

NMC response to the call for input on trade with South Korea

About Us

- 1 We are the UK's independent regulator of nursing and midwifery professions. We regulate 758,000 nursing and midwifery professionals. Our purpose is to promote and uphold the highest professional standards in order to protect the public and inspire confidence in the professions. Our vision is safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery that improves everyone's health and wellbeing.
- 2 Our core role is to regulate. To regulate well, we support our professionals and the public. Regulating and supporting our professionals allows us to influence health and social care.

Background

- 3 We welcome this call for input on the UK's trade with South Korea. It is vitally important that the direction of the UK's emerging trade policy is transparent and open to views. Our response builds on our previous submissions on other ongoing trade negotiations, most recently on [Switzerland](#) and [Israel](#).
- 4 Compared to the countries covered by the consultations we've responded to previously, South Korea accounts for a very small proportion of our international applicants. In total, there are 67 people on our register who trained in South Korea. Over the previous five years, we have added 28 new joiners to our register who trained in South Korea. 15 of these joined in the 12 months to September 2022, compared with 18,401 total overseas new joiners over the same period. In contrast, we are not aware of any people who moved from the UK to practise in South Korea in the last five years.
- 5 We have responded to those questions of greatest relevance to our regulatory role, which for the purposes of this call for evidence principally concern the facilitation of the movement of people and the mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

Thinking about potential future trade negotiations between the UK and South Korea, which of the following areas of the current UK-South Korea FTA do you feel the Government should aim to keep the same?

- 6 As the professional regulator of nurses and midwives in the UK, and nursing associates in England, our mandate is to protect the public. We uphold this mandate by requiring that all applicants evidence that they have the knowledge and skills needed to deliver consistent and quality care.
- 7 Consequently, our primary priority for the UK's trade policy is that regulatory autonomy should not be undermined through the negotiation of mutual recognition agreements based on a person's qualification, and that our ability to assess

international applicants through our [Test of Competence](#) (ToC) should not be restricted.

- 8 As a result, our position is that any enhanced trade deal between the UK and South Korea must not undermine our ability to apply the ToC as our method for assessing applicants from South Korea. This not only supports public safety, it also helps ensure a reliable flow of qualified professionals onto the register.
- 9 This is because the ToC is structured around our pre-registration proficiency standards and allows us to ensure that everyone joining the register meets the same standards. It is formed of two parts: a multiple-choice computer based theoretical test, known as the Computer Based Test (CBT), and a practical test known as the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).
- 10 We are confident in the robustness of this assessment approach because it is designed to test the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for nursing and midwifery in the UK specifically. As these skills evolve and change, we can review and adapt the ToC to keep it aligned to reflect our new standards. This was done most recently in August 2021 in order to reflect our new [Future Nurse](#) and [Future Midwife](#) standards. This ensures that all those delivering care in the UK meet the same high standards, regardless of where they are trained.
- 11 In addition, the ToC is applied consistently, transparently, and equally to all applicants. This aligns with the Government's ambition to see an efficient and fair process for the recruitment of internationally trained health professionals. It also underscores our commitment to fairness and non-discrimination in our processes.
- 12 Finally, the ToC offers a far more cost-effective and time-efficient method of assessment when compared to qualification assessment. We have previously undertaken work which looked at this in detail and found that putting a qualification assessment process in place for overseas applicants would be very resource intensive and would require extensive additional research before we could begin considering whether a qualification is comparable.

What are your main priorities and concerns about an enhanced trade agreement (or related talks) with South Korea?

- 13 Our main concerns relate to maintaining public safety, ensuring that all nursing and midwifery professionals in the UK meet the right standards to achieve this, and being sufficiently engaged in trade negotiations to be able to make sure this remains the case.
- 14 As a result, any trade deal with South Korea should not provide automatic recognition of nursing and midwifery qualifications gained in South Korea. However, given the complexity of trade deals, other issues could arise through the course of negotiations that we are not able to predict at this time.
- 15 It is therefore important that we are involved at the earliest opportunity possible in any negotiation process to ensure that we are able to provide input and feedback on relevant areas in the deal, so we can highlight unintended consequences and help shape outcomes in mutually beneficial ways. We would welcome continued

in-depth engagement from DIT through the Regulated Professions Advisory Group throughout the process.

Is there anything else that you would want to say about the UK's future trade and investment relationship with South Korea?

- 16 Trade can provide an important opportunity to promote good regulatory practice. We see benefits for both the UK's and South Korea's health and care system if our respective professional regulation and education systems are better able to learn from one another, so that we are continuously pushing forward innovation and best practice. We think that a trade deal could be an important enabler for this by providing a high-level framework which allows for closer regulatory engagement and knowledge exchange, shares expert best practice and increases cooperation on healthcare resilience.
- 17 The UK has historically relied on recruiting nurses and midwives trained overseas. We know that internationally-trained professionals bring a wealth of skills and insights to the UK. However international nursing and midwifery professionals, and trade deals facilitating their movement and registration, should not be seen as a panacea to workforce shortages in the UK.