



OT AUSTRALIA
Australian Association of Occupational Therapists

Submission in response to

**National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for
the Health Professions**

Consultation Paper:

Proposed arrangements for accreditation

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Further information:

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme's Consultation Paper on "Proposed arrangements for accreditation".

In summary, OT AUSTRALIA believes that it is vital that the arrangements for accreditation have clear links and responsibilities to the profession as a whole, and not just individual health practitioners. It is the role of the profession as a whole to establish practice standards which guide the work of individual practitioners and to assess the ability of programs to prepare graduates to meet the competencies to practice.

OT AUSTRALIA believes that it is essential for the health professions to set the quality standards and direction for their own profession, with appropriate consultation, scrutiny and inputs from external organisations and individuals. These standards should be approved by the profession as a whole before being used as the basis for the accreditation process.

OT AUSTRALIA recommends that the current accreditation processes, and the standards that these are based on, are retained under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the health professions. It is essential that a structure for accreditation is developed that allows the health profession to take responsibility for the quality and standards of practitioners.

Accreditation Processing

OT AUSTRALIA believes that the organisations currently undertaking the accreditation processes should continue being responsible for this task under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

It is important that the responsibility for accreditation rests with the profession, with input from key stakeholders. It is imperative that any guidelines for membership to an accrediting body are not exclusive nor forbid the inclusion of important stakeholders.

OT AUSTRALIA believes that accreditation processing should be transparent, with the details of accreditation, including the standards used and the associated fees and charges, publicly available. Further, OT AUSTRALIA believes that reports on the accreditation of each entry level program should be publicly available, and that these reports include the outcomes of the accreditation processing and recommendations, if any, for improvement.

Developing Profession Specific Accreditation Standards

OT AUSTRALIA believes that it is important for each health profession to be responsible for the development and review of the accreditation standards for that profession. It is in the best interest of the health profession to maintain high, quality standards for the profession as a whole and for individual practitioners.

The development of the standards should include input from a range of stakeholders, including registration boards, universities, and health services, however, OT AUSTRALIA believes that the ultimate responsibility for the finished standards is with the health profession.

To ensure best practice outcomes, the health profession should continue to have considerable input and responsibility for both the accreditation process and for developing the standards under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

Current accreditation process for occupational therapy

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) is the official international profession body for occupational therapy.

All occupational therapy education programmes in Australia are required to meet the WFOT Revised Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists – 2002. These standards provide an internationally recognised benchmark for occupational therapy educational programmes.

WFOT has delegated authority to OT AUSTRALIA to accredit Australian entry-level educational programs for recognition by the WFOT.

In addition, OT AUSTRALIA requires educational programs to demonstrate that they are preparing graduates to meet the competencies for occupational therapy, defined in the Australian Competency Standards for Entry-Level Occupational Therapists (© OT AUSTRALIA 1994). These Standards outline the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of competent occupational therapy practitioners. The Standards are in the process of review, to update and ensure continued relevance. OT AUSTRALIA has further developed competency standards for some fields of practice (e.g. mental health) that specifically focus on standards for maintaining professional competence and provide guidance for the education of occupational therapists in a specialised area of practice.

The occupational therapy profession's accreditation process aims to provide assurance that graduates are being prepared in accordance with expected peer standards as well as community expectations. OT AUSTRALIA has an established panel of expert assessors who undertake the accreditation process employing the Standards. OT AUSTRALIA has recently reviewed the accreditation processes and is implementing an Accreditation Committee to oversee the work of the Panel and further enhance the accreditation process. The Committee includes representatives of the Council of Occupational Therapy Registration Boards, the Australian and New Zealand Council of Occupational Therapy Educators and consumers. The accreditation process used by OT AUSTRALIA is built upon a philosophy of continuous improvement, and the

standards and processes used in accreditation aims to support innovation and currency in the content of educational programmes.

Meeting the WFOT Revised Minimum Standards not only benchmarks the Australian occupational therapy programmes internationally. For Australian occupational therapists, graduating from a WFOT recognised programme allows them to have their qualification recognised overseas.

All occupational therapy entry-level programmes in Australia are required to be accredited by OT AUSTRALIA every five years for graduates to be eligible to practice. The accreditation status awarded by OT AUSTRALIA is recognised by the State Registration Boards in those states where registration is required for occupational therapists.

The education of occupational therapists occurs in thirteen universities around Australia, with further programs planned to commence in 2009 and 2010. The minimum entry level qualification is a four year Bachelor of Applied Science (OT), with many universities also offering two year Masters level entry courses. Some universities also offer post graduate occupational therapy specialisation courses, including PhDs.

Accreditation of overseas trained occupational therapists is currently undertaken by the Council of Occupational Therapy Registration Boards.