

INFORMATION SHEET

Refreshing our English Language Competence Policy

This information sheet outlines a refresh of Te Kaunihera Tapuhi o Aotearoa Nursing Council of New Zealand's policy on English Language Competence.

This refresh is based on consultation and engagement we conducted earlier this year on our processes for registering and assessing internationally qualified nurses. It also draws on feedback we have heard over time from recruiters, employers, and internationally qualified nurses themselves.

The points outlined here will apply to all nurses who begin their application with CGFNS on or after 19th August 2022, and we invite nurses whose applications have recently expired to re-apply if appropriate. Nurses who applied to CGFNS and/or Nursing Council before this date will not be disadvantaged by the changes we have announced.

Why do we have an English Language Competence requirement?

Effective communication, including comprehension, is a core part of being able to safely practise as a nurse. Nurses need to be able to communicate effectively with patients and their whānau/ family, as well as with other nurses and members of the healthcare team. This includes the need to document and interpret planned nursing care clearly and accurately.

Communicating with other health professionals involves using and interpreting complex technical language and may occur in pressured, fast-paced environments. In some situations, miscommunication can lead to severe harm or death. This means that the Nursing Council has higher requirements for English competence than might be needed for immigration or study purposes.

The need for an English language standard is set in the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003, which is the Nursing Council's governing legislation. This requires the Council to be satisfied that a nurse can communicate at an appropriate level to practise in their scope (section 16(a)), and that the nurse's "ability to communicate and comprehend English is sufficient to protect the health and safety of the public" (section 16(b)). If we are not satisfied that this is the case, we cannot register a nurse.

What Does This Refresh Involve?

This policy refresh involves both changes to our existing English language Competence policy, and clarification of the English language requirements for nurses who want to practise in Aotearoa New Zealand. The key elements of this refresh are:

- Changing our IELTS and OET writing band score requirements.
- Clarifying our policy around computer-based testing.
- Providing clarity around education and registration-based evidence pathways.

A New Minimum Writing Score

The Nursing Council has decided that the minimum score for the writing band will be changed to 6.5 in the International English Language Test System (IELTS) and 300 in the Occupational English Test (OET). This change takes effect at 9am, 19 August 2022.

There will be no change to the required Reading, Speaking, and Listening band scores. These will remain at 7 for IELTS and 350 for OET.

The Council has carefully considered this change. In our consultation survey, 68% of respondents (77% of IQNs and 62% of non-IQNs) clearly supported the change, while 17% clearly opposed it (12% of IQNs and 23% of non-IQNs). The Nursing Council has balanced the need to ensure English language competence for safe practise with the need to avoid undue barriers to registration.

We are confident that this writing score is sufficient to ensure public safety. This writing score is the same as required by the United Kingdom's nursing regulator. It is generally a higher writing score than is required to immigrate or study in Aotearoa New Zealand, reflecting the technical language requirements of nursing practice.

The Nursing Council will continue to accept either IELTS (Academic) or OET tests of English, and has decided to not prioritise one of these tests over the other.

Computer-based and Online Testing

The Council has decided not to alter our existing policy around computer-based testing. However, we have heard that our current policy is not clear. We are therefore providing clearer guidance on this policy as follows:

- Testing that occurs at an IELTS or OET testing venue but that is undertaken on a computer will be accepted by the Council.
- Fully online computer-based testing (for example OET@home or IELTS Online), will not be accepted by the Council.
- The Speaking Test component of the OET's *On Computer* mode, which is delivered online but with a live assessor, will be accepted by the Council.

The Council will continue to monitor developments in the security and effectiveness of new testing modes. This includes engaging with other agencies that use English language testing (such as Immigration NZ) and international regulators, to ensure our policy reflects any developments in security and technology of online testing.

Evidence Pathways

The Nursing Council will continue to offer three pathways for nurses to demonstrate they have sufficient English language competence to practise safely. Pathways 2 and 3 have previously often been referred to as *waivers*. We are changing our language to *evidence pathways*, to emphasise that all nurses must supply evidence demonstrating English competence.

The three pathways are:

1. A test-based pathway, where evidence consists of IELTS or OET results that demonstrate achievement of minimum scores as follows:
 - a) IELTS: 7 in Reading, Speaking, & Listening, and 6.5 in Writing
 - b) OET: 350 in Reading, Speaking, & Listening, and 300 in Writing
2. An education-based pathway, where evidence consists of the education that led to registration as a nurse being taught and examined in English in the United Kingdom, Singapore, Ireland, Canada, or the United States of America.¹
3. A registration-based pathway, where evidence consists of having passed an English language test to obtain registration in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, or the United States of America.

The above gives greater clarity around who is eligible for the education and registration pathways. For example, to be eligible for the registration-based pathway, a nurse must have sat an English language test to gain registration. This accounts for some Canadian and US states where registration does not have an English language requirement.

Similarly, for a nurse to be eligible for the education-based pathway they must have completed their initial nursing education in English. Evidence of postgraduate or post-experience courses in English will not be accepted, unless these enabled nursing registration in one of the countries listed (such as some Masters qualifications).

For the education and registration pathways, we will actively monitor the English language requirements of other nursing regulators. Over time, this may lead to changes in the countries that provide eligibility for these pathways.

¹ These countries are all members of the International Nurse Regulator Collaborative.

It is important to recognise that we require nurses to provide evidence for each pathway. For some nurses it may be faster to use the test-based pathway than the education-based or registration-based pathways.

Changes for Singapore Nurses

Nurses who were educated in English in Singapore are eligible for the education-based Evidence Pathway. Nurses who are currently registered in Singapore are also not normally required to complete a Competence Assessment Programme (CAP), which assesses clinical skills, to gain registration in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We have received messages from some nurses that listing Singapore as an eligible country for the registration-based pathway (as was the case under our previous settings) was misleading. This is because the Singaporean Nursing Board does not currently require an English language test to gain registration. This meant that in practice nurses could not meet the necessary requirements for this pathway, and this could in turn slow down the time it took for them to be registered with us.

Following discussions with the Singaporean Nursing Board, we have therefore removed Singapore from the list of countries where a nurse may be eligible for the registration-based pathway. As noted above, nurses who are educated in English at a Singaporean institution are eligible for the education-based pathway, and Singaporean-registered nurses are not usually required to complete a CAP if applying for equivalent registration.

Australian-registered Nurses

Under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997, a nurse registered in Australia is generally entitled to registration in Aotearoa New Zealand. A nurse with Australian registration therefore does not need to provide evidence of English language competence to the Nursing Council.

Where Can I Find More Information?

Our website is being updated at 12am on 19 August 2022 to reflect our refreshed policy. To avoid overloading our website we recommend visiting after 1:00pm.

To make it easier to find out about our English Language Competence requirements, the Nursing Council has also produced a short booklet outlining the three pathways. This is available in PDF on our homepage for internationally qualified nurses at <https://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz/IQN>.