



The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by our registrants.

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Our practice support tools are developed using current reference material. The source of this material is available upon request.



SECTION 1: CONDITIONAL LICENCE

1. What is the difference between a Conditional Licence and a Practicing Licence?

Both categories of licences enable a nurse to enter practice.

A practicing licence is issued when an applicant has met all the registration and licensing requirements set out in the Nursing Act.

A conditional licence is issued when a domestically or internationally educated applicant has met the requirements of their nursing program and NSCN's registration and licensing requirements set out in the Nursing Act but has not yet passed the required registration exam.

2. Why do some international nurses have a conditional licence and others do not?

Generally, an international nurse will receive a conditional licence if they have met all the registration requirements and still have to pass the required registration exam or have met all the registration requirements (which may or may not include passing the required registration exam) but have been away from practice for a period of time.

3. Are there conditions or restrictions on the conditional licence?

Yes, and they will vary depending on the reason the nurse was issued the conditional licence and the length of time they have been away from practice.

4. What is the purpose of the conditions?

The conditions are public safeguards intended to ensure nurses are supported to provide safe and competent nursing services as they make the transition into the Canadian health care system.

5. Are conditional licences new because of the new direct international licensing process?

Conditional licences have been used for many years by NSCN and the legacy Colleges (CLPNNS and CRNNS). Most commonly, new graduates were issued a conditional licence until they passed their respective exam. They used to be called a "temporary licence", "grad", "GN" or "GPN" licence.

6. What are the types of conditions with a conditional licence?

There are two types of conditions with a conditional licence:

- **Newly Licensed Nurse Conditions.** Nurses who are new to practice in Nova Scotia or Canada and have yet to pass the required registration exam. This includes nurses who have recently graduated from a Nova Scotia or Canadian nursing program, or an international nurse who are entering practice in Canada for the first time.
- **Mentorship and Transition to Practice Conditions.** Domestically or internationally educated nurses returning to practice after being away for five or more years.

7. Are there practice restrictions associated with these conditions?

The nurse is not restricted from practicing to the full scope of practice of their nursing designation. However, it is **critical to understand** that a nurse with a conditional license is either new to nursing practice (newly graduated nurse), new to nursing practice in Canada (international nurse), or returning to practice after an extended absence. While there are no prohibitions on their practice, their "novice-ness" is an important context to be considered as they enter the workplace.

SECTION 2: NEWLY LICENSED NURSE CONDITIONS

8. What is the purpose of the newly licensed nurse conditions?

These conditions are intended to ensure that new nurses are supported to provide safe and competent nursing services as they make the transition from student to nurse or, in the case of international nurses, as they make the transition into the Canadian health care system.

9. Can a nursing student apply for a conditional licence before they graduate?

Yes. Students in Nova Scotia nursing programs are advised in their last semester when and how to apply. While they can apply for the license before graduation, **it will not be processed and they cannot practice** until we receive official confirmation from the school that they are eligible to graduate.

10. Do nurses need a conditional licence before they start employer orientation?

Yes, and this includes classroom orientation.

11. How do I know if the conditional licence has been processed?

Nurses are notified by email when their application has been processed and the conditional licence is valid. Once it is valid, the nurses name and licensure status will appear on Search for a Nurse on the NSCN website.

12. What are the signature credentials for a nurse holding this conditional licence?

LPN	RN	NP
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Licensed Practical Nurse pending• LPN pending	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Registered Nurse pending• RN pending	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nurse Practitioner pending• NP pending

13. How long is the conditional licence valid?

The conditional licence is valid for four months from the date it was issued.

14. Can a conditional licence be re-issued once it expires?

Yes. Nurses must request (and pay for) subsequent conditional licences by emailing registration@nscn.ca.

15. Can a nurse continue to practice while waiting for a conditional licence to be re-issued?

No. The initial conditional licence is invalid when it expires. Therefore, the nurse is not eligible to practice until a new conditional licence has been issued. Practicing without a licence may be considered professional misconduct and could result in disciplinary action.

