

How to assess a candidate's English language proficiency for the SIFE pathway

A Guide

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Foreword

The development and implementation of the SIFE pathway were a result of thorough public consultation and analysis of unprecedented responses received. This demonstrates a commitment to ensuring a robust and fair assessment process for Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) seeking registration with the NMC.

Its not a standalone pathway, the eligibility criteria for the SIFE pathway are well-defined, requiring evidence of the applicant completing their nursing course in English (taught and examined in English) in a non-majority English-speaking country. Moreover, they have to evidence a minimum of 12 months of full-time (37.5/week) or part-time equivalent work experience in a non-registered role in a health and care setting in the UK during the language demonstration period (LDP).

Furthermore, the 10-station OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) with a significant emphasis on communication skills (75% assessment) further underscores the importance of effective communication for nurses. This comprehensive assessment aims to ensure that IENs can communicate safely and effectively in various clinical settings.

It's clear that the SIFE pathway is not a hastily implemented solution but rather a well-considered approach and thought-out process to assess the English language proficiency and communication skills of the uniquely placed IENs to maintain safety and quality in patient care settings.

Nor is it unique, as it **is similar to how UK nursing students are assessed for their communication skills during their training by their Practice Assessors.**

We hope the implementation of the SIFE pathway and other supporting initiatives will continue to facilitate the registration process for IENs and contribute to the delivery of high-quality healthcare services in the UK.

A) The NMC (2018) standard against which the assessment for English language proficiency for clear and safe communication is done:

7. Communicate clearly

To achieve this, you must:

7.1 use terms that people in your care, colleagues and the public can understand.

7.2 take reasonable steps to meet people's language and communication needs, providing, wherever possible, assistance to those who need help to communicate their own or other people's needs

7.3 use a range of verbal and non-verbal communication methods, and consider cultural sensitivities, to better understand and respond to people's personal and health needs

7.4 check people's understanding from time to time to keep misunderstanding or mistakes to a minimum.

7.5 be able to communicate clearly and effectively in English

Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/nmc-publications/nmc-code.pdf>

B) In the SIFE form you are attesting the candidate can:

Communicate clearly and effectively in English.

Demonstrate clear and compassionate communication that reassures and informs.

Interact with patients and people who use services.

Share with people, their families and their carers, as far as the law allows, the information they want or need to know about their health care and ongoing treatment sensitively and in a way that they can understand.

Clearly relayed plans of care

Respond to feedback from patients, people who use services and families.

Share necessary information with other health and care professionals and agencies

Use terms that people in their care, colleagues and the public can understand.

Use a range of verbal communication methods, and considered cultural sensitivities, to better understand and respond to people's personal and health needs.

Deal with differences of professional opinion with colleagues by discussion and informed debate

The candidate should be demonstrating the above characteristics of clinical communication in the language demonstration period stipulated by the NMC. To sum up these, at the point of assessment (signing the SIFE form), request the applicant to work with you (assessor) for a period of 37.5 hours during which you can make your observations and make necessary comments.

C) Scenarios/instances that the above can be assessed: *Use a tick to indicate the candidate has undertaken some of these, using your professional judgement.*

Sl No	Behaviour/Action	Comment
1	Undertakes a shift handover	
2	Attends a ward round	
3	Be a shift coordinator and delegate work	
4	Undertakes a discharge conversation with the patient/carer/family (providing clear instructions on discharge)	
5	Undertakes an admission assessment	
6	Undertakes a patient transfer handover	
7	Participates and engages in multidisciplinary team meetings	
8	Escalates care as required – for instance Blood Glucose levels	
9	Attends phone calls and signposts accordingly	
10	Discusses with doctors the care of your patient and any other patient related concerns	
11	Communicates with the patient regarding dietary needs/attend the patient during mealtimes/fills up the menu sheet.	
12	Communicates with relatives and healthcare professionals	
13	Provides advice on lifestyle, health promotion or risk factors	
14	Seeks and obtains informed consent.	
15	Involves the patient in decision-making (during procedures)	

D) Cues that can indicate how safely the candidate can communicate: *Use a tick to indicate the candidate has undertaken some of these, using your professional judgement.*

Whilst approaching a patient, the candidate:	Comment
<p>Introduces/explains/clarifies the purpose of the visit. Checks how the patient would like to be addressed. Is polite, respectful, and non-judgemental, and maintains the patient's dignity. Is empathic, acknowledges the patient's emotions or concerns, and show sensitivity to any discomfort. Ensures consent from the patient (or carer/guardian for children or certain people with disabilities) prior to undertaking any procedures. Is sensitive to personal space, stands/sits at an appropriate distance from the patient</p>	

Whilst explaining and advising, the candidate:	Comment
<p>Establishes what the patient already knows and/or wants to know. Explains clearly what you are going to do and why, so that the patient can understand. Checks whether the patient understands or has any questions. Offers appropriate reassurance.</p>	

Whilst involving the patient in a procedure, the candidate:	Comment
<p>Respect the patient's autonomy and helps them to make a decision based on the available evidence-based information. Explains information and its implications so that the patient can make an informed choice about their care. Checks the patient's understanding and feelings about the proposed nursing interventions (understands they may not always agree with the proposed plan of care).</p>	

Whilst undertaking a nursing assessment, the candidate:	Comment
<p>Listens attentively to the patient's problems and concerns. Uses clear language, and question at a comfortable pace. Clarifies and checks information and summarise understanding.</p>	

E) Links:

- [English language requirements - The Nursing and Midwifery Council \(nmc.org.uk\)](https://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/guidance-for-employers/sife-faqs/)
- [Guidance on registration language requirements \(nmc.org.uk\)](https://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/guidance-for-employers/sife-faqs/)
- <https://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/guidance-for-employers/sife-faqs/>

The NMC code of conduct (2015) states:

You should always uphold the reputation of your profession. You should display a personal commitment to the standards of practice and behaviour set out in the Code. You should be a model of integrity and leadership for others to aspire to. This should lead *to trust and confidence in the professions from patients, people receiving care, other health and care professionals and the public.*

Therefore, you are accountable to make sound professional judgement regarding whether the candidate can communicate safely or not and be able to provide rationale if challenged.