

Guidance on registration language requirements

Updated February 2023

Why do we ask for evidence of English language?

1. Nurses, midwives and nursing associates play a vital role in providing healthcare in the UK. As a person on our register, your main concern must be the safety and wellbeing of people in your care. A key part of this is communication, and the need to be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English.
2. In order to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), you must satisfy us that you know enough English¹ to practise safely and effectively as a nursing or midwifery professional in the United Kingdom.² This is the equivalent of level C1 in the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#) (CEFR). A person with a C1 level of English has a full range of functionality at work or in an academic setting, and can be fully autonomous in a native English-speaking country.
3. This guidance³ set outs the evidence, information and documents you need to provide to satisfy us of your English language competence, and how we will assess this evidence, information and documentation.

Types of evidence we will accept

4. You must demonstrate competence in:
 - 4.1. reading
 - 4.2. writing
 - 4.3. listening
 - 4.4. speaking.
5. We will consider the evidence we receive against the following criteria:
 - 5.1. whether it is recent, objective and independent
 - 5.2. 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
 - 5.3. whether we can readily verify it.
6. There are three types of evidence that will satisfy us that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise in the UK. We will accept one of these types without needing further evidence.

¹ Article 9(2)(ba) of the Order

² Schedule 4 of the Order

³ Article 5A(1) of the Order, Article 5A(2) of the Order

- 6.1. Evidence type 1: you have recently achieved the required score in the academic version of International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the Occupational English Test (OET). You must achieve the required score in reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- 6.2. Evidence type 2: you have completed a pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme that was taught and examined in English. During that programme you must have spent at least half your time interacting with patients, service users, their families and other healthcare professionals, and at least three-quarters of these interactions must have been in English.
- 6.3. Evidence type 3: you have recently practised for one year in a [country where English is a majority spoken language](#).

Evidence type 1

- 7. You have recently achieved the required score in the academic version of International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or the Occupational English Test (OET). You must achieve the required scores in reading, writing, listening and speaking.**
8. For IELTS you must achieve at least 7 in reading, listening and speaking, and at least 6.5 in writing.
9. For OET you must achieve at least a grade B (350 to 440) in reading, listening and speaking, and at least a grade C+ (300 to 340) in writing.
10. Whichever test you take, you must have achieved the required scores within the last two years at the point we are considering your complete application.⁴
11. You can meet the required scores across two test sittings. The following requirements apply when combining test scores across two sittings:
 - 11.1. You can only combine test scores across two sittings of the same test (two IELTS or two OET tests). You cannot combine IELTS and OET test scores.
 - 11.2. IELTS: in both sittings your scores must be at least 6.5 for speaking, listening and reading, and at least 6 for writing.
 - 11.3. OET: in both sittings your grades must be at least grade C+ (300 to 340) for speaking, listening and reading, and at least grade C (250 to 290) for writing.
 - 11.4. You must take the two test sittings within twelve months of each other, and you must have been tested in all four sections both times.

⁴ The British Council advises that test scores showing that a person has become proficient in English should not be relied upon more than two years after they are achieved.

Evidence type 2

- 12. Evidence type 2: you have completed a pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme that was taught and examined in English. During that programme you must have spent at least half your time interacting with patients, service users, their families and other healthcare professionals, and at least three-quarters of these interactions must have been in English.**
13. 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.
14. If you completed your pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme in a [country where English is a majority spoken language](#), you will need to demonstrate that the programme meets the requirements for interactions in English by providing evidence that is recent, objective and that we can easily verify, such as a transcript from the University or Higher Education Institution where you completed your course.
15. If you completed your pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme in a country where English is not a majority spoken language, you will need to provide evidence that you were taught in English and that you can interact clinically in English. To help you, we will allow you to provide separate evidence for the teaching and interaction elements. You will need to provide:
- 15.1. a training transcript or official letter from your training institute showing that your course was taught and examined in English
 - 15.2. supporting information from your employer (see point 22) as evidence that you can interact clinically in English.
16. If you cannot provide both of these elements you will need to provide an alternative type of evidence such as a language test.

Evidence type 3

- 17. Evidence type 3: you have recently practised for one year in a country where English is a majority spoken language.**
18. The end of the period of practice you are relying on must be within the last two years at the point you submit your complete application.

Registered practice

19. 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, and we may ask for a reference from your employer (or employers) to confirm your practice period.

Nursing associate applicants whose practice was not registered

20. 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 country where English is a majority spoken language that was:

20.1. 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

20.2. the qualification that we considered as eligible as part of your registration application must have been taught and examined in a country where English is a majority spoken language.

21. You must provide supporting evidence that meets the criteria in paragraph 5.

Supporting information from employers

22. As set out above, in specific circumstances we will allow you to supplement evidence type 2 with supporting information from your current employer. You must have been working in a health or social care setting in the UK for at least 12 months at the point you submit your application.

23. When you apply you will be asked to nominate your line manager to confirm that you have suitable knowledge of English. You must have shown that you can interact with a wide range of people, including patients, service users, their families and other healthcare professionals. Your line manager (or line managers) must be an NMC registrant.

24. You will also need to nominate a senior NMC registrant to counter-sign the information.

Readmission

25. If you are seeking to return to the register through our readmission process we need to be satisfied that you have maintained the necessary knowledge of English since you were last on our register. We will accept one of the following types of evidence:

Evidence type 1: English language test

26. You must have recently achieved the required score in the academic IELTS or OET. You must achieve the required scores 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 (see evidence type 1 for further details).

Evidence type 2: A relevant qualification in English

27. You must have completed:

- 27.1. an NMC-approved return to practice programme that was taught at an NMC-approved educational institution and that formed part of your readmission application to the NMC, or
- 27.2. a pre-registration nurse, midwife or nursing associate programme that was taught and examined in English (see evidence type 2 for further details, including on supporting information from employers).

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

28. You must have:

- 28.1. been registered with us within the last two years, or
- 28.2. practised for either 450 hours in the previous three years, or 750 hours in the previous five years, in a majority English-speaking country.

Language assessment

- 29. If we are not satisfied that you have the necessary knowledge of English, we may ask for further evidence, information or documents.⁵ We may also ask you to complete an examination or assessment and give us evidence that you have done so.⁶
- 30. 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.⁷

Fitness to practise

- 31. Once you are admitted to the register, you must uphold the professional standards that are set out in [The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates](#) (the Code). Paragraph 7.5 of the Code states that you must 'be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English'.
- 32. If we receive a concern that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English after you have joined our register,⁸ you may be subject to fitness to practise proceedings.
- 33. Decision-makers will base their decision about whether a nurse, midwife, or nursing associate has the necessary knowledge of English primarily on language test results. For more information please see our online fitness to practise guide on [not having the necessary knowledge of English](#).

⁵ Article 5A(4) of the Order

⁶ Article 5A(6) of the Order

⁷ Article 37(1)(za) of the Order

⁸ Article 22(1)(a)(iva) of the Order

We're the independent regulator for nurses and midwives in the UK, and nursing associates in England. Our vision is safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery practice that improves everyone's health and wellbeing.

**23 Portland Place,
London W1B 1PZ
+44 20 7637 7181
www.nmc.org.uk**

**@nmcnews
@nmcuk**

**nmc
Nursing &
Midwifery
Council**

Registered charity in England and Wales (1091434) and in Scotland (SC038362).