

Media Release

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English language skills needed to provide safe care to Australian community

A national registration and accreditation scheme for 10 health professions was introduced in Australia on 1 July 2010 in all states except Western Australia, which expects to join the scheme later in 2010. Under the scheme, the regulation of these health professions is governed by the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009*.

Under the National Law, the Boards set registration standards which all registrants must meet before they are registered to practise in Australia. Each of the National Boards have set an English language skills standard to ensure all registered health practitioners in Australia can provide safe care to the Australian community and can communicate effectively – orally and in writing – with other health professionals about the care of their patients.

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) has set an English language skills standard that requires all applicants to demonstrate English language skills at IELTS academic level 7 or the equivalent.

This standard is consistent with the English language skills requirements for registration in the United Kingdom and is the lowest minimum standard for English language across all the health professions in Australia.

In July 2009, all Australian State and Territory Nursing and Midwifery Registration Boards had endorsed the same standard. The NMBA consulted extensively on its proposed English language skills standard in October 2009.

The Board understands that many universities work with students to meet the English language requirements for registration, which are higher than some University entrance requirements to complete an approved course. The Board also understands that since the introduction of the English language standard in 2009, a number of Australian universities have made this requirement explicit to their students.

The Board has put a number of strategies in place to help a group of Victorian students to achieve the standard. These include:

- Negotiating with Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to assist those students to meet the requirements for registration with AHPRA after their student visa expires, which will allow them a further three months to complete the registration requirements, including meeting the English language registration standard;
- Consulting with IELTS to ensure that there are test places available for these students within the timeframe.

The role of the Board is to protect the public. The Board has set a range of registration standards aimed at ensuring that all nurses and midwives can provide safe care to the Australian community. The English language

Media Release

standard is set at a level to ensure that all nurses and midwives are able to communicate effectively – verbally and in writing – with their patients and with other healthcare professionals.

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