



Policy: Assessing Proficiency in English or French: A Registration Requirement for Nursing in Ontario	
Developed by: Team Lead, Entry to Practice	Date of Effectiveness: August 29, 2023
	Date of Annual Review: February 24, 2024
Accountability: Entry to Practice Team	Date Revised: April 22, 2015; May 30, 2018; October 14, 2021; July 28, 2022, February 24, 2023, August 29, 2023

Part A: Policy

PURPOSE:

To set out:

- The options available to all applicants for meeting the language proficiency (LP) requirement for registration or reinstatement; and
- Eligibility for extensions.

APPLICATION:

LP is a requirement for registration as a nurse in Ontario. It is defined as: “the ability to communicate and comprehend effectively, both orally and in writing, in either English or French”. This includes all four components of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The two pieces of legislation that provide guidance on how this requirement can be met can be found in:

- The registration requirements outlined in *Ontario Regulation 275/94*, made under the *Nursing Act, 1991* (General Regulation); and
- Section 3 of *Ontario Regulation 508/22* (Registration Requirements Regulation), made under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (RHPA).

The General Regulation states that applicants: “must have demonstrated language proficiency and the ability to communicate and comprehend effectively, both orally and in writing, in English or French at a date no more than two years before the day that he or she is issued a certificate of registration, or such longer period of time as specified by the Executive Director or a panel of the Registration Committee as is applicable”.

This requirement for registration is non-exemptible and applies to applicants in all classes, except for the Non-Practising Class. Applicants must demonstrate LP if applying to the General Class, Extended Class, Temporary Class, Special Assignment Class or the Emergency Class. LP is also a requirement for:

- Registrants of the Non-Practising Class applying for registration in the general or Extended Class; and
- Past registrants applying for registration in the General or Extended Class.

The Registration Requirements regulation specifies: “An applicant for registration satisfies a College’s English or French language proficiency testing requirement if the applicant demonstrates, within two years before the date of making the application, English or French language proficiency at a level satisfactory to the College on a test that is approved under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada)* (IRPA) for use in assessing language proficiency”.

The Executive Director must be satisfied that applicants demonstrate the level of proficiency needed to practice nursing competently and safely in Ontario. Applicants can meet the LP requirement by demonstrating their proficiency in a number of different ways, including passing a LP test referred to in the *RHPA* Registration Requirements regulation.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ASSESSMENT:

The regulation requires that applicants must provide evidence to satisfy the Executive Director that they meet the LP requirement. Other than the tests specified in the *RHPA* Registration Requirements regulation, the legislation neither stipulates how this requirement should be met, nor defines the term ‘language proficiency’. To provide applicants with clarity, CNO’s policy interprets the term ‘language proficiency’ as:

1. The level of language proficiency required to practice nursing competently and safely in Ontario; and,
2. How that proficiency can be demonstrated.

Seven options are available to applicants to demonstrate LP. These options provide CNO with reasonable grounds to believe that an applicant’s language skills are proficient, and that the applicant has the ability to communicate and comprehend effectively at the level required for safe nursing practice, in each of the following areas: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE OF PROFICIENCY:

To ensure applicants have the level of proficiency required to practice nursing safely and competently, CNO will accept the following as evidence of proficiency in English or French:

- Completing an entry-level nursing program in English or French, with a clinical practicum, placement or co-operative component, in any jurisdiction;
- Completing additional nursing education in English or French with a clinical practicum, placement or co-operative component, in any jurisdiction;

- Practicing as a nurse in a primarily English or French setting, such as working or volunteering as a nurse or completing a supervised practice experience approved through CNO;
- Completing a health care or health care support program in English or French in Canada, including a clinical practicum, placement or co-operative component;
- Working or volunteering in health care or health care support services in English or French in Canada;
- Having current or past registration as a practicing nurse in a Canadian jurisdiction; or
- Obtaining required benchmark scores in reading, writing, speaking and listening on one of CNO's approved LP tests, which refers to tests required under the *RHPA* Registration Requirements regulation and additional tests approved by CNO.

