

Guidelines

17 December 2020

An employer and managers guide to registration and orientation for internationally qualified nurses and midwives (IQNMs)

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) undertakes functions as set by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The National Law recognises nursing and midwifery as two distinct professions. The NMBA regulates the practice of both the nursing profession and the midwifery profession in Australia, and one of its key roles is to protect the public.

The NMBA does this by developing registration standards, professional codes, guidelines and standards for practice which together establish the requirements for the professional and safe practice of both nurses and midwives in Australia.

The NMBA works in partnership with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) in the assessment of IQNMs.

Who needs to use these guidelines?

These guidelines have been developed as general framework for all practice settings to support employers and managers when employing IQNMs. The NMBA and employers of IQNMs have a shared responsibility in developing orientation requirements and implementing orientation programs.

What do these guidelines cover?

These guidelines cover the IQNM registration process, the NMBA orientation program for IQNMs and provide guidance for health and aged care services on the essential components of workplace orientation programs relevant to IQNMs.

Orientation program requirements focus on providing safe and quality nursing and midwifery care that reinforce the NMBA's role in ensuring competent practice for public safety. Essential employer components include identifying the characteristics of working in the Australian healthcare system and the provision of healthcare in the Australian context of practice.

How should these guidelines be used?

These guidelines should be used by health service and aged care sector employers including people and culture directorates, to build knowledge in the IQNM registration experience and to support the development and/or refinement of local orientation programs for IQNMs.

These guidelines are research-based and represent best practice in IQNM orientation. Using these guidelines to shape the content of local orientation programs will support IQNMs to have the best opportunity to commence practise in Australia safely, effectively and professionally.

Registration with the NMBA: The IQNM journey

Background

IQNMs provide the Australian healthcare system with a wide range of skills and professional experience often supplemented by the unique capability to communicate and provide culturally appropriate nursing or midwifery care for people who identify with an IQNMs country of origin. The NMBA recognises IQNMs as a vital part of the social fabric in our communities, health and aged care services and the nursing and midwifery professions.

To work as a nurse or midwife in Australia, IQNMs must be registered with the NMBA. They may also need to apply for a visa issued by the Australian Department of Home Affairs. These two processes are entirely separate and success in one does not automatically guarantee success in the other. Current information on employing or sponsoring workers and current visa requirements is available on the [Australian Governments Home Affairs website](#).

While some IQNMs may begin the process to register as a nurse or midwife after arriving in Australia, most IQNMs will begin their journey to registration while still residing and practising overseas. This section explains the IQNM journey prior to employment in an Australian health service and contextualises the IQNM experience for health and aged care service employers and managers.

Registration requirements

To be registered with the NMBA, IQNMs must meet the NMBAs mandatory registration standards and qualification criteria. Before commencing the qualification self-assessment, the IQNM must first self-assess whether they meet the requirements of the NMBAs registration standards. The registration standards define the requirements that all IQNMs, registered nurses, enrolled nurses and midwives need to meet to be registered. These are the:

- [Criminal history registration standard](#)
- [English language skills registration standard](#)
- [Registration standard: Continuing professional development](#)
- [Registration standard: Recency of practice](#)
- [Registration standard: Professional indemnity insurance arrangements](#)

IQNMs who do not meet the registration standards are not eligible for registration with the NMBA. Evidence of meeting the registration standards is required by the NMBA in order to finalise an IQNMs registration.

Qualification criteria

The NMBA determines the qualification criteria that must be met to register. As IQNMs have not attained their nursing or midwifery qualification via an NMBA-approved program of study in Australia, their qualification(s) is assessed using an online self-assessment tool (known as the Self-check). Following completion of the Self-check, each IQNM is assigned into one of three streams for assessment, with IQNMs in each stream progressing through different assessment stages before being eligible to apply for registration.

The three streams are:

Stream A - IQNMs who hold a qualification considered to be *substantially equivalent*, or based on similar competencies, to a NMBA-approved Australian qualification.

