

English language skills registration standard FAQs – Nursing and midwifery

General

Does the *English language skills registration standard* apply to me?

Two new English language skills registration standards commence on 1 July 2015:

1. the ***Common English language skills registration standard***, which applies to all applicants for initial registration in Chinese medicine, chiropractic, dental, medical, medical radiation, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathy, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology. For clarity, three versions are published:
 - a. the version for 10 boards (no additional wording)
 - b. the version for dental, with the addition for some very brief dental-specific words for applicants for limited registration
 - c. the version for medical, with the addition of information about two medicine-specific English language tests
2. the ***Nursing and Midwifery English language skills registration standard***, which applies to all applicants for registration as enrolled nurses, registered nurses and midwives.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice (ATSIHP) Board of Australia has its own standard; see the ATSIHP Board's website for information on the *ATSIHP English language skills registration standard*.

These FAQs relate to the *Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard* that comes into effect on 1 July 2015. The standard does not apply to students but does apply to graduates seeking initial registration.

When does the new standard come into effect?

The new common and nursing and midwifery *English language skills registration standards* come into effect on 1 July 2015.

Why do I have to meet the *English language skills registration standard*?

In order to be registered as a health practitioner in Australia, you must be able to demonstrate that your English language skills will enable you to safely practice your profession. The *English language skills registration standard* is one of the five core standards required under the National Law.

What does initial registration mean?

Initial registration means the first time that you apply for registration as a health practitioner in Australia.

You are also considered to be applying for initial registration if:

- your registration has lapsed (or you are moving from non-practising registration to another registration type) and you have not used English as your primary language for more than five years, and you are now re-applying for registration, or
- you currently hold or previously held limited registration and were granted an exemption from the English language registration standard under specified circumstances, and you are now applying for another type of registration.

How can I demonstrate my English language competence?

There are four pathways that you can use to demonstrate your English language competence. These are outlined in the *Nursing and midwifery English Language skills registration standard*. The pathways are:

1. Primary language pathway
2. Extended education pathway, or
3. English language test pathway

A flow diagram to help you find the most appropriate pathway for you is published on the English language skills page on the AHPRA website.

I grew up and studied in Australia – which pathway is appropriate for me?

If you grew up and completed all of your education in Australia, the most appropriate pathway for you is the Primary language pathway.

I did not go to secondary school in a recognised country but I have been studying for an extended period in a recognised country. Which pathway is most relevant for me?

If you have completed at least five years (full-time equivalent) education in English in a recognised country, you meet the standard through the extended education pathway, provided that you can provide evidence of at least:

- two years (for registered nurses), or
- one year (for enrolled nurses)

in a full-time equivalent pre-registration program of study approved by the recognised nursing and/or midwifery regulatory body in any of the recognised countries.

If your qualification as a health practitioner was not taught and assessed in English in one of the recognised countries, you will need to demonstrate that you meet the standard through the English language test pathway.

Will the National Board or AHPRA check that I have maintained my English language skills once I am registered?

The information you provide in your application for registration about your English language skills may be checked by AHPRA. However, it is up to you to ensure that you maintain your level of English language proficiency once you are registered, even if you frequently communicate with patients in a language other than English.

The National Boards and AHPRA may also reassess your English language skills if specific concerns arise, e.g. if a complaint is made about you.

What are the ‘recognised countries’ and why were they chosen?’

The recognised countries are: Australia, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland and South Africa. With the exception of South Africa and Australia, these countries are the same as the countries recognised by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) for the purpose of exempting visa applicants from having to sit a test to demonstrate English language competency.

This approach reflects similar approaches taken by state and territory health practitioner boards in Australia before the National Scheme commenced, as well as National Boards' experience since the National Scheme started. The recognised countries have health care delivery systems with significant similarities to Australia. In most of these countries, health care is almost always delivered in English.

South Africa is included in the list of ‘recognised countries’ in the standard, consistent with the approach taken by a number of Australian health practitioner regulators before the National Scheme started. In developing the current standard, National Boards consulted on whether South Africa should be removed from the list, bringing it into line with DIBP. After considering the available evidence, National Boards decided that South Africa should remain on the list of recognised countries for the time being.

Are there any plans to add more countries to the list of ‘recognised countries’?

At this time there are no plans to add any new countries to the list of ‘recognised countries’.

This issue was considered as part of the recent review of English language skills registration standards but no substantive evidence to support the addition of new countries was uncovered.

National Boards may reconsider this issue in future reviews of the standard if new evidence comes to light.

I have been granted a skilled migration visa. Why do I need to demonstrate that I meet the standard?

The *Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard* applies to all applicants for initial registration as enrolled nurses, registered nurses or midwives in Australia. This means that all new applicants for registration must meet the standard, regardless of their language background or visa status.

The standard aligns closely with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) English language requirements for skilled migration visas. The four tests listed in the new standard – IELTS Academic, OET, TOEFL iBT and PTE Academic – are also used by DIBP to assess English language competence. If you sat one of these tests as part of your application for a skilled migration visa in the past two years and you achieved the results specified in the standard, you can use those results and do not need to sit another test.