This evidence is used to assess that the applicant has the level of proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening required to practice nursing competently and safely in Ontario

Generally, the evidence must demonstrate that the applicant completed their education, test, or experience no more than two years prior to registration with the CNO. There is an exception to this for the LP test required under the *RHPA* Registration Requirements regulation, which must have been completed no more than two years prior to applying for registration with the CNO.

EXCEPTION TO LP EXPIRY:

Generally, once an applicant meets the LP requirement, the requirement will remain “met” for a two-year timeframe based on the date the applicant completes the specific evidence they provide to meet the requirement (e.g., LP test date; last date working as a nurse or health care service provider; date of completion of nursing or health care related education). The date then expires after a two-year period, at which time the applicant must provide updated evidence if not yet registered, unless the expiry date is extended (see page 9 for information related to LP extensions).

Section 3(1) of the *RHPA* Registration Requirements regulation creates a specific exception to the general two-year expiry period. It specifies that an applicant for registration satisfies CNO's English or French LP testing requirement if the applicant achieves the required benchmark scores on one of the *IRPA* approved LP tests, *within two years before the date of making the application*. This means that if an applicant completes a test approved under the *IRPA* within two years before applying for registration with CNO and obtains the required scores to meet the LP requirement, then the requirement will remain met as long as the application remains open. If the application is withdrawn, closed, or subject to a final disposition by the Registration Committee (i.e., refused), then the applicant will be required to provide updated LP evidence for any subsequent application.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

Staff in Entry-to-Practice (ETP) are delegated the authority to assess the evidence relating to the options (#1-7) outlined in this policy.

The authority to provide extensions to applicants applying for registration in the General, Temporary, Special Assignment, or Emergency Assignment Classes is delegated by the Registration Committee to ETP staff.

The authority to provide extensions to former registrants seeking reinstatement from the Non-Practising Class into the General or Extended Class is delegated by the Executive Director to ETP staff.

Registration Committee delegates to ETP staff, its authority to accept, on the Committee's behalf, test scores meeting the required benchmark scores on LP tests approved under the *IRPA* per the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (IELTS General: International English Language Testing System – General; CELPIP¹: Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program; TEF Canada: Test d'évaluation de français; TCF: Test de connaissance du français) written within two years of applying for registration in any class (except the Non-Practising) and to apply the successful LP test result to any other open application(s) regardless of when it was opened by the applicant.

Extensions must be granted in accordance with Part B of this policy.

REVIEW OF LP POLICY

This policy is subject to an annual review. Substantive changes will require approval by the Executive Director and/or the Registration Committee as required.

Part B: Procedure

Applicants must provide CNO with evidence of the level of proficiency required to practice nursing in all four areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking (as explained in *Appendix A*). LP will be demonstrated by:

- completing nursing or health care/health care support education in English or French;
- using English or French in nursing practice or experience in health care or health care support services;
- registering as a practising nurse in any Canadian jurisdiction; or
- obtaining required results on one of CNO's approved LP tests.

¹ As at the effectiveness date of this policy, CNO does not currently accept CELPIP as benchmark scores are not available

CNO has a duty to ensure that nurses are: “qualified, skilled, and competent health professionals”². For this reason, the evidence provided must fall within two years of an applicant’s registration with the CNO, to demonstrate that their proficiency remains active and on-going with the exception of completing one of the *IRPA* approved LP tests.

Demonstrating LP: Acceptable Evidence

Option 1: Entry-level or other Nursing Education completed in Canada or any jurisdiction in English or French

Applicants meet the LP requirement where they have completed entry-level nursing education³ or other nursing **education delivered in English or French in Canada or in any jurisdiction**. Acceptable programs/education includes

- Entry-level or other nursing programs/education in Ontario,
- Entry-level or other nursing programs/education in Canada, or,
- Entry-level or other nursing programs/education outside of Canada where one of the primary languages of the program was English or French.

