

## **Appendix A**

# **Knowledge of English Guidance**

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## Introduction

- 1.1. Pharmacists<sup>1</sup> in Northern Ireland must have sufficient English language ability to practise safely and effectively. If a pharmacist does not have adequate English language skills, they may not be able to provide the appropriate advice and support to their patients and the safety of patients may be put at risk.
- 1.2. It is a legal requirement for persons to have the necessary knowledge of English for safe and effective practice as a condition of registration as a pharmacist with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (the 'Society').<sup>2</sup> This requirement enhances public protection by permitting the Society to introduce fair and proportionate language controls which apply to all registrants and applicants<sup>3</sup> for registration as a pharmacist, irrespective of their nationality or country of qualification, and gives the Registrar powers to request evidence or information about knowledge of English in certain circumstances.

## Background to this guidance

- 2.1 The Society is required to publish guidance setting out the evidence, information or documents an applicant must provide to demonstrate having the necessary knowledge of English to practice safely in Northern Ireland and the process to be followed by the Registrar when making that determination.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.2 The law and guidance apply to registrants and all applicants seeking registration as a pharmacist (including applicants for restoration or retention), irrespective of where the person's qualification was obtained.
- 2.3 The Registrar must consider this guidance when deciding if an applicant has the necessary knowledge of English.<sup>5</sup> The Registrar can refuse to register an applicant if the applicant does not provide evidence of their knowledge of English or where the evidence provided does not meet the criteria set out in this guidance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this Guidance the term 'pharmacist', unless otherwise indicated, means persons registered in Northern Ireland in the register of pharmaceutical chemists under Article 6(1)(a) of the [Pharmacy \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1976 \(the '1976 Order'\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [The Health Care and Associated Professions \(Knowledge of English\) Order 2015 \(the 'Knowledge of English Order'\)](#) and [The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland \(General\) \(Fitness to Practise and Disqualification\) and \(Continuing Professional Development\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2023 \(the '2023 Regulations'\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this Guidance, the term 'applicants' includes applicants for first time registration, retention and restoration to the register of pharmaceutical chemists.

<sup>4</sup> Article 8AA(1) of the 1976 Order, as introduced by the Knowledge of English Order.

<sup>5</sup> Article 8AA(2) of the 1976 Order, as introduced by the Knowledge of English Order.

<sup>6</sup> Article 8(2A) of the 1976 Order, as amended by the Knowledge of English Order.

2.4 This guidance sets out the criteria for assessing language evidence and the types of evidence of knowledge of English which will be acceptable to the Society and the processes which will be followed. Responsibility for the cost of examinations/assessments, rights of appeal and fitness to practise matters are also addressed.

2.5 In preparing this guidance, the Society has considered the General Pharmaceutical Council's ('GPhC') 'Guidance on evidence of English language skills'.<sup>7</sup>

## **Criteria for assessing language evidence**

3.1 The criteria for assessing evidence and information in relation to knowledge of English reflect the Society's need to be assured that applicants have the necessary knowledge of English for safe and effective practice.<sup>8</sup> An applicant should be able to provide evidence to demonstrate knowledge of English competence in each of the following areas:

- reading;
- writing;
- listening;
- speaking.

The evidence must be recent,<sup>9</sup> independent, objective, robust and capable of verification. It should clearly demonstrate that the applicant can read, write and communicate in English with patients, pharmacy service users, carers, relatives and other healthcare professionals.

## **The role of employers**

4.1 The Society's requirements concerning evidence of English language skills do not replace the very important role that employers will continue to play in checking that persons have the necessary knowledge of English to practice safely and effectively in the role applied for, as part of the interview and selection process.

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<sup>7</sup> Published in March 2021 and acknowledged as GPhC copyright.

<sup>8</sup> See Articles 2(2), 5(1)(bb), (1B) and 8(2A) of the [1976 Order](#), as introduced by the Knowledge of English Order and the 2023 Regulations.

<sup>9</sup> 'Recent', in this Guidance, means evidence relating to English Language competence that is less than two years old at the time of the application to the Society.

