



COAG Health Council

Meeting as the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council

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Dr Lynette Cusack, Chair, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia
Ms Julie Brayshaw, Presiding member, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia
Mr Colin Waldron, Chair, Optometry Board of Australia
Dr Nikole Grbin, Chair, Osteopathy Board of Australia
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Dear National Board Chairs

Approval of revised English language skills (ELS) registration standards, as submitted and recommended by 13 National Boards

Thank you for your letter of 7 November 2014, advising that 13 National Boards have reviewed their current approved ELS registration standards as part of a planned review of common and core registrations standards that have mostly been in effect since the start of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme in 2010.

I am pleased to advise that pursuant to Section 12 of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each State and Territory, the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (AHWMC) decided on 17 March 2015 to approve the:

- revised common ELS registration standard, as recommended by 12 National Boards (the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia, Chiropractic Board of Australia, Dental Board of

Australia, Medical Board of Australia, Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia, Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, Optometry Board of Australia, Osteopathy Board of Australia, Pharmacy Board of Australia, Physiotherapy Board of Australia, Podiatry Board of Australia, Psychology Board of Australia); and

- revised ELS registration standard, as recommended by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (the NMBA).

Ministers also agreed with the proposal that the revised registration standards commence up to 6 months after the AHWMC approval to support a smooth transition, except for the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia's revised ELS registration standard, which will commence on 1 July 2015 to coincide with the end of grandparenting arrangements specific to the profession.

In making this approval, Ministers noted advice from the 12 National Boards that the key revisions will provide more pathways for applicants to demonstrate their ELS; provide greater flexibility for applicants to count English language test results from more than one sitting in strictly defined circumstances; and the additional two English language tests will provide more choice for those applicants who are required to sit an English language test

Ministers also noted advice from the NMBA that its revised ELS registration standard mostly incorporates the key revisions agreed by the other 12 National Boards, but retains the pathways in the current NMBA registration standard based on years of education to demonstrate competency in English language (pathways 2 and 3) to ensure that the level of ELS required to meet the standard is not increased. We also understand that the new pathway 1, which differs slightly to the equivalent in the revised common ELS registration standard, will enable nurses or midwives who meet the requirements of this new pathway to demonstrate their English language competency without having to sit an English language test.

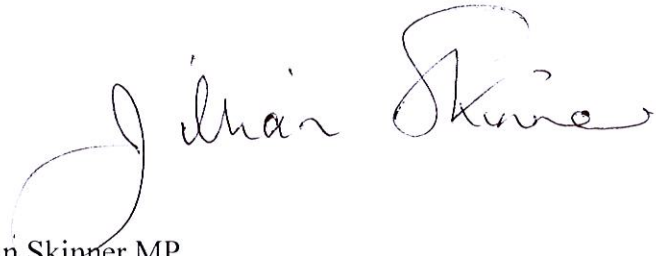
Health Ministers commend the approach taken by the National Boards to jointly review common and core registration standards to ensure there is as much consistency as practicable for registration requirements that apply to all professions regulated under the National Scheme.

It is pleasing that there will be clearer, more flexible, and more consistent requirements for applicants from 12 professions to demonstrate the ELS necessary for practitioners to be suitable for registration. While there remains some variance for nursing and midwifery applicants, Ministers understand that this is to provide a degree of flexibility that reflects the characteristics of this profession. Ministers understand that flexibility in each of the revised registration standards will be achieved to benefit applicants without reducing the quality of ELS or reducing current protection of the public.

Health Ministers note advice that work is currently well underway to manage a smooth transition to the revised requirements. We are confident that implementation will be successful and request that the National Boards and AHPRA keep us informed as work progresses. If any unforeseen operational or administrative challenges arise, please advise Ministers as soon as possible. The National Boards' commitment to reviewing the revised registration standard in at least three years after commencement is also welcomed by Ministers as good regulatory practice.

We trust that communicating the AHWMC's approval will enable the National Boards to publish the approved revised registration standards in advance of the standards taking effect, so that practitioners and consumers are aware of the changes that will take effect later this year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jillian Skinner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jillian Skinner MP

Minister for Health

Minister for Medical Research

Chair, Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council

30 April 2015