Stream A IQNMs who successfully complete the first part of the NMBAs IQNM orientation program are eligible to apply for registration.

Stream B - IQNMs who hold a qualification that is *relevant* to the profession, but is not substantially equivalent, nor based on similar competencies to a NMBA-approved Australian qualification.

Stream B IQNMs who have successfully completed the first part of the NMBAs IQNM orientation program and submitted a portfolio with detailed qualification and identification documentation are required to complete an outcomes-based assessment (OBA)¹ comprising:

- a multiple-choice question (MCQ) exam related to the profession/division in which they intend to register in Australia, and
- an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) related to the profession/division in which they intend to register in Australia.

Once the OBA has been successfully completed, Stream B IQNMs are eligible to apply for registration.

Stream C – IQNMs who hold a qualification that is *not substantially equivalent or relevant* to a NMBA-approved Australian qualification. Stream C IQNMs are not eligible for registration with the NMBA and must upgrade their qualification before recommencing the assessment process.

Pathway to employment in Australia for IQNMs

The following pathways articulate the most common routes for IQNMs to register with the NMBA and gain employment in Australia; however, it should be noted that this is not always a linear process. The employment pathway may be impacted by visa requirements, immigration challenges and the Australian Department of Home Affairs' skilled migration program. The NMBA does not regulate nor influence these areas.

