

## CREDIT TRANSFER FOR NURSES: HOW DO AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES DEAL WITH HOSPITAL/HEALTH SECTOR QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE?

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### BACKGROUND

The Nursing Reference Group of the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) Credit Transfer Project was established in March, 1993. Phase I of the Reference Group's work focussed on university-university and TAFE-university credit transfer, and resulted in a report to the Working Party on Credit Transfer in July, 1993. As a result of that report, a pilot scheme for university-university credit transfer was implemented in 1994 and is to be continued in 1995.

The Reference Group found that the current state of development in TAFE nationally (with only Western Australia offering a Nursing Associate Diploma) did not justify the establishment of a national pilot scheme for TAFE-university credit in Nursing.

In October, 1993, the Nursing Reference Group invited a team of consultants from the University of Newcastle to conduct Phase II of the Nursing Credit Transfer Project. This phase investigated the credit transfer arrangements that Australian universities apply to applicants to Nursing courses who have qualifications and/or experience from the hospital/health sector. The principal focus of the study was the credit transfer arrangements that apply to students entering undergraduate Nursing courses. However, the opportunity was also taken to gather data about credit transfer arrangements for students entering postgraduate certificate, diploma and coursework masters degree courses.

This paper describes the methods that were developed and used to gather data on the credit transfer policies and practices of Australian universities in relation to applicants for entry to Nursing courses. It outlines some of the difficulties that were experienced in the process, and uses selected data from the project to highlight some of the inconsistencies in the approaches that Australian universities use for determining credit transfer. The paper concludes by speculating on the likely success of the AVCC's attempt to convince universities to take consistent approaches to credit transfer.

### METHOD

In early November, 1993, the consultants sought the co-operation of Deans of Nursing (or equivalent) at all Australian universities by distributing a survey that requested information about the credit transfer arrangements existing at each university. The covering letter stressed that this phase of the project was concerned only with students seeking entry to undergraduate (and certain specified postgraduate coursework) Nursing courses, and only with credit that is granted for qualifications and/or experience gained in the

hospitals/health sector. The study was not concerned with credit for studies completed at university, or in TAFE, or overseas. The survey was in three parts: Part A sought general information about each university's credit transfer policies and practices; Part B sought information on specific amounts of credit that are given for a range of hospital/health sector courses in a range of university Nursing courses; and Part C presented three scenarios of typical applicants for entry to Nursing courses. Part C was included to provide a simple means of comparing the credit transfer practices (as opposed to policies) of each university.

Surveys were sent to thirty-six (36) separate faculties or departments of Nursing at twenty-seven institutions in all States and Territories of Australia. Mitchell and Riverina campuses of Charles Sturt University provided a combined response as did Geelong, Burwood and Warrnambool campuses of Deakin University, and the Australian Catholic University. This reduced the number of respondents to thirty-four (34)

and also gave a 100% response rate. All respondents (34) stated that courses were given at their university for nurses or people studying to become nurses.

When the data from the surveys had been compiled, a draft report was distributed to the Reference Group for comment and a meeting was held in early March, 1994, to discuss these preliminary results. The institutions were then provided with an opportunity to check that their responses were complete and that they had been interpreted correctly. A draft report (not including recommendations) was sent to each institution that provided the initial data, with a request that the data relevant to their institution be checked. This resulted in some minor modifications and additions, in some cases due to the fact that the person checking the data was not the person who had originally supplied it.

A second draft of the consultants' report, including draft recommendations, was presented to the Chairperson of the Reference Group and to the Director of the Credit Transfer Project in early May, 1994. Following a meeting with these people to refine the recommendations, the consultants circulated the report to all members of the Reference Group for final comment prior to the report being submitted to the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

## RESULTS

General information about credit transfer policies and practices  
The first section of the survey was designed to gather information about the forms of credit that are available to students with hospital/health sector qualifications and experience who are entering Nursing courses at Australian university, and to provide an overview of the credit transfer policies and practices of these universities. All the institutions responding to the survey indicated that some form of credit was given to Nursing students in undergraduate or postgraduate courses for qualifications gained in the hospital/health

sector. However, the forms of credit offered varied considerably. Thirty (88%) of the thirty-four respondents gave block credit of some sort, predominantly to Registered Nurses from hospital-based programs. Of those who indicated that block credit (exemption from a fixed period of study) was given, twelve indicated that the block credit granted ranged from 50% to 75% of the undergraduate degree. Twenty-eight (83%) of the respondents indicated that specified credit was given (i.e. credit in specific subjects, but not necessarily subjects that made up a complete section of the course); sixteen (47%) indicated that unspecified credit was given, and sixteen (47%) indicated that credit within a subject was given. All but five of the institutions that gave specified credit explained that credit was given in elective subjects and/or in subjects which were deemed equivalent to the applicant's prior study.

Twenty-seven (79%) of the respondents indicated that the credit given always resulted in an overall reduction in the time taken to complete the award, whereas ten (29%) indicated that the effect on the overall time taken varied from case to case. (Of these ten, three also indicated that block credit always reduced the duration of some courses.)

The majority of respondents (73%) indicated that decisions on credit were made using a mixture of precedent and individual consideration. Only one university considered every application individually, and seven institutions indicated that they always used established precedents to determine credit. Six institutions indicated that established precedent was used for block credit for Registered Nurses in undergraduate courses, whereas individual consideration was used for applications for additional credit and/or for students enrolled in postgraduate courses.

