

Position Statement

Undergraduate Nursing Education in Australia

This position statement has been prepared by the Coalition of National Nursing Organisations (CoNNO), a coalition of more than 50 national nursing organisations that represent the nursing profession and its many areas of specialist practice.

The CoNNO supports a rigorous scholarly educational preparation for registered nurses based on evidence and research to meet the complexity of care demands of Australia's health and aged care sectors. The current environment of health care reforms calls for nurses who are educationally prepared to a level of competence which not only meets the regulatory requirements for protection of the public (ANMC, 2008), but more critically, can accommodate the challenges of rapid advances in knowledge and technology for care delivery.

The university-based* bachelor degree program for registered nurses achieves this level of professional development, and inter-professional parity and equity of education standard.

It is the position of the Coalition of National Nursing Organisations that:

The minimum level qualification for entry to practice for registered nurses be a university-based bachelor degree program, with a minimum length equivalent to six fulltime semesters (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002).

University schools of nursing have an ethical commitment to students, and a professional commitment to the community, to maintain entry standards which will lead to protection of the credibility of the education process as well as standards of the discipline of nursing (AVCC, 2005).

As rationale for the CoNNO position, four areas have been identified as essential to retaining university-based undergraduate nursing education programs in Australia, namely: academic enquiry, professional competencies, inter-professional education, and academic scholarship.

Academic enquiry

- Universities offer undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing courses which prepare registered nurses for the high level critical thinking, problem solving, evidence based and reflective practice that leads to improved health outcomes for our community (RCNA, 2007)
- Nursing is a complex and demanding profession that requires an educational grounding in ethical, legal and evidence based concepts and practice
- Nursing practice should be evidence based as this contributes to the safety, quality and cost effectiveness of nursing care for individuals, groups and communities using health and/or aged care services
- Universities provide an environment of academic enquiry based on a tradition for encouraging research and investigation of ideas and practices (CDNM, 2007)

* "University" refers here to a self-accrediting institution which meets the requirements of protocols A and D of the National Protocols for Higher Education Processes (2006), and is established by an Australian legislative instrument, as defined in Part 3 of the National Protocols (ANMC, 2008).

Representing the national interests of nurses and midwives in all sectors of the health profession

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Professional competencies

- The national competency standards developed by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council indicate the need for registered nurses to be able to think critically about client care, to have the skills to contribute to the evidence-based practice framework for nursing through research, and to apply research to their practice (ANMC, 2008)
- Undergraduate students need to meet a range of professional standards required for registration across the four domains of: professional practice; critical thinking and analysis; provision and coordination of care; and collaborative and therapeutic practice (ANMC, 2008)
- Staffing levels and skills mix in clinical placement facilities must be adequate for nurse clinicians to assist students to optimise their learning experience. Formal mechanisms to support dialogue, interaction and the development of collaborative arrangements between the health and education sectors, including research, should continue to be developed and strengthened (ANF, 2007).

Inter-professional education

- The university environment provides for comparability of education for nurses with other health professionals whom they must work alongside (RCNA, 2007)
- The delivery of nursing education in the university sector allows the opportunity for important collaborations to occur across the health professions
- Inter-disciplinary learning makes an important contribution to professional learning and subsequent inter-professional practice by health professionals

Academic Scholarship

- In line with international approaches, Australian universities have strong links between teaching and research (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008)
- Universities recruit qualified staff at the highest professional levels who must meet extensive educational requirements to ensure that their scholarship and pedagogical enquiry continues to inform the teaching and learning offered (NLN, 2003; CDNM, 2007)
- Research activities of nurse academics inform the body of knowledge on which nursing practice is based to give assurance to the public of safe, competent care.

Education

Each student is provided with a variety of well-placed workplace experiences reflecting the major health priorities and broad landscape of nursing practice. Opportunities are provided for intra and inter professional learning and the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours for collaborative practice (ANMC 2012).

Clearly articulated models of supervision that include relevant mentoring/ preceptorship support, facilitation and assessment must be in place so students can achieve required learning outcomes and current National Competency Standards for the Registered Nurse (ANMC 2012; ANMC 2010). Also those programs are regularly evaluated to ensure they are supporting students while on work placement.

Academics, nurse clinicians and other health professionals engaged in supervising and supporting students during workplace experiences are provided with the resources to prepare for this role and seek to incorporate contemporary and evidence-based Australian and international perspectives on nursing practice (ANMC 2010).

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This position statement reflects the views of the Coalition of National Nursing Organisations, but not necessarily the full or particular views of all of its member bodies.

Endorsed May 2009

Reviewed and re-endorsed August 2013

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