



Nurses and Midwives Board of New South Wales

GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONS WISHING TO DEVELOP COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS LEADING TO ELIGIBILITY FOR REGISTRATION AS A NURSE AND ENROLMENT AS A NURSE

Introduction

This document outlines the requirements for organisations seeking Nurses and Midwives Board approval to provide competence assessment programs to enable individual applicants referred by the Board to satisfy the requirements for registration and / or enrolment. These individual applicants will usually be persons who have been educated in other countries, as nurses or midwives. The Board may refer other applicants for competence assessment.

Background

A graduate of a recognised course (which has been scrutinised and approved by the Board) may be registered or enrolled without any requirement for further assessment or further education. Where a person has completed a course in another country and the course is considered to be at the standard of recognised Australian courses, the person may similarly be registered or enrolled without any requirement for further assessment or further education.

Where a person has completed a course, either in Australia or in another country, which is not at the standard of recognised courses, the Nurses and Midwives Board may take other factors into consideration and may form the view that the entirety of the person's qualifications and experience are adequate for registration or enrolment.

In accordance with the *Nurses and Midwives Act 1991* where an individual's qualifications are not considered adequate for registration or enrolment the Board may require the applicant to:

- pass one or more specified examinations; or
- complete specified further training.

For reference the legislative requirements are outlined in sections 18 (registered nurses), 19 (registered midwives) and 27 (enrolled nurses) of the Act.

Competence assessment programs are considered by the Board to constitute examinations in accord with the legislation.

Alternative Pathway to Registration or Enrolment

Persons with prior education in nursing may apply for entry to courses which have been recognised by the Nurses and Midwives Board and lead to registration or enrolment. Recognition of prior learning is determined by education institutions in accord with the organisations' rules and in accord with the information in the curriculum document approved by the Nurses and Midwives Board. Some recognised courses have special entry provisions for applicants who have completed professional education in another country. Persons who are not eligible for a referral to undertake an evaluation of competence or who are unable to gain entry to an approved competence assessment program, may achieve registration or enrolment by completing recognised courses.

Competence Assessment Programs

At a minimum, the program must assess the theoretical knowledge base for safe practice and must include a comprehensive assessment of each applicant's competence in clinical practice within an appropriate Australian health care setting.

The program must be delivered in the English language. The clinical component of the program and competence assessment must be completed within the Australian context and where approved the theoretical component of the program, including clinical laboratory practice, may be delivered outside of Australia. The evaluation of competence must be based on the applicable national competency standards (i.e. registered nurse, registered midwife or enrolled nurse) endorsed by the Nurses and Midwives Board.

Applicants will be referred by the Nurses and Midwives Board to undertake competence assessment programs to demonstrate safe practice. It is appropriate that applicants be provided with preparatory orientation prior to being assessed.

Appropriate methods of assessment to permit adequate evaluation of the applicant's knowledge and clinical competence are to be incorporated in the program proposal.

The program development process must include a Steering Committee comprising members with a range of nursing/midwifery expertise who have reviewed the program proposal prior to its submission to the Board.

Program providers may wish to develop various options to meet the individual needs of the people participating in competence assessment programs. Programs may be of some weeks or months duration. It is recommended that the proposal include a minimum of seven weeks full-time participation, of which three weeks would be classroom-based and four weeks undertaken in a clinical setting. Proposals may include a fast-track option or additional education may be provided to people who are experiencing difficulty in some aspects. Part-time options will be considered.

Program providers may identify additional components that they wish to add to competence assessment programs. In some instances the Board may specify that the applicant requires education and assessment in a particular additional aspect or may specify that clinical assessment is to be undertaken in a particular clinical environment e.g. medical / surgical nursing, paediatric nursing or mental health nursing.

Program providers may wish to develop a program so that it attracts recognition should the person complete the program and wish to proceed with further study.

Theoretical component

Competence assessment programs must include orientation to, and where appropriate, assessment in:

- nursing in the Australian health care system
- relevant legal aspects applicable to nursing practice in Australia;
- drug calculations
- pharmacology with emphasis on medications encountered in practice in Australia
- health and information technology used in Australia
- communication in health including etiquette, idiom and other aspects of professional communication (including information technology)
- documentation used in Australian health care facilities, including electronic documentation
- professional standards applicable in Australia, including codes of professional conduct and ethics, competency standards, the boundaries between professional relationships and personal relationships
- introduction to Australian culture with specific reference to the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues relating to cultural diversity
- an overview of contemporary clinical practice in a range of Australian health care settings including but not limited to medical-surgical nursing, mental health nursing, aged care nursing and community nursing.

Clinical component of competence assessment programs

The program must include a clinical placement. It is recommended that the program include four weeks full-time equivalent clinical experience. During the program, applicants must be assessed against and demonstrate the relevant national competency standards endorsed by the Nurses and Midwives Board (i.e. the competency standards for the registered nurse, registered midwife or enrolled nurse).

The Board may require applicants to undertake clinical experience and assessment in a variety of settings, such as medical / surgical, paediatric or mental health nursing. This will be indicated in the correspondence from the Board permitting the person to undertake the competence evaluation program.

While simulation techniques and laboratory experiences are recognised as an important part of clinical learning, it is essential that clinical experience is organised within health facilities in a way which enables applicants to meet the Board's approved competency standards.