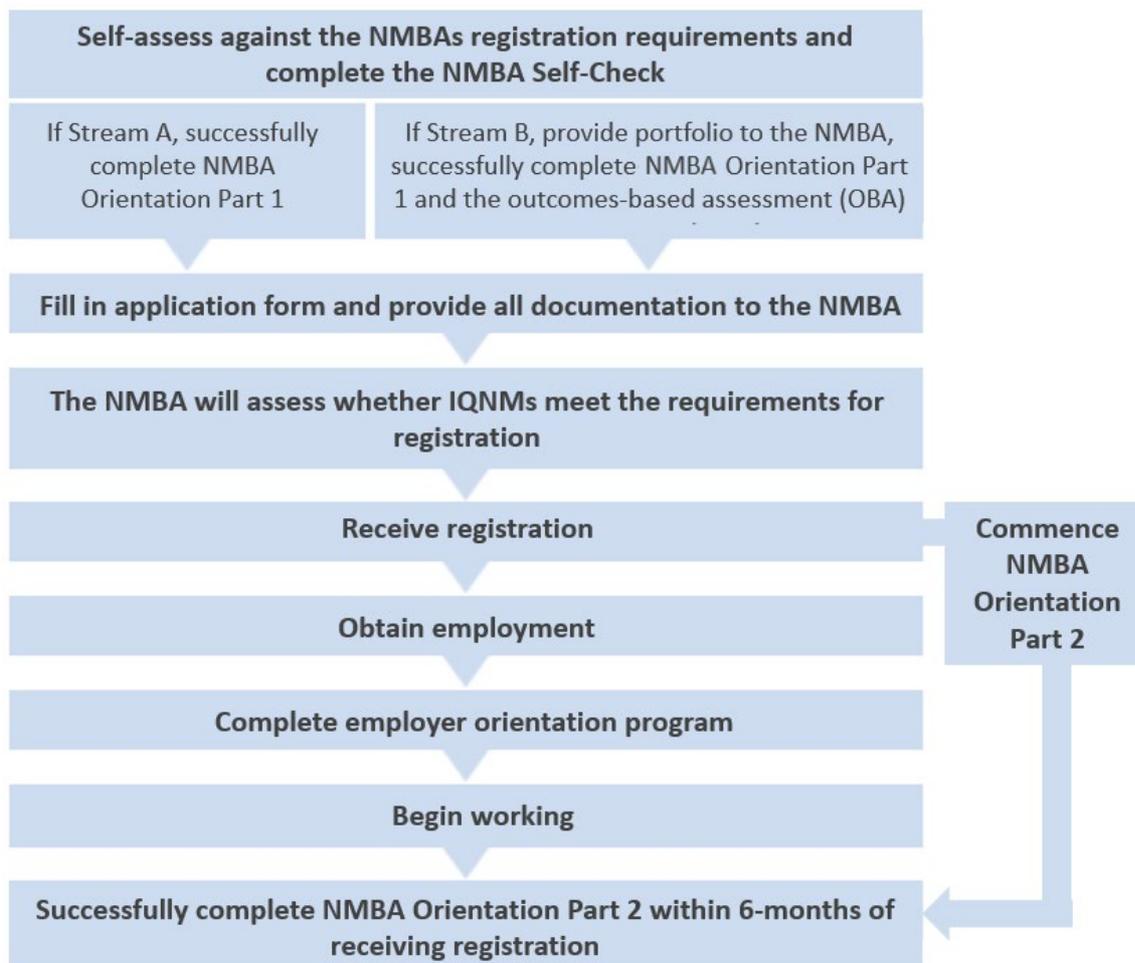


Figure 1: IQNM employment pathways

¹ The OBA process replaces the traditional 'bridging program' pathway and has been implemented to streamline the assessment process, maintain fair and equitable outcomes and apply greater procedural rigour to ensure all IQNMs are safe to practice in the Australian context.

IQNMs whose outcome from the NMBA Self-check is determined 'Stream C' are not eligible for registration until they have upgraded their qualification.

The NMBA orientation program for IQNMs

Ensuring all nurses and midwives have a robust understanding of the Australian healthcare system, their professional obligations and the skills, knowledge and attributes required to deliver safe, high quality care is critical to professional practice and public safety. For IQNMs who may be faced with the additional challenges of language barriers, cultural nuances, differences in practice skills/knowledge and role expectation, the importance of a good understanding of what it is like to work within the Australian healthcare system prior to commencing practice is paramount.

In recognition of these challenges, the NMBA has developed a compulsory online orientation program to introduce IQNMs to a range of concepts, professional practice requirements and cultural safety learnings relating to the Australian healthcare context. The NMBA's aim is to keep the public safe by supporting IQNMs who register with the NMBA to prepare for the environment in which they will be working. For employers and managers, this means IQNMs will commence practice with foundation knowledge of the Australian healthcare system that can continue to be built upon during their first 6-months of practice and supplemented by employer-based, local orientation programs.

The NMBA's orientation program has two parts and is further examined in the next section.

NMBA Orientation Part 1 – Part 1 introduces IQNMs to the Australian healthcare system and must be completed as part of the IQNM assessment process, prior to applying for registration.

NMBA Orientation Part 2 – Part 2 provides an in-depth orientation to the Australian healthcare context and comprises of four modules with detailed learnings on:

- the Australian healthcare context
- professional responsibilities when practicing in the Australian healthcare system
- person and woman-centred care, and
- cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is a requirement of registration with the NMBA for IQNMs to complete Part 2 within six-months of becoming registered, irrespective of whether they have gained employment in an Australian health or aged care service. IQNMs will have a notation on their registration that identifies the requirement to complete Orientation Part 2. The notation is removed once the IQNM completes this component of their orientation. An IQNM's registration status can be checked through the [NMBA public register of practitioners](#) or alternatively, via [Ahpra online services](#).

NMBA Orientation

Informed by research and broad consultation, the compulsory NMBA orientation program provides a series of learning opportunities to address the inherent knowledge gaps associated with commencing practice in a new country. Completion of the NMBA's orientation program in combination with an employer-based IQNM orientation program means IQNMs in Australia will have the best opportunity to commence practice safely, effectively and professionally. This minimises clinical risk and maximises patient safety.

The Australian healthcare context

In this module, IQNMs are equipped with essential learnings on how the Australian healthcare system is structured, governed and regulated. This includes information on the importance of using the highest quality evidence available to inform practice (evidence-based practice), risk management and infection prevention and control. The application of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) standards are delivered using scenario-based learning, supplemented by periodic knowledge checks.