## **Types of Evidence to demonstrate knowledge of English**

5.1 Applicants may be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge of English for safe and effective practice in a number of ways and this is reflected in the types of evidence the Society will accept. The Society will review this guidance and the English language evidence requirements on a regular basis to ensure that they remain appropriate.

Currently, the Registrar will accept the following types of evidence as demonstrating the necessary knowledge of English to practice as a pharmacist in Northern Ireland:

### ***UK qualified applicants***

5.2 UK qualified applicants wishing to register as a pharmacist in Northern Ireland having completed:

(a) a General Pharmaceutical Council ('GPhC') accredited or PSNI/GPhC jointly accredited Master of Pharmacy ('MPharm') degree from a university within the UK *and*

(b) the Foundation Training Year and the registration assessment within the UK, will in most cases, automatically satisfy the Registrar of the necessary knowledge of English for registration as a pharmacist.

### ***Non-UK qualified applicants***

5.3 Non-UK qualified applicants can demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely as a pharmacist in Northern Ireland in a number of ways:

#### **Evidence type 1**

5.4 **A recent<sup>10</sup> pass of either:**

**(a) the academic version of International English Language Testing System<sup>11</sup> ('IELTS') test with no score of less than 7 in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking at one sitting of the test;**

**(b) the Pharmacy Occupational English Language Test<sup>12</sup> ('OET') 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.**

5.5 IELTS or OET scores that are two years old or more may be accepted if the applicant

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<sup>10</sup> 'Recent', in this context, means evidence relating to the IELTS test or OET which is less than two years old at the time of the application to the Society.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ielts.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/>

can provide evidence to demonstrate having maintained English language proficiency since the test was taken. This may include, for example, evidence that the applicant has subsequently worked as a pharmacist in a majority English speaking country<sup>13</sup> and at least 75% of day to day interaction with patients, pharmacy service users, carers, relatives and other healthcare professionals has been in English.

### **Evidence type 2**

5.6 **A recent<sup>14</sup> pharmacy qualification that has been taught and examined in English in a majority English speaking country (other than the UK)<sup>15</sup> (e.g. Ireland, United States of America, Australia or New Zealand).**

5.7 The entire course must have been taught and examined in English and at least 75% of any in-service training, including clinical interaction and contact with patients, pharmacy service users, carers, relatives and other healthcare professionals as part of that course of study must have been conducted in English. Applicants must be able to show that their training provided them with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in reading, writing, listening and speaking in English.

### **Evidence type 3**

5.8 **Recent<sup>16</sup> practice for at least two years as a pharmacist in a majority English speaking country.<sup>17</sup>**

5.9 A comprehensive written reference from the applicant's employer(s) in a majority English speaking country detailing the applicant's knowledge of English will be required. As part of this reference an employer will be required to provide evidence of how the applicant demonstrated ability in the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking in English.

5.10 If the applicant was required to pass an English language test before being permitted

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<sup>13</sup> The list of countries accepted by the Society is modelled on the UK Border Agency's list of 'majority English speaking countries', plus Ireland. See: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/984675/english-language-v19.0ext.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/984675/english-language-v19.0ext.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> 'Recent', in this context, means a pharmacy qualification that was awarded less than two years ago at the time of the application to the Society.

<sup>15</sup> See footnote 13, above.

<sup>16</sup> 'Recent', in this context, means practice that was completed less than two years ago at the time of the application to the Society.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 13, above.

to register and practise as a pharmacist in another majority English speaking country<sup>18</sup> then the applicant should provide evidence of having passed such an English language assessment.

## **When to provide evidence of Knowledge of English for first registration**

6.1 This section describes how and when applicants will need to provide evidence or information to show whether they have the necessary knowledge of English to register as a pharmacist in Northern Ireland and the process which will be followed. The process will depend on where the applicant qualified.

### ***UK qualified applicants***

6.2 The registration process has not changed for UK qualified applicants since the English Language requirements were introduced.

6.3 Applicants for registration as a pharmacist in Northern Ireland having completed an accredited MPharm degree and the Foundation Training Year in Northern Ireland will continue to be required to submit a certified copy of their MPharm degree certificate when applying to join the Foundation Training Year. On applying to join the register, applicants are required to provide documentary evidence of successful completion of the Foundation Training Year accompanied by a completed and signed Registration Checklist. The Registrar must also be in possession of evidence confirming that the applicant has passed the Registration Assessment.

