

Prepare Nurses for the Future Recommendation 2 Work Group

Feasibility of an accelerated program for Division One
Nurses

Final Report

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1. Executive Summary

It has been identified that the demand for nurses is set to increase. This is due to many factors but the aging and increase of the population are two major factors for this predicted increase. In order to meet this increase in demand key stakeholders have had to re-examine the educational preparation of nurses. One solution that is being explored is the implementation of accelerated programs. This study examines the feasibility of a model that enables the student to graduate after either two and half years, completing the first semester of their final year as a summer semester, or after two years with the first semester of both year two and three being undertaken as a summer semester. Availability of clinical places for an accelerated program, interest amongst 2nd year undergraduates and implementation issues for education providers were examined. The feasibility study was conducted in the same manner as a Program Evaluation or a Rapid Assessment would be conducted. A selection of stakeholders were identified and given equitable input (Shadish, Cook & Leviton, 1991). Stakeholder groups included the students, Directors of Nursing and Heads of School of all Division one educational providers in Victoria.

Of the students who responded 66 % (n=23) indicated that they would be interested in participating in an accelerated program. Of those 100% (n=23) indicated that the major incentive was a quicker completion time. When asked what the main issue preventing students from participating would be, 30% (n=11) of respondents indicated that they would need a rest at this time of year, 53% (n=17) indicated that this time of year was important for raising funds for the rest of the year.

The Director's of Nursing from 25 institutions provided responses. Responses indicated a total number of 253 clinical places would be available during a summer semester. Numbers per institution ranged from 2 to 30 with a mean of 16 (sd of 8.44). Thirteen directors indicated that there would be minimal difference and 11 responded that this time of year would mean a compromise on the quality of placements or at least a reduction in the numbers that would normally be offered. Specifically smaller metropolitan hospitals reported that it was more likely to have a lower patient acuity. Some hospitals indicated an increased acuity during the summer period, principally those located at mostly coastal tourist destinations.

Education providers were surveyed to determine the feasibility of their institution offering an accelerated division one nursing program. Of those who were interested in Accelerated Programs most thought that a two and a half year model was the best model, but there was some (n=1) interest in having a two-year model. Most respondents (n=3) indicated that they would prefer commonwealth-supported places to full fee places in an accelerated program.

Given the number of places offered and interest expressed by students, health care providers and education providers, it would seem feasible *to implement a pilot accelerated program* to further explore the issues associated with this form of undergraduate preparation. To ensure students are given adequate time to rest, consolidate information and generate sufficient financial support it is recommended that *a two and a half year model is adopted* for the above pilot. As finances and fees remains a contentious issue it is further recommended that consideration be given to funding the accelerated program via *commonwealth supported places or additional forms of financial support* or incentive.

2. Background

It has been predicted that the demand for nurses in the Australian health care sector will increase. As the Australian population increases and ages so will the need for health care and health care professionals. In addition, the nursing workforce is also aging and the need for greater numbers of nurses to replace those leaving the profession will increase. Equally, the move to part-time work within the profession requires more nurses to deliver the same level of nursing services (Australian bureau of Statistics, 2005). Such imperatives have forced key stakeholders to re-examine the educational preparation of nurses.

This project contributes to the above inquiry by examining the feasibility of accelerating the preparation of division one nurses in Victoria. Traditionally Division one nurses undergo a three or four year undergraduate degree provided by an education provider accredited by the Nurses Board of Victoria. To date within Victoria this preparation has been conducted within the higher education sector. Courses are delivered within university timetables providing students with two semesters a year running from March to June and July to November. Although variations to the model are common principally to facilitate clinical placement, the majority of content and assessments are conducted within this time frame.

Health care providers and to a lesser extent students are beginning to question if the summer break (November to March) could be used for additional tuition. For the health care provider it provides additional staffing at a time when permanent staff traditionally takes leave. For the student it offers the potential to begin earning a wage earlier. For the profession a shorter or accelerated programme could provide additional nurses in a shorter period. In effect the summer break becomes a "summer semester" where student undertake education that would have traditionally been delivered at a later date.

