

# FORUM OF AUSTRALIAN HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCILS

## Response of the Forum of Australian Health Professions Councils to the Draft Procedures for Development of Accreditation Standards

### Preamble

The Forum of Australian Health Professions Councils (the Forum) is a coalition of the ten Councils concerned with accreditation in each of the regulated health professions, and most have been assigned accreditation functions under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. The Forum comprises the:

- Australian Dental Council
- Australian Medical Council
- Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council
- Australian Osteopathic Council
- Australian Pharmacy Council
- Australian Physiotherapy Council
- Australian Psychology Accreditation Council
- Australian and New Zealand Podiatry Accreditation Council
- Council on Chiropractic Education Australasia
- Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand

The Forum has agreed that as an organisation which has been closely involved in the consultations regarding the development of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Bill, 2009, particularly in the matters related to accreditation – functions and standards – that it is appropriate to comment on the *Draft Procedures for Development of Accreditation Standards* as issued by the Agency Management Committee of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency on 29 September 2009.

This submission constitutes a consensus response of the Forum, and in the main, concentrates on general issues which are common to all the health professions. Member organisations will be making separate submissions on issues more germane to their profession, and what is said here cannot be seen to override the views expressed by the member Councils in their individual submissions.

The members of the Forum consider that the aim of accreditation is to ensure that a program of education and training has the appropriate objectives and resources and has the conditions to reasonably allow for the achievement of those objectives. Through well conducted accreditation processes, accreditation bodies have access to information about education and training in the profession across the institutions and the challenges that confront it. Accreditation processes can contribute to ongoing improvement in the quality of health profession education in line with health needs and practices and scientific developments.

The Agency Management Committee asks for comment on the 'draft procedures' in relation to the task of the National Agency under Clause 25 (c) of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Bill 2009 - to establish procedures for the development of accreditation standards, registration standards and codes and guidelines approved by National Boards, for the purpose of ensuring the national registration and accreditation scheme operates in accordance with good regulatory practice.*

The Forum appreciates that the procedures, as drafted, are aimed at assisting the accreditation authorities to propose accreditation standards that are in accordance with good regulatory practice – taking into account the objectives and guiding principles of the National Law (Clauses 3 (2) and 3 (3)), the consultation requirements (Clause 46 (2)), and the Council of Australian Governments *Best Practice Regulation, October 2007* regarding competition, cost factors and relevance over time.

The members of the Forum agree with the definition of an accreditation standard in the legislation - *for a health profession, means a standard used to assess whether a program of study, and the education provider that provides the program of study, provide persons who complete the program with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes necessary to practise the profession in Australia.* The Forum agrees that the accreditation functions of Clause 42 of (a) *developing accreditation standards for approval by a National Board,* and (b) *assessing programs of study, and the education providers that provide the programs of study, to determine whether the programs meet approved accreditation standards* are those assigned to the accreditation authorities and the functions to which the standards should apply.

The Forum appreciates that the 'draft procedures' provide principles to be followed in the development of the accreditation standards rather than processes, and considers that this is appropriate and will allow the health professions of the Scheme to develop processes in accordance with the size of the profession, the nature of the education and training programs and the number of practitioners involved in the accreditation functions.

The 'draft procedures' contain objectives, principles and matters directly related to the accreditation function and in line with the definition of an accreditation standard and which the members of the Forum agree should be considered in developing or amending a standard. However there are also items in the list which do not relate to accreditation standards and functions and which are more pertinent to the operation of the Scheme as a whole. The Forum is concerned that the inclusion in the final 'procedures' of matters not relevant to the development or amendment of accreditation standards may result in unnecessary work by the accreditation authorities and possible confusion in the development of standards and the approval, refusal or review by the National Boards. In summary, there are some objectives, principles or guidance listed that are applicable to developing accreditation standards, some that do not apply and some that require further clarification as to how they might apply. The Forum proposes that the 'procedures' should be more specifically directed to the accreditation function and would be happy to assist the Agency with the drafting of these.

## **Draft Procedures**

### **1. Objectives and Guiding Principles**

#### **1.1. Objectives**

Of the objectives of the Scheme (Clause 3 (2)) and as listed in the 'draft procedures', (a), (c), and (f) apply directly to the accreditation function and are objectives which the Forum agrees should be taken into account when developing or amending accreditation standards.

