failed attempts, your application will close, and you will need to wait six months to submit a new application and sit the CBT again.

In exceptional cases, a further attempt at each part may be offered. This attempt will be agreed only by application to the NMC. The additional attempt will be granted in situations such as the following:

- the test centre did not follow agreed processes
- the assessor behaved in a way that demonstrably did not comply with the agreed processes
- there was an unanticipated interruption to the assessment, such as a fire alarm
- illness or severe anxiety on the part of the candidate.

Booking your re-sit attempt

When you book your re-sit, you must select the right CBT exam again and all the module(s) you have failed.

The system will not let you rebook a passed module or rebook only one module if you have failed both modules.

The re-sit for Part A will take 30 minutes and the re-sit for Part B will take 2.5 hours. You will be administered a new form of the CBT for each re-sit you take.

Confidentiality and test security

Any disclosure of examination test questions before, during, or after the examination is a violation of the 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.

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 from obtaining an unfair advantage.

To ensure that 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 to have occurred.

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

Reasonable adjustments

It is acknowledged that a candidate with a declared disability may require reasonable adjustments in order to complete the Test of Competence. Reasonable adjustments are offered within the scope of the Equality Act 2010².

The CBT consists of two parts with 115 questions in total, and the time allowance is 3 hours in total. Reasonable adjustments to the CBT can include, for example, a separate testing room or additional time. You may be allowed up to 25% additional time, depending on your specific needs. Breaks may also be allowed, if required for accessibility purposes.

The re-sit for Part A will generally take 30 minutes and the re-sit for Part B will take 2.5 hours. Again, 25% extra time may be allowed, depending on specific needs.

Evidence must be provided from professional reports at the time of booking to verify the learning support needs prior to undertaking the CBT.

Last updated: 29 October 2021

² The Equality Act 2010 does not apply in Northern Ireland, but there are very similar equality requirements spread across several pieces of legislation. For example, section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 also includes consideration of 'political opinion' as a protected characteristic, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 still applies to employment in Northern Ireland, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 applies in all education settings.