The evidence must demonstrate that:

- a. Theory / academic instruction was provided where one of the primary languages of the program was English or French (completed on-line or in-person), and
- b. The clinical practicum, placement or co-op experience was completed in a health care or practice setting and involved direct interaction with patients, clients, and/or healthcare professionals, where one of the primary languages used was English or French. Virtual simulated clinical hours are not accepted exclusively, and,
- c. The evidence must demonstrate that the applicant has completed the education within the past two years.

Option 2: Additional nursing education completed in Canada or any jurisdiction in English or French

Applicants meet the LP requirement where they have completed additional nursing education delivered primarily in English or French. Acceptable additional education includes:

- a. Theory / academic instruction was provided where one of the primary languages was English or French (completed on-line or in-person), and
- b. Successful completion of both a clinical component and a theoretical component, and
- c. The clinical practicum, placement, or co-op experience was completed in a health care or practice setting and involved direct interaction with patients, clients, and/or

² *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*, Schedule 2, section 2.1

³ The CNO receives evidence that a program (outside of Canada) has been approved or accredited on the Nursing Education Form, which is provided via the National Nursing Assessment Service (NNAS).

- healthcare professionals where one of the primary languages used was English or French (virtual simulated clinical hours are not accepted exclusively), and
- d. The evidence must demonstrate that the applicant has completed their additional education within the past two years.

Option 3: Practice as a nurse in English or French

Applicants meet the LP requirement if evidence of either A) or B) is provided:

- A. The applicant has employment or volunteer experience as a nurse in any jurisdiction within the past two years where English or French are one of the primary languages used by the applicant in the health care/practice setting for:
 - i. Providing direct patient/client care or delivering services that have a direct or indirect effect on a patient/client's care or on healthcare systems; and
 - ii. Having direct interactions with patients, clients, and/or other healthcare professionals.

Where required, registration as a nurse in the jurisdiction where practice occurred must be verified.

- B. The applicant has successfully completed a supervised practice experience in Ontario in the past two years through:
 - i. CNO's Supervised Practice Experience (SPE) program for returning registrants;
 - ii. CNO's Supervised Practice Experience Partnership (SPEP) program for applicants; or
 - iii. an acceptable supervised practicum for Nurse Practitioner's (NPs).

English or French must be one of the primary languages used by the applicant in the health care/practice setting for:

- i. Providing direct patient/client care or delivering services that have a direct or indirect effect on a patient/client's care or on healthcare systems; and
- ii. Having direct interactions with patients, clients, and/or other healthcare professionals.

LP will be met for two years from the last date on which the applicant worked, volunteered or practiced.

Option 4: Health care or health care support program/education in Canada in English or French.

Applicants meet the LP requirement where they have completed health care or health care support education in Canada in the past two years where:

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- a. Theory / academic instruction was provided in English or French (completed on-line or in-person); *and*
- b. A clinical practicum, placement, or co-op experience was completed in a health care or practice setting and involved direct interaction with patients, clients, and/or healthcare professionals, where one of the primary languages used was English or French; *and*
- c. The evidence must demonstrate that the applicant has completed their program/education within the past two years.
- d. Virtual clinical simulation will not be accepted.

Option 5: Health care or health care support experience in English or French in Canada.

Applicants meet the LP requirement where the applicant has employment or volunteer experience in a health care or health care support role in Canada in the past two years where English or French are one of the primary languages used by the applicant in the health care or practice setting for:

- a. Providing direct health care or health care support services to patients or clients; and,
- b. Having direct interactions with patients, clients, and/or other healthcare professionals.

The applicant's level of proficiency must be verified by a regulated health professional⁴ (RHP) who works with the applicant in the health care or practice setting. The RHP must have sufficient experience interacting with or observing the applicant while the applicant uses their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in the health care or practice setting to formulate the opinion that the applicant can communicate and comprehend effectively in English or French at a level required for safe and competent nursing practice.

LP will be met for two years from the last date on which the applicant worked, volunteered, or practiced.

Examples of acceptable evidence includes experience working as a Personal Support Worker, Health Care Assistant, Continuing Care Assistant, Medical Office Assistant, Unregulated Healthcare Provider, and other similar roles where applicants interact with patients, clients and other professionals to provide health care and health care support services.

