

Registration standard

English language skills

Effective date: 18 March 2025

Ahpra and the National Boards acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Elders past and present.

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (Board) requires all applicants for **initial registration**¹ to demonstrate English language skills to be suitable for registration.

This registration standard sets out how an applicant for registration can demonstrate to the Board that their competency in speaking and communicating in English is sufficient to practise nursing and/or midwifery.

Does this standard apply to me?

This standard applies to all applicants for **initial registration**.

It does not apply if you are applying for non-practising registration or if you are a **student**.

What must I do?

If you are applying for **initial registration** you must demonstrate your English language competency in one of the following ways:

1. English is your primary language and:
 - a. you have attended and satisfactorily completed at least **six years of primary and secondary education** taught and assessed solely in English in a **recognised country**, including at least two years between years 7 and 12, **and**
 - b. your tertiary qualification in the relevant professional discipline, which you are relying on to support your eligibility for registration under the **National Law** was taught and assessed solely in English in a **recognised country** and:
 - i. in the case of a registered nurse and/ or midwife, you must provide evidence of having successfully completed at least a two (2) years full-time equivalent pre-registration program of study approved by the recognised nursing and/or midwifery regulatory body in a **recognised country**.
 - ii. in the case of an enrolled nurse, you must provide evidence of having successfully completed at least a one year full-time equivalent pre-registration program of study approved by the recognised nursing and/or midwifery regulatory body in a **recognised country**.

OR

2. Registered nurses and midwives

If you are applying for registration as a registered nurse and/or midwife, you must provide evidence that you have successfully completed at least **five (5) years (full-time equivalent) continuous education** taught and assessed solely in English, in a **recognised country**, which includes tertiary qualifications in the relevant professional discipline which you are relying on to support your eligibility for registration under the **National Law**.

The Board will only accept the successful completion of **five (5) years (full-time equivalent) continuous education** that is a combination of:

- a. tertiary and secondary education taught and assessed in English; or
- b. tertiary and vocational education taught and assessed in English; or
- c. combined tertiary, secondary and vocational education taught and assessed in English; or
- d. tertiary education taught and assessed in English

The last period of education must have been completed no more than five years prior to applying for registration in Australia.

OR

3. Enrolled nurses

If you are applying for registration as an enrolled nurse, you must provide evidence that you have successfully completed at least **five (5) years (full-time equivalent) continuous education** taught and assessed solely in English, in a **recognised country**, which includes **vocational** qualifications in the relevant professional discipline which you are relying on to support your eligibility for registration under the **National Law**.

1. Bolded terms are defined in the *Definitions* section of this registration standard

The Board will only accept the successful completion of **five (5) years (full-time equivalent) continuous education** that is a combination of:

- a. vocational and secondary education taught and assessed in English; or
- b. tertiary and vocational education taught and assessed in English; or
- c. combined tertiary, secondary and vocational education taught and assessed in English; or
- d. tertiary education taught and assessed in English

The last period of education must have been completed no more than five years prior to applying for registration in Australia.

OR

4. You achieve the required minimum scores in one of the following English language tests and meet the requirements for **test results** specified in this standard:
 1. **Cambridge** (C1 Advanced or C2 Proficiency)
 2. **International English Language Testing System** (Academic) (IELTS)
 3. **Occupational English Test** (OET)
 4. **Pearson Test of English Academic** (PTE Academic)
 5. **Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based test** (TOEFL iBT)
 6. Other English language tests approved by the National Boards from time to time and published on the Board's website with the required minimum scores. National Boards reserve the right at any time to revoke their approval of an English language test.

NOTE: We will only accept test results from:

- i. one test sitting, or
- ii. a maximum of **two test sittings in a 12-month period**

and only if the requirements for test results, such as when the test must be taken, type/modality of test and the required minimum scores, specified in this standard are met as set out in this standard.

Test results and minimum requirements

What are the test results requirements that I must meet?

The following requirements apply to the English language **test results**:

1. **Test results** will be accepted if they were obtained:
 - 1.1 within the two years before the date you lodge your application for registration, or
 - 1.2 more than two years before the date you lodge your application for registration if, in the period since the **test results** were obtained, you:
 - a. have been **continuously working**:
 - (i) as a registered health practitioner (starting within 12 months of the test date) where English was the main language of practice in one of the **recognised countries**, or
 - (ii) in another relevant health, disability or aged-care related role where English was the main language of practice in one of the **recognised countries** and your role requires you to read, write, listen to and speak English in the working environment, and
 - b. lodge your application for registration within 12 months of finishing your last period of employment, or
 - 1.3 more than two years before the date you lodge your application for registration if, in the period since the test result was obtained, you:
 - a. have been continuously enrolled in a **Board approved program of study** (which started within 12 months of the test date) and successfully completed subjects in each semester, with no break from study apart from the education provider's scheduled holidays, and
 - b. lodge your application for registration within 12 months of completing the **Board approved program of study**.

