

Observer questions – Council meeting 2 December 2020

Question 1 - Raj Mehar Marykutty Selvaraj, Staff Nurse, NHS

Dear Sir / madam

As per the criteria set by NMC in 2020, it is compulsory for a candidate to score at least a 6.5 in IELTS (C+ in the OET) in writing and 7 in IELTS (B in the OET) in the remaining sub-tests with an overall 7 score, to be eligible to proceed for the registration. Many overseas nurses are struggling to register the NMC, UK because of minor variations (in comparison with the NMC requirement) in their OET/ IELTS score. Many of them obtained a 7 score in IELTS (B in OET) in 3 sub-tests and a 6.5 (C+ equivalent in OET) in the remainder. Due to COVID-19, they are unable to club their score by re-taking the tests as unavailability of OET test dates/ inability to reach the test centre due to lockdown and social distancing. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) approved the candidates for registration with 6.5 (C+) in any one sub-test and 7 (B) in the rest others, without needing an overall score of 7. If the NMC could modify their criteria at least as per the criteria set by NMBI, it would be easier and a great relief to all those nurses and could proceed for registration without any delay. NMC and Honourable UK Parliament. please listen to all the talented and ambitious angels, who are about to miss their opportunity during this pandemic, after a lot of efforts and financial crisis, due to minor differences in their test scores. Kindly discuss this in this December council meeting.

Response: Executive Director, Professional Regulation

This question can be answered in two parts. This is our response to the first part, about why we can't accept slightly lower results like the NMBI do.

- Our English language requirements are there to fulfil our statutory obligation of public protection. This includes ensuring peoples' English ability is such that they can practice safely and effectively.
- We regularly review and update the ways in which applicants can meet the requirements.
- The required scores on the IELTS and OET have been set following expert input and have both been reviewed and consulted upon in the last two years. As a result of this review, in 2018 we did change our requirements to allow the slightly lower score of 6.5 in writing only. This was based on the evidence available and though we continue to monitor our requirements, we do not believe there is evidence that this adjusted score should be extended to cover any of the other modules
- We can't comment on the reasons for other regulators' requirements, but when we review our requirements, we will look at what other regulators do, and why.

The second part of the question says that due to Covid-19, applicants haven't been able to re-sit tests and so don't have results that are within six months of each other which means they can't combine their tests – it asks what can we do about that?

- Our evidence base on the effectiveness of the language testing is based on British Council advice. The British Council does not support the combining of test results.

However, after careful consideration of the impact on applicants and the risks to public protection we introduced the six month rule that gives applicants flexibility whilst adhering to the level of safety we expect from anyone on our register.

- All options to extend this further have been considered in light of the COVID-19 emergency but we do not have evidence to support any extension to this six months.
- We have however been working closely with the language test providers and we're pleased to say that since October we accept tests taken through the OET@Home platform. This lets candidates take the OET on their computer at home instead of having to travel to a test centre. It uses the same test material, format, tasks and activities as the test venue centres. This may help address issues caused by Covid-19 that prevent applicants from taking two tests within six months of each other.

Question 2 - Jothi Husson, Nurse, Barts Health NHS Trust

For overseas nurses registration into the register:
Can anyone take CBT test or OSCE without OET/ILETS?

Response: Executive Director, Professional Regulation

Yes, people can take the test, but when they submit their registration application they will need the evidence that they meet our language requirements.

Our process gives applicants the flexibility to complete their application in whatever order suits them. But please note:

- We understand that language sometimes takes longer to obtain so would encourage applicants to have that secured before starting their application, including before they start their test of competence
- Applicants may also need to follow recruiter or employer processes and often they will require language up front
- And lastly applicants should be mindful of the language requirements for any tier 2 visa application