⁴ Regulated health professional refers to a professional regulated under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 in Ontario, or regulated in another Canadian jurisdiction under equivalent health professional legislation (for example, the Health Professions Act in B.C. or the Regulated Health Professions Act in Manitoba).

Non-health care roles and non-health care support service roles will not be considered in relation to assessing LP related work experience (e.g., restaurant or hospitality work, salon-related personal care services, childcare/nanny services).

Option 6: Applicants who are / were registered as a practising nurse in a Canadian jurisdiction

Applicants meet the LP requirement if:

1. They are registered as a practising nurse in another Canadian jurisdiction at the time they submit their application for registration to CNO; or
2. They were registered as a practicing nurse within the past two years in any Canadian jurisdiction.

They will meet the requirement for a two-year timeframe based on the last date of validated registration.

The evidence must demonstrate that:

- a. The applicant currently holds registration with CNO or in another Canadian jurisdiction in an active and practicing category. If so, LP will be valid for two years.
 - i. The applicant held registration within the previous two years in another Canadian jurisdiction in an active and practising category. LP will be valid for two years from the date on which the applicant's registration expired or ended.
- b. The applicant previously held a certificate of registration with the CNO in the General, Temporary, Special Assignment, or Extended Class within the past two years. LP will be valid for two years from the date on which the applicant last held registration in one of these classes of registration.
- c. The applicant is a current registrant of the Non-Practising Class seeking registration/reinstatement in the General or Extended Class. LP can be demonstrated if the applicant held practicing registration with CNO or in another Canadian jurisdiction in the previous two years.

Option 7: Achieving the required benchmark scores for one of the approved LP tests

Applicants meet the LP requirement if they achieved the required benchmark scores for one of the approved LP tests, as outlined in *Appendix B*, where:

- a. Test results are valid, *and*
- b. All benchmark scores are achieved within the same attempt of the test.

Test scores are valid for two years from the date on which the applicant attempted the test, unless it is a test approved under the *IRPA* and is written on a date two years before the date of application. For language tests that are delivered in parts (e.g., on two different dates), then the latest date is used to determine validity.

Test scores on a test approved under the *IRPA* and written within two years before the date of application, remain valid for as long as the application is open. If the application is withdrawn, closed due to inactivity or subject to a final disposition by the Registration Committee (e.g., refused), the applicant is required to provide updated LP information with any new application.

DEFAULT OPTION

Applicants, whose evidence does not meet any of the above, must achieve the benchmark scores on an approved LP test.

LP Extensions

1. One Year Extension

Applicants with a 'met' LP requirement expiring prior to registration will be granted an additional one-year extension from the date of expiry. This one-time extension will be granted without the need for additional evidence unless there is contradictory evidence suggesting that the applicant should no longer meet the LP requirement via the extension.

Applicants reinstating from the Non-Practising class with a 'met' LP requirement expiring prior to registration, will be granted an additional one-year extension from the date of expiry. This one-time extension will be granted without the need for additional evidence unless there is contradictory evidence suggesting that the applicant no longer should meet the LP requirement via the extension.

Applicants whose LP expires after the one-year extension will be asked to submit new evidence to demonstrate the LP required to practice nursing in Ontario. The evidentiary options available are outlined in: CNO's policy, *Assessing Proficiency in English or French: A Registration Requirement for Nursing in Ontario*. No additional forms of evidence will be accepted.

2. LP Currency Extension

Applicants, who meet the LP requirement for one open application, with test scores meeting the approved benchmark scores on an LP test approved under the *IRPA* and written on a date no more than two years before the date of application (other than to the Non-Practising Class), will be granted extensions to the date of expiry to ensure that this proof of language proficiency will meet the LP requirement of all other open applications that the applicant may have. The LP requirement will remain met as long as the application remains

open, or until other evidence is presented that the requirement should no longer remain met. If the application is withdrawn, closed, or subject to a final disposition by the Registration Committee (i.e., refused), or contradictory evidence is provided, then the applicant will be required to provide updated LP evidence to the current or any subsequent application.