16. How many times can a conditional licence be re-issued?

A conditional licence can be re-issued twice, enabling nurses to have a conditional licence for a maximum of 12 months from the date they were made eligible. For domestically educated nurses, eligibility for a conditional licence begins on the date the school of nursing confirms that graduation requirements have been met. Eligibility for international nurses begins on the date they were approved by NSCN to write the registration exam.

17. Other than exceeding the 12-month time limit, are there other reasons why a conditional licence may not be re-issued?

Yes. LPN and RN applicants do not qualify for additional conditional licences after **three** failed exam attempts. NP applicants do not qualify for additional conditional licences after **one** failed exam attempt.

18. What does a nurse do if they fail their third attempt of the LPN or RN exam or their first attempt of the NP exam?

They must notify their employer that they have failed the exam and **stop working immediately**.

19. I have written the registration exam (and failed) with another regulatory body. Will this effect how many or how long I can have a conditional licence with NSCN?

Yes. Email registration@nscn.ca to find out how this may impact your application.

20. What happens to conditional licence when the nurse passes the required registration exam?

The conditional licence is valid until it reaches its expiration date. The nurse will be notified by email when they pass the exam and provided instructions on how to obtain and pay for a practicing licence.

They must do this before the conditional licence expires or they will not be eligible to practice.

21. I have recently written and passed the registration exam with another regulatory body. Do I have to re-write the exam for NSCN?

If you already passed a registration exam approved by NSCN, you are not required to re-write the exam.

22. What are the Newly Licensed Nurse Conditions?

The nurse must:

- Engage in a comprehensive orientation or transition to practice plan to the practice setting.
- Have access to a nurse mentor who can provide practice and clinical mentorship, assistance, and consultation. However, if they have failed the applicable registration exam, they must have access to an on-site **designated** nurse for mentorship, assistance, and consultation.
- Not be the only regulated care provider on a unit or the nurse in charge (unless with a mentor).
- In the event of exam failure(s), notify your employer of the change in the conditions that now require you to have access to an on-site designated nurse mentor who can provide practice and clinical mentorship, assistance, and consultation for a period of time as determined by the employer.
- Notify NSCN of your registration exam results if taken through another regulatory body.
- Maintain written records establishing compliance with the conditions and restrictions to provide to NSCN upon request.

SECTION 2B: NEWLY LICENSED NURSE CONDITIONS EXPLAINED

- Tools are available for the newly licensed nurse or employer to use to help develop an orientation or transition to practice plan.

An important part of nurses' transition to practice is to reflect on current practice and determine what aspects they may need to further develop including applying learned concepts into practice. Self-assessment is the first step in building a successful learning plan. Nurses should start with a review of their [standards of practice](#) and [code of ethics](#) and then, through self-assessment, identify areas of practice where they can grow their competence. We have developed [a Self-Assessment Tool for LPNs](#) and [a Self-Assessment Tool for RNs](#) that nurses can use in assessing their learning needs and developing their learning plan. The [New Graduate Online Resource](#) and [Jurisprudence Information](#) may also be useful.

- A newly licensed nurse must engage in a comprehensive orientation or transition to practice plan.

A well designed and evidence informed orientation is critical for the successful transition of any nurse in any practice area. It is particularly important for the successful integration of newly licensed nurses.

A comprehensive orientation or transition to practice plan for nurses includes additional support for nurses that are beyond the general organizational orientation. This may include education sessions as well as preceptor-led shifts. Orientation length is determined through an analysis of the nurse's experience in context of the competencies required to practice safely and competently in the employment setting.

Consider the following components as you develop a comprehensive orientation or transition to practice plan:

- Utilizing the nurse's self-assessment of learning needs to develop a competency-based plan that is centered on the needs of the nurse in context of the practice environment.
- Education specific to the client population served in the practice setting.
- Formal and informal learning opportunities to provide structured and unstructured, varied learning activities, such as classroom training, mock scenarios, clinical practice, preceptorship, and peer support.
- Job description and role expectations review.
- Policy, process, and guideline review for the unit.
- NSCN standards of practice and code of ethics review for the designation.
- Orientation to health care team roles and supports.
- Supports available from system partners (NSH/IWK, DHW, HANS, Continuing Care).

