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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

Healthcare professionals must have sufficient English language competence for safe and effective practice. If a registrant does not have the necessary knowledge of English there is a risk that they may not be able to act in the best interests of patients and could compromise patient safety and lead to a fitness to practise investigation.

A new law¹ makes it a legal requirement for all registrants and applicants to have the necessary knowledge of English for safe and effective practice as a condition of registration with us.

Previously, if a pharmacy professional was a national of the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, we could not check their English language skills before we registered them. We were only able to check the English language skills of non-EEA nationals who qualified outside the EEA.

This new law improves public protection. It enables us to introduce fair and proportionate language controls that would apply to all registrants and applicants for registration irrespective of nationality or country of qualification and gives the registrar powers to request evidence or information about a pharmacy professional's knowledge of English in certain circumstances.

¹ The Health Care and Associated Professions (Knowledge of English) Order 2015 (The Knowledge of English Order)
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/806/pdfs/uksi_20150806_en.pdf

How this change will affect you

Under the new law we must publish guidance² setting out the evidence, information or documents you must provide to show you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely in Great Britain and the process to be followed when making that determination.

The law and guidance applies to registrants and to all applicants seeking registration. It therefore applies:

- irrespective of whether you are applying to register as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician and
- irrespective of whether you qualified as a pharmacy professional:
 - in the United Kingdom (UK)
 - in another European Economic Area (EEA) member state or Switzerland
 - in a country outside of the UK, EEA or Switzerland

The registrar must take account of this guidance when deciding whether you have shown that you have the necessary knowledge of English. The registrar can refuse to register you if you do not provide evidence of your knowledge of English or where the evidence you provide does not meet the criteria set out in this guidance.

Please be aware that our requirements concerning evidence of English language skills do not replace the very important role that employers will continue to play in checking that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely and effectively in the role you are applying for, as part of their interview and selection process.

² The requirement to publish guidance is provided by Article 23A of the Pharmacy Order 2010 introduced by the Knowledge of English Order



Criteria for assessing language evidence

Our criteria for assessing evidence and information in relation to knowledge of English are set out below. The criteria reflect our objective of ensuring patient safety and provide us with adequate assurance that you have the necessary knowledge of English³ for the safe and effective practice as a pharmacy professional in Great Britain before we can register you.

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

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening and
- Speaking in English

and must:

- be recent⁴, 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.

³ Article 3(1) and Article 20(1)(a)(iia) and 2(a)(iia) of the Pharmacy Order 2010 introduced by the Knowledge of English Order.

⁴ When we refer to 'recent' we mean evidence relating to English language competence that is less than 2 years old at the point of making an application to the GPhC.

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

UK qualified applicants

If you are a UK qualified applicant wishing to register as a pharmacist having completed:

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

you will in most cases automatically satisfy the registrar that you meet the English language requirements for registration.

If you are a UK qualified applicant wishing to register as a pharmacy technician having completed an approved knowledge and competency qualification in the UK while working under the supervision, direction or guidance of a registered pharmacist in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, you will in most cases automatically satisfy the registrar that you meet the English language requirements for registration.

Non-UK qualified applicants

There are different ways in which you may be able to demonstrate that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise in Great Britain and this is reflected in the types of evidence we will accept.

We will review our English language evidence requirements on a regular basis to ensure they remain suitable. We will give full consideration to new sources of evidence that can provide the necessary assurance that you have the necessary knowledge of English.

However, based on our experience of assessing language evidence from international pharmacists qualified outside the EEA we have set out below the types of evidence we will accept as demonstrating that you have the necessary knowledge of English to practise as a pharmacy professional in Great Britain.



Evidence type 1

A recent⁵ pass of the academic version of International English Language testing System (IELTS)⁶ test with 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 to demonstrate that you have maintained your English language proficiency during that time. This can be for example if you have subsequently worked as a pharmacy professional in a majority English speaking country⁷ 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 recent⁸ pharmacy qualification that has been taught and examined in English in a majority English speaking country (other than the UK) (for example Ireland, United States of America, Australia, or New Zealand).

⁵ When we refer to 'recent' we mean evidence relating to the IELTS test that is less than 2 years old at the point of making an application to the GPhC.

⁶ www.ielts.org

⁷ The list of countries we accept is modelled on the UK Border Agency's list of 'majority English speaking countries' plus Ireland: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340583/English_language_v11.0_EXT.pdf

⁸ When we refer to 'recent pharmacy qualification' we mean a pharmacy qualification that was awarded less than 2 years ago at the point of making an application to the GPhC.

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, contact with patients, their carers and other healthcare professionals as part of that course of study must have been conducted in English.

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

Recent⁹ practice for at least two years as a pharmacy professional in a majority English speaking country.

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

If you were required to pass an English language test before being permitted to register and practise as a pharmacy professional in another majority English speaking country then you can provide evidence of having passed such an English language assessment.

⁹ When we refer to 'recent practice' we mean practice that was completed less than two years ago at the point of making an application to the GPhC.

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 necessary knowledge of English for the safe and effective practice of pharmacy in Great Britain, and 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 pharmacist¹⁰ or pharmacy technician¹¹ together with your application for registration. You must provide the evidence in the form and manner described in the registration application form and supporting guidance. You will not normally be required to provide further evidence of your English language ability.

Pharmacist applicants who had submitted a pre-registration training plan where they requested to complete up to 13 weeks of their pre-registration training placement in another

¹⁰www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/Registration%20criteria%20for%20pharmacists%20September%202012_0.pdf

¹¹www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/Registration%20criteria%20for%20pharmacy%20technicians%20Dec%202013.pdf

European member state in accordance with the pre-registration training scheme¹² and then passed the GPhC registration assessment will also not normally be required to provide additional evidence of their language ability with their application for registration.

