

30 November 2007

Ms Angela Magarry  
Director – Policy and Analysis  
Universities Australia  
One Geils Court  
Deakin ACT 2600

Dear Ms Magarry

**Re. Universities Australia A National Internship Scheme - Discussion Paper  
Response from the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia & New Zealand)**

The Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia & New Zealand) represents the Deans and Heads of the Schools of Nursing in universities that offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in nursing and midwifery throughout Australia and New Zealand. Since periods of practical work experience are an essential part of the courses leading to the Bachelor of Nursing or Bachelor of Midwifery the Council has a strong interest in any proposed scheme to support and strengthen this component of its courses and welcomes the opportunity to respond to the proposals.

We regard the Discussion Paper as a balanced approach to a serious problem. It covers all students and therefore all fields of study and covers work experience generally as well as structured internships and practicums. We commend Universities Australia for raising the general issue and for its careful treatment of the economics of the issue. Our response focuses on the practicum in Nursing and Midwifery. Our graduates are at present facing criticism, much of it unwarranted but voiced nevertheless, for not being fully work-ready at the moment of graduation, and we are glad to see any measures which would dispel that impression.

Of the proposed options for action, two – “Encouragement” and “Leading by Example” are not relevant in our profession, since the practicum is mandated by the authorities which register graduates for employment in the profession. Our interest is in the other two options: Public/Private Partnerships, and Enhanced Public Subsidy.

The Paper proposes partnerships between universities, industry (in our case, health facilities) and government to facilitate placement of students for work experience. It proposes “funding business organisations (read: health facilities) and universities to provide systematic, well-designed intermediation services”. It suggests some 80 internship officers working across all fields, at a cost of \$12 million, and the creation of “a sub-dean role” in each faculty or school with responsibilities for liaison with relevant

industries, and receiving a higher duties allowance of some \$10,000 per year – a total cost of \$5.7m. A subsidy to employers for their costs in the practicum is estimated at \$105m; that is a total of \$122.7m across all fields, not any one. This is welcome recognition that the placement of students in facilities for their practicum is expensive both to the universities and to the facilities. Some facilities have given notice that they intend to charge for such placements – a cost universities find hard to bear on top of the cost to themselves of finding and supporting the placements. We most strongly endorse this proposal and urge the Government to examine and develop it without delay.

One point worth mentioning is the issue of management - in the discussion paper it suggests this will be regulated by a group comprising industry and others. The authors have not accounted well for the existing regulatory authority overlap in approval of placements and arrangements and will need to explore that interface more fully when considering administration.

The Paper also proposes subsidising some modest payment of income support to students during their practicum. Any measure that assists students to survive financially and advance their studies without the need to flip hamburgers or sit at checkouts has our warm support. The Paper makes clear that this is a sound investment, not simply a welfare measure. The costs are extremely modest, especially compared to the billions cheerfully handed out during the recent election campaign.

There are however some caveats we would place on this proposal is, that the students must remain students during the practicum – they are not subsidised semi-skilled labour, but are pursuing learning experiences. Also the authors have not thought through the issue of indemnity for a student 'unfit' for practice and increased university liability as a possible cost for work placement. Nor the issue of student criminal check, fit for working with children, immunisation etc, and there may be more that comes with declaration of fitness.

We look forward to the outcomes of the Discussion Paper.

With best wishes and regards

Sincerely

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