

Guidance on evidence of English language skills

ensuring pharmacy professionals
have the necessary knowledge of
English to practise safely in Great
Britain

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Introduction

One of the main ways in which we protect the public is by making sure that only pharmacists and pharmacy technicians with the knowledge and skills to practise safely and effectively can register and work in Great Britain.

This includes making sure that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can communicate effectively in English. Patients and the public rightly expect that healthcare professionals involved in their care can communicate clearly with them. It could also put patient safety at significant risk if we allowed healthcare professionals without the necessary knowledge of English to practise in Great Britain.

Everyone applying to register as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician must provide evidence, information or documents to show they have the knowledge of English they need to practise pharmacy safely and effectively. They cannot join the register until they have done this.

This guidance describes the evidence, information or documents applicants for registration must provide to show they have the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely in Great Britain. It also describes the processes we must follow to check this.

How this affects you

This guidance applies to registrants and to anyone applying to register. It therefore applies:

- whether you are applying to register as a pharmacist or a pharmacy technician, and
- wherever you qualified as a pharmacist or a pharmacy technician

We must use this guidance when you apply to register or to restore your entry to the register. We will use it to check whether you have the knowledge of English you need to practise pharmacy safely and effectively. We can refuse to register you if:

- you do not provide evidence of your knowledge of English, or
- the evidence you provide does not meet the criteria in this guidance



Criteria for assessing language evidence

Our criteria for assessing evidence and information in relation to your knowledge of English are set out below. The criteria reflect our objective of ensuring patient safety. They give us adequate assurance, before we register you, that you have the knowledge of English you need to practise safely and effectively as a pharmacy professional in Great Britain.

The evidence you provide must demonstrate your competence in English under the four areas of:

- reading
- writing
- listening, and
- speaking

The evidence must:

- be recent*, objective, independent and robust
- clearly demonstrate that you can read, write and communicate with patients, pharmacy service users, relatives and healthcare professionals in English, and
- be readily verifiable by us

* In this guidance 'recent' means (at the point you make an application to the GPhC):

- evidence of English language skills that is less than two years old

- qualifications that were awarded less than two years ago, or
- practice that was completed less than two years ago

The role of employers

Employers still have a very important role, as part of their interview and selection process, in checking that candidates have the knowledge of English they need to practise safely and effectively in the job they are applying for.

Types of evidence we will accept to demonstrate your knowledge of English

UK-qualified applicants

Pharmacists

You will usually satisfy the registrar automatically that you meet the English language requirements for registration as a pharmacist if you are a UK-qualified applicant who has:

- completed a GPhC-accredited Master of Pharmacy degree from a university within the UK, and
- completed pre-registration training and the registration assessment within the UK

Pharmacy technicians

You will usually satisfy the registrar automatically that you meet the English language requirements for registration as a pharmacy technician if you are a UK-qualified applicant who has:

- completed the UK integrated, or linked, knowledge and competence qualification(s) as set out on the GPhC website, and
- done this while working under the supervision, direction, or guidance of a registered pharmacy professional in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, or the Isle of Man

Applicants with international pharmacy qualifications

There are different ways to demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise in Great Britain. This is reflected in the types of evidence we will accept.

We will review our English language evidence requirements regularly to make sure they are still suitable. We will fully consider new sources of evidence that can assure us that you have the necessary knowledge of English. If we are satisfied that new evidence can meet our criteria, we will consult on changing our guidance to include it.

We have set out below the types of evidence we will accept as demonstrating that you have the knowledge of English you need to practise as a pharmacy professional in Great Britain.

Definition of 'mainly English-speaking countries'

In describing the evidence, we use the term 'mainly English-speaking countries'. The countries we accept as being 'mainly English-speaking' are those in the Home Office list of 'majority English-speaking countries' in their guidance document [English language requirements: Tier 1](#), plus Ireland.

Evidence type 1a:

A recent pass of the academic version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)¹ test, including the IELTS for UKVI test, but not the IELTS for UKVI Life Skills tests². You must have an overall score of at least 7, and with no score less than 7 in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking, at **one** sitting of the test.

We may accept IELTS test scores that are more than two years old if you can provide evidence that you have maintained your English language proficiency during that time. This can be, for example, if:

- you have since worked as a pharmacy professional in a mainly English-speaking country, and
- at least 75 per cent of your day-to-day interaction with patients, carers, their families, and other healthcare professionals has been in English

Evidence type 1b:

A recent pass of the of the Pharmacy Occupational English Language Test (OET)³ Test on Paper or OET Test on Computer, with a score of at least a B in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, at **one** sitting of the test. We do not accept the OET@Home[®] Test.

¹ <http://www.ielts.org/>

² The UKVI IELTS is a version of the IELTS test accepted by UK Visas and Immigration as proof of English proficiency for visa applications. We will not accept the IELTS for UKVI Life Skills tests.

Please remember to share your results with the General Pharmaceutical Council in the myOET portal so that we can verify your scores. Failure to share your results with us will delay your application. You should also provide a print-out of your results with your application.

We may accept Pharmacy OET scores that are more than two years old if you can provide evidence that you have maintained your English language proficiency during that time. This can be, for example, if:

- you have since worked as a pharmacy professional in a mainly English-speaking country, and
- at least 75 per cent of your day-to-day interaction with patients, carers, their families, and other healthcare professionals has been in English

Evidence type 2:

A recent pharmacy qualification that has been taught and examined in English in a mainly English-speaking country other than the UK.

The entire course must have been taught and examined in English, and at least 75 per cent of any in-service training (including clinical interaction and contact with patients, carers, and other healthcare professionals) as part of that course of study must have been conducted in English.