NSCN has developed transition to practice resources to support domestic and internationally educated nurses who are new in Nova Scotia in their transition to practice nursing in our province. The resources also provide guidance for employers, preceptors, mentors and managers who are working with new nurses who are transitioning to practice in Nova Scotia. They can be accessed [here](#).

- A newly licensed nurse must have access to a mentor who can provide practice and clinical mentorship, assistance, and consultation.

This requirement is intended to ensure the nurse has access to another nurse identified by the employer to provide them with mentorship, assistance, and consultation to support them in providing safe and competent nursing services. It is important to know, that even though they are practicing with a mentor, they remain responsible and accountable for their own nursing practice.

Newly licensed nurses often receive mentorship from a variety of nurses as they move through their transition to practice plan in a new employment setting. However, nurse mentors providing practice guidance, support, and advice to newly licensed nurses must have the professional capacity to do so.

23. What is the difference between a mentor and a preceptor?

A mentor is a nurse who guides, counsels and/or teaches nurse learners (mentees) in their adjustment to new environments, roles and/or responsibilities. A preceptor is a nurse who teaches, counsels, and serves as a role model and supports the growth and development of a nurse in a particular discipline for a limited time, with the specific purpose of socializing the novice nurse in a new role usually during orientation to a unit. Preceptors fill the same role as mentors but for a more limited time frame.

24. Can a nurse with newly licensed conditions come off orientation before they obtain their full practising license?

Nurses will progress in a new workplace differently, and some nurses may require longer orientation periods than others. Other nurses may demonstrate the competencies that are required for them to work more independently on a unit. If they demonstrate these competencies as assessed by their mentor, preceptor and themselves, they could take on a more independent client assignment and become “core” staffing on a unit. They must be assigned a mentor on the unit until they obtain a full practicing RN without conditions.

- A newly licensed nurse must have access to an on-site designated nurse for mentorship, assistance, and consultation” after an exam failure.

Nurses can continue to practice after two exam failures. This condition is a public safeguard, intended to ensure that a nurse has been **designated** by the employer specifically to provide the conditional licence holder with assistance and consultation if and when required. The designated nurse must have the necessary competence and professional capacity. For further clarity, **on-site** means the designated nurse mentor is in close physical proximity to the conditional licence holder so a conditional licence holder is never in a situation where they cannot reach out to another nurse for assistance. It is up to the nurse and their employer to decide how this condition can be best met.

For final clarity, the conditional license holder remains responsible and accountable for their own nursing practice at all times. This includes knowing when, and how to access the designated nurse mentor and ask for guidance. The designated nurse is not required to co-sign medications, treatments, or documentation of the conditional license holder, unless it is otherwise required by policy (i.e., double signatures on a drug count).

- A newly licensed nurse must not be the only regulated care provider on a unit or the nurse in charge (unless with a mentor).

Newly licensed nurses have not had the opportunity to integrate their education and clinical experience in a new practice environment. While they are educationally prepared to grow into a practitioner to manage multiple priorities and emergencies, it is unlikely they can do this effectively alone so early in their practice in Nova Scotia.

Newly licensed nurses, whether domestically or internationally educated, require the support of other licensed care providers as they transition in their new role in your organization. The other licensed care providers do not need to be of the same designation as the conditional licence holder.

- A newly licensed nurse must notify NSCN of registration exam results if taken through another regulatory body.

PASS: Arrange for written confirmation of passing the exam to be sent directly to NSCN from the regulatory body that initially granted exam eligibility. Licensure applications cannot be processed until NSCN receives official communication.

FAIL: Email registration@nscn.ca to notify us of your exam results.

- A newly licensed nurse must maintain written records establishing compliance with the conditions and restrictions to provide to NSCN upon request.

Documentation can be as formal or informal as desired. This condition is intended to be a public safeguard. In the event that a nurses’ practice is called into question, NSCN will want to see evidence that the terms of the conditions were met.

