

Policy: Assessing Proficiency in English or French: A Registration Requirement for Nursing in Ontario	
Developed by: Team Lead, Entry to Practice	Date of Effectiveness: November 16, 2021
	Date of Annual Review: November 2022
Accountability: Entry to Practice Team	Date Revised: April 22, 2015; May 30, 2018; October 14, 2021

Part A: Policy

Purpose:

To set out:

- who / which applicants are subject to this policy; and,
- the options available to all applicants for meeting the language proficiency (LP) requirement for registration or reinstatement.

APPLICATION:

“Language proficiency” (LP) is a requirement for registration as a nurse in Ontario and is defined as: “the ability to communicate and comprehend effectively, both orally and in writing, in either English or French”. The General Regulation under the Nursing Act 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 a panel of the Registration Committee”.

This requirement for registration is non – exemptible and applies to applicants to all classes, with the exception of the non-practising class (as per the General Regulation). Applicants must demonstrate LP if applying to the general class, extended class, temporary class, special assignment class or the emergency assignment class. LP is also a requirement for:

- members of the non-practising class applying for registration in the general or extended class; and,
- past members applying for registration in the general or extended class.

The CNO must be satisfied that applicants demonstrate the level of proficiency needed to practise nursing in Ontario. Applicants can meet the LP requirement by demonstrating their proficiency in a number of different ways.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ASSESSMENT:

The regulation states that applicants must provide evidence to satisfy the Executive Director that they meet a requirement. Regulation 275/94 does not stipulate how this requirement should be met, nor is the term ‘language proficiency’ defined in the General Regulation. To provide applicants with clarity the college’s policy interprets:

- (1) the level of language proficiency required to practise nursing; 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 nursing practice, in each of the following areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE OF PROFICIENCY:

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

- completion of an approved nursing education program in English or French, with a clinical component, in any jurisdiction;
- registration as a nurse in a Canadian jurisdiction;
- successful results on one of CNO’s approved language proficiency tests;
- additional nursing education in English or French;
- practice experience as a nurse in a predominantly English or French setting;
- experience working in a healthcare setting providing services in English or French in Canada; or
- completion of a health care or health care support program in English or French in Canada.

The evidence must demonstrate that the applicant completed their education, test, or experience no more than two years prior to registration with the CNO. This evidence will be used to assess that the applicant has the level of fluency required to practise nursing in Ontario by engaging in the use of French or English in a health care setting or attaining the required scores on one of the college’s approved language tests.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

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

REVIEW OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY POLICY

This policy will be subject to an annual review. Substantive changes will require approval by the Executive Director.

Part B: Procedure

Applicants must provide the college with evidence of the level of proficiency required to practise nursing in all four areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking (as explained in *Appendix A*). For most applicants, the required proficiency will be demonstrated through the completion of a nursing program in English or French; the use of English or French in nursing practice or in health care setting, or successful results on one of CNO's approved language proficiency tests.

CNO has a duty to ensure that nurses are: “qualified, skilled, and competent health professionals” (RHPA, Schedule 2, section 2.1). For this reason, the evidence that is provided must fall within two years of their registration with the CNO, to demonstrate that the applicant's proficiency is active and on-going.

Demonstrating Language Proficiency: Acceptable Evidence

Option 1: Applicants who complete a Canadian approved nursing education program¹ in English or French Or complete a nursing program outside Canada, delivered in English or French.

Acceptable programs include:

- nursing programs in Ontario,
- nursing programs in Canada, or,
- nursing programs outside of Canada where the primary language of delivery is English or French.

The evidence must demonstrate that:

- a. Theory / academic instruction was provided in English or French (completed on-line or in-person), *and*
- b. The clinical practicum was completed in an English or French health care setting (can include a practicum, placement or coop experience); and,
- c. The evidence must demonstrate that the applicant has completed their program within the past two years.

Option 2: Applicants who are / were registered as a nurse in a Canadian jurisdiction

Applicants meet the language proficiency requirement if, at the time of submitting their application, they are a labour mobility applicant. They will meet the requirement in Ontario for a two-year timeframe.

¹ 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).

The evidence must demonstrate that:

- a. The applicant currently holds registration in another Canadian jurisdiction in an active and practising category. If so, language proficiency will be valid for two years from the date of the signature on the document verifying the applicant's registration status in the other Canadian jurisdiction.
- b. The applicant held registration within the previous two years in another Canadian jurisdiction in an active and practising category, then language proficiency will be valid for two years from the earliest of the following two dates:
 - i. The date on which the applicant's registration in the other Canadian jurisdiction expired or ended; or
 - ii. The date of the signature on the document verifying the applicant's registration status in the other Canadian jurisdiction.
- c. Past members of the CNO who held a certificate of registration with the CNO in the General, Temporary, Special Assignment, Emergency Assignment or Extended Class. Language proficiency will be valid for two years from the date on which the applicant last held registration in the General, Temporary, Special Assignment or Extended Class, or the applicant was last registered in one of these classes.
- d. Current members of the non-practising class seeking registration in the general or extended class, language proficiency can be demonstrated if the applicant held registration with the College of Nurses of Ontario or in another Canadian jurisdiction in the general class within the previous two years.

Option 3: Achieving the required benchmark scores for one of the approved language proficiency tests

Applicants meet the language proficiency requirement if they achieved the required benchmark scores for one of the approved language proficiency 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. For language tests that are delivered in parts (for example, on two different dates), then the latest date is used to determine validity.