APPENDIX A. EXAMPLES OF INDICATORS OF THE LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY REQUIRED

The following are *examples* of indicators and are *not* to be used as an exhaustive list*. These indicators align with CNO's benchmark scores of the Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN) test.

CELBAN is scored using Canadian Language Benchmarks, which describe a person's ability in a specific language skill (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) at 12 different benchmarks. The descriptions for the benchmark scores approved by CNO were reviewed and key themes identified. These themes were formed into the indicators.

Table 4. Examples of indicators of the level of proficiency required by CNO

Language skill	Level of proficiency required and examples
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant can read and comprehend text in English or French in moderately demanding contexts. For example, Reading and understanding work policies, regulations, standards, etc. • Reading and understanding information they have researched.
Writing	<p>The applicant can write in English or French in moderately demanding contexts and is understood by others. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly documenting information in the manner required for the work being performed. Documented information can be understood and used by others. • Preparing reports or other multi-page documents that can be understood and used by others. • Taking notes during a conversation, presentation, etc. and summarizing them in writing for colleagues.
Listening	<p>The applicant can listen and comprehend English or French, in moderately demanding and demanding contexts. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to multi-step, complex instructions and carry them out. • Using contextual clues (e.g., tone of voice, body language and behaviour of others) to respond appropriately to a situation.



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Speaking	<p>The applicant can speak and be understood by others when speaking in English and French, in moderately demanding contexts. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly explaining to another person how to perform a task or procedure.• Communicating with others in order to solve problems.• Interacting appropriately with others in unfamiliar situations.
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APPENDIX B. APPROVED LP TESTS

CNO accepts results from the following language proficiency tests:

- *Official* version of the CELBAN,
- *Academic* and *General training* versions of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS),
- Test d'évaluation de français (TEF), and
- Test de connaissance du français pour le Canada (TCF).

Table 1. Benchmark scores for CELBAN (official version)

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score	Standard error of measurement (SEM)
Writing	7	The SEM is already accounted for in all of these scores.
Speaking	8	
Listening	9	
Reading	8	
Total	Not calculated	

These are the minimum benchmark scores that must be achieved; they include the standard error of measurement.

NOTE: CNO accepts scores from a CELBAN test completed virtually or at a CELBAN administration site, written on a date that is no more than two years before the date of registering with CNO. CNO does *not* accept results from CELBAN tests that educational institutions have administered for educational purposes.

Table 2. Benchmark scores for IELTS (General and Academic version)

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score	Standard error of measurement
Writing	6.5	The SEM is 0.5 and is already accounted for in all of these scores.
Speaking	7	
Listening	7	
Reading	6.5	
Total	7	

These are the minimum benchmark scores that must be achieved; they include the standard error of measurement of 0.5.

NOTE: CNO will accept scores from both the General and Academic format of the IELTS test as follows:

- Results from the IELTS General will only be accepted when written on a date that is no more than two years before the date of applying for registration with CNO. CNO will not accept results from IELTS General if you write it any other time.
- Results from the IELTS Academic test will be accepted when written on a date that is no more than two years before the date of registering with CNO.

Table 3. Benchmark scores for TEF

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score	Test Score
Writing (Expression écrite)	4 00	271 (out of possible 450)
Speaking (Expression orale)	500	349 (out of possible 450)
Listening (Compréhension orale)	400	280 (out of possible 360)
Reading (Compréhension écrite)	400	181 (out of possible 300)
Total	Not applicable	

These scores are the minimum benchmark scores that must be achieved.

NOTE: CNO will accept results of TEF Canada if it is written either on a date that is no more than:

- two years before the date of applying for registration with CNO, *or*
- two years before the date of registering with CNO.

Table 4. Benchmark scores for TCF

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score
Writing (Expression écrite)	10
Speaking (Expression orale)	12
Listening (Compréhension orale)	503
Reading (Compréhension écrite)	453
Total	Not applicable

These scores are the minimum benchmark scores that must be achieved.

NOTE: CNO will only accept TCF results when written on a date that is no more than two years before the date of applying for registration with CNO. CNO will not accept results from TCF if you write it any other time.