



Specialist Language Courses



Europe's first OET-accredited
Premium Provider

CASE STUDY:

OCCUPATIONAL ENGLISH TEST (OET) PREPARATION

Trial Group
Programme

The Occupational English Test (OET) was recognised by the NMC in November 2017 as an official assessment of whether an international nurse has the right English language skills to practice safely and effectively in the UK.

OET is a healthcare-specific English language test that assesses the language proficiency of healthcare professionals from 12 professions, including nurses. It differs from general or academic tests in that it uses real communication scenarios that nurses will experience in the healthcare workplace.

Content includes understanding consultations, medical talks and medical articles, as well as participating effectively in role plays and writing a letter of referral based on a set of case notes.

OET was designed in the late 1980s and has been used in Australia for many years. In addition to Australia and the UK, OET is recognised by healthcare boards and councils in Ireland, New Zealand, Dubai and Singapore. The test may be taken every month in more than 40 countries.

Nurses wishing to register in the UK need to achieve a Grade B in the four papers of the OET – Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing. Grade B is an advanced level, equivalent to a C1 on the Common European Framework, a scale used internationally to measure language skills.

SLC was the first OET training organisation in Europe to become an OET-accredited Premium Preparation Provider. SLC specialises in producing digital materials and teaching Medical English and Exam Preparation courses to medical professionals around the world.

The Challenge

SLC was delighted to be commissioned by OET to prepare a group of nurses to take the OET on a trial course.

We were asked to train a group of eight nurses. Four of them were in the UK working as Health Care Assistants at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, while the other four came through King's Commercial, the commercial arm of King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, and were based in the Philippines and India. All needed to show they have the required English language skills to register in the UK.

The nurses were all at an upper-intermediate or mid- to high-B2 level of English.

The Solution

We designed a 100-hour preparation programme to be delivered over 10 weeks. The group met their teacher in the SLC online classroom for two hours every day, from Monday to Friday. They were also given homework, which varied according to their specific needs and was tracked in their personal study plans.

A 10-week course enabled us to get a deep understanding of how the participants responded to the training, how quickly they improved and – very importantly – what their results were. Using an online classroom allowed the participants to work together even though they were thousands of miles apart. It also ensured we could assign an OET-expert teacher to lead the course.

The course was carefully planned to meet the different learners' needs. Lessons were highly interactive, so nurses could work together on writing tasks, role playing different scenarios, and participating in small group discussions, for example.

We provided all the course materials, including our own Reach OET B study course and practice tests. Attendance and progress was monitored throughout, with formal OET mocks at mid- and end-points.

6 out of 8
achieved
Grade B in
4 papers

75%

The Results

However, the question remains of what the results in the actual test were.

The eight participants took the OET in April and May 2018. We're delighted to say that six of the eight achieved Grade B in all 4 papers, thereby satisfying NMC requirements. The remaining two came very close to achieving NMC requirements, both scoring a B in three of the papers and C in the final one.

We're very hopeful that the other two participants will join them once they re-take their tests.

Six out of eight first time passes is an excellent result and a very encouraging sign that the NMC's decision to recognise the OET was the right one.

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“Great experience ... enjoying a lot ... I got many new ideas to crack the OET test ... I am really grateful.”

Sonia, course participant,
4 Grade Bs on 1st sitting

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“The feedback from students about their working life was overwhelmingly positive. Students studied and practised functional phrases in context in class, they were then able to use these phrases on the ward with their patients. They said they felt more confident when interacting with patients, better equipped to plan and structure a conversation and crucially, they noticed a positive difference in the reactions from their patients.”

Bethan Edwards,
Academic Director, SLC

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The Feedback

The participating nurses responded very well to the lessons. Attendance levels were high and feedback on the course content was overwhelmingly positive. All said that they could see how the content of the course was relevant to their profession and how the additional language skills would support them at work – much more so than the Academic English they studied on previous IELTS preparation courses.

They adapted to the different inputs and tasks in the test quickly, learning the techniques and strategies their teacher gave them. Progress on the four test papers was steady, and motivation levels remained high throughout the course.





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“We were delighted with the results achieved through SLC for our candidates undertaking the OET. It’s proven to us that distance learning can be highly effective in supporting them to study and pass their English Language qualification and reducing the number of attempts and costs. This will ultimately benefit employers who are waiting for their future employees to arrive. We would recommend this training programme to all our hospital partners.”

Michael Joyce, Divisional Manager,
King’s Commercial, part of King’s College Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust



“Congratulations to both the successful candidates and SLC on these excellent results. While we are delighted, we are not surprised. Candidates and employers alike tell us time and again that OET is a valid proof of English proficiency and that OET alumni enter the workplace with the communication skills required to ensure patient safety and quality care.”

Sujata Stead, CEO of Cambridge Boxhill Language Assessment, the owners of OET



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