An orientation or transition to practice plan could be an ideal place to document that the terms of the conditions were upheld.

SECTION 3: MENTORSHIP AND TRANSITION TO PRACTICE CONDITIONS

25. What is the purpose of the mentorship and transition to practice conditions?

These conditions and restrictions are intended to help domestically or internationally educated nurses safely and competently transition back to practice after a five-to-ten-year hiatus.

26. Have nurses with these conditions already passed the required registration exam?

Some may and some may have not. The exam specific conditions are removed for any nurse who has already passed the required registration exam.

27. What are the signature credentials for a nurse holding this conditional licence?

Nurses who **have not** passed the registration exam: Same as those on page 3.

Nurses who have passed the registration exam: Use their designation (LPN, RN or NP) abbreviation or written out.

28. What are the mentorship and transition to practice conditions?

The nurse must:

- Confirm their employer's agreement to these conditions and restrictions.
- Engage in a comprehensive orientation to a single employer's practice setting.
- Work with a 1:1 mentor (a nurse(s) identified by the organization and be able to provide the necessary support and mentorship) for a period of at least 320 hours.
- Conduct a self-assessment of their individual competence and develop and implement a learning plan to address any gaps.
- Only work for one employer and may not work for an agency or in a "float pool" unless assigned to the same workplace or unit for a minimum of 2 months.
- Not be the only regulated care provider on a unit or the nurse in charge (unless with a mentor) for the period of the orientation.
- Meet with their mentor (within the orientation period) to discuss their standards of practice, code of ethics and the intent and focus of their learning plan.
- Notify NSCN of registration exam results if taken through another regulatory body.
- Notify employer of exam results (pass or fail).
- Maintain written records establishing compliance with the conditions and restrictions to provide to NSCN upon request.

29. How long do the mentorship and transition to practice conditions remain in place?

The conditions are in place until they are met. The nurse is accountable to ensure their employer notifies NSCN (registration@nscn.ca) when the conditions have been satisfied.

SECTION 3B: MENTORSHIP AND TRANSITION TO PRACTICE CONDITIONS EXPLAINED

- A nurse must confirm the employer's agreement to these conditions and restrictions.

This can be captured quite simply in an email between the employer and nurse or embedded into the transition plan or part of the employment offer. This is a public safeguard ensuring the employer understands that the nurse needs specific support as they transition into practice in the employment setting.

- A nurse must engage in a comprehensive orientation to a single employer's practice setting.

A well designed and evidence informed orientation is critical for the successful transition of any nurse in any practice area. It is particularly important for the successful integration of newly licensed nurses.

See page 3 and 4 for more information about a comprehensive orientation.

Limiting the orientation to a **single employer's practice setting** is intended to maximize the success of the transition back to practice, given the nurses time away from nursing practice.

- A nurse must work with a 1:1 mentor (a nurse(s) identified by the organization and able to provide the necessary support and mentorship) for a period of at least 320 hours.

This condition is a public safeguard to ensure that a nurse with the necessary competence and professional capacity has been designated specifically to provide the conditional licence holder with assistance and guidance as they transition back to practice.

The minimum amount of mentorship is 320 hours, however the nurse and employer may negotiate more as required.

The conditional licence holder remains responsible and accountable for their own nursing practice at all times. This includes knowing when, and how to access mentorship and guidance. The designated nurse is not required to co-sign medications, treatments, or documentation of the conditional licence holder, unless it is otherwise required by policy (i.e., double signatures on a drug count).

30. What is the difference between a mentor and a preceptor?

A mentor is a nurse who guides, counsels and/or teaches nurse learners (mentees) in their adjustment to new environments, roles and/or responsibilities. A preceptor is a nurse who teaches, counsels, and serves as a role model and supports the growth and development of a nurse in a particular discipline for a limited time, with the specific purpose of socializing the novice nurse in a new role usually during orientation to a unit. Preceptors fill the same role as mentors but for a more limited time frame.

