

**From:** Maurice Drake  
**Sent:** Friday, 10 December 2010 5:54 PM  
**To:** Kathleen Almond  
**Subject:** Submission re: English Language Standards

Dear Ms Almond

Please find attached my submission regarding the English Language Standards. Many of response are from a 'big picture' perspective and don't address the current operational issues.

My comments are informed by my background as a recent Head of School of a Bachelor of Nursing and Enrolled Nursing programme in New Zealand and previous auditor of Nursing Council of New Zealand undergraduate programmes.

Please note, while I have permission from the author to use the attached letter providing advice in regards to IELTS, I do not consent for this to be made available on the website as I have not discussed this with the author. I have also de-identified the letter in regards to the practitioner it is about.

I do however give permission for the submission to be made available on Board website.

Kind regards

**Maurice Drake**

A/Manager, Registrations Compliance and Auditing

Phone |

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### Summary

All applicants seeking initial registration as a nurse or midwife must demonstrate English language skills at a level that ensures safe and competent care is delivered to the public. The Board may require this capacity to be demonstrated in a number of ways.

The Board requires all applicants seeking initial registration to demonstrate English language skills on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) academic module examination by achieving, in a single sitting, a score of level 7 on each of the four components of the test, being listening, speaking, reading and writing. Alternatively, applicants may submit results achieved in a single sitting of an Occupational English Test for Nurses (OET) with a minimum A or B score on each of the four components of the test, being listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The Board considers that applicants who have been taught **and** assessed in English in their tertiary, entry to practice nursing and/or midwifery education in the countries listed here should meet this requirement. The countries are:

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- Republic of Ireland
- South Africa
- United Kingdom and
- United States of America.

Test results need to be obtained within the two years preceding application for registration. The Board may grant an exemption in specified circumstances (see *Requirement 3*).

### Scope of application

This registration standard applies to all applicants seeking initial registration as a nurse or midwife in Australia, including students holding student registration at the time of application **for initial registration**. It does not apply to applicants:

- a) who are currently registered with the Board in any other category of registration or
- b) who have been registered under previous legislation as a nurse or midwife in any jurisdiction in Australia.

**Comment [m1]:** Including these terms provides clarification

*The requirement for students to meet the same English language standards as registered staff will create some significant challenge unless there is consistency amongst education providers regarding minimal English language entry requirements into nursing (Enrolled or Registered) or midwifery programmes. One way around this could be if the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia determined minimal English language entry requirements for all nursing and midwifery programs which could be part of the accreditation standards and checked on accreditation and subsequent program audits. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that if a student is studying a minimum of three semesters of tertiary education in the medium of English, that their use of the English language will improve (across all components of the IELTS test) and the question is asked in this case, is it fair to treat students the same as registered staff if as part of their education they are also improving their English language?*

## Requirements

1. An applicant who was taught and assessed in his or her tertiary (*education*), entry to practice nursing and/or midwifery education in English in the countries listed here:

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- Republic of Ireland
- South Africa
- United Kingdom and/or
- United States of America

may be considered to have met the English language skills registration standard. For graduates from programs of study approved by the Board (as published at the Board's website at [www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au](http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au) under *Accreditation: Approved programs of study*), it is a requirement that the head of school confirms to the Board that the applicant is safe to practise nursing and/or midwifery in a clinical setting, using the English language.

*Requiring the Head of School (HoS) or their delegate to confirm to the Board that the applicant's English language ability does not pose risks to the public is potentially very problematic and is duplicating a requirement that is already addressed by the NMBA competency standards. If the applicant for registration or enrolment from a NMBA accredited program successfully completes the program, by definition this means that they have met the required level of competencies for entry into the profession.*

*This includes competency 9. Establishes, maintains and appropriately concludes therapeutic relationships; and sub-competency 9.2 Communicates effectively with individuals/groups to facilitate provision of care using a range of effective communication techniques, using language appropriate to the context, using written and spoken communication skills appropriate to the needs of individuals/groups, using an interpreter where appropriate, providing adequate time for discussion, establishing where possible, alternative communication methods for individuals/groups who are unable to verbalise, and using open/closed questions appropriately. If students fail this competency then they would not meet the requirements of their program and therefore will not have their name forwarded to the NMBA for registration or enrolment.*

*Furthermore the question is asked whether it is appropriate to treat the United Kingdom differently from other countries who are members of the European Union (given EU legislation enabling health professionals from member countries to move and work throughout the Union).*

*Additional consideration should be made in regards to requesting evidence from applicants that their schooling was undertaken in English, as some applicants from some of these named countries e.g. Canada and South Africa, may have completed their schooling in an official language of their home country other than English.*