6.4 UK qualified applicants who have been first registered in Great Britain will continue to be required to submit the documentary evidence set out in the 'Application for registration as a Great Britain qualified pharmacist' (<https://www.psni.org.uk/>) which includes a certified copy of the accredited MPharm degree certificate and an authorising document confirming first registration with GPhC or a certified copy of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society ('RPSGB') certificate of registration.

6.5 UK qualified applicants will not normally be required to provide further evidence of their knowledge of English.

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<sup>18</sup> See footnote 13, above.



### **Non-UK qualified applicants**

6.6 Following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), from 1 January 2021, the registration process changed for applicants with non-UK qualifications.

6.7 The process for providing evidence of knowledge of English for non-UK qualified applicants depends on whether the applicant qualified:

- in a country outside the UK, EEA or Switzerland. Such applicants should follow the '**Non-EEA qualified applicants**' process outlined below; or
- in the EEA or Switzerland and are covered by Article 8A of the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976<sup>19</sup> and they hold a relevant European qualification. Such applicants should follow the '**Relevant European qualified applicants**' process outlined below.

### **Non-EEA qualified applicants**

6.8 Non-EEA qualified applicants are required to complete an accredited Overseas Pharmacists' Assessment Programme ('OSPAP'), the Foundation Training Year in the UK and the registration assessment before they can apply for registration. The OSPAP is a postgraduate diploma and is administered by the GPhC on behalf of the PSNI. Non-EEA qualified applicants are required to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge of English as part of their application to the GPhC for eligibility to start the OSPAP (see: <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/> ). The Society will also require applicants to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge of English when applying for registration in Northern Ireland.

6.9 Non-EEA qualified applicants applying for registration in Northern Ireland having completed an OSPAP course and the Foundation Training Year in Northern Ireland will have been required to submit a certified copy of their OSPAP when applying to join the Foundation Training Year. On applying to join the register, applicants are required to provide documentary evidence of successful completion of the Foundation Training Year accompanied by a completed and signed Registration Checklist. The Registrar must also be in possession of evidence confirming that the applicant has passed the registration assessment.

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<sup>19</sup> Art 8A of the 1976 Order, as substituted by the [European Qualifications \(Pharmacists\) \(Amendment etc.\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2019, SI 2019/585](#).

- 6.10 Non-EEA qualified applicants who have been first registered in Great Britain, following completion of the OSPAP and the Foundation Training Year in Great Britain, will continue to be required to submit the documentary evidence set out in the 'Application for registration as a Great Britain qualified pharmacist' (<https://www.psni.org.uk/>) which includes a certified copy of the OSPAP, the applicant's original qualification certificate and an authorising document confirming first registration with GPhC or a certified copy of the RPSGB certificate of registration.
- 6.11 If a non-EEA qualified applicant is unable to provide evidence to satisfy the criteria under either the recent pharmacy qualification (Evidence type 2) or recent practice as a pharmacist in a majority English speaking country (Evidence type 3), the applicant will be required to provide evidence of knowledge of English by achieving the required scores in either the academic version of the IELTS or the OET in one sitting of the test (Evidence type 1).

**Relevant European qualified applicants i.e. applicants falling within the provisions of S.I. 2019/585<sup>20</sup>**

- 6.12 If an applicant is entitled to have their qualification automatically recognized under the above legislation, they will have to provide evidence of their knowledge of English as part of their application for registration.
- 6.13 Relevant European qualified applicants who have been first registered in Great Britain will continue to be required to submit the documentary evidence set out in the 'Application for registration as a Great Britain qualified pharmacist' (<https://www.psni.org.uk/>) which includes a certified copy of their degree certificate and an authorising document confirming first registration with GPhC or a certified copy of the RPSGB certificate of registration. Such applicants will have been required to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge of English as part of their application for registration with the GPhC. The Society will also require the applicant to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge of English when applying for registration in Northern Ireland.
- 6.14 If a relevant European qualified applicant is unable to provide evidence to satisfy the criteria under either the recent pharmacy qualification (Evidence type 2) or recent practice as a pharmacist in a majority English speaking country (Evidence type 3), the applicant will be required to provide evidence of knowledge of English by achieving the required scores in

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<sup>20</sup> [European Qualifications \(Pharmacists\) \(Amendment etc.\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2019, SI 2019/585.](#)

either the academic version of the IELTS or the OET in one sitting of the test (Evidence type 1).

