Commencement of the Accreditation Systems Review

On 10 October 2016, AHMAC released a Communique which announced the appointment of Professor Michael Woods as Independent Reviewer for the Accreditation Systems Review.

Professor Woods is currently Professor of Health Economics in the Centre for Health Economics Research and Evaluation at the University of Technology Sydney. He has Visiting Scholar status at Australian National University. Professor Woods has extensive experience in economics, the public sector and health policy. He has previously been Commissioner, then Deputy Chair, of the Australian Productivity Commission during which time he presided on over 20 national policy inquiries and reviews. Professor Woods has also been Under Treasurer for the Australian Capital Territory.

Background to the Review

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) for the health professions came into operation on 1 July 2010. The Scheme was implemented through enactment of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law in each state and territory (the National Law). The objectives and guiding principles of NRAS are set out in section 3 of the National Law and include:

- to facilitate the provision of high quality education and training of health practitioners
- to facilitate the rigorous and responsive assessment of overseas-trained health practitioners
- to enable the continuous development of a flexible, responsive and sustainable Australian health workforce
- to enable innovation in the education of, and service delivery by, health practitioners.

In 2014, the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council commissioned an independent review of NRAS which identified significant concerns with the high cost, lack of transparency, accountability, duplication and approach of the existing accreditation processes. The NRAS Review recommended a number of measures to address these issues, including further exploration of the United Kingdom approach to accreditation.

In August 2015, Health Ministers accepted in principle the NRAS Review recommendations related to ‘Accreditation Functions’ but requested a more comprehensive review of accreditation processes within the National Scheme to inform further consideration.

Scope of the Review

The Accreditation Systems Review’s Terms of Reference require that it consider the findings of the 2005 Productivity Commission Report Australia’s Health Workforce and the NRAS Review and that it undertake further analysis of the Australian, UK and other international accreditation systems.
In particular, the Review is to address:

- the cost effectiveness of the existing systems for the delivery of accreditation functions
- governance structures including reporting arrangements
- opportunities for the streamlining of accreditation including consideration of other educational accreditation processes
- the extent to which accreditation arrangements support educational innovation in programs including clinical training arrangements, use of simulation and inter-professional learning
- opportunities for increasing consistency and collaboration across professions.

Professor Woods’ Report will provide advice to the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council and the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council on options for reform of the accreditation system and structures to support a sustainable health workforce that is flexible and responsive to the changing health needs of the Australian community.

The Report is scheduled to be completed by September 2017.

The full Terms of Reference are at Attachment 1.

Consultation

Feedback from stakeholders about their direct experience within NRAS will play a key part in informing the Accreditation Systems Review; particularly to identify:

- the strengths and limitations of existing procedures and governance arrangements and opportunities for improvement
- key issues and concerns about enabling the continuous development of a flexible, responsive and sustainable Australian health workforce
- priority areas and options for reform.

All stakeholders and interested parties will have the opportunity to contribute to the Review. This includes attending the National Consultations to be held in all jurisdictions in 2017 and providing a submission in response to the Review consultation paper.

It is also recognised that a wide range of stakeholders have already provided feedback on the existing accreditation systems within Australia by participating in the 2014 NRAS Review through consultation forums and/or submissions. Indeed, many of the stakeholders also made significant contributions to the earlier Productivity Commission Report. The current Review will consider, utilise and build on this expert body of knowledge to develop a consultation paper that provides a comprehensive review of accreditation systems and seeks to address the issues raised by Health Ministers.

Further information

Further information on the national consultations and submission process will be announced in later Bulletins and posted on the Review of Accreditation Systems Review website at www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/AccreditationSystemsReview

To register your interest in this Review and to receive future Bulletins, or to contact the Accreditation Systems Review team on any other matter, please email: admin@ASReview.org.au
ATTACHMENT 1

Accreditation Systems Review: Terms of Reference

The Review of Accreditation Systems will provide advice to AHMAC on the governance, structure, cost, and reporting arrangements to improve the efficiency, transparency and cost effectiveness of the health professions accreditation system, to support a sustainable health workforce that is flexible and responsive to the changing health needs of the Australian community.

The Review is to address:

- cost effectiveness of the regime for delivering the accreditation functions
- governance structures including reporting arrangements
- opportunities for the streamlining of accreditation including consideration of the other educational accreditation processes e.g. Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) and Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)
- the extent to which accreditation arrangements support educational innovation in programs including clinical training arrangements, use of simulation and inter-professional learning
- opportunities for increasing consistency and collaboration across professions to facilitate integrated service delivery.

The Review will:

1. Map current arrangements through which health professions accreditation functions are delivered and the quality of health professions training is assured in Australia. This should include mapping of existing governance arrangements for health professions accreditation across education sectors in which the education providers operate (higher education, vocational education and training, and the specialist colleges system), and examination of the governance arrangements through which:
   - accreditation standards are established
   - qualifying programs of study are assessed
   - the equivalence of qualifications of overseas trained practitioners is determined
   - national examinations and other assessments are conducted, for the purposes of entry to practise in the Australian health professions
   - ‘competent authorities’ in other countries are recognised.

2. Undertake a comparative analysis of key features of the systems for delivery of health professions accreditation functions in selected international jurisdictions. This should include an analysis of the scope, governance, cost and performance of these systems compared with the Australian system.

3. Review the findings and recommendations of previous reports that have addressed governance of health professions program accreditation functions, and other relevant documents, including:
   - the Productivity Commission’s 2005 research report titled Australia’s Health Workforce
   - the NRAS Review Final Report of 2014
   - the Australian Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015.
4. Assess how well the accreditation functions are meeting the objectives and guiding principles of the National Law.

5. Identify and analyse a range of feasible options for reform of the governance of health professions accreditation functions in Australia, and undertake a national consultation on these options.

6. Undertake a cost-effectiveness analysis of feasible options for reform of health professions accreditation functions, compared with the status quo, and make recommendations for a preferred option or options.

The advice to AHMAC and Health Ministers will include a report outlining options for reform of accreditation systems and structures. The final report will also include advice on any necessary legislative changes, and policy or administrative actions required to give effect to the preferred option/s and recommendations.