

Professions Reference Group Communiqué

The Professions Reference Group (PRG) met via video conference on Thursday 1 October 2020.

The meeting was chaired by Nello Marino from the Australian Podiatry Association.

Ahpra update

Ahpra's Executive Director, Strategy and Policy Chris Robertson provided an update on the work of Ahpra to members in the absence of CEO Martin Fletcher.

- All Ahpra offices are open for staff (still closed to the public) under 'COVID-normal' arrangements except for Melbourne and Sydney. Darwin reopened with a refurbished office and we expect Sydney to reopen in the next few months. The timing of Melbourne's opening is still unknown but Ahpra is working on plans towards the end of the year. Staff have been fairly resilient and coping reasonably well.
- Ahpra is currently working with the higher education sector to collaborate on management of student placements and to support the majority of students being able to graduate by the end of the year. We are working to assess graduate registrations without delay.
- The number of practitioners on the pandemic response sub-register remains stable at around 35,000. A survey has been sent to practitioners to find out about their experience on the register, including whether they worked and if they plan to stay registered once the pandemic subsides.
- The Annual Report for 2019/20 has been finalised, submitted and presently under embargo until it is tabled in Parliament. A briefing of the report will be arranged for the PRG.

Regulatory operations update

Ahpra's Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough updated members.

- For graduate registration Ahpra is expecting to see around 34,000 applications. They have worked to smooth out arrival patterns and opened the campaign early this year and onboarded a surge workforce earlier than usual to handle applications. In mid-September Ahpra offered webinars, which were very well subscribed, to support students in making correct and complete applications. Queries from the webinars have been picked up as a series of [frequently asked questions](#) with responses now published which can be useful in pointing students in other professions for information on how to lodge correct and complete applications. So far 3,100 applications have been received or around 300 per day. The goal is to have 9,000 applications over four weeks, so this pace is kept strong and steady.
- Emails have been sent to nursing, pharmacy and medical students inviting them to lodge their applications early. These are the professions we are targeting first for early lodgement. Ahpra is working towards information for other professions that may have specific requirements.
- Feedback received from the PRG on the graduate video was taken into account and reflected in the final version published for new graduates.
- After a long and successful career Ahpra National Director of Compliance Jim O'Dempsey has retired. We have recruited a new National Director of Compliance Jason McHeyzer who comes from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. Members passed on their thanks to Mr O'Dempsey and regret that the COVID-19 working arrangements meant there was no opportunity to express their thanks in person.

Revised regulatory principles for the National Scheme preliminary consultation

Ahpra's National Director, Regulatory Governance Alley Peck updated members.

- The regulatory principles, launched in 2014 which guide the National Boards and Ahpra decision-makers in day-to-day decisions, are being reviewed to ensure they are contemporary, align with policy directions and ensure public protection, patient safety and support for vulnerable people in the community. The principles are broken into two components – preamble and principles. There have been some changes to update some principles while other principles require greater work to incorporate public safety and support for vulnerable communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Preliminary consultation with the PRG is being sought and comments or feedback closes at the end of the month. A public consultation is likely to occur early next year.

Operation Reset

Ahpra's Executive Director, Regulatory Operations Kym Ayscough updated members.

- Operation Reset is about resetting our approach to investigations of notifications. It accelerates the work Ahpra has been undertaking in applying a risk assessment and controls approach to the assessment stage of the notifications process and tailoring this approach to investigations. It resets our approach to lower risk matters to move away from investigating if an event happened to, instead, ensuring there are sufficient risk controls in place to support safe and professional practise in the future. It is a fundamental reshaping of thinking.
- This is being done to address a growing increase in notifications causing delays in the time to resolve matters, which impacts the experience of notifiers and practitioners. Efforts need to be focused on resourcing matters where there are not sufficient risk controls in place to mitigate ongoing risk to the public from the health, performance, or conduct of a practitioner.
- From October 2020 Ahpra will be training staff in new processes which will involve more direct engagement with practitioners and employers.
- A more detailed information session is being organised for PRG members on Thursday 15 October 2020.

Next meeting

The next virtual meeting was set for Thursday 19 November at 3-4pm.

Nello Marino

Chair
Professions Reference Group