Note that the Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) test is accepted by DIBP but is not currently accepted by National Boards.

Why is there a different *English language skills registration standard* for nurses and midwives?

In developing new English language skills registration standards, National Boards decided to take a joint approach to maximise consistency across the registered health professions, given the similarity of the issues involved. However, there are a number of issues specific to nursing and midwifery which merit a slightly modified standard. These include:

- the different cohorts of applicant (enrolled nurses, registered nurses and midwives)
- the different lengths of courses for enrolled nurses, registered nurses and midwives
- the number of nurses and midwives who studied their profession as mature age students
- the large number of applicants for nursing and midwifery registration, including internationally qualified applicants
- the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's experience with their old English language skills registration standard, which had some key differences from the previous common standard.

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia has taken these issues into consideration in developing a profession-specific standard. While the *Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard* generally aligns with the new common standard, key differences ensure that registered nurses, enrolled nurses and midwives are not disadvantaged compared with other registered health professions in the assessment of their English language skills.

What are the pathways and how do I know which one applies to me?

The *Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard* contains three pathways. These are:

1. the primary language pathway

2. the extended education pathway, or
3. the English language test pathway.

Each pathway is outlined in the standard.

A flow chart to help you find the most appropriate pathway for you is published on the English language skills page on the AHPRA website.

I am an enrolled nurse. Do I have to fulfil the same English language requirements as registered nurses and midwives?

All registered nurses and midwives, including enrolled nurses, must be able to demonstrate the same level of English language proficiency in order to become registered and safely practice the profession. However, the NMBA has taken differences in the education of enrolled nurses into consideration when developing the standard. Although enrolled nurses are required to demonstrate the same number of total years of education in English as registered nurses and midwives in order to meet the requirements of the *primary language pathway* and the *extended education pathway*, they are only required to have completed a minimum of one year of a full-time equivalent pre-registration program of study in English, as part of their total education in English in a recognised country.

I studied nursing as a mature age student and I am a native English speaker. Which pathway applies to me?

If English is your primary language, it is likely that you meet the standard through the *primary language pathway*. In this pathway, you do not need to demonstrate continuous education however you must be able to show that you have attended and satisfactorily completed at least six years of primary and secondary education taught and assessed in English in one of the recognised countries, including at least two years between years 7 and 12. In addition, you must have successfully completed your relevant qualification as an enrolled nurse, registered nurse or midwife in English in one of the recognised countries. It does not matter if you have had a break from study or if you did not complete all six years of high school, as long as the other criteria specified in the standard are satisfied.

I did my nursing degree in Australia and I had to sit an English language test before I started the course. Why do I have to sit another one now?

If you sat one of the English language tests listed in the standard within the past two years and you achieved the results specified in the standard, you do not need to sit another test.

If your results were lower than the results listed in the standard, or you sat the test more than two years ago, you may have to sit another test.

The *extended education pathway* in the standard specifies that you must be able to demonstrate five years of continuous education (as defined) taught and assessed in English in a recognised country, including a minimum of two years (registered nurses and midwives) or one year (enrolled nurses) of a nursing or midwifery program of study. The five years of continuous

education may be a combination of tertiary and/or vocational and/or secondary education. If you are able to demonstrate that you meet the standard through this pathway, then you do not need to sit another English language test.

Is the new *Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard* easier or harder to meet than the old standard?

The new *Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard* has been developed to ensure that the high level of English language skill expected of nurses and midwives in Australia is maintained. However, additional pathways have been added to ensure that applicants who demonstrably meet the standard are not disadvantaged due to their particular circumstances. The new standard also includes two new English language tests, giving applicants greater choice in how they demonstrate that they meet the standard through the *English language test pathway*. Increasing the number of test sittings from which results can be counted in certain circumstances also provides reasonable flexibility for applicants, without altering the level of English language competence required in order to meet the standard.

English language tests

Why are there so many English language tests and how do I decide which one I should sit?

The tests used by the National Boards to determine English language competence are also used by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) to determine visa eligibility. The scores required to demonstrate English language competence for each test are specified in the standard. Each test is slightly different, however the scores required to meet the standard have been benchmarked so they are set at equivalent levels across all the tests. It is not easier to achieve the required scores on one test, compared with any of the others.

The IELTS, PTE Academic and TOEFL iBT test can be taken by applicants from any profession. Currently, the OET test is not applicable for chiropractic, osteopathy and psychology applicants for registration, as OET has not yet developed a specific test for these professions. For Chinese medicine, any of the existing OET tests will be accepted as evidence.

In choosing which test to sit, you will need to do your own research and decide on which test is the most suitable or convenient for you. Links to the tests are published on the English language skills page on the AHPRA website.

Do I need to achieve the required test scores in one sitting?