Objectives (b) and (e) apply to the operation of the Scheme but are not, in the view of the Forum, matters that can be addressed in the accreditation standards nor by the accreditation functions. The application of the accreditation standards to the assessment of education programs cannot *facilitate workforce mobility*, nor can it *facilitate access to services*.

With regard to objective (d) *to facilitate the rigorous and responsive assessment of overseas-trained health practitioners*, although the accreditation authorities have been assigned the function (Clause 42 (c) and (d)) of *assessing authorities in other countries who conduct examinations for registration in a health profession .....* and of *overseeing the assessment of the knowledge, clinical skills and professional attributes of overseas qualified health*

*practitioners.....* the accreditation standards themselves cannot (except in a very limited way) meet the objective of (d).

## **1.2 Guiding Principles**

In the guiding principles of the Scheme (Clause 3 (3)) and as listed in the 'draft procedures' while it agrees that (a) (*transparency, accountability and fairness*) is applicable to the development of the accreditation standards the Forum finds it difficult to see that (b) (*fees*) and (c) (*restrictions on practice*) can be applied to the procedures for the development of accreditation standards.

## **2. Consultation**

In developing an accreditation standard the Forum agrees that there should be consultation about the content of the standard – Clause 46 (2) says that *...an accreditation authority must undertake wide-ranging consultation...* this is also a principle of the COAG best practice regulation which states (in Appendix F) that *consistent with the principle for good regulatory process that effective consultation with affected key stakeholders should occur at all stages of the regulatory cycle, and that it should be widely based to ensure it captures the diversity of stakeholders affected by the proposed changes.*

The question for the accreditation authorities will be the extent of the consultation, the resources of the authorities to conduct such consultation and whether or not such processes would be applicable to each and every amendment to a standard. It is assumed that each of the national boards will be in a position to guide each of the accreditation authorities as to the extent of the consultation that will be required. For some of the smaller health professions, in particular, conducting wide-ranging consultations may impose some difficulties.

The Forum, because it represents all the regulated health professions, may be able to work collaboratively to develop consultation principles and practices applicable across the health professions.

## **3. International Standards**

Number 3 of the 'draft procedures' effectively reads that 'in putting forward a proposal for a new or amended accreditation standard, an accreditation authority must be satisfied that the proposal meets any international standards relating to the profession' – as this would be neither possible nor necessarily desirable the Forum agrees with the Australian Medical Council that this be redrafted to read *..... takes account of relevant international statements relating to education and training in the profession, and the accreditation standards applied in countries with comparable education and practice standards for the profession.* Many of the Councils which are members of the Forum have close international relations with their counterpart organisations and are cognizant of the accreditation standards applied internationally, they are also aware of the different legislation, health system structures, government policy, practitioner roles and financial considerations that impact on health practitioner education and training.

## **4. COAG Principles for Best Practice Regulation**

In principle the matters of competition, cost factors and relevance over time should be considered in the development or amendment of an accreditation standard, it is the extent to which investigation of each of these factors needs to be undertaken before proposing an accreditation standard to the national board which the Forum considers needs to be clarified. The COAG *Best Practice Regulation* provide for a level of investigation of these matters which would be well beyond the scope and resources of many of the accreditation authorities represented within the Forum.

In relation to education and training the cost benefit analysis of improvements in the quality of a professional's knowledge, skills and attributes would be very difficult to determine given that they are being prepared not only to practise safely and effectively on graduation but throughout their professional career.

## **5. Approval of Accreditation Standards**

While this has not been addressed in the 'draft procedures' (neither would we expect it to be) Clause 47 (2) states that the national board will approve, refuse to approve, or ask the authority to review a standard. Clause 47 (4) outlines the process which must take place if the national board refuses to approve a standard. The Forum would like to know whether or not there will be opportunity afforded to the accreditation authority to respond to the 'refusal to approve' decision and to discuss the decision with the national board.

The Forum would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these matters with the Agency Management Committee and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the further development of matters related to accreditation within the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

### **Contacts**

For further discussion on the matters raised in this submission please contact:

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