

NENAC response to the independent review of nursing education September 2020

Introduction

The National Enrolled Nursing Advisory Council (NENAC) is the peak body within Australia representing the TAFE sector, in all state and territories, that offer enrolled nursing programs.

NENAC has been formed, in part, to contribute to the examination of sector concerns, to collaboratively bring our learned insights and strategic advice to provide solutions for both regulatory and core nursing issues.

NENAC welcomes *Educating the Nurse of the Future*, the Report of the Independent Review of Nursing Education authored by Emeritus Professor Steven Schwartz AM (the Report). As NENAC aims to be the voice of vocational education and training (VET) for enrolled nurses (EN), NENAC has provided the following comments on matters relating to enrolled nursing education in the Report for consideration in implementation of recommendations.

General feedback on the Report

Some statements in the report do not appear to be substantiated with research or evidence as outlined below.

Laissez-faire approach to clinical placements and inadequate supervision

In addition to the regulatory obligations outlined above, all enrolled nursing program providers must demonstrate to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC) how they meet Criterion 8.5 of the Enrolled Nurse Accreditation Standards 2017, which states:

'Clearly articulated models of supervision, support, facilitation and assessment are in place for all workplace settings so students can achieve the required learning outcomes and the NMBA Enrolled nurse standards for practice.'

In addition to criterion 8.5 above, many states and territories use a central system for requesting health care placements. Supervision in many of these venues is dictated by the facility – with many using their own educators to facilitate student placements. For those states that do not have centralised systems the supervisor/facilitator relationship is negotiated as part of the student placement agreement.

NENAC is committed to quality education and training outcomes through better practice and continuous improvement. As a group of respected practitioners, we remain aware that clinical placements will continue to pose significant challenges for both industry and the VET sector, as it does for undergraduate nursing placements.

NENAC response to the independent review of nursing education September 2020

ANMAC proposal to transfer the education of enrolled nurses from the VET sector to higher education, where enrolled nursing would become an associate degree

NENAC has sought further clarification from ANMAC on the background of this statement as this does not appear to be in line with the current work of ANMAC or the relationship with the VET sector. The Report also notes that transferring the Diploma of Nursing to higher education may have adverse effects including access and diversity issues for the nursing workforce. NENAC would welcome a dialogue with the National Nursing and Midwifery Education Advisory Network (NNMEAN) and ANMAC to further unpack the potential consequences of this proposal.

VET providers have less rigorous admission requirements than HEPs

VET providers have rigorous admission requirements into the Diploma of Nursing, which are also required for funding and accreditation. These are related to English language and numeracy requirements. Applicants are also informed of the requirements to be met as a student during their studies and registered with AHPRA.

Feedback on specific recommendations in the Report

Recommendation 10: ...ANMAC/NMBA should also increase the minimum number of placement hours required for EN diplomas and graduate entry master's degree programs proportionately.

NENAC would welcome a discussion on the evidence collected that suggests graduates of a Diploma of Nursing program are not prepared clinically and have not met the enrolled nurse standards of practice.

NENAC would further welcome an opportunity to work closely with ANMAC on the issue of competency including consideration of an outcomes-based assessment approach in enrolled nursing, rather than a time served approach.

Recommendation 12: As RNs take on increasing responsibility for complex care, it is likely that three years of higher education will be insufficient to prepare the nurse for the future. Working with NMBA, ANMAC, the Commonwealth education department, and other stakeholders. HEPs should explore ways to extend nursing education, including the option of nesting an associate degree in a four-year bachelor's degree.

NENAC urges consideration of the repercussions of this recommendation for the VET sector. Currently there is no job outcome for a nurse with an associate degree. This also makes an assumption that all students undertaking an enrolled nursing program want to transition into a Bachelor of Nursing program which is not always the case.

NENAC response to the independent review of nursing education September 2020

This recommendation may also lead to increased costs to students to obtain their qualification, and has implications for the health care workforce.

NENAC would welcome a dialogue with both ANMAC and NMBA to further consider the implications of this recommendation.

Recommendation 15: HEPs should develop robust articulation arrangements from VET credentials to degrees. Exit points should allow students to work while continuing their studies. HEPs should also consider creating EN associate degrees to facilitate a smooth transition between EN and RN qualifications.

Our understanding is that all Higher Education Providers (HEPs) have to submit articulation arrangements for transitioning Diploma of Nursing graduates when accrediting their degree programs. As stated above, the creation of an enrolled nursing associate degree may have unintended repercussions for the VET sector, the enrolled nursing workforce as well as the staff skill mix.

NENAC would welcome the opportunity for HEPs and the VET sector to work together to ensure that there is a seamless transition for those enrolled nursing graduates who would like to undertake a Bachelor of Nursing.

Recommendation 18: Mental health is a national priority area; it should also be a priority area for educational institutions preparing nurses for practice. ANMAC has added "content related to mental health" to its proposed RN accreditation standards. The EN and NP accreditation standards should be amended to contain similar requirement. To ensure that all nurses are adequately prepared, the accreditation standards should be specific about the core areas of mental health that must be covered and the required learning outcomes.

This is a requirement in the enrolled nurse accreditation standards, which also require that teaching staff are qualified in the relevant discipline for their level of teaching. The nationally accredited Diploma of Nursing course includes mental health as a core unit.

Recommendation 19: ANMAC's accreditation standards require inter-professional learning to be "embedded in the curriculum". The EN accreditation standards should contain the same requirement...

This is a requirement in the enrolled nurse accreditation standards (Criterion 2.4, 3.5, 8.5) and inter-professional knowledge and skills is included in units of competency within the qualification. However, this could be further strengthened by having set learning outcomes for students to achieve when on placement.

**NENAC response to the independent
review of nursing education
September 2020**

Recommendation 20: ANMACs RN accreditation standards for health informatics and digital health technologies should specify learning outcomes and the level of expertise required. The EN accreditation standards should contain similar specifications.

This is a requirement in the enrolled nurse accreditation standards (Criterion 4.4).

Recommendation 23: The Commonwealth Department of Health should sponsor research aimed at determining the ideal mix of online and face-to-face teaching as well as how best to integrate simulation and clinical placements.

Research has been conducted on this internationally and NENAC would support this recommendation to explore within the Australian context.

Contact NENAC

NENAC welcomes further dialogue with all relevant stakeholders on the implementation of the recommendations in the Report. If you wish to discuss NENAC's response to the Report, please contact:

Gabrielle Koutoukidis

Chair NENAC

Email: Gabrielle.Koutoukidis@holmesglen.edu.au