Ideally, you will be able to demonstrate that you meet the standard in one test sitting. However, National Boards will accept results from a maximum of **two test sittings in a six month period** so long as certain minimum scores are achieved in each sitting. These vary from test to test and are outlined in the standard. Note that this does not mean that you can only sit the test twice in the six month period; you may sit the test more than twice if you wish (although this is not recommended by the testing authorities). However, only the results from two sittings will be considered by National Boards.

Can I just re-sit one component of a test?

No, you will need to re-sit the entire test and achieve the required result in the relevant component, and any other minimum scores as outlined in the standard.

If you do not achieve the required results, you will have to re-sit the entire test again. You may only count the results of two tests within a six month period.

I have a valid English language test result that demonstrates I meet the standard, however it is more than two years old. Do I need to sit another test?

Generally, yes.

However there are certain circumstances in which you may not have to sit another test. If, within twelve months of sitting the test, you started or continued employment as a registered health practitioner in one of the recognised countries where English was the primary language of practice; or you commenced or continued your enrolment in a Board approved program of study and you applied for registration within 12 months of completing that employment or study, you may not have to sit another test. Each application will be assessed to ensure that the employment or study undertaken satisfies the requirements specified in the standard.

For further information on the evidence you will need to verify your test result and your period of employment or study, please see the [*Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard evidence guide*](#) published on the English language skills page on the AHPRA website.

Do I need to sit a language test every two years to remain registered?

No. If you have demonstrated that you meet the standard through the *Language test pathway*, you do not need to sit another test as long as you remain registered.

I was previously told that I needed to achieve the required results in one test sitting, even though I had achieved the required results in all components in two test sittings. Do I meet the standard now?

If the two tests were taken within a six month period, and the first test was taken less than two years ago, then it is possible that you now meet the standard. Your results will need to be assessed to ensure that they meet all the criteria for multiple test sittings specified in the standard. You should contact AHPRA to check the status of your application.

Evidence requirements

What evidence do I need to provide about my secondary education in English?

The evidence required to demonstrate secondary education taught and assessed in English in one of the seven recognised countries listed in the standard may vary, depending on where it occurred.

For detailed information about the evidence you need to provide, please see the [*Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard evidence guide*](#) published on the English language skills page on the AHPRA website.

What evidence do I need to provide about my tertiary and/or vocational studies in English?

The evidence required to demonstrate tertiary and/or vocational education taught and assessed in English in one of the seven recognised countries listed in the standard may vary, depending on where it occurred.

For detailed information about the evidence you need to provide, please see the [*Nursing and midwifery English language skills registration standard evidence guide*](#) published on the English language skills page on the AHPRA website.

What if I cannot submit the requested evidence of education in an English-speaking country, even though my first language is English?

You should provide as much information as possible in the application form. AHPRA will consider whether the information you have provided is sufficient evidence of meeting the standard. If not, you may need to sit an English language test.

What does 'full-time equivalent' mean?

'Full-time equivalent' means:

- a course load that a student would need to take in order to complete a course in the minimum time (not including accelerated or fast-track courses). For example, a full-time load for a four year undergraduate degree would be the normal course load for a student who would expect to complete that degree in four years, or
- a combination of part-time courses, which together make up a full-time course load. For example, two part-time courses each consisting of a 50% course load.

Course loads for particular programs of study are set by educational institutions.

Can I count studies that are more than full-time on the *extended education pathway*?

If your course load is greater than full-time, you cannot count the [additional](#) study towards the total number of years you are claiming. For example, if you are undertaking full-time study for a particular course, but are also studying another course part-time, you cannot claim the equivalent of 1.5 times the duration of study in English. That is, one year of full-time equivalent study is the maximum that you can claim in a single year, regardless of whether your subject load would normally be considered to be in excess of full-time.

Can I count part-time studies on the *extended education pathway*?

You can count part-time studies as long as your overall course load is full-time equivalent. For example, you may be studying one part-time course with a 40% course load and another part-

time course with a 60% course load. Together, this would be considered a full-time equivalent course load.

I have completed a tertiary preparation English course before commencing my Board approved program of study. Can this be included as vocational education under the *extended education pathway*?

Yes, you may be able to include this course if it meets the requirements in the definition for vocational education. The length of time you may count towards the required number of years of study in English will depend on whether you studied full-time or part-time. If you studied part-time, you can only count this course if you were studying another course part-time (that also meets the requirements in the definition), such that your total hours of study in English would be considered 'full-time equivalent'.

I have completed an online university or TAFE course. Can this be included as vocational education under the *extended education pathway*?

Potentially. You can count online study provided that the course requires you to use English language speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. Courses that are delivered entirely online and do not require students to use all these English language skills to communicate are not acceptable. For vocational education, the course must also meet the requirements in the definition for vocational education. You may be required to provide further evidence about the program and delivery method.

I have completed a traineeship through a Registered Training Organisation in Australia. Can this be included as vocational education under the *extended education pathway*?

It is unlikely. Traineeships and apprenticeships generally involve full time work and on the job training by an employer, which is supplemented by some formal education with a Registered Training Organisation, whereas the extended education pathway considers a full time course of study that is formally assessed.