2. All other applicants must submit evidence to the Board, or, in the case of test results, arrange for evidence to be provided of competency in English language skills, demonstrated by having completed the following tests English language proficiency:

**a) completion in a single sitting of the IELTS examination (academic module) with a minimum score of 7 in each of the four components (listening, reading, writing and speaking) or**

**b) completion in a single sitting and an overall pass in the OET with grades A or B only in each of the four components.**

*The key issue the Board needs to consider is whether the IELTS test is an appropriate measure for entry into the profession. IELTS was specifically developed for use as a test of the readiness of non-native speakers of English for entry into tertiary study in English-speaking institutions and not for vocational work. One of the original developers of IELTS considers the practice of using it for native speakers of English as "inappropriate and probably unethical" [see attached]. Furthermore, while IELTS has been used extensively for vocational purposes, it was not designed for this purpose. The*

attached information was only used in regards for reference to the historical purpose of the development of IELTS only, as the reference to the ISLPR test which is also referred to by the author highlights a potential conflict of interest.

It is suggested that other mechanisms could be used in regards to applicants' whose nursing and midwifery pre-registration programs were not taught in English. These may include:

1. Requiring applicants to complete a Board approved competency assessment program
  2. Granting applicants conditional registration for three months only with the following conditions:
    - Work under indirect supervision of a RN or RM
    - Required within the three month timeframe to provide evidence of successful achievement in the NMBA competency standards which includes competency standard '9.2 Communicates effectively with individuals/groups to facilitate provision of care', before granting unconditional registration. (This would ensure consistency with graduates from Australian nursing and midwifery programs who are required to demonstrate satisfactorily the NMBA competencies.)
  3. The Board may approve other 'tailor-made' English language courses specifically developed for nurses and midwives that meet the demands of contemporary nursing/midwifery practice. These courses would need to be approved by the Board through the accreditation section of the current health practitioner legislation. Furthermore, requirement 6 (six) below refers to 'other English tests' accepted by the Board which suggests options exist.
3. Results must have been obtained within two years preceding application for registration.
4. An IELTS (or approved equivalent) Test Report Form older than two years may be accepted as current if accompanied by proof that an applicant:
- a) has maintained employment in the workplace as a nurse and/or midwife using English as the primary language of practice in a country where English is the native or first language or
  - b) is a registered student who was required to provide an IELTS of 7 or equivalent at the commencement of his or her program of study and who has successfully completed the program of study in a full-time or part-time capacity in English, in a period that is greater than two (2) years.
5. Results from any of the English language examinations mentioned in this registration standard must be obtained in one sitting.
- This requirement is a repetition of requirement two.*
6. The applicant is responsible for the cost of IELTS / OET or other English tests accepted by the Board.
7. The applicant must make arrangements for test results to be provided to the Board for verification *at their own cost.*
- It is the applicant's responsibility to provide these to the Board.*
8. The Board reserves the right at any time to require an applicant seeking initial registration to undertake an English language test as specified by the Board.
- One additional suggested requirement for consideration*
- 9. The Board may at its discretion, require an applicant seeking initial registration for further evidence of English language proficiency to satisfy registration standards.*

## **Exemptions**

1. The Board may grant an exemption where an applicant is seeking limited registration in special circumstances, such as:

**a) to perform a demonstration in clinical techniques**

**b) to undertake research that involves limited or no patient contact and/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.**

These special circumstances exemptions will be subject generally to conditions requiring supervision by a registered health practitioner and may also require the use of an interpreter.

*While the intent of the use of an interpreter is appreciated i.e. a foreign speaking nurse undertaking postgraduate research in an Australian practice context, it is suggested that these conditions be very specific and clearly refer to any restrictions on actual provision of clinical care.*

2. The Board reserves the right at any time to revoke an exemption and/or require an applicant to undertake an English language test specified by the Board.

#### **Definitions**

**IELTS** means the International English Language Testing System developed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, The British Council and IDP Education Australia (see <http://www.ielts.org/>).

**OET** means Occupational English Test (OET) administered by the Centre for Adult Education (see <http://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/>).

An **internationally-qualified applicant** means a person who qualified as a health practitioner outside Australia.

**One sitting** means the period of time set by the testing authority for completion of the test. For example, IELTS states that the listening, reading and writing components of the test are always completed on the same day. Depending on the test centre, the speaking test may be taken up to seven days either before or after the test date.

#### **Review**

This registration standard will commence on ddmm 2010. The Board will review this standard at least every two years.