

La Trobe University response to the AHPRA Public Consultation paper

La Trobe University welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed amendments to the Review of Criminal history registration standard and English language skills registration standard.

La Trobe University provides entry-level courses in the following 8 professions subject to national registration:

- Dental
- Nursing
- Midwifery
- Occupational Therapy
- Pharmacy
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Psychology

Review of Criminal History Registration Standard

The National Boards preferred option is Option 1 – Status Quo.

The public consultation relating to the Criminal History Registration Standard explicitly states that “It does not apply to students” (p.6).

La Trobe University supports the preferred option, but suggests that **it may be helpful for the National Boards to take a position on the issue of student criminal history checks** that could facilitate the development of a nationally-consistent approach by health facilities in which students undertake clinical training.

Currently a range of criminal record certifications are available; State police, Federal policy, CrimCheck, and fit2work are examples. When dealing with international students studying in Australia an international police record is required as they have no Australian history. A nationally consistent approach would help stream line the administrative resources required. Web based registries would further facilitate this process

The National Act Division 3, 38 (1) (b) states that board must develop registration standards “about the criminal history of applicants for registration in the profession, and registered health practitioners and students registered by the Board...” (p.61).

Section 130 (3) (b) of the Act requires the student to notify the board within 7 days of any “relevant event”, being charged with an offence punishable by 12 months or more imprisonment, or being convicted to an offence punishable by imprisonment, or having their student registration in another country suspended or cancelled.

Student registration occurs by the bulk notification to the Board of enrolled students, with no requirement for students to complete an initial or annual declaration regarding their impairment status or criminal background. The responsibility for ensuring that students are eligible for registration is therefore effectively delegated to the institution of enrolment.

In the registrable disciplines at La Trobe University there is a very complex and time consuming process required on the part of students and administrative staff to obtain Police checks. This serves both the purpose of ensuring students are compliant with their registration obligations, but also requirements of the health facilities in which students undertake clinical training. However at present, there is not a nationally or even state-consistent requirement by health facilities relating to the provision of police record check. Health facilities typically require the university to site a police record check for students at least annually and sometimes the check can be no older than 6 months. This latter situation imposes a considerable burden and cost on students and on the institution of enrolment, without any evidence that it contributes more to public safety than an annual declaration. We believe it would be desirable to have a consistent approach.

English Language Skills Registration Standard

The National Boards preferred option is Option 2 - Proposed revised standard.

La Trobe University supports the preferred option.

1. From your perspective, how is the current registration standard working?

The current registration standard has resulted in considerable barriers to registration for individual graduates of La Trobe University programs.

Vignette 1:

A physiotherapy graduate who had been an international student sat the IELTS test on several occasions following their course completion, each time not meeting the minimum standard of 7 in one of the four bands. The cost to the graduate in fees and lost income was considerable. The graduate had successfully applied for a position as a physiotherapist, and pending registration was employed as a Physiotherapy Assistant.

The student (whose secondary education was in a language other than English) had met the IELTS requirements (overall minimum of 7, and no score lower than 7 for listening, reading, writing and speaking) to gain a place in the 4-year entry-level physiotherapy program. During the final 18 months of the course they had successfully undertaken 20 weeks of supervised clinical placement and had been assessed as meeting entry-level competence on

the national assessment instrument (the Assessment of Physiotherapy Practice) in 6 different workplaces, by 6 different clinical supervisors.

Under the proposed revised standard it seems that a graduate in this situation could have their registration granted on initial application, provided the following conditions are met (p.16, Test Results):

Test results provided directly to the Board by the testing authority, and..."more than three years prior to applying for registration and you are a registered student and have been continuously enrolled in a Board approved program of study since the test result was obtained and applied for registration within 12 months of completing the Board approved program of study".

2. **Should the countries recognised in the standard be consistent with those countries recognised by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for exemptions from English language testing? If so, should the recognition of South Africa in the National Boards' English language skills registration standard be phased out over time?**

La Trobe University's view is that countries recognised in the standard should be consistent with the countries recognised by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and so we recommend that recognition of South Africa in the national Board's English Language skills recognition standard is phased out over time

3. **Is there any evidence to assist National Boards to assess whether there are any additional countries that should be recognised in their English language skills registration standard?**

None that we are aware of.

4. **Do you have comments about how the National Boards should approach test results that are very close to, but slightly below, the current standard?**

We note that while test validity was considered in the Summary of Research Findings (p.24), the issue of test reliability and measurement error was not. All test results reflect the true score of the person tested, and random variation or measurement error. Sources of error in a test score include aspects of the test itself, the person being tested, and the person marking the test. Test results that are both just under and just over the required score may therefore be within the margin of error of the test. The National Boards might therefore be justified in seeking some standard secondary assessment method to supplement the test results where test results are very close to, but slightly below, the current standard.

5. **Should National Boards accept results from more than one sitting or is there a better way to address this issue, such as the approaches described above?**

It is our opinion that results from more than one sitting provides greater reliability (measurement error is reduced with multiple testing) and therefore the suggested approach is supported.

6. **Is the content of the draft revised registration standard helpful, clear, relevant and more workable than the current standard?**

Yes we believe it is

7. **Is there any content that needs to be changed or deleted in the revised draft registration standard?**

Clarification is needed about the phrase recognition of “multiple sites”. Does this pertain to sites within Australia or international sites. We believe it may be harder to police the rigour of the test environment in international settings.

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