There was considerable diversity in responses to the question on who

made decisions on credit applications. Most commonly (44%), the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Co-ordinator or Course Co-ordinator made the decision. The titles given for this person varied but in the majority of these cases it was a nurse academic in a Course Co-ordination role. In seven cases, recommendations made by individuals were then forwarded to a Committee or Faculty Board for ratification. In another three cases, the decisions were made by an Admissions and Progression Committee or a Curriculum Committee in the case of specific block credit being given in accordance with established policies. Again, the names of these committees varied, but they were all in the category of being at a more specific level of decision-making than the Faculty Board. In eleven cases (32%), decisions were made by a senior academic (e.g. the Dean or Head of Department). In four institutions, the decision was made by non-academic Administrative Officers, Student Advisers or Registrars. The respondents were asked to indicate what time limits, if any, applied to qualifications and/or experience for which credit was being sought. Eleven institutions (32%) applied no time limits at all. One

indicated that no time limits were applied for Enrolled Nurses, but that there were time limits for Registered Nurses unless the applicant's Nursing experience is deemed by the Faculty of Nursing to have maintained the currency of their qualifications. In contrast to this, another respondent said there were no time limits for Registered Nurses but that there were time limits for other students. One respondent specified there were no time limits for supporting subjects. Twenty-one respondents (62%) indicated that, in general, time limits applied for credit. Ten of these twenty-two indicated that the time limit would be ten years in all cases. One said that the time limit was ten years, but the student would have to present a case for consideration of work completed between five and ten years previously.

Another institution had a five-year time limit for the Bachelor of Nursing pre-registration course, but a ten-year time limit for the Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing) post-registration course. One institution indicated a basic time limit of ten years, with some concession given to students undertaking conversion courses. Four respondents (12%) stated that the time limit was five years, one that the limit was seven years, one that it was from three to five years, and another that it was from eight to ten years. One of the respondents specified that there was no time limit on credit for courses which had led to registration, but the time limit for all other courses was five years. Because some institutions had time limits for specific groups and none for others, the total number of responses to this question add to more than thirty-four.

Respondents were asked if credit decisions were influenced by whether or not the course for which credit was being sought was externally accredited (such as by a Nurses Registration Board or by a College of Nursing). Eighteen institutions (53%) stated that external accreditation did not influence decisions. Fourteen institutions (41%) indicated that external accreditation influenced their credit transfer decisions. Two respondents indicated that external accreditation influenced credit transfer decisions for some courses. Four respondents (12%) stated that if the qualifications were from a nurse registering authority and/or a College of Nursing, then this would influence decisions.

All the institutions indicated that the mode of study by which the prior qualification was obtained (i.e. part-time, full-time, external, etc) did not influence decisions made on credit.

Twenty respondents (59%) indicated that none of the courses for which credit was granted was developed jointly by the university and another organisation. One of these respondents previously offered short courses in conjunction with the university's marketing company and would give credit for completion of those courses. Thirteen

respondents (38%) stated that their university was involved with outside organisations in the offering of courses for which credit was then given by the university. One of these universities gave credit for completion of courses which were offered by the university's own

Centre for Professional Development in Health Sciences. One respondent did not answer this question.

All but two respondents indicated that the State in which a qualification was gained did not influence the amount of credit given. One university stated that decisions were not normally influenced by any consideration of the State in which qualifications were gained, with the exception of ". . . mental health/psychiatric Nursing because of the requirements of the Registration Board". Another university indicated that consideration of the State where the qualification was gained did not normally influence decisions, but also indicated that some cases were "assessed individually".

Sixteen of the respondents (47%) stated (without further comment) that credit would not be given to a student who had completed only part of a course elsewhere (e.g. to a student who completed only the first year of a three year pre-registration course in a hospital). Five respondents stated that credit would not normally be given for partially completed courses, but then added comments to indicate that there were some exceptions. For example, one respondent said that credit would not be given but that "credit will be granted where students can demonstrate competence in the subject to which academic credit is sought. Students may be required to undertake a challenge examination". Another said that to date credit had not been given to anyone in this situation, but that "individual applications would be considered". Several respondents indicated specifically that credit would not be given for partially completed hospital-based courses. Eleven respondents indicated that credit may be given for partially completed studies, but five of these did not provide any details. Those who did provide details included comments such as "The credit granted is not only dependent upon the portion of the course completed, but is also related to the course structure/curriculum and its comparability to our course".

Twenty-four of the respondents (71%) stated that credit was not given for work experience or other forms of prior learning. Several respondents stated that work experience or other forms of prior learning would not influence credit given, but may be taken into consideration in selection processes. Ten respondents (29%) indicated that some credit was given for work experience or prior learning. For example, one university said that decisions were made individually, and related "to the type/length of experience, attendance at seminars/in-service, etc".

Nineteen respondents (56%) stated that there were no opportunities for students to sit for challenge tests as part of the process of determining credit transfer. One of these said that they were "investigating a challenge exam at present". Thirteen institutions (38%) stated that they did offer the opportunity for a challenge examination under some circumstances. Comments in relation to the offering of challenge examinations included the following: "at the discretion of individual subject co-ordinators", "migrants whose documents are destroyed", "if the basis for credit is not evident in supporting documents" and "for completed Nursing qualifications gained

overseas".

All the respondents indicated that the level of achievement (above the level of pass) in qualifications that are being used for a credit application was not taken into consideration when processing applications for credit.

Twenty-seven of the respondents (79%) stated that credit transfer policies were published, with the policies of twenty of these respondents being widely available to people outside the university.

The remaining seven respondents indicated that they do not have published credit transfer policies, but one of them indicated that they support the idea and are preparing for publication.

Ten institutions (30%) stated that there were no procedures for appeals from students following credit application decisions. The institutions that do provide for appeal procedures do this by a variety of means, including appeal to the Faculty Board or to the Registrar.

Eight institutions (24%) stated that