Option 4: Completing additional nursing education in English or French

Applicants meet the language proficiency requirement where they have completed additional nursing education in English or French. Acceptable education includes nursing courses with:

- a. Theory / academic instruction provided in English or French (completed on-line or in-person), *and*
- b. A clinical practicum that is completed in a predominantly English or French health care setting (can include a practicum, placement or coop experience); *and*,
- c. Successful completion of both a clinical component and a theoretical component.
- d. The evidence must demonstrate that the applicant has completed their program within the past two years.

Option 5: The applicant has practice experience as a nurse in a predominantly English or French setting.

Applicants meet the language proficiency requirement if evidence of either a) or b) exists:

- a) The applicant completes a Supervised Practice Experience in Ontario where:
 - a. The primary language spoken in the health care setting is English or French; and
 - b. The primary language of the patient population is English or French; and,
 - c. There is evidence of successful completion of the program by the applicant.
- b) The applicant has practised as a nurse in a health care setting and:
 - a. Registration as a nurse in that jurisdiction is verified; and,
 - b. The language spoken in the practice setting is English or French; and,
 - c. The primary language of the patient population is English or French.
 - d. Note: LP can be met for two years from the last date where the applicant worked or practised.

Option 6: Applicants with experience working in health services in English or French in Canada.

Applicants meet the language proficiency requirement where:

- a. They have experience providing health and personal support / care services to patients in English or French in Canada; and,
- b. Their level of proficiency is verified by a regulated health professional² who works directly with the applicant in the health care setting.
- c. LP will be met for two years from the last date where the applicant worked or practised.

² 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).

Examples of acceptable evidence includes experience working as a personal support worker (PSW), Health Care Assistant (HCA), Continuing Care Assistant (CCA), Medical Office Assistant are acceptable. In these roles, applicants interact with clients and other professions to provide health and health-related services.

Roles that will not be considered in relation to assessing fluency include: non-health related work experience (for example, restaurant or hospitality work, salon - related personal care services, child care / nanny services and any other roles that are non-health service related).

Option 7: Applicants who complete a health care or health care support program in English or French in Canada.

Applicants meet the language proficiency requirement where:

- a. Theory / academic instruction was provided in English or French (completed on-line or in-person); *and*
- b. A clinical practicum was completed in a health care setting where services are provided to patients in English or French (a practicum, placement or coop experience can be considered); *and*
- c. Their level of proficiency is verified by a regulated health professional³ who worked directly with the applicant in a health care setting; and,
- d. The evidence demonstrates that the applicant has met the requirements outlined in 7a and 7b within the past two years.

DEFAULT OPTION

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

³ 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).

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 are aligned with the College’s benchmark scores on the 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 the College 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 the College

Language skill	Examples of the indicators of the level of proficiency required
<p><u>Reading</u> In moderately demanding contexts, the applicant can read in English or French and comprehend the text that is read.</p>	<p>The applicant can, in moderately demanding contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand work policies, regulations, standards, etc. • Read and understand information that she or he researched.
<p><u>Writing</u> In moderately demanding contexts, the applicant can write in English or French and the written text can be understood by others.</p>	<p>The applicant can, in moderately demanding contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly document information in the manner required for the work being performed and the documented information can be understood and used by others. • Prepare reports or other multi-page documents that can be understood and used by others. • Take notes during a conversation, presentation, etc. and then summarize them in writing for colleagues.
<p><u>Listening</u> In demanding contexts, the applicant can listen in English or French and comprehend what was said.</p>	<p>The applicant can, in demanding contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to multi-step, complex instructions and carry them out. • Use contextual clues (e.g., tone of voice, body language and behaviour of others) in order to respond appropriately to a situation.
<p><u>Speaking</u> In moderately demanding contexts, the applicant can speak in English or French and be understood by others when speaking.</p>	<p>The applicant can, in moderately demanding contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly explain to another person how to perform a task or procedure. • Communicate with others in order to solve problems. • Interact appropriately with others in unfamiliar situations.

APPENDIX B. APPROVED LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

The College accepts results from the following language proficiency tests:

- *Official* version of the Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN),
- *Academic* version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and
- Test d'évaluation de français (TEF).

Table 1. Benchmark scores for CELBAN (official version)

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score	Standard error of measurement ⁴
Writing	7	The SEM is already accounted for in all of these scores.
Speaking	8	
Listening	10	
Reading	8	
Total	Not calculated	

Table 2. Benchmark scores for IELTS (Academic version)

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score	Standard error of measurement ¹
Writing	7	The SEM is 0.5 and is already accounted for in all of these scores.
Speaking	7	
Listening	7.5	
Reading	6.5	
Total	7	

Table 3. Benchmark scores for TEF

Test component	Absolute minimum benchmark score	Standard error of measurement ¹
Writing (Expression écrite)	4	271 (out of possible 450)

⁴ The standard error of measurement (SEM) is the range or band of scores in which a person's actual language proficiency lies.

Speaking (Expression orale)	5	349 (out of possible 450)
Listening (Compréhension orale)	5	280 (out of possible 360)
Reading (Compréhension écrite)	4	181 (out of possible 300)
Vocabulary & Grammar (Lexique et structure)	4	145 (out of possible 240)
Total	Not applicable	