

Language requirements

Policy

Status: Approved	Version No: 2 nd Edition	Issue date: Feb 2024 Updated following GPHP revision, October 2024	Next revision: Feb 2027
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1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out UKPHR’s approach to satisfying itself that applicants for registration have the necessary knowledge of the English language (and Welsh where appropriate).

The Registrar may refuse to grant an application for registration, including an application for restoration of registration, in any case where the applicant has not demonstrated the necessary knowledge of English.

Legislation in Wales applies specifically to the knowledge of Welsh which may be required for specific posts. The Registrar would expect questions relating to knowledge of Welsh to be dealt with under that legislation. In the unlikely event that the Registrar were required to make a ruling about knowledge of Welsh, the Registrar will follow this policy as far as practicably possible, substituting “Welsh” for “English” in the text as necessary.

2. Background

To practise safely in the UK, registrants must have sufficient knowledge of English and, in some defined jobs, Welsh.

Our core guidance Good Public Health Practice (2024) states that:

‘You must have the necessary knowledge of the English language to provide a good standard of public health practice in the UK.’

And:

‘You must make sure information to be shared is meaningful. You must share with the public, in a way they can understand, the information they want or need to know about their health and health care and the health options available to them, including associated risks and uncertainties.’

For doctors who are UKPHR registrants, Good Medical Practice (2024) states that doctors “must have the necessary knowledge of the English language to provide a good standard of practice and care in the UK”.

The reason it is essential for registrants to have the necessary language skills to practise in the UK is to be able to communicate effectively with individual service users and communities, work in partnership with other healthcare colleagues and clearly and accurately document their work.

If a registrant does not have the necessary knowledge of English or Welsh, there is a risk that they may not be able to fulfil these requirements.

3. Demonstrating proficiency in English

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There are multiple opportunities for applicants for registration and restoration to demonstrate their proficiency in English during the application process. If the Registrar has confidence in an applicant's English proficiency based on their application process, no further evidence or information regarding language proficiency will be requested.

In most cases for initial application for registration, applicants will be able to provide sufficient evidence of their knowledge of English via the route they undertake to gain registration.

- Public Health Practitioner – Portfolio – the applicant will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of English via the assessment of their portfolio of commentaries and evidence against the UKPHR Practitioner Standards
- Public Health Practitioner – Apprenticeship – the applicant will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of English via successfully completing a Public Health Apprenticeship, which includes an End Point Assessment
- Public Health Specialty Registrar – the applicant will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of English via participation in the Public Health Specialty Training Programme
- Public Health Specialist – Dual – the applicant will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of English via public health specialist registration with the GMC or GDC
- Public Health Specialist – Training – the applicant will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of English via participation and successful CCT of the Public Health Specialty Training Programme
- Public Health Specialist – Portfolio – the applicant will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of English via the assessment of their portfolio of narratives and evidence against the UKPHR Specialist Registration by Portfolio Assessment Standards

In cases for restoration to the Register, a UK applicant returning to the Register may not need to provide additional evidence or information if the Registrar is satisfied about the applicant’s knowledge of English from the application process.

A relevant consideration will be whether the registrant first registered with UKPHR before or after the introduction of the language requirements policy, since those registering after the rule was introduced will have satisfied the policy at that time and the Registrar will take this factor into account.

4. If there are doubts to an applicant’s proficiency in English

If the Registrar has doubts as to an applicant's proficiency in English, further evidence or information will be requested and considered.

The applicant will be requested to:

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- Provide further evidence or information; and/or
- Undertake, at the applicant's own cost, an assessment designed to evaluate the applicant's knowledge of English.

The Register may also carry out other investigations.

The Registrar will consider evidence of knowledge of English which meets one or more of these criteria:

- It is recent (less than two years old at the point of initial application or restoration to UKPHR), objective, independent and robust
- It clearly shows that the applicant can read, write and interact with individuals, communities and health and social care professionals and the public in English
- It can be verified by UKPHR through contact with recognised health and social care institutions, regulators and other official bodies.

The criteria reflect UKPHR's overriding objective of protecting and enhancing public safety and provide UKPHR with adequate assurance that registrants practising in the UK can interact and communicate appropriately with individuals, communities, and other healthcare professionals.

One appropriate way to provide acceptable evidence is to take the academic version of the IELTS test and meet UKPHR's required minimum scores. Please refer to section 9 for appropriate types of evidence.

The Registrar has the power to exercise discretion and consider all types of credible evidence, which meet the parameters of the above criteria.

5. If doubts remain to an applicant's proficiency in English

If doubts remain after the provision of such further evidence or information, there is a further opportunity for applicants to provide additional or alternative language proficiency evidence, which will be considered.