## Restoration

7.1 In an application for restoration<sup>21</sup> to the register, applicants will be required to provide a written declaration as to whether they hold evidence, information or documents to satisfy the Registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English. Applicants will be required to provide this evidence, if requested to do so by the Registrar.

7.2 The following criteria will be used to determine whether an applicant has shown the necessary knowledge of English or if further evidence is required:

- The length of time since the applicant last practised in Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the UK;
- Whether the applicant had practised elsewhere or continued to live in Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the UK whilst off the register;
- Whether the applicant had previously demonstrated English language competence at initial registration;
- The length of time the applicant was registered and practising in Northern Ireland or elsewhere in the UK;
- Other information as may be relevant, for example, whether concerns were raised about the applicant's English language competence while previously registered.

This is not an exhaustive list but gives an indication of matters which will be taken into account in determining whether to request further evidence of an applicant's knowledge of English before returning the applicant to the register of pharmacists in Northern Ireland.

7.3 When an application for restoration is made following a striking off,<sup>22</sup> applicants will be required to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate their fitness to return to practice in addition to the requirement for a written declaration as to whether they hold evidence, information or documents to satisfy the Registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English. If the applicant was struck off following a finding of

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<sup>21</sup> Restoration, in this context, means returning to the register following a lapse in registration, voluntary removal or removal for continuing professional development or indemnity arrangements reasons.

<sup>22</sup> See paragraph 9 of Schedule 3 to the [1976 Order](#) and [Regulation 9 of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland \(Fitness to Practise and Disqualification\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2012 \(as amended\)](#).

impairment due to them not having the necessary knowledge of English, they will be required to provide sufficient evidence, information or documents to satisfy the registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English.

## **Retention**

8.1 In an application for retention, an applicant will be required to provide a written declaration as to whether they hold evidence, information or documents to satisfy the Registrar that they have the necessary knowledge of English and will be required to provide this evidence, if requested to do so by the Registrar.

## **Cost of examination/ assessment**

9.1 If requested to pass the academic version of the IELTS test or the OET test and achieve the required scores in one sitting before applying for registration or restoration, the applicant must meet the cost of taking the test.

## **Right of appeal**

10.1 Applicants have a right to appeal decisions of the Registrar in relation to whether they have the necessary knowledge of English for registration to the Council of the Society.<sup>23</sup>

## **Fitness to practise**

11.1 A registrant's fitness to practise may be considered to be impaired on the basis that the registrant does not have the necessary knowledge of English.<sup>24</sup> If the Society receives an allegation or has information which calls into question the fitness to practise of a registrant because the registrant does not have the necessary knowledge of English for safe and effective practice, this will be treated as an allegation that will be dealt with through the fitness to practise process.

11.2 Such cases will be dealt with in a similar way to any other allegation of impaired fitness to practise. A registrant who is subject to such an allegation or information/concern, may be required by the Registrar or directed by the Scrutiny Committee or the Statutory Committee to undertake an examination or other assessment of their knowledge of English. In this case, the registrant will be required to undertake either the academic

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<sup>23</sup> Article 11(2) of the 1976 Order. The Registration Appeals Procedure is set out at: <http://www.psni.org.uk/registration/pharmacist-registration/>

<sup>24</sup> Paragraph 4(1)(ca) of Schedule 3 to the 1976 Order, as introduced by the Knowledge of English Order.

version of the IELTS test and achieve a score of no less than 7 in each of the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking at one sitting of the test or the OET 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. The criteria and types of evidence outlined above (at paras 3.1 and 5.1-5.10) may also be considered in the fitness to practice process.