For the purposes of calculating time, if an applicant relies on **test results** from two sittings in a 12-month period, time begins to run from the date of the earlier sitting.

Results from different test providers cannot be combined.

Test requirements

The table below includes the versions of the tests approved by the NMBA. Additional versions or modalities of the tests may be approved from time to time and will be published on the Board's and Ahpra's website.

Test	Overall score needed ²	Component scores needed	Test results accepted from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one test sitting, or a maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period only if:
Cambridge (C1 Advanced or C2 Proficiency) (Paper and computer at test centre only)	Minimum score of 185	Minimum overall score of 185 in each of the three components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening reading speaking and minimum score of 176 in the one component of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you are tested in all four components in each sitting you achieve a minimum score of 185 in each component for listening, reading and speaking and a minimum score of 176 for writing across the two sittings, and when using two test sittings no score in any component of the test(s) for either test sitting is below 176.
IELTS (Academic-paper and computer at test centre only)	Overall score of 7	Minimum score of 7 in each of the three components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening reading, and speaking. and minimum score of 6.5 in the one component: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you achieve a minimum overall score of 7 in each sitting, and you achieve a minimum score of 7 in each component for listening, reading and speaking and a minimum score of 6.5 for writing across the two sittings, and when using two test sittings no score in any component of the test(s) for either test sitting is below 6.5.
OET (on paper or computer based in testing centre) (any profession specific OET test can be accepted)		Minimum score of B in each of the three components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening reading speaking and minimum score of C+ in the one component: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you are tested in all four components in each sitting, and you achieve a minimum score of B in each component for listening, reading and speaking and a minimum score of C+ for writing across the two sittings, and when using two test sittings no score in any component of the test(s) for either test sitting is below C+.
PTE Academic (computer at test centre only)	Minimum overall score of 66	Minimum score of 66 in each of the three communicative skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening reading speaking and minimum score of 56 in one communicative skill: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a minimum overall score of 66 is achieved in each sitting, and you achieve a minimum score of 66 in each of the communicative skills of listening, reading and speaking and a minimum score of 56 in writing across the two sittings, and when using two test sittings no score in any of the communicative skills for either test sitting is below 56.

2. Test scores are as advised by test providers and may change in line with score concordance search. Any changes to score requirements will be published on the Board's website.

Test	Overall score needed ²	Component scores needed	Test results accepted from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one test sitting, or • a maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period only if:
TOEFL iBT (computer at test centre only)	Minimum total score of 94	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 for listening • 24 for reading • 24 for writing, and • 23 for speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ a minimum total score of 94 is achieved in each sitting, and ◦ you achieve a minimum score of 24 for listening, 24 for reading, 24 for writing and 23 for speaking across the two sittings, and ◦ when using two test sittings no score in any of the test sitting sections is below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 for listening • 19 for reading • 24 for writing, and • 20 for speaking.

other English language tests approved by the Board from time to time and published on the Board's website with the required minimum scores.

OR

5. In other defined circumstances/cases where there is compelling evidence demonstrating English language proficiency at least equivalent to the other pathways in this standard set out in a policy published by the Board.

Exemptions

1. The Board may grant an exemption to this standard when you apply for limited registration in the following circumstances:
 - a. to perform a demonstration in clinical techniques
 - b. to undertake research that involves limited or no patient contact, or
 - c. to undertake a period of postgraduate study or supervised training while working in an appropriately supported environment that will ensure patient safety is not compromised.
2. Conditions will generally apply to these exemptions, which will require supervision by a registered health practitioner and may also require the use of an interpreter.
3. The Board reserves the right at any time to revoke an exemption and/or require an applicant to undertake a specified English language test.

More information

Practitioners who meet this standard on the basis of results from an English language test will be asked to declare that they have continued to use English as their **primary language** when they apply to move from non-practising to **practising registration**.

Further information regarding the evidence that applicants must provide to the Board to prove that they meet this standard is set out in the relevant application form.

Your **test results** will be verified independently with the test provider.

You are responsible for the cost of English language tests.

Authority

This registration standard was approved by the Ministerial Council on 21 June 2024.

