

Bachelor of Nursing courses leading to division 1 registration

Discussion paper

July 2008

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Introduction

The Nurses Board of Victoria (NBV) is a self-funded statutory authority which operates under the *Health Professions Registration Act* (HPRA) 2005. The main purpose of HPRA is set out in section 1(a) "To protect the public by providing for the registration of health practitioners and a common system of investigations into the professional conduct, professional performance and ability to practise of registered health practitioners". The NBV is guided by a set of values and principles that ensure it can carry out its mission to serve and protect the public. Fundamental to its business is the commitment to self-regulation of the nursing profession, and a continued regard for professional standards.

The NBV as a public authority is limited by the principles of administrative law and cannot consider factors or make decisions outside the jurisdiction of the law. The Board has the function under HPRA of approving courses of study that provide qualifications for registration (s118 (1)(b) with the power to perform its function (s118(4))qualified by the provisions of subsections 5(2), (3) and (4) which include reference to the Minister's general or specific directions, where there may be substantive and adverse impact on the recruitment or supply of nurses. The NBV Standards for Course Accreditation (2007) reflect this requirement where evidence is requested from education providers of consultation with stakeholders and consumers including students, teaching/clinical staff, the wider profession and health care providers to inform when developing curriculum content.

The issues addressed in this discussion paper are limited to those factors that the NBV can legally take into account which concern the safety of the public, promotion of the profession and maintenance of public confidence in the profession.

The NBV monitors trends affecting the profession and its delivery of health care, including recent wide discussion and research about preparing nurses for the future, which has addressed initiatives critical for nursing in informing the future education and preparation of nurses. The NBV as the nursing regulatory authority in Victoria, which approves courses leading to registration, has been informing itself about education providers from higher education institutions seeking to provide Bachelor of Nursing courses leading to division 1 registration. The issue of provision of these courses has been vigorously debated in recent months including at a forum conducted by the NBV in November 2007.

The November 2007 forum included speakers from the Department of Human Services, the Royal College of Nursing Australia, the Council of Deans, Holmesglen TAFE/Higher Education and a representative of rural Directors of Nursing. Key issues raised by the speakers included the definition of a profession, the purpose of nursing education, quality of an education institution and its courses, support for the current delivery model of nursing education, research opportunities in university based education, basing nursing education in a similar setting as other health professionals, public perception of the skill level of nurses and the increasing complexity of care, the need for nursing research and critical thinking, the professions image and reputation, university funding and the increasing pressure on clinical placements, the VET sector also being a higher education provider offering degree courses with quality audit requirements, rigour in design of a Bachelor of Nursing course, evidence of high quality graduates from higher education providers, including Avondale College in NSW which is currently approved to conduct a Bachelor of Nursing course, support from industry for higher education degrees in nursing and the implications in excluding a provider who meets all requirements for delivering a Bachelor of Nursing degree.

In addition to these key issues it should be noted that Nurse Regulatory Authorities in Australia in accordance with the *Mutual Recognition Act* and/or the *Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement* recognise the equivalent occupation of nurses who have completed a Bachelor of Nursing course which may have been undertaken in an education facility other than a university. For example in New Zealand many of the Bachelor of Nursing courses are delivered in institutes of technology and polytechnics.

Introduction (cont.)

In regulating all fields of nursing the NBV ensures that those using the health care system in Victoria can be confident that anyone bearing the title of registered nurse is educated and competent. The responsibilities of the NBV do not include funding of education providers offering nursing courses or of courses leading to registration and/or endorsement. The NBV is also not responsible for deciding entry places to education providers offering these courses.

Approval of courses

The Nurses Board of Victoria (NBV), under the *Health Professions Registration Act (HPRA)* 2005 in accordance with sections 5 and 118, approves courses leading to registration, endorsement and recognition of additional qualifications. The NBV has developed Standards for Course Accreditation which were approved by the Minister for Health in December 2007. The Standards present education providers with a framework for developing curricula that ensure the integration of theory and practice to enable students to meet the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) Competency Standards. Education providers wishing to conduct approved nurse education courses must address core and appropriate specific standards.

The core standards request evidence of the accreditation, scope and scale of operations of the education institution as well as evidence of the need for the course and consultation with stakeholders and consumers of the course. Further evidence is sought of sufficient and appropriate human and physical resources to deliver the course which includes specific clinical setting requirements. There are also requirements for curriculum design which must demonstrate professional graduate outcomes based on the appropriate ANMC Competency Standards (e.g. division 1 or division 2 registered nurse), evidenced by the content of the curriculum and a program of correlated theory and practice. The core standards apply to all courses, with separate specific requirements where appropriate. The curriculum may be designed for example to certificate level within a national training curriculum or as a degree course designed by an education provider.

Qualifications

The Australian Qualifications Framework is a unified system of national qualifications in post compulsory education and training which defines Australian qualifications to which Australian approval processes apply. The Australian qualifications to which higher education approval processes apply include Bachelor and Masters degrees (leading to registration as a division 1 nurse). Separate approval process are required for registration as a provider of Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses which include the Certificate IV in Nursing (leading to registration as a division 2 nurse).

Evidence of Accreditation

The NBV requires evidence to be presented that confirms accreditation status of the education institution and of the course(s) it provides. The evidence required for courses submitted for approval from the VET sector will have some differences to those from higher education providers.

VET providers. Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are providers and assessors of nationally recognised training providing people with specific occupational or work related knowledge and skills. In order to become registered, training providers must meet the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) 2007 *Standards for Accredited Courses*. Accreditation means the formal recognition of the course by a course accrediting body in accordance with the AQTF 2007 *Standards for State and Territory Course Accrediting Bodies* and the AQTF 2007 *Standards for Accredited Courses*.