31. Can a nurse with mentorship and transition to practice conditions come off orientation before they complete the 320 hours of mentorship?

The employer, in partnership with the conditional licence holder and the mentor, should design an orientation that meets the needs of the nurse and the clients on the unit. This may look different for each orientation. For example, at the beginning of the mentorship period the conditional licence holder and the mentor may be assigned the same patients and work side by side. As the conditional licence holder develops their competencies, accountability of assignment changes. For instance, the conditional license holder starts by being accountable completely for 1/3 of the assignment, progresses to 2/3 of the assignment until eventually they have the total assignment on their own with the mentor available on the unit should they need support. The 320 hours may look different for each conditional licence holder and should be individualized to that nurse's needs and competencies. They must be assigned a mentor on the unit until they obtain a full practicing RN licence without conditions.

- A nurse must conduct a self-assessment of their individual competence and develop and implement a learning plan to address any gaps.

See the previous section, page 5, for tools for nurses and employers.

- A nurse must only work for one employer and may not work for an agency or in a "float pool" unless assigned to the same workplace or unit for a minimum of 2 months.

Working in one practice setting allows the nurse returning to practice to have consistency in their client population they are caring for and makes the transition back to practice smoother.

- A nurse must not be the only regulated care provider on a unit or the nurse in charge (unless with a mentor) for the period of the orientation.

Nurses who have been away from practice require the opportunity to learn and adjust to what has changed in the health care system since they last practised as a nurse. These nurses require the support of other licensed care providers as they transition in their new role in your organization.

While these nurses have nursing experience to draw from, they need support in the practice setting before safely assuming the role of the nurse in charge.

- A nurse must meet with their nurse mentor (within the orientation period) to discuss their respective standards of practice, code of ethics and the intent and focus of their learning plan.

The mentor should support the nurse in meeting their standards of practice and code of ethics, as well as being able to direct them to the appropriate resources, which may include their manager, clinical nurse educator or NSCN. The standards of practice, code of ethics and other practice support tools can be found [here](#). If mentors have questions about this requirement, they can reach out to a NSCN Practice Consultant for support at practice@nscn.ca. It is up to the mentor and nurse when they meet, however the meeting should be formally included in the transition to practice plan, as it is a term of the conditional licence.

See the previous section for explanation on the following conditions:

- Access to an onsite mentor
- Not being the only regulated health care provider on a unit
- Notifying NSCN of exam results

SECTION 4: CONDITIONAL LICENSURE: PENDING DOCUMENTS

32. What is a conditional licence “pending documents”?

Occasionally you may see a “documents pending” condition. Almost always, this means we need an updated document from the applicant. This condition enables the nurse to enter practice while the final document is being sent to us. There are no other conditions or restrictions on their licence, and they can work to their full scope of practice while we await the application document.

33. How long is a conditional licence for pending documents valid?

Generally, conditional licences issued for pending application documents expire at the end of the licensure year.

34. Can a conditional licence issued for pending documents be re-issued?

Generally, no. However, exceptions may be made if the conditional licence is issued late in the licensure year.

SECTION 5: OTHER QUESTIONS

35. Some international nurses coming through the expedited or traditional registration and licensing process do not qualify for a practicing or conditional licence but have been made eligible to write the respective registration exam. Why is this?

Any nurse who has not practiced as a nurse in the last 10 years is ineligible for licensure. If the ineligible nurse passed the required registration exam more than 10 years ago, they are required to complete a nursing re-entry program before they can be licensed.

Nurses who have been out of practice in the last 10 years and have not passed the required exam may be eligible to write the exam and may qualify for a licence (with or without conditions) when they pass the exam. The difference in approach is related to the timing of passing the exam. Passing the required registration exam in itself establishes practice currency. (Currency related to passing the exam expires after three years.) Nurses with expired practice currency related to passing the exam and prolonged time away from practice will need more support than nurses who have established currency by passing the exam. This is the rationale for requiring the former to complete a re-entry program and the latter to enter practice with mentorship and transition to practice conditions.