Registration standards are developed under section 38 of the National Law and are subject to wide ranging consultation.

Definitions

Board approved program of study means an accredited program of study approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia under section 49(1) of the National Law and published in the Board's list of approved programs of study on the Board's website.

Continuously working means working for at least 26 weeks **full-time equivalent** per year. For example, 52 weeks part-time work (five days per fortnight) which in total adds up to the equivalent of 26 weeks full-time.

Continuously working can include some periods of leave. However, as this requirement is to demonstrate exposure to English in the working environment the minimum hours worked per year must total 26 weeks **full-time equivalent**.

Five years (full-time equivalent) continuous education means education over a period of five consecutive calendar years without a break from study apart from the education institution (e.g. school, university or vocation education provider) scheduled holidays.

Full-time equivalent

For the purpose of:

- education, is the successful completion of a course load which meets the education provider's definition of full-time enrolment and does not include recognised prior learning. For example, a student enrolled in a full-time four-year undergraduate degree would be expected to complete the degree in four years. This is set by the relevant educational institution. This could include a combination of part-time courses, which together make up a full-time course load. For example, two part-time courses taken at the same time, each consisting of a 50 per cent course load that together meet the full-time load requirement. This requirement is to demonstrate exposure to English in the education environment. For that reason, concurrent education, accelerated courses, fast track courses and/ or additional education taken during semester breaks cannot be counted for more than one full-time equivalent course load. For example, an applicant that has studied two programs in a year concurrently, one at half full-time equivalent and the other at three quarters full-time equivalent, could only count a maximum of one full-time equivalent year. Where a course load is delivered in a shorter time such as an accelerated or fast-tracked course (for example a four-year course delivered over 3 years) only the duration of the delivery of the course is to be counted (i.e. the three-year course delivery period in this example)
- work, means the equivalent to working full time hours typically ranging from 35 to 38 hours per week.

Initial registration means:

- a practitioner applying for registration in Australia in nursing and/or midwifery for the first time; **or**
- a practitioner applying for registration (including moving from non-practising to another registration type) who has not used English as their **primary language** for a period of greater than five years; **or**
- a practitioner who currently holds limited registration on the basis that they were granted an exemption from this standard in the limited circumstances described under *Exemptions* and who is applying for another type of registration.

Initial registration otherwise does not include a practitioner who has had continual registration in nursing and/ or midwifery and is applying for a different category or division of registration in that profession, for example, a practitioner who holds provisional registration and is applying for general registration; or a practitioner who holds general registration and is applying for specialist registration.

National Law means the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act* (as in force in each state and territory).

Practising registration means provisional, general, specialist or limited registration.

Primary language means the language primarily used for reading, writing, listening, and speaking and the language known best and most comfortable with.

Recognised country means one of the following countries or territories:

- Antigua and Barbuda
- Anguilla
- Australia
- The Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Bermuda
- British Indian Ocean Territory
- Canada

- Cayman Islands
- Dominica
- Falkland Islands
- Gibraltar
- Grenada
- Guernsey
- Guyana
- Isle of Man
- Jamaica
- Jersey
- Malta
- New Zealand
- Republic of Ireland
- Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
- St Kitts and Nevis
- St Lucia
- St Vincent and the Grenadines
- Trinidad and Tobago
- United Kingdom
- United States of America
- US Virgin Islands.

Other **recognised countries** approved by the National Boards from time to time will be published on the Board's website.

Secondary education means Australian school years 7 through to 12, even where year 7 is classified as part of primary school in a particular state or territory.

Six years primary and secondary education means six years of Australian school years 1 through to 12 or the equivalent in a recognised country with two of the years being between 7 and 12.

Student means a student currently registered under the National Law

Test results means the official results provided by the English language test provider. If you are providing test results from two test sittings as defined, the results from both sittings must meet the requirements of this standard.

Two test sittings in a 12-month period means that the dates of the sittings must not be more than twelve months apart. For example, if your first test sitting was on 1 March, the second sitting must be no later than 1 March of the following year. If you are providing test results from two sittings, you may provide results of any two tests taken within a 12-month period as set out in this standard. Results cannot be combined from different test providers.

Vocational education for the purpose of this standard is education that is taught and assessed solely in English in a recognised country where:

- The level of vocational education was at the Australian Qualifications Framework Level 3 or Certificate III or higher, and
- The vocational education was delivered primarily face to face and required students to use English speaking, writing, reading and listening skills.

Review

This standard will be reviewed at least every three years.