Evidence of Accreditation (cont.)

Accreditation of the course is confirmation by the course accrediting body that the course meets industry, enterprise or community needs, provides appropriate competency outcomes and a satisfactory basis for assessment, meets national quality assurance requirements and is aligned to the appropriate level of the Australian Qualifications Framework where it leads to a qualification such as the Certificate IV in Nursing . Accreditation means the course is nationally recognised and that an RTO can issue a nationally recognised qualification. Prior to assessment of a curriculum against the NBV Standards for Course Accreditation the NBV would expect evidence in a curriculum submission that an RTO offering a Certificate IV in Nursing course, which led to registration as a division 2 nurse, has met the AQTF standards and is offering an AQF qualification.

Higher Education Providers

The higher education sector in Australia is made up of universities and other higher education institutions or 'higher education providers'. Higher education providers may be universities, self accrediting providers or non self accrediting providers. In 2007 in Australia there were 39 universities, one Australian branch of an overseas university, four other self accrediting higher education institutions and more than 150 non self accrediting providers. Higher education in Australia is delivered by institutions that meet nationally agreed criteria set out in the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* (National Protocols) and are authorised by an Australian government to offer higher education qualifications. Government Accreditation Authorities are responsible for higher education approvals, with each jurisdiction within Australia enacting legislation to give effect to the National Protocols. Responsibility for quality assurance of higher education in Australia is shared among the Australian and State/Territory Governments and the institutions themselves which include a system of institution registration, course accreditation, a national qualifications framework and external quality audits. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is the national quality audit body responsible for auditing all universities, other self accrediting higher education institutions, some non self accrediting higher education institutions and Government Accreditation Authorities. Prior to assessment of a curriculum against the NBV Standards for Course Accreditation the NBV would expect evidence in a curriculum submission that an education provider offering a qualification, which led to registration as a division 1 nurse, would be an accredited higher education institution authorised to offer higher education qualifications.

The Revised National Protocols 2007 set out five Protocols that outline criteria and processes for higher education approval. Protocols A and B are discussed here - for further references to protocols C - E please refer to the accompanying references list. Protocol A relates to all Australian higher education delivery and includes nationally agreed criteria including for example that it delivers teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry and that its academic staff are active in scholarship that informs their teaching. Protocol B relates to registration of non self accrediting higher education institutions and the accreditation of their higher education courses and includes additional criteria such as "...delivery arrangements... that are appropriate to higher education" (Protocol 4B1) and "is comparable in requirements and learning outcomes to a course at the same level in a similar field at Australian Universities" (Protocol 5B2) .

Conclusion

Courses submitted to the NBV leading to registration as a division 1 or 2 nurse must meet NBV Standards for Course Accreditation. Within these Standards is the requirement to present evidence of accreditation, scope and scale of operations of the education institution and curriculum content and resources. The NBV in making decisions about suitable providers of courses leading to registration must take into account the quality of the provider. The way that this occurs is by the education provider providing evidence to the NBV of its status in meeting nationally agreed criteria to operate as an education provider and also to teach courses listed in the Australian Qualifications Framework. Decisions to approve education institutions and their courses are made objectively based on agreed NBV standards.

Conclusion (cont.)

Further to the NBV seeking consultation and exploring all views which affect both the interests and safety of the public as well as the growth of the nursing profession, it invites submissions from the nursing and midwifery community, education providers, the health care industry and interested parties that respond to the questions posed in the document above.

Please tell us, providing well supported reasons:

1. If the type of educational institution (i.e. university or other higher education providers) providing a course leading to registration as a division 1 nurse results in any differences in the level of education and competence that can be expected of a registered nurse graduating from that institution.
2. If the type of educational institution (i.e. university or other higher education providers) providing a course leading to registration as a division 1 nurse results in any differences in the continuing public confidence in the nursing profession.
3. If the core standards as stated in the NBV Standards for Course Accreditation achieve the aim of ensuring the integration of theory and practice to enable students to meet the ANMC National Competency Standards for the Registered Nurse - 4th Edition, January 2006. This document is available at www.anmc.org.au/publications/index.php.

Submissions may be made to:

**Petrina Halloran
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Nurses Board of Victoria
GPO Box 4932
MELBOURNE VIC 3001**

Closing date for submissions: 11 August 2008

References

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Training, Higher Education Summary, www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education

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Nurses Board of Victoria, Annual Report 2006/2007.

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Nurse Policy Branch (2006) Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Prepare Nurses for the Future Report - Phase 1 December 2005.

Prepare Nurses for the Future - Final Reports, www.health.vic.gov.au/nursing/publications

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Discussion Paper July 2008
Bachelor of Nursing courses in Higher Education Institutions

Feedback Questions

Please tell us, providing well supported reasons:

1. If the type of educational institution (i.e. university or other higher education providers) providing a course leading to registration as a division 1 nurse results in any differences in the level of education and competence that can be expected of a registered nurse graduating from that institution.

2. If the type of educational institution (i.e. university or other higher education providers) providing a course leading to registration as a division 1 nurse results in any differences in the continuing public confidence in the nursing profession.

3. If the core standards as stated in the NBV Standards for Course Accreditation achieve the aim of ensuring the integration of theory and practice to enable students to meet the ANMC National Competency Standards for the Registered Nurse - 4th Edition, January 2006. This document is available at www.anmc.org.au/publications/index.php.
