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Benchmarking Academic Standards across Nursing and Midwifery

The CDNM is the peak organisation that represents the Deans, Leaders and Heads of Higher Education courses for Nursing and Midwifery throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Council is the voice of higher education for nurses and midwives, and provides leadership on health policy, education standards and research as applied to nurses and midwives.

Background

The Council of Deans supports the benchmarking of academic standards across Nursing and Midwifery to improve and enhance practice. This statement, made in the context of the Higher Education (HE) regulatory environment, particularly the proposed, revised Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) (2014) [Standards 1.4.1; 5.3.1 & 5.3.2], clearly supports regular external referencing and benchmarking across the discipline. The Provider Course Accreditation Standard (CAS) 5.5 refers to course benchmarking, not only of intended achievement standards but also of student performance data. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) defines benchmarking as 'a structured, collaborative learning process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes. Its purpose is to identify comparative strengths and weaknesses, as a basis for developing improvements in academic quality' (2014, p.1).

Summary

- The development of a benchmarking framework to compare practice, learn from each other and align with industry standards
- Developing efficient systems and processes for benchmarking and peer review of assessment which takes into consideration workload implications
- Developing a collaborative network for structured conversations around identified hot topics
- Benchmarking clinical placements to identify key areas for development and good practice
- Identified gap in professional development of staff, particularly around the complexity of courses and assessment
- Importance of developing a national statement that defends the level of assessment in Nursing and Midwifery

Position

The HE sector is about to enter a time of significant change in the regulatory environment in how HE institutions demonstrate comparability of academic standards to students and other external stakeholders. A key challenge is how the Deans Councils ensure comparability of standards across their discipline as well as consider alignment with professional accreditation processes. The Council of Deans takes a proactive approach towards benchmarking across the Nursing and Midwifery by taking carriage of the process rather than having it imposed. CDNM will establish a College of Peers to set a strategic agenda on benchmarking for the profession for quality improvement and quality enhancement purposes. The main purpose of the College of Peers is to bring academics together in a collegial way for professional development to compare discipline specific benchmarks and academic standards to ensure comparability of standards across the discipline. The CDNM Executive will put in place a Terms of Reference for the College of Peers. Each HE institution will nominate an Assessment Coordinator to work with the Deans Council and each will have sign off from the HE institution to participate in any benchmarking activity.

Equally important to the benchmarking of academic standards across the discipline is the alignment of benchmarking activity to the accreditation process with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC). The key purpose of ANMAC is responsibility for protecting the health and safety of the Australian community by ensuring a high standard of nursing and midwifery education. Both the Nursing and Midwifery Board and ANMAC as national regulatory partners for nursing and midwifery in Australia will contribute to the establishment of efficient processes for benchmarking and peer review of assessment [or course benchmarking]. Key representatives will work with the Deans Council to ensure an efficient, timely process is in place for benchmarking.

In considering benchmarking standards across Nursing and Midwifery, the following position is taken:

- The CDNM expects that academics in nursing and midwifery have professional development on the benchmarking of academic standards across the discipline.
- The CDNM endorses the implementation of a College of Peers process to create opportunities for a structured, collaborative learning process for quality improvement and quality enhancement purposes.
- The CDNM will work closely with ANMAC and the Nursing and Midwifery Board to ensure efficient timely processes for benchmarking and accreditation.
- The CDNM trial an online benchmarking tool as a proof of concept with a group of universities in Nursing and Midwifery, in collaboration with Dr Sara Booth [University of Tasmania] and Education Services Australia (ESA), a not-for-profit organisation led by the Education Ministers of Australia.

References

- Booth, S., Beckett, B., Saunders, C., Freeman, M., Alexander, H., Oliver, R., Thompson, M., Fernandez, J., Valore, R. (2015). *Peer review of assessment networks: Sector-wide options for assuring and calibrating achievement standards within and across disciplines and other networks*, report prepared for the Office for Learning and Teaching, Australia Government.[in press]
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (2014). TEQSA Guidance Note on Benchmarking. Available at:
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