



australian nursing federation

National Professional Accreditation Scheme

The ANF welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed national professional accreditation scheme model, governance and transition arrangements. The ANF's comments relate specifically to the nursing profession.

Principles

- The model for national accreditation of courses for health professionals needs to be able to ensure that professional standards are met and exiting graduates are able to provide safe practice for themselves and the community.
- A close link needs to be established between the accreditation of education courses for health professionals and the national registration and regulation of health professionals.
- The accreditation of education courses for health professionals must include both theoretical and clinical components.
- Ongoing evaluation of the scheme must be built into the governance arrangements together with a mechanism to correct anomalies or improve outcomes in a cooperative environment.

The model

It is unclear from the documentation provided whether a National Accreditation Board is to be established with responsibility to set national standards and clear and transparent processes for how education courses for health professionals are to be accredited; or whether this Board will be accrediting other bodies to undertake profession specific or cross professional accreditation; or whether this Board will have responsibility for the actual accreditation of courses.

One model would be for the National Accreditation Board to have a policy and oversighting function, with accreditation taking place, as it does now in nursing, by the regulatory authorities. Another model might be for the National Accreditation Board to accredit particular bodies to undertake the accreditation process (eg. regulatory bodies, universities etc). If it is proposed that the National Accreditation Board is also responsible for the accreditation of courses then profession specific panels would be an essential feature of such a model.

It is also important that the accreditation of both the theoretical and the clinical components of education courses for health professionals are accommodated within the model. While it is essential that these components have active profession specific input, there may be merit in cross professional accreditation of facilities and services which provide clinical placements for health professionals undertaking educational courses.

1. How will the scheme be governed?

The governance of the scheme will depend on the model chosen, however it should be able to demonstrate transparency, flexibility and accountability to the community and to the professional groups. The ANF supports consumer involvement in governance bodies. These principles must be clearly outlined in the proposed intergovernmental agreement between the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

2. How will expert professional input be assured?

Again, this will depend on the model chosen. What is essential is that the actual accreditation of education courses for health professions is profession specific within national standards and guidelines that may be cross professional. Each profession may be given responsibility for the accreditation of courses for their profession within national standards and guidelines or alternatively professional panels of a National Accreditation Board take responsibility for this function.

3. What are the main issues around transition?

- What will be the relationship between the national accreditation board and the national registration board? As there is such a close link between course accreditation and registration, this link needs to be a close and effective one. How is this to be assured?
- It needs to be determined what is being accredited. Is the national accreditation scheme limited to education which takes place in the higher education sector? Are the courses to be accredited only those that lead to registration? If there are education requirements attached to re-registration how will they be dealt with? What of those professions, such as nursing, who have registered members educated in the vocational education sector where considerable work has gone on to ensure articulation arrangements between courses in the higher education sector and courses in the vocational education sector?
- If national accreditation is limited to education courses leading to registration, how are specialist education courses not linked to registration to be accredited?
- What impact will national course accreditation arrangements have on cost? What will be that cost and who will meet it?
- How are education courses undertaken by overseas health professions to be evaluated? Is this a responsibility of the national accreditation board or the national registration board?
- Will it be possible for a national cross professional accreditation scheme to be timely in its responses to requests for course accreditation?
- Communicating the new arrangements to health professionals when they are determined and ensuring clarity around the transition to and implementation of the new arrangements, will be essential, but will be a challenge. Existing professional bodies - regulation, education, professional and unions - need to be involved in this process.

Conclusion

The ANF appreciates the opportunity to be involved in the process of establishing a national accreditation scheme. Like national registration, it is a complex process and time should be taken to work toward the best possible outcome, rather than hasty decisions being made to meet an arbitrary time frame determined without due consideration of the issues involved in making national registration a reality. The ANF looks forward to further consultation and an opportunity to provide further input into the development of the final model.