

Submission to Productivity Commission

Skills and Workforce Development Agreement

December, 2019

 106 Victoria St, West End Q 4101
 GPO Box 1289, Brisbane Q 4001
 (07) 3840 1444
 (07) 3844 9387
 qnmu@qnmu.org.au
 www.qnmu.org.au

submission

Contents

Introduction	3
Recommendations	3
Information request 1	4
Information request 2	4
Information request 3	5
Information request 4	5
Information request 5	6
Information request 6	6
Information request 7	6
Information request 8	6
Information request 9	7
Information request 10	7
Information request 11	7
Information request 12	8
Information request 13	8
Information request 14	8
Information request 15	8
Information request 16	8
Information request 17	8
Information request 18	9
Information request 19	9
References	10

Introduction

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) thanks the Productivity Commission (the Commission) for the opportunity to comment on the *Skills and Workforce Development Agreement issues paper* (the paper).

Nursing and midwifery is the largest occupational group in Queensland Health and one of the largest across the Queensland government. The QNMU is the principal health union in Queensland covering all classifications of workers that make up the nursing and midwifery workforce including registered nurses (RN), registered midwives (RM), enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AIN) and students who are employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors including aged care.

Our more than 61,000 members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from entry level trainees to senior management. The vast majority of nurses and midwives in Queensland are members of the QNMU.

The QNMU supports Australian governments in their objectives to develop the skills of the Australian people and workforce development. We have responded to each information request from a nursing and midwifery perspective.

Recommendations

The QNMU recommends:

- AIN and EN courses offered by the VET system be accredited by the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC);
- Practical placements for students be organised by the RTO;
- The VET sector be discussed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council to ensure the VET sector is producing work-ready health care employees.

Information request 1

The QNMU believes it is important to investigate the vocational education and training (VET) system to ensure that a productive and highly skilled workforce is being delivered. By having a broad consultation, it allows for national views as well nuanced views that may take the approach of examining the VET system at a state, rural and remote, regional and local levels. This allows for an overall picture to emerge of Australia's VET system.

A focus for the QNMU is the aged care sector and the skill mix and workforce that are integral to this industry. With Australia's population ageing, there will be a higher demand for aged care. This means there will be an even greater need for a highly skilled and comprehensively VET-prepared aged care workforce. Statistics show that in 2016 there were estimated to be 366,027 workers in aged care with 240,317 in direct care roles, with 70% of direct residential workers being personal care attendants, 15% were RNs and 10% were ENs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019a). Coupled with the Productivity Commission reporting that by 2050 the aged care workforce will need to have grown to around 980,000 workers, it follows that the VET system will need to keep up with the community's expectations and needs (Productivity Commission, 2011).

There must be appropriate minimum standards for the delivery and outcomes of aged care related vocational education and training courses by registered training organisations (RTOs). The aged care workforce must be comprehensively prepared for aged care work and the workforce should be fit for purpose.

As requested by the Commission the QNMU has two suggestions of other reviews that may be relevant to this study. We propose SkillsIQ and the reviews it has completed as well as the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce which has been tasked with developing a strategy for growing and sustaining the aged care workforce.

Information request 2

The QNMU suggests meeting industry needs and not the community's needs may lead to depleting the skills that are needed and subsequently taught. This has been seen in the evidence being heard at the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Royal Commission) about the aged care sector and workforce. The evidence has shown that the current aged care system fails to meet the needs of older Australians and there is a necessity to improve professional and vocational training and education in order to equip workers with the knowledge and skills to deliver good aged care (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019b). Simply put: "Improving staffing levels, skills mix, and the training/education of workers are

urgently required to improve aged care services” (Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation, 2019, p.57).

To ensure all industry needs and community needs are being met we suggest other stakeholders, not just principal stakeholders be included in determining the objectives for the VET sector.

In meeting the national training system objective of ensuring it includes being centred on quality teaching and learning outcomes, the QNMU suggests that students should not be asked to organise their own practical placements. Training arrangements must be organised by the RTO to ensure there is support from the organisation and facilitators are available and provided. Quality work placements are imperative for undergraduate preparation.

The QNMU would also suggest that any courses that are designed to assist the work of RNs such as AINs and ENs should be accredited by the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC), the independent authority for nursing and midwifery education. This would ensure the same standards would be applied across all RTOs and the nursing courses they provide.

Information request 3

The QNMU supports the use of different models of education service delivery such as face-to-face and/or online which includes learning programs, virtual classes, resources, and the type of support provided. Also, if there is a practical component of a course this must be rigorously monitored to ensure students are competent.

Information request 4

Performance in care-based qualifications will remain limited if the VET sector does not consult with the nursing industry. Health care workers have a National Code of Conduct which sets minimum standards of conduct and practice for all unregistered/unregulated health care workers who provide a health service. Yet, they are not taught the nursing context of this National Code through the VET system. The question is then, what is safe and ethical care if these courses are being taught in isolation from the nursing profession. Again, we reiterate the need for nursing courses to be accredited by ANMAC, to ensure performance is assessed against outcomes and targets, relevant for nursing.