Non-UK qualified applicants

If you are a non-UK qualified applicant, the process for providing evidence to demonstrate your knowledge of English will depend on whether you qualified:

- in a country outside of the UK, EEA or Switzerland. If this applies you will need to follow the process described under non-EEA qualified applicants below
- in the EEA or Switzerland and are covered by the provisions in Directive 2005/36/EC on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (the Directive)¹³. If this applies you will need to follow the process described under EEA qualified applicants below.

Non-EEA qualified applicants


If you are a non-EEA qualified pharmacist you will need to provide evidence to demonstrate your knowledge of English as part of your application for eligibility to start the Overseas Pharmacists Assessment Programme (OSPAP)¹⁴.

If you are unable to provide evidence to satisfy the criteria under either the recent primary

¹²www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/GPhC%20Education%20Procedures%20December%202013.pdf

¹³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02005L0036-20140117&from=EN>

¹⁴ www.pharmacyregulation.org/education/pharmacist/overseas-pharmacists-assessment-programme



pharmacy qualification or recent practice as a pharmacist in a majority English speaking country you will be required to provide evidence of your English language proficiency by achieving the required scores in the academic version of the IELTS in one sitting of the test.

If you are a non-EEA qualified pharmacy professional and wish to register as a pharmacy technician, because you will first have to complete the same requirements as a UK qualified applicant described on page 6, you will not normally be required to provide additional evidence of your language ability with your application for registration. As at present you will need to submit documentary evidence of having successfully met the criteria for registration as a pharmacy technician together with your application for registration. You must provide the evidence in the form and manner described in the registration application form and supporting guidance.

However if a situation arises during the registration process where you require the services of a translator or another person in order to communicate in English with us we will review the evidence that has already been provided. In these cases we are likely to request further evidence of your knowledge of English before granting registration.

EEA qualified applicants

If you are an EEA qualified pharmacist you are first required to make an application for recognition of your EEA qualification. You are not required to provide evidence to show your knowledge of English when you make this application for recognition but you can do so if you wish.

If we determine that your EEA pharmacist qualification meets the requirements for automatic recognition under the Directive¹⁵, we will inform you that we have recognised your qualification for registration purposes.

Where you had supplied evidence of your English language competence with your application for recognition and the registrar determines that the evidence submitted meets our criteria and is described under types of evidence above, we will not normally request further evidence or information from you, and you can proceed to complete your application for registration.

Where

- you did not provide evidence to show your knowledge of English with your application for recognition or
- you did provide evidence but this does not satisfy the registrar as to your English language competence,

we will still recognise your EEA qualification, provided that this meets our requirements. We will write to you informing you of this and ask you to provide evidence of your language competence before you can progress on to registration. If you do not provide evidence of your knowledge of English with your initial application, this formal request for evidence cannot be made until we have recognised your qualification.

¹⁵ For automatic recognition your qualification must be listed in Annex V 5.6.2 and comply with the minimum training requirements set out in Article 44 or you must be able to benefit from the acquired rights provisions set out in Article 23 of Directive 2005/36/EC.

If you are an EEA qualified pharmacist or pharmacy technician and your application is being assessed via the EU General System provisions¹⁶ we will ask you to provide evidence of your English language competence before we authorise you to begin any required compensation measure. This is because we want to make sure that your English language competence meets our requirements before you start working in a supervised capacity with patients, carers, their families and other healthcare professionals.

If the registrar is still not satisfied as to your English language competence after you have provided further evidence or information, or if you are unable to provide any evidence, we will ask you to pass the academic version of the IELTS test and achieve the required scores in one sitting before we can register you or before you can start the compensation measure where relevant.



¹⁶ Articles 10 to 14 of Directive 2005/36/EC.

Returning to the register

In cases where your registration has lapsed or you have voluntarily removed yourself from the register, you may apply to return to the register and restore your entry. Some pharmacy professionals apply to return to the register soon after their registration has lapsed while others do so after having been off the register for a more significant period of time, 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 consider the following criteria to determine whether you have shown that you have the necessary knowledge of English:

- The length of time since you last practised in GB
- Whether you had practised elsewhere or continued to live in GB whilst off the register
- Whether you had previously demonstrated English language competence at your initial registration
- The length of time you were registered and practising in GB
- Other information as may be relevant for example whether concerns were raised about your English language competence while previously registered.

This is not an exhaustive list but gives an indication of matters we will take into account in determining whether to request further evidence of your knowledge of English before returning you to the register.

Renewal of registration

In an application for renewal you will be required to specify, by way of a self-declaration, whether you have evidence, information or documents demonstrating that you have the necessary knowledge of English. You will only be required to provide this evidence if requested to do so by the registrar.

Fees

If you are requested to pass the academic version of the IELTS test and achieve the required scores in one sitting before applying for registration or restoration, you must pay the fee for taking the IELTS test yourself.

Rights of appeal

The law¹⁷ gives you a right of appeal to the appeals committee where the registrar makes the decision that he is not satisfied that you have the necessary knowledge of English and requires you to take an examination or assessment (the IELTS test).

¹⁷ Article 39 of the Pharmacy Order 2010

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

Under the law¹⁸, your fitness to practise may be considered to be impaired on the basis that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English. If we receive an allegation or have concerns ourselves that you do not have the necessary knowledge of English and as a result your fitness to practise may be impaired then this will be treated as an allegation that will be dealt with via the fitness to practise process. Such cases will be dealt with in a similar way to any other allegation of impaired fitness to practise. If you are subject to such an allegation or concern the registrar, Investigating Committee or Fitness to Practise Committee can require you to be assessed as to your knowledge of English. If this happens you will be required to undertake 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.

¹⁸ Article 51(1)(ca) of the Pharmacy Order 2010



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