



*The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) 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 its registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, RNs and NPs unless otherwise stated.*

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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 an 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?

Generally, an international LPN or RN will receive a conditional licence if they have met all the registration requirements and still have to pass the required registration exam.

### 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.

### 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?

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. Are there practice restrictions associated with these conditions?

The nurse is not restricted from practicing to the optimized 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) or new to nursing practice in Canada (international nurse).

## SECTION 2: NEWLY LICENSED NURSE CONDITIONS

### 7. 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.

Only LPNs, RNs and NPs are eligible for a newly licensed conditional licensure. RPNs are not eligible.

### 8. Can a nursing student apply for a conditional licence before graduation?

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.

### 9. Does a nurse need a conditional licence before they can start employer orientation?

Yes, and this includes classroom orientation.

### 10. How does a nurse 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.

### 11. What are the signature credentials I can use while holding this conditional licence?

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

### 12. How long is the newly licensed conditional licence valid?

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

### 13. Can a newly licensed conditional licence be re-issued once it expires?

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

### 14. 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.

### 15. How many times can a newly licensed conditional licence be re-issued?

A conditional licence can be re-issued for a maximum of 12 months from the date a nurse was 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 sent the letter approving them to write the registration exam.

### 16. 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.

### 17. What does a conditional licence holder 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**.

18. A nurse has written the registration exam (and failed) with another regulatory body. Will this affect how many or how long they can have a conditional licence with NSCN?

Applicants may contact [registration@nscn.ca](mailto:registration@nscn.ca) to learn how this may impact their application.

19. What happens to a nurses conditional licence when they pass 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 will be provided instructions on how to obtain and pay for a practicing licence.

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

20. A nurse has recently written and passed the registration exam with another regulatory body. Does the nurse have to re-write the exam for NSCN?

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

21. What are the Newly Licensed Nurse Conditions on a LPN or RN conditional licence?

**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), the nurse must notify their employer of the change in the conditions that now require them 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.
- The nurse must notify NSCN of their 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.

22. What are the Newly Licensed Nurse Conditions on a NP conditional licence?

The only condition on a NP conditional licence is that they are required to pass the licensing exam prior to obtaining a practising licence.

## SECTION 2B: NEWLY LICENSED LPN OR RN 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 [Transition to Practice: Practice Guideline](#) 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 these nurses includes additional support that is 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.

Employers should consider the following components as they 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 their needs 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 with new nurse transitioning to practice in Nova Scotia. They can be accessed [here](#).

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

This requirement is intended to ensure the LPN or RN 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 an LPN or RN with newly licensed conditions come off orientation before they obtain their practising licence?

Nurses will progress in a new workplace differently, and some nurses may require longer orientation periods than others. Some nurses may demonstrate the competencies that are required 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 practicing licence without conditions.

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

LPNs or RNs 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 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 they are 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 licence 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 for the conditional licence holder, unless it is otherwise required by policy (i.e., double signatures on a drug count).

- A newly licensed LPN or RN 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.

The other licensed care providers do not need to be of the same designation as the conditional licence holder.

- A newly licensed LPN or RN 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](mailto:registration@nscn.ca) to notify us of exam results.

- A newly licensed LPN or RN 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

On May 1, 2026, the currency of practice policy changed. The guidance in section 3 only applies to LPNs and RNs issued a Mentorship and Transition to Practice Conditional Licence prior to May 1, 2026. If you have any questions, please contact [registration@nscn.ca](mailto:registration@nscn.ca).

### 25. What are the signature credentials for an LPN or RN holding this conditional licence?

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

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

Only LPNs and RNs are eligible for a conditional license with mentorship and transition to practice conditions. NPs are not eligible. please contact [registration@nscn.ca](mailto:registration@nscn.ca) if you have questions about re-establishing currency.

### 26. What are the mentorship and transition to practice conditions?

#### The nurse must:

- Disclose these conditions and restrictions to prospective employers and notify NSCN of the 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.
- The conditional licence will become invalid if they fail to comply with any of the conditions or restrictions.

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

The conditions are in place until they are met. The LPN or RN is accountable to ensure their employer notifies NSCN ([registration@nscn.ca](mailto:registration@nscn.ca)) when the conditions have been satisfied.

## SECTION 3B: MENTORSHIP AND TRANSITION TO PRACTICE CONDITIONS EXPLAINED

- Disclose these conditions and restrictions to prospective employers and notify NSCN of the employer's agreement to these conditions and restrictions.

This can be captured quite simply by sending an email to [registration@nscn.ca](mailto:registration@nscn.ca) confirming that they met with their employer about their conditions and they agreed to support the nurse during the transition back into nursing practice. This is a public safeguard ensuring the employer understands the nurse needs specific support as they transition into practice in the employment setting.

- 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 their time away from nursing practice.

- 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, unless it is otherwise required by policy (i.e., double signatures on a drug count).

### 28. 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.

### 29. 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 needs of 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 licence 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 practicing licence without conditions.

- 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.

- 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 the client population they are caring for and makes the transition back to practice smoother.

- 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 for awhile, and having this condition in place, offers 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 the 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.

- Must meet with my nurse mentor (within the orientation period) to discuss my respective standards of practice, code of ethics and the intent and focus of my 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](mailto:practice@nscn.ca). It is up to the nurse and their mentor 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

### 30. What is a conditional licence “pending documents”?

Occasionally there will be a “documents pending” condition. Almost always, this means we need an updated document from the nurse. 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 optimized scope of practice while we await the application document.

### 31. 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.

### 32. 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.