We suggest performance indicators consisting of:

- Comparison of courses including:
 - The qualifications required to be a member of the teaching staff;

- Modalities of teaching;
- Practical placements;
- Course length;
- Number of students enrolled;
- Course completion rates; and
- Employment outcomes.

Information request 5

We believe governments must be engaged in skills and workforce development to ensure the needs and skills of communities are met now and into the future.

The recent events at the Earle Haven residential aged care facility at Nerang where the facility went into administration after a payment dispute between the operator and subcontractor which saw residents removed from their residential home, highlights the need for more robust regulatory mechanisms and better coordination between state and federal agencies. This also applies to the VET sector where governments need to communicate regularly to ensure the quality of training delivery and assessment is maintained.

Information request 6

The QNMU posits that the VET sector is not just about employment but health care. For example, what is taught to nursing VET students is linked to the health care they provide after graduating. We therefore suggest that the VET sector be discussed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council to ensure the VET sector is producing workforce ready employees.

Information request 7

The balance between national consistency and local flexibility of the national training system is a commendable feature. The QNMU also believes that to produce the best outcomes, the VET provider market must not be profit driven, so costs are not reduced ensuring education and training are of a high standard.

Information request 8

The QNMU believes that for nursing courses through the VET system, English language skills assessment must be included to ensure competency in speaking and communicating in

English. This would also align with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) registration standard.

Information request 9

The QNMU supports the skills needs assessment as a basis for estimating demand for VET services. There is a genuine need for workforce planning and delivery of future skills needed for the health workforce, including nurses. Research suggests that with Australia's ageing population and subsequent demand for and use of health services, coupled with an ageing nursing workforce and poor nursing retention rates, there will be a nursing shortfall (Health Workforce, 2014). Planning for this shortfall should extend to the VET industry and the number of type of courses provided for nurses.

The QNMU believe VET arrangements could include more consultation with professional bodies such as unions as well as national boards like the NMBA. This would ensure that the courses being taught align with regulatory frameworks and deliver on the future skills needed for the nursing profession. It would also mean that workforce skills and projections would not only be reliant on the view of organisations and providers, but industry-specific leaders would also have a voice in VET services.

In our view, there is also a strong need to ensure nursing VET courses are articulated to nursing university courses. This would support the career progression of nurses, life-long learning of nurses and ensure clinical and quality standards flow from VET to university study. Nursing studied in the VET system is a very important and necessary part of the greater industry of nursing and therefore must align with nursing education in the university sector.

Information request 10

The QNMU has no specific comment regarding this information request, other than to say that we support nationally coordinated initiatives that influence demand and supply of VET services.

Information request 11

We believe there should be tighter regulations on the VET market and employers to ensure amongst other things, compliance to the relevant industry standards. Further, employers are an important part in determining VET offerings but not the only voice.

Information request 12

The QNMU suggests state and territory governments should provide funding to enable rural and remote students and those who are living in lower socio-economic areas the opportunity of training and learning in the VET system.

Information request 13

No comment.

Information request 14

If governments agree to a new national funding agreement for co-funding VET in schools, we would expect to see similar performance indicators we have described in *information request 4*.

Information request 15

The QNMU supports a consistent funding model and loan arrangements for the VET sector. The Joyce Review proposed a new vision for vocational education and recommends a six-point plan for change. One of these six points quite rightly relates to funding which is the need for “simpler funding and skills matching” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019c, p.66).

Information request 16

We believe research needs to be undertaken to determine the benefits of the VET program and ensure decisions are made based on evidence. This research should be alongside the implementation of a standard reporting program and performance indicators.

One method for determining priorities for funding would be to use the statistics and data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and broaden the remit of the AIHW if required.

Information request 17

The QNMU supports a standardised, national approach for data collection and reporting arrangements.

Information request 18

No comment.

Information request 19

The QNMU supports a competency-based system of VET as it allows training to be delivered to students that suits them and acknowledges their experience and knowledge.

References

- Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation. (2019). *National aged care survey 2019: Final report*. Retrieved from http://anmf.org.au/documents/reports/ANMF_Aged_Care_Survey_Report_2019.pdf
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2019a). *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Interim report: Neglect*. Retrieved from <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/interim-report/interim-report-volume-1.pdf>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2019b). *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Navigating the maze: An overview of Australia's current aged care system. Background paper 1*. Retrieved from <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/background-paper-1.pdf>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2019c). *Strengthening skills: Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system*. Retrieved from https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets_1.pdf
- Health Workforce Australia. (2014). *Australia's future health workforce – nurses*. Retrieved from [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/34AA7E6FDB8C16AACA257D9500112F25/\\$File/AFHW%20-%20Nurses%20detailed%20report.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/34AA7E6FDB8C16AACA257D9500112F25/$File/AFHW%20-%20Nurses%20detailed%20report.pdf)
- Productivity Commission. (2011). *Caring for older Australians. Inquiry report*. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report/aged-care-overview-booklet.pdf>