The School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Tasmania (UTAS), was the first school to offer a 2½ year accelerated BN program beginning in the summer of 2001/2002, with its first graduates from this program in June 2002. The 2002 preliminary evaluation of this program indicated that satisfaction among the student cohort (n=22) was high. When asked if they had made the right decision to enrol on the accelerated program student responses were extremely positive, with comments such as, 'no regrets', 'definitely', 'happy', 'very glad I did it', 'I would do it again'. Students reflected on their experience thus: "intense", 'hectic', 'rewarding', 'brilliant', 'full on', 'a lot of work', 'challenging', 'tiring', 'you needed to be prepared', 'it was fast', 'my best time at university'. This continues to be a popular program. (From 2005, students enrolling in the program were offered HECS places).

In 2006, UTAS also offered a full fee 'fast track' program in partnership with St Vincent's and Mater Health, Sydney. This course offers a three-year undergraduate degree over two calendar years, using two summer semesters. Demand for this course has been high. In 2007, students can apply for Commonwealth Supported Places (<http://www.fasttracknursing.com/>).

For the purposes of this project it was decided to adopt the UTAS Models, ie,

- A 2 ½ yr. model that enables students to graduate in June, after completing the first semester of their final year as a summer semester.
- A 2 yr. model with students completing the first semester of second year and the final semester of third year as summer semesters.

Table 1. Accelerated program options considered by this project

		YEAR 1			YEAR 2			YEAR 3	
	Summer	Sem 1	Sem 2	Summer	Sem 1	Sem 2	Summer	Sem 1	Sem 2
Current arrangement		1.1	1.2		2.1	2.2		3.1	3.2
2.5 years		1.1	1.2		2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	Graduation
2 years		1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	Graduation	

The possible introduction of such models raises a number of philosophical and pragmatic questions ranging from the pedagogical soundness of such a program to the quality of clinical experience offered to the student. This report provides preliminary information that when combined with future findings from the University of Tasmania could be used to inform a pilot of an accelerated undergraduate program.

3. Project Aim

Explore the feasibility of an accelerated undergraduate program leading to registration as a Division 1 Registered Nurse in Victoria.

4. Project Objectives

- Establish the number of potential clinical places available in health care facilities to provide clinical places for an accelerated program.
- Identify interest amongst 2nd year undergraduates via a postal survey.
- Identify implementation issues that would need to be resolved via a stakeholder survey/focus group.
- Explore opportunities for a mid year intake into graduate nurse programs.

5. Project Methodology

This feasibility study was conducted in the same manner as a Program Evaluation or a Rapid Assessment would be conducted. A selection of stakeholders were identified and given equitable input (Shadish, Cook & Leviton, 1991). Stakeholder groups included the students, Directors of Nursing and Heads of School of all Division one educational providers in Victoria. Given the funds available and time constraints a targeted survey was chosen as the data collection method (see appendix A). Quantifying the number of clinical places available during a "summer semester" was achieved via an email survey distributed to Directors of Nursing in metropolitan and regions hospitals list of the department of Human Services data base. In addition to available clinical places respondents were asked to identify any major issues, including ones of patient acuity. Issues of course delivery were identified via a survey sent to the Heads of School of institutions that provided Division one nursing preparation in Victoria. Respondents were asked to signal their preparedness to offer an accelerated division one program and any implementation issues they felt would arise. Student interest in undertaking an accelerated program was elicited via an e-survey distributed via global email addresses provided by the relevant education providers. Students were asked to identify levels of interest in such a program, any issues that would have a serious impact on their ability to participate in an accelerated program, and features that would encourage them to consider an accelerated pathway.

The completed surveys were entered in to SPSS computer package and analysed. As a large amount of data was qualitative, major themes were identified and then quantified. Most analyses conducted were in order to enable descriptions of the issues identified and sentiments expressed by each group of stakeholders.

6. Findings

The findings were examined to determine support for four critical elements required for an accelerated program; student demand, willingness of education providers to deliver and clinical placement options for a summer semester.

Student demand

Surveys were sent to 207 second year students at La Trobe University. Responses were received from 36 students giving a response rate of 17.3%. This may in itself indicate the level of interest or may reflect that the survey was conducted at the end of the year when student were focussed on end of year assessments. Of the 36 responses received 64 % (n=23) indicated that they would be interested in participating in an accelerated program. Of those all (n=23) indicated that the major incentive was a quicker completion time for the degree. When asked what the main issue preventing students from participating would be, 30% (n=11) of respondents indicated that they would need a rest during the summer months, 53% (n=19) indicated that this time of year was important for raising funds for the rest of the year. Four students explained that the accelerated program would have to be HECS instead of fees for them to be able to participate.

