

Guidance on registration language requirements

Updated June 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 professional on our register you must put the interests of people using or needing nursing or midwifery services first.¹ 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 English² to practise safely and effectively as a nursing or midwifery professional in the United Kingdom.³ 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 guidance⁴ set out 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, and
 - 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 and
 - 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 The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates, NMC, 2018

² Article 9(2)(ba) of the Order

³ Schedule 4 of the Order

⁴ 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 of 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 consider your complete application.⁵
11. You can meet the required scores across two sittings of the same test. You cannot combine OET and IELTS test scores when combining tests. 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.
 - 11.1. IELTS: you must achieve at least 7 for reading, listening, and speaking, and at least 6.5 for writing, in at least one of the two test sittings. You must not score below 6.5 for listening, reading, and speaking, or below 6 for writing, in either of the two test sittings.
 - 11.2. OET: you must achieve at least grade B (350-440) for reading, listening, and speaking, and at least grade C+ (300-340) for writing, in at least one of the two test sittings. You must not score below grade C+ (300-340) for listening, reading, and speaking, or below grade C (250-290) for writing, in either of the two test sittings.
12. If you have taken the test twice and missed one of the required scores by no more than 0.5 (IELTS) or no more than half a grade (OET), you can supplement your test

⁵ 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.

scores with additional supporting information from your employer (see below for more details).

Evidence type 2

- 13. 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 of 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.**
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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:
- 16.1. A training transcript or official letter from your training institute showing that your course was taught and examined in English, and
- 16.2. Additional supporting information from your employer (see below) as evidence that you can interact clinically in English
17. 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

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

Regulated practice (nurse and midwife applicants)

20. 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.

Non-regulated practice (nursing associate applicants)

21. If you are applying to the nursing associate part of the register and have been practising for at least one year in a country where English is a majority spoken language in a role that is not regulated, you can use this practice as evidence type 3 provided that your role corresponds to that of a nursing associate, and you used the skills, knowledge and experience you gained from the qualification you are relying on as part of your registration application. We may ask for a reference from your employer (or employers) to confirm that your role corresponded to that of a nursing associate. You must also have successfully completed a language assessment as part of your employment.

Supporting information from employers

22. As set out above, in specific circumstances we will allow you to supplement evidence types 1 and 2 with additional supporting information from your current employer. You must have been working in a health or care setting 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 in reading, writing, listening and speaking. 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 from the same employer 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 still have 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 consider your complete application (see evidence type 1 for further details, including on additional supporting information from employers).

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 country where English is a majority spoken language

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 country where English is a majority spoken language.

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.⁶ We may also ask you to complete an examination or assessment and give us evidence that you have done so.⁷

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.⁸

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,⁹ you may be subject to fitness to practise proceedings.

33. When they are 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 on [not having the necessary knowledge of English](#).

Last updated: June 2023

⁶ Article 5A(4) of the Order

⁷ Article 5A(6) of the Order

⁸ Article 37(1)(za) of the Order

⁹ Article 22(1)(a)(iva) of the Order