Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa | Medical Council of New Zealand

Policy on English language requirements

Policy statement

Section 16(b) of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 requires the Medical Council of New Zealand (Council) to be satisfied that any doctor or physician associate seeking registration in New Zealand is able to communicate in and comprehend English sufficiently to protect the health and safety of the public.

Rationale

A doctor or physician associate making an application for registration or a doctor applying to sit the New Zealand Registration Examination (NZREX Clinical), must first satisfy Council that their ability to communicate in and comprehend English is sufficient to protect the health and safety of the public.

Requirements for doctors

To be accepted to sit the NZREX Clinical or to be registered with the Council, applicants must demonstrate they meet one of the eight following English language requirements.

A. Have a primary medical qualification from a New Zealand medical school.

B. (i) Speak English as a first language; and

(ii) Have an acceptable primary medical qualification from Australia, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, or a Canadian or South African medical school where English is the sole language of instruction of that medical school.

C. (i) Satisfy the Council of work as a registered doctor where English was the first and prime language, for at least 2 years within the 5 years immediately prior to application, which must include:
   a) a period of 6 months continuous work at one workplace; or
   b) participation in a recognised formal vocational training programme* in Australia, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, Canada, or South Africa for a period of 6 months; or
   c) completion of a recognised formal vocational training programme* in Australia, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, Canada, or South Africa; and

(ii) Provide the names and contact details of at least two referees who are senior doctors who speak English as a first language, and who can attest to the applicant's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English in a clinical setting with both patients and professional colleagues. Referees must have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months. Referees will be contacted directly by the Council, or a body Council authorised to do this (employer or recruitment agency).

**Recognised formal vocational training programmes are: Fellowship of one of the Australian or Australasian medical colleges in Australia; the Membership or Fellowship of a Royal College in the United Kingdom or Ireland accompanied by a Certificate of Completion of Training in the United Kingdom or Completion of Specialist Training in Ireland; Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of*

Canada accompanied by a Specialist Certificate; the Certificate of the American Boards in the United States of America; and Fellowship of a Medical College in South Africa.

D. Pass the Academic Module of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) by achieving a minimum score in each component of the test.

Minimum required scores:

- Speaking 7.0
- Listening 7.0
- Reading 7.0
- Writing 6.5

Test results are accepted from:

- One sitting; **or**
- A maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period only if the applicant:
    - is tested in all four components in each sitting;
    - achieves a minimum score of 7.0 in each component for listening, reading and speaking and a minimum score of 6.5 for writing across the two sittings; and
    - when using scores from two test sittings, no score in any component from either test sitting is below 6.5.[1]

Validity of IELTS results

IELTS results are valid within:

- 2 years of an application for registration.
- 2 years of NZREX Clinical examination date (new candidate).
- Repeat candidates for the NZREX Clinical will not be required to re-sit IELTS for up to 5 years of the examination date if they have been, since last sitting the NZREX Clinical, residing continuously in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, Canada (English speaking region, not Quebec) or South Africa. Acceptable evidence includes a letter of reference from an employer or landlord with a passport displaying visa or residency.

E. Pass the Medical Module of the Occupational English Test (OET) by achieving a minimum score in each component of the test.

Minimum required scores:

Speaking 350
Listening 350
Reading 350
Writing 300

Test results are accepted from:

- One sitting; **or**
- A maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period only if the applicant:
    - is tested in all four components in each sitting;
    - achieves a minimum score of 350 in each component for speaking, listening and reading and a minimum score of 300 for writing across the two sittings; and

[1] Council also accepts the IELTS One Skill Retake. The IELTS One Skill Retake allows eligible test takers to re-sit one component of the test within a 60-day period if all other components and certain requirements are met. Successful completion of an IELTS One Skill Retake is not considered an additional test sitting by Council; however, if an applicant is relying on results from two test sittings and an IELTS One Skill Retake, all three of these tests must have been completed within a 12-month period.

- when using scores from two test sittings, no score in any component from either test sitting is below 300.

Validity of OET results

OET results are valid within:

- 2 years of an application for registration.
- 2 years of NZREX Clinical examination date (new candidate).
- Repeat candidates for the NZREX Clinical will not be required to re-sit OET for up to 5 years of the examination date if they have been, since last sitting the NZREX Clinical, residing continuously in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the United States, Canada (English speaking region, not Quebec) or South Africa. Acceptable evidence includes a letter of reference from an employer or landlord with a passport displaying visa or residency.

F. (i) Satisfy the Council of having completed at least 24 months full time equivalent of a health-related postgraduate qualification (diploma, master's or PhD) at an accredited New Zealand university within the 5 years immediately prior to application; and

(ii) Provide references from two professors from an accredited New Zealand university who are registered as doctors in New Zealand and who speak English as a first language. The referees must be able to attest to the applicant's ability to read, write, speak and understand spoken English.