A variety of locations for placement were preferred. Whilst a number of respondents indicated an enthusiasm for coastal clinical placements, most students showed an interest in the larger metropolitan hospitals over other hospitals. When specialty was considered most respondents expressed a preference for paediatrics (n=8); many also expressed a desire for placements in acute settings.

Willingness of education providers to deliver an accelerated program

Education providers were surveyed to determine the feasibility of their institution offering an accelerated division one nursing program. All Victorian Heads of School (n=7) were invited to respond via The Victorian and Tasmanians Deans of Nursing committee. Responses were received from five Victorian Universities given a response rate of 71% . Three Universities indicated that they would be interested in running and accelerated program. Of those who expressed an interested most preferred a two and a half year model, with minimal interest (n=1) in a two year model. Most respondents (n=3) indicated that they would prefer commonwealth supported places over full fee places in an accelerated program.

Implementation issues outlined by respondents included concern over clinical staff burnout because of having placements over times of year that were traditionally used for leave or research activities. Equity between Rural at Metropolitan areas was also a concern expressed by respondents. Some summer subjects are already on offer at other institutions and these institutions preferred to keep working with the model they were already using. When respondents were asked about clinical supervision all indicated that they would consider either of clinician facilitated or clinical teacher facilitated placements. Equally, no preference was cited in regards to employment models for clinical supervisors. All respondents indicated that both supervisors employed by either the agency or education provider was acceptable.

Clinical placements.

Securing sufficient clinical places is an essential requirement of any accelerated program. Anecdotal evidence from health care providers has suggested that a number of clinical places are available outside of contemporary university semester timetables. Similar discussions with education providers have indicated that, as the number of division one education providers has increased, so too has the competition for clinical places. The result

has been an increased use of clinical places outside of the semester timetable. Given these contrasting views it was felt important that a reliable estimate of available clinical places was an essential first step in determining the feasibility of an accelerated program.

Number of places

The Director's of Nursing from 25 institutions provided responses to the email survey. Responses indicated a total number of 253 clinical places could be estimated would be available during a summer semester. Numbers per institution ranged from 2 to 30 (see table two) with a mean of 16 (sd of 8.44).

	Frequency	Percent
1	3	9.7
2	1	3.2
4	1	3.2
6	1	3.2
7	1	3.2
20 or less	18	58.1
25.00	1	3.2
30	1	3.2
Total	27	87.1
Missing	4	12.9
Total	31	100.0

Table two. Number of places indicated by institutions

To help examine if clinical places would be available for either the two year or the two and half year models, respondents were asked to indicate their preference for level of student (first, second or final year students). Of the Directors of Nursing that responded 12 (48%) indicated that they would have places for 1st year students, 22 (88%) indicated that they would have places for year two student and 25 (100%) for year three students.

Given the number and variety of placements on offer it could be expected that a very reasonable quality of clinical experiences are available. Some placements offer unique experiences not currently available, such as working in a tourist area during peak times of the year.

Quality of clinical placement

The type of experience students receive on clinical placement is variable. Clinical placement over a summer semester brings with it additional variations; principally reductions to elective services. To help measuring these variations respondents were asked to identify perceived changes to patient acuity and services over the summer period. Thirteen directors (52%) indicated that there would be minimal difference. Eleven (44%) indicated that this time of year would mean a compromise on the quality of placements or at least a reduction in the numbers that would normally be offered. Specifically smaller metropolitan hospitals reported that it was more likely to have a lower patient acuity. Some hospitals indicated an increased acuity during the summer period, principally those located at mostly coastal tourist destinations.