Professional responsibilities when practising in the Australian healthcare system

In this module, IQNMs learn about their professional responsibilities when working as a nurse or midwife in an Australian health service or aged care facility. This includes information on the NMBA's professional practice expectations (the standards for practice) and mandatory reporting obligations. IQNMs also develop knowledge around what is expected in a supervisory relationship, their annual continuing professional development (CPD) requirements and self-care.

Person and woman-centred care

Research shows that learnings centred around person/woman-centred care may differ in the international context. This module unpacks this concept and, through scenario-based learning, educates IQNMs on applying the principles of person and woman-centred care to clinical scenarios.

This module also provides learnings on the principles of decision making, consent, open disclosure, professional boundaries and how to be an advocate for people and/or women in an IQNMs care.

Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In this module, IQNMs learn about the health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and how practising in culturally safe ways can improve health outcomes. This part of the IQNM learning journey also provides comprehensive learnings on the history and historical factors that are influencing the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how to provide culturally safe and respectful care. Further information on Australian policies designed to address health inequalities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is also included.

Employer-based IQNM orientation programs

Employer-based orientation programs and the process of introducing IQNMs to the philosophy, goals, policies, procedures and role expectations for nurses and midwives in Australia are crucial to an IQNMs integration into the Australian workplace. Those who participate in formal orientation programs adapt better to cultural differences and respond better to new situations.² They also have a higher level of commitment to their employer.²

These orientation programs should address the professional skills and knowledge needed for the IQNM to practice safely in Australia and should include orientation on the relevant skills needed for specialised wards, facilities or practice settings.²

General guidelines for employer-based IQNM orientation programs

The following areas have been identified as high-value learning opportunities for inclusion in all employer-based IQNM orientation programs. These may be structured around five research-based principles² and include:

1. Healthcare systems knowledge and understandings (as relevant to context of employment)

- Organisational code of conduct, culture and values
- Organisational policies, protocols, procedures and general clinical practice guidelines
- The [National Safety and Quality Health Service \(NSQHS\) Standards](#) and/or the [Aged Care Quality Standards](#) (Quality Standards)
- Evidence-based practice and local documentation requirements
- Human resources, legal obligations and ethical issues
- Physical resources, equipment, use and supplies
- Orientation as specific to unit or area and any facility specific expectations
- Expectations of staff including mandatory continuing professional development
- Local patient safety processes and risk management expectations
- Incident reporting and complaints management
- Organisational medical and/or professional indemnity insurance cover

2. Professional interpersonal relationships and role expectations

- Scope of practice and local area clinical practice guidelines
- Resilience, stress management and coping strategies
- Partnering with consumers
- Healthcare teams (including importance of teamwork and interprofessional collaboration)
- Discrimination policies and escalation processes

² Roots, A and Gibson, P (2015) Outcomes-based assessment of competence to practice and orientation requirements for IQNMs in the Australian healthcare context, Final report for the NMBA.

- Role of advocacy in professional practice

3. Language and communication

- Verbal communication including colloquialisms and slang (learning the 'local lingo')
- Common terminology, abbreviations, acronyms, and the professional lexicon
- Non-verbal communication including eye contact and contextually appropriate facial expressions
- Documentation, electronic medical records (EMR) and the use of digital technologies
- Telephone communication and electronic orders

4. Practice skills and knowledge

- Clinical deterioration including use of emergency codes
- Medication management (specific to state and territory legislation)
- Blood management
- Infection prevention and control
- Falls prevention and management
- The Australian College of Midwives' National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral
- Locally available continuing professional development (CPD) and how to access it

5. Culture and diversity

- Cultural awareness, safety, respect and competence
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Diversity of Australian health consumers
- Cross-cultural communication

For more information

[Internationally qualified nurses and midwives](#)

Visit www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au under *Contact us* to lodge an online enquiry form
For registration enquiries: 1300 419 495 (in Australia) +61 3 9275 9009 (overseas callers)

Document control

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