G. (i) Have been granted registration with the Medical Council of New Zealand on or after 18 September 2004 which was cancelled for administrative reasons (and not as a result of an order of the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal or a direction by the Council under section 146 or 147 of the HPCAA); and

(ii) Provide the names and contact details of at least two referees who are senior doctors registered in New Zealand, and who can attest to the applicant's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English in a clinical setting with both patients and professional colleagues. Referees will be contacted directly by the Council, or a body Council authorised to do this (employer or recruitment agency).

H. For applying for registration only (via the provisional general *Examinations* pathway), pass the NZREX Clinical examination or Part 1 and Part 2 of the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board test, within the 5 years immediately prior to application.

Requirements for physician associates

To be registered with the Council, applicants must demonstrate they meet one of the five following English language requirements.

A. (i) Speak English as a first language; and

(ii) Have successfully completed the Physician Associate Registration Assessment (PARA) or the Physician Associate National Examination (PANE); or

(iii) Have successfully completed the Physician Assistants National Certification Examination (PANCE); or

(iv) Have successfully completed the Physician Assistant Entry to Practice Certification Examination administered by the PACCC in English.

B. (i) Satisfy the Council of work as a registered physician associate where English was the first and prime language, for at least 2 years within the 5 years immediately prior to application, which must include a period of 6 months continuous work at one workplace.

(ii) Provide the names and contact details of at least two referees who are senior doctors who speak English as a first language, and who can attest to the applicant's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English in a clinical setting with both patients and professional colleagues. Referees must have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months. Referees will be contacted directly by the Council, or a body Council authorised to do this (employer or recruitment agency).

C. Pass the Academic Module of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) by achieving a minimum score in each component of the test.

Minimum required scores:

- Speaking 7.0
- Listening 7.0
- Reading 7.0
- Writing 6.5

Test results are accepted from:

- One sitting; **or**
- A maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period only if the applicant:
    - is tested in all four components in each sitting;
    - achieves a minimum score of 7.0 in each component for listening, reading and speaking and a minimum score of 6.5 for writing across the two sittings; and
    - when using scores from two test sittings, no score in any component from either test sitting is below 6.5.[2]

Validity of IELTS results

IELTS results are valid within 2 years of an application for registration.

D. Pass the Medical Module of the Occupational English Test (OET) by achieving a minimum score in each component of the test.

Minimum required scores:

Speaking 350
Listening 350
Reading 350
Writing 300

Test results are accepted from:

- One sitting; **or**
- A maximum of two test sittings in a 12-month period only if the applicant:
    - is tested in all four components in each sitting;
    - achieves a minimum score of 350 in each component for speaking, listening and reading and a minimum score of 300 for writing across the two sittings; and
    - when using scores from two test sittings, no score in any component from either test sitting is below 300.

[2] Council also accepts the IELTS One Skill Retake. The IELTS One Skill Retake allows eligible test takers to re-sit one component of the test within a 60-day period if all other components and certain requirements are met. Successful completion of an IELTS One Skill Retake is not considered an additional test sitting by Council; however, if an applicant is relying on results from two test sittings and an IELTS One Skill Retake, all three of these tests must have been completed within a 12-month period.

Validity of OET results
OET results are valid within 2 years of an application for registration.

E. (i) Have been granted registration with the Medical Council of New Zealand, which was cancelled for administrative reasons (and not as a result of an order of the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal or a direction by the Council under section 146 or 147 of the HPCAA); and

(ii) Provide the names and contact details of at least two referees who are senior doctors registered in New Zealand, and who can attest to the applicant's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English in a clinical setting with both patients and professional colleagues. Referees will be contacted directly by the Council, or a body Council authorised to do this (employer or recruitment agency).

Notes

Incomplete applications
Applications for registration, or applications to sit the NZREX Clinical, are incomplete if they are submitted without sufficient evidence of meeting one of the English language requirements listed above. Council cannot consider incomplete applications.

NZREX Clinical candidates
If comprehension and communication deficiencies are noted during the NZREX Clinical, candidates will be required to undertake further remediation and/or testing of their ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English before being eligible to apply to re-sit the NZREX Clinical (if needing to re-sit) or to apply for registration.

Version control	
Date	Details
October 2010	Approved by Council
March 2018	Updated to reflect changes to OET reporting of results
October 2020	Updated by Registrar
December 2022	Revised by Council
November 2025	Revised by Council
September 2026	Updated by Registrar
September 2029	Scheduled for review
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