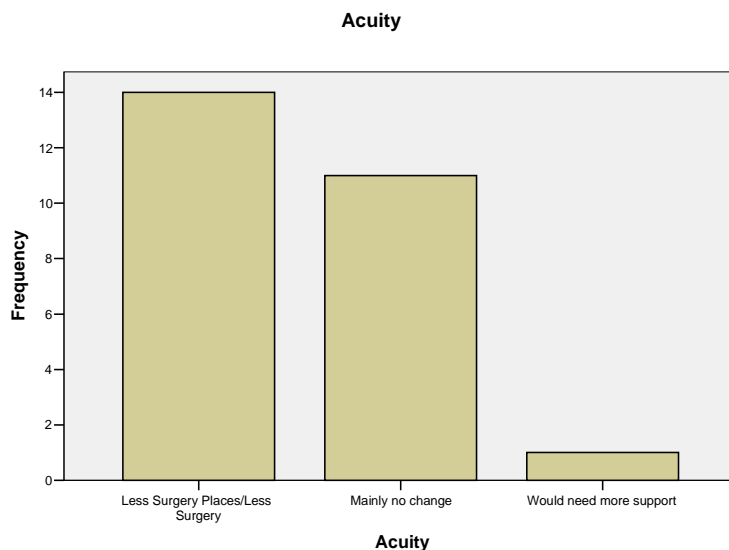


Figure one. Expected patient acuity over summer

Clinical supervision

Various models of student supervision are used by education providers during clinical placement. To help establish student supervision resources necessary for a summer school respondents were asked to identify preferred student supervision models. When asked about clinical supervision models the response was varied. Most respondents indicated that they preferred a clinical teacher model with the facilitator either employed by the health care provider or the educational provider (see table three).

Supervision model	Frequency
Clinician facilitated	9
Clinical Teacher	19
Employed by Agency	12
Employed by Educator	11

Table three. Types of Clinical supervision

Nine respondents (36%) indicated that staffing and hence clinical supervision/support for students could be an issue as summer was the time of year when many staff were on holidays.

Graduate year employment options for students undertaking an accelerated program.

Traditionally graduate year programs have recruited at the beginning of each year. To examine the opportunities for students graduating mid year Directors of Nursing were asked to identify graduate year options for this cohort. The main consensus was that despite varying issues in different settings, mid year intakes were viewed favourably and would be useful. Concerns related to the use of Computer Match to facilitate a mid year process were expressed by some respondents.

7. Limitations

In terms of limitations to the study, the time of year the study was conducted may have affected response rates to surveys and in particular a larger number of student responses were probably possible to obtain at a different time. Equally the number of health care provider responses is small and may not be indicative of the state.

The methodology of qualitative analysis of the data is open to interpretation. The findings of such analyses are difficult to generalize beyond the data analysed and there are concerns with reliability of measures in comparison to methods more reliant on mathematical proof. This means that this study does not establish feasibility for other populations in other locations and the findings apply to those who were surveyed.

8. Conclusions

Many of the limitations with Accelerated Programs such as issues of finance for students, burnout for staff and students were identified by respondents. They explained that retention of nurses within institutions was also a major issue with regards to nursing shortages with 20% of Nurses being identified as leaving employment after one year of employment (Kingma, 2006) and that the link between accelerated programs and improvement with the overall nursing shortage was not well established. However Directors of Nursing from the hospitals indicated that the mid year intake and increased number from this perspective would be useful to them. This would have to be the subject of a study itself and is far beyond the scope of a study in to the feasibility of accelerated programs. For now it would be enough to say that an increase in the number of students becoming nurses would still lead to an overall increase in nurses even after a 20% reduction after one year.

Given the number of places offered and interest expressed by students, health care providers and education providers, it would seem feasible *to implement a pilot accelerated program* to further explore the issues associated with this form of undergraduate preparation. To ensure students are given adequate time to rest, consolidate information and generate sufficient financial support it is recommended that *a two and a half year model is adopted* for the above pilot. As finances and fees remains a contentious issue it is further recommended that consideration is given to funding the accelerated program via *commonwealth supported places or additional forms of financial support* or incentive.

9. References

Shadish, W., R. Cook, T., D. & Leviton, L., C. (1991) *Foundations of Program Evaluation: Theories of Practice*. London : Sage

Kingma (2006) [Nurses on the Move: Migration and the Global Health Care Economy](https://books.google.com)
books.google.com

School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Tasmania <http://www.fasttracknursing.com/>

10. Appendix A



Dear Head of School,

A shortage in nurses is a growing problem for healthcare delivery across Australia. To help meet the ever increasing demand for nurses, Nurse Policy Branch, Department of Human Services is exploring the feasibility of an Accelerated Program for Nurses in order to shorten completion times for degrees. The Accelerated Program would utilize the long summer breaks in order to complete theory and placements. In order to assess the feasibility of summer placements we require the appropriate person from your institution to help us understand the issues that would arise from such a proposal. It is anticipated that the questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

1. Would you be interested in having an accelerated program at your institution?

- Yes
- No

2. Would you prefer a model in which students did 2 semesters over 2 summer breaks and finished in 2 years or one semester over one summer break and finished in 2 ½ years?