6. If the necessary knowledge of English is still not satisfied

If after both attempts the Registrar is not satisfied that the applicant has the necessary knowledge of English, the Registrar may refuse to grant an application for registration if the Registrar considers that:

(a) Without reasonable excuse, the applicant has:

- failed to satisfy the requirement of necessary knowledge of English (or Welsh where appropriate)
- failed to provide any evidence or information requested by the Registrar

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- failed to undertake an assessment requested by the Registrar
- or

(b) Having taken account of any evidence as to the applicant’s knowledge of English, an applicant has failed to demonstrate the necessary knowledge of English.

7. Factors the Registrar will consider when requesting evidence of necessary knowledge of English

For example, if an applicant has a recent relevant qualification that has been taught and examined in English, or the qualification is from a country where English is the first and native language or an applicant has recent experience of practising in a country where English is the first and native language, then the Registrar is unlikely to seek any further evidence.

By ‘recent’ UKPHR means evidence relating to English language competence that is less than two years old at the point of submitting the application to UKPHR. Two years is considered the accepted period for an individual to remain proficient in English if the language is used regularly.

Reference to a country where English is the first and native language means any country which is on the UK Government’s list of countries that are exempt from proving knowledge of English in relation to British citizenship and settling in the UK.

The Registrar is likely to ask for further evidence or information from applicants who do not hold recent relevant qualifications that have been taught and examined in English or do not have recent experience of practising in a country where English is the first and/or native language.

If during the application process a situation arises where an applicant requires the services of a translator or another person in order to communicate in English with UKPHR, the Registrar will review any language evidence that has already been provided. In these cases, the Registrar is likely to request further evidence of the applicant’s knowledge of English before granting the application for registration.

8. Examples of appropriate evidence

Evidence type 1:

A recent overall score of 7 in the academic version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This can be achieved over two sittings of the tests. Both tests must be within six months of each other and no single score must be below 6.5 in any of the areas across both tests.

IELTS is an objective method of demonstrating proficiency in English and is widely accepted by many employers, regulators and professional bodies.

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The Registrar may accept IELTS test scores that are more than two years old if the applicant can provide evidence to demonstrate that their language skills have not deteriorated in that time, for example by having subsequently undertaken a postgraduate course of study which has been taught and examined in or evidence that they have subsequently worked in a country where English is the first and native language.

Evidence type 2:

A recent relevant qualification that has been taught and examined in English.

UKPHR requires the relevant qualification to be taught and examined in English so as to give the Registrar sufficient assurance that the applicant has experience in an English-speaking public health environment. Communication and interaction are key components of safe public health practice in the UK. To assure the Registrar that applicants have experience in these essential areas, most of the applicant’s professional interaction, including personal contact with individuals, communities and healthcare professionals must have been conducted in English.

Where a qualification meets the above criteria but is not recent, the Registrar will ask for evidence that demonstrates the applicant’s experience of practising for the preceding two years in a country where English is the first and native language.

The Registrar will ask all employers over the preceding two years to provide original references detailing the applicant’s practice in English. This provides assurance that the applicant’s experience of practising in an English-speaking health and social care practice environment is recent and their language skills are up to date.

The following are examples of what is meant by practice:

- Assessing, researching, reporting or giving advice in a professional public health capacity (for example as a member of a panel or committee or as an expert witness); and/or
- Public health teaching, research, health and social care management in hospitals, clinics, general practice and community and institutional contexts (for example in a university, Royal College or company) whether paid or voluntary; and/or
- Signing any certificate required for statutory purposes, such as death certificates; and/or
- In all cases, using the knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences initially obtained for the relevant qualification, degree (or equivalent) and built upon in postgraduate and continuing professional education.

Evidence type 3:

A recent pass in a language test for registration with a relevant regulatory authority in a country where the first and native language is English.

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The Registrar will contact the regulatory authority to find out which language test was used and its requirements before accepting this evidence.

Where the pass in another regulator’s language test is older than two years the Registrar may ask for evidence that demonstrates the applicant’s experience of practising for the preceding two years in a country where English is the first and native language.

The Registrar will ask all employers over the preceding two years to provide original references detailing the applicant’s practice in English.

Evidence type 4:

An offer of employment from a UK public health organisation.

The Registrar will require written confirmation from the UK public health organisation that an offer of employment has been made.

The Registrar will require the appointing employer to complete a structured English language reference form detailing the applicant’s skills in all four language domains of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and how these were assessed during the recruitment process.

The Registrar will seek confirmation from the appointing employer that it endorses the recruitment process the employer has in place to ensure that the applicant has the necessary knowledge of English to practise safely in the UK.

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