³ <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/>

You will need to be able to show that your training provided you with the opportunity to demonstrate your ability in reading, writing, listening and speaking in English.

Evidence type 3:

Recent practice for at least two years as a pharmacy professional in a mainly English-speaking country.

You will need to provide a detailed, written reference from your employer(s) about your knowledge of English. As part of this reference your employer(s) must provide evidence of how you have demonstrated your ability in the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking in English.

If you had to pass an English language test before being allowed to register and practise as a pharmacy professional in another mainly English-speaking country, then you can provide evidence of this.

When you need to provide evidence of your knowledge of English for first registration

This section describes how and when you will need to provide evidence or information to show whether you have the knowledge of English you need to practise pharmacy safely and effectively in Great Britain. It also describes the process we will follow. The process will depend on where you qualified.

UK-qualified applicants

If you are a UK-qualified applicant, the registration process has not changed since the English language requirements were introduced. As before, you will need to submit documentary evidence of having successfully completed the relevant UK qualifications as set out in the criteria for registration as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician. You must provide the evidence in the form and manner described in the supporting guidance. You will not usually have to provide further evidence of your English language ability.

Internationally qualified applicants

The routes to registration for non-UK-qualified applicants are given in the criteria for registration as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician.


Pharmacist applicants with international pharmacist qualifications who have to complete the Overseas Pharmacists Assessment Programme (OSPAP)

Under our governing legislation and registration criteria, you may have to complete the Overseas Pharmacists Assessment Programme (OSPAP)⁴. If so, you will need to provide evidence to demonstrate your knowledge of English as part of your application to start the OSPAP.

If you cannot provide evidence to show you meet the requirements of either a recent primary pharmacy qualification or recent

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<https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/registration/registering-pharmacist/overseas-non-eea-qualified-pharmacists>



practice as a pharmacist in a mainly English-speaking country, you will have to provide evidence of your English language proficiency. To do this you will need to achieve the required scores in either the academic version of the IELTS test or the Pharmacy OET, at one sitting of the test.

Pharmacist applicants with international pharmacist qualifications covered by provisions in SI 2019/5935; and with pharmacy qualifications obtained in European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) and Switzerland

If you are entitled to automatic recognition of your qualification or apply for recognition of your EEA-EFTA or Swiss qualification, you will have to provide evidence to demonstrate your knowledge of English as part of your registration application.

If you cannot provide evidence to show you meet the requirements of either a recent primary pharmacy qualification or recent practice as a pharmacist in a mainly English-speaking country, you will have to provide evidence of your English language proficiency. To do this you will need to achieve the required scores in either the academic version of the IELTS test or the Pharmacy OET, in one sitting of the test.

Pharmacy technician applicants with international pharmacy qualifications

Because you have to complete the same UK qualification(s) as a UK-qualified applicant you will not usually need to provide additional evidence of your language ability with your application for registration. You will need to submit documentary evidence of having successfully completed the relevant UK qualifications with your application for registration, as set out in the criteria for registration. You must provide the evidence in the form and manner described in the supporting guidance.

However, if you need the services of a translator or another person to help you communicate in English with us during the registration process, we will review the evidence that has already been provided. In these cases, we are likely to ask for more evidence of your knowledge of English before granting registration.

Renewal of registration

In an application for renewal, you must specify whether you have evidence, information or documents demonstrating that you have the necessary knowledge of English. This is a self-declaration, and you will only have to provide this evidence if we ask to see it.

Returning to the register

If your registration has lapsed, or you have voluntarily removed yourself from the register, you may apply to return to the register and

⁵ The European Qualifications (Health and Social Care Professions) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

restore your entry. Some pharmacy professionals apply to return to the register soon after their registration has lapsed. Others do so after having been off the register for a longer period – for example, after having spent time practising abroad or when returning to practice after a career break.

If you are returning to the register, we will use the following criteria to decide whether you have shown that you have the necessary knowledge of English:

- the length of time since you last practised in Great Britain
- the length of time you were registered and practising in Great Britain
- whether you had practised elsewhere or continued to live in Great Britain while off the register
- whether you had previously demonstrated English language competence at your initial registration
- other information that may be relevant – for example, whether concerns were raised about your English language competence when you were previously registered

This is not a complete list but it shows the type of information we will take into account in deciding whether to ask for further evidence of your knowledge of English before returning you to the register.

⁶ Article 39 of the Pharmacy Order 2010

Fees

If you are asked to pass the academic version of the IELTS test or the Pharmacy OET before applying for registration or restoration, you must pay the fee for taking the relevant test yourself.

Rights of appeal

The law⁶ gives you a right of appeal to the appeals committee if we decide that you do not have the knowledge of English you need to practise pharmacy safely and effectively and ask you to pass a language test.



If a concern about your language competence is raised while you are on the register

Under the law⁷, your fitness to practise may be considered to be impaired because you do not have the necessary knowledge of English. If we receive a concern that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English, and as a result your fitness to practise may be impaired, we will deal with it under the Fitness to Practise (FtP) process. If we have concerns ourselves that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English, and as a result your fitness to practise may be impaired, this will be treated as an allegation that will be dealt with under the FtP process.

We will deal with these cases in a similar way to any other allegation of impaired fitness to practise. If such an allegation or concern is

raised about you, the registrar, Investigating Committee or Fitness to Practise Committee can require your knowledge of English to be assessed. If this happens you will have to sit either:

- the academic version of the IELTS test, and achieve an overall score of at least 7, with no score less than 7 in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking, at one sitting of the test; or
- the Pharmacy OET test, and achieve a score of at least a B in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, at one sitting of the test.

⁷ Article 51(1)(ca) of the Pharmacy Order 2010