- complete in 2 years
- complete in 2 1/2 years

3. What type of student supervision would be preferred for placements?

- Clinician facilitated (preceptor ship provided by the agency)
- Clinical teacher facilitated
 - Employed by your agency
 - Employed by the Education provider

Other: Please specify

.....

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4. It is yet to be decided under what fee structure this system would operate. Do you have any comments regarding full fee paying or HECS places with respect to an accelerated program?

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5. What would be that major issue preventing you from implementing an accelerated program?

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.....

6. Do you have any other comments regarding summer placement or the Accelerated Program?

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.....

7. Are you prepared to attend a focus group regarding placement or the Accelerated Program?
.....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please forward your responses to mard@unimelb.edu.au

Sincerely,

Bill McGuiness
Deputy Head of School
Metropolitan Campus
School of Nursing and Midwifery
Ph: +61 3 94795924
Fax: +61 3 9479 5842



Dear Director of Nursing,

A shortage in nurses is a growing problem for healthcare delivery across Australia. To help meet the ever increasing demand for nurses, Nurse Policy Branch, Department of Human Services is exploring the feasibility of an Accelerated Program for Nurses in order to shorten completion times for degrees. The Accelerated Program would utilize the long summer breaks in order to complete theory and placements. In order to assess the feasibility of summer placements we require the appropriate person from your institution to help us understand the issues that would arise from such a proposal. Please forward this email to the most appropriate person. It is anticipated that the questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete

1. Would there be any student clinical places available for the months of December to February?

- Yes (go to question 2)
- No (go to question 7)

2. If there are places available, how many would there be?

- < 20
- 20-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- >60

Other please specify

3. please indicate which level of student would be considered for a summer placement. **You may select more than one option**

- First year
- Second year
- Final year

4. For the places nominated please indicate the preferred type of student support

- Clinician facilitated (preceptor ship provided by the agency)
- Clinical teacher facilitated
 - Employed by your agency
 - Employed by the Education provider

Other: Please specify

.....
.....

5. What would the differences in patient acuity be between the 'normal' placement times and the December to February period?..

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.....

6. How would this compare to 'normal' student placements in your agency?

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7. What are the major issues preventing summer placements?
.....
.....

8. As a result of implementing an Accelerated Program, an increased number of nurses would become available mid-year. What is your opinion of mid-year graduate intakes?
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please forward your responses to mard@unimelb.edu.au

Sincerely,

Bill McGuiness
Deputy Head of School
Metropolitan Campus
School of Nursing and Midwifery
Ph: +61 3 94795924
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A shortage in nurses is a growing problem for healthcare delivery across Australia. To help meet the ever increasing demand for nurses, the School of Nursing and Midwifery is considering an Accelerated Program for Nurses in order to shorten completion times for degrees. This Accelerated Program would utilize the long summer breaks in order to complete placements. The time normally spent on placements could then be used to complete the coursework. This would mean that the degree could be completed in two and a half years instead of three years, with 1st semester of 3rd year held December to February and then second semester starting in February, with graduation mid year. This would be available to all fee paying and HECS students, but would have to be a full fee paying semester. It is expected that this would be offset by earning a salary 6 months earlier. We are interested in the opinions of students with regards to the Program and would appreciate the time you spend in your responses.

Would you be interested in summer placements?

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What would be the main issue stopping you from undertaking summer placements?

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What do you like about the model for the accelerated program?

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How would you change the model? What improvements could you suggest?

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What would be your preferred location for a summer placement be?

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What would your preferred specialty for a summer placement be?

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Do you have any other comments regarding summer placement or the Accelerated Program?

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.....
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Are you prepared to attend a focus group regarding placement or the Accelerated Program?

.....
.....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Sincerely,
Bill McGuinness
Deputy Head of School
Metropolitan Campus
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Budget

Item	Cost
Casual Research Assistant Level 1 (plus 28% on costs)	\$11,314
Return address envelopes	\$200
Total	\$11,514
DHS Funding	\$11,514
Other Funding (please specify)	Nil