Requirements for the theoretical and clinical components of a competence assessment program

The program proposal must include:

- a clear statement of the clinical and theoretical program hours, mode/s of delivery of both theory and clinical components
- objectives for the theoretical component
- detailed content of the theoretical component
- details of the Steering Committee membership
- evidence that students will be assessed against and demonstrate the national competency standards endorsed by the Nurses and Midwives Board
- a profile of the staff involved with the theoretical component; and
- the qualifications and professional experience of persons who will develop and assess theoretical content including assignments and examinations
- mechanisms for monitoring the identity of students submitting assignments, undertaking examinations and clinical experience.

English language requirements

The *Nurses and Midwives Act 1991* requires nurses and midwives to have knowledge of the English language adequate for the conduct of the practice of nursing or midwifery.

Program applicants must have achieved an overall score of 7 or more in the academic modules of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or its equivalent in an English language test accepted by the Board. The English test results accepted by the Board are outlined in the *Information for Applicants for Registration and Enrolment* (<http://www.nmb.nsw.gov.au/Info-Booklet/default.aspx>), which should be used as a reference document for program providers.

The program proposal must clearly specify the English language tests that will be accepted and the minimum scores / grades required by applicants.

Clinical supervision and assessment

It is required that, during the clinical components of the program, applicants demonstrate the relevant national competency standards endorsed by the Nurses and Midwives Board. Students must be supervised and assessed by registered nurses or, where appropriate, registered midwives during all clinical experience.

In their proposal, program providers must provide extensive detail about the criteria and process to be used in selecting, supporting and evaluating clinical supervisors / assessors. Some illustrative examples may assist in demonstrating how individual registered nurses / registered midwives are selected, supported and evaluated in the supervision and assessment role.

Processes that ensure clinical supervisors / assessors have a current theoretical and clinical knowledge base and are oriented to the particular competence evaluation program must be documented.

The program proposal must include:

- a profile of the staff involved in the clinical component
- qualifications and professional experience of persons who will supervise, teach and assess clinical competence
- criteria for selecting clinical supervisors / assessors
- documentation regarding their orientation and evaluation
- processes for evaluation of competence in clinical settings and sample assessment materials used for clinical assessment
- sample assessment materials used for clinical competence evaluation.

Approval of clinical placements/facilities

The clinical component of the program must be completed within the Australian context.

Appropriate clinical resources must be utilised in the program. An accurate and current list of health facilities and services used for clinical placements must be included together with justification of the choice of clinical placements.

There must be a nominated liaison person (who is involved with nursing education) at each health facility and who is provided with a clinical experience outline for applicants.

When submitting program proposals, program providers must submit extensive detail about the criteria and process to be used in selecting and monitoring clinical facilities at which applicants will obtain supervised clinical practice as part of the approved program. The document should also outline how the program provider will ensure ongoing suitability of the selected clinical facilities and how it would deal with changing suitability of facilities for clinical learning.

The Board has issued *Education of Enrolled Nurses – Information for Education Providers* (<http://www.nmb.nsw.gov.au/Education-of-Enrolled-Nurses/default.aspx>), which may serve as a useful guide for selecting clinical facilities for competence assessment programs leading to both registration or enrolment.

Who may conduct competence assessment programs?

As the critical components of competence assessment programs are the assessments of theoretical knowledge and clinical competence, organisations must demonstrate a substantial record of appropriate provision of courses and conduct of assessments at the level of entry into practice as registered nurses

or enrolled nurses, as applicable, within Australia. Competence assessment programs must be developed, coordinated and delivered by registered nurses with appropriate qualifications and experience.

Eligibility to undertake competence assessment programs

Entry to competence assessment programs is limited to persons whose qualifications the Nurses and Midwives Board have assessed and who have been issued with an individual letter of referral to undertake a competence assessment program.

Outcomes of competence assessment programs

In order to be approved, the program provider must undertake to provide comprehensive individual reports to both the Nurses and Midwives Board and to each participant, whether the person passes or fails. An example of these reports must be included in the program proposal.

Each report must:

- address the individual's ability or inability to demonstrate each standard in the applicable competency standards
- conclude with an assessment of overall competence and a recommendation as to whether or not the individual should be registered or enrolled, as applicable; and
- be signed by a registered nurse or registered midwife who holds a senior position in the organisation and who is authorised by the education institution to provide these reports.

Program providers must have and demonstrate:

- appropriate appeals processes in place
- access to counselling and support services for both participants and assessors; and
- mechanisms to manage applicants who continue to be unsatisfactory in either the theoretical or clinical assessment.

Cost of Competence Assessment Programs

The Nurses and Midwives Board does not provide financial support to applicants or to organisations conducting competence assessment programs.

Approval of Competence Assessment Programs

Proposals to conduct competence assessment programs will be referred by the Nurses and Midwives Board to the Nurses Practice Committee, for advice and recommendations. The Nurses Practice Committee (NPC) is established in accord with section 12A of the *Nurses and Midwives Act 1991* and further

information may be found on the Board's website. It is anticipated that the process will be similar to that for consideration of recognised courses leading to registration or enrolment. Particular attention will be given to the processes for assessment of nursing competence and to selection, training, monitoring and support of assessors.

Program Accreditation

Competence assessment programs to be accredited or re-accredited should be forwarded to the Nurses and Midwives Board at least six (6) months prior to proposed commencement of the program.

Twenty (20) copies of all program documentation are to be submitted.

A separate document, identifying where the Board's requirements are met in the program documentation, should be included with the submission.

The program provider will be invited to nominate representatives to attend the meeting with the NPC to clarify any issues raised.

Changes to an Approved Competence Assessment Program

The Nurses and Midwives Board must be advised of any changes to an approved program. If changes are made without approval, persons completing the assessment program may not be granted registration or enrolment, as applicable.

Where appropriate, evaluation data relating to the previous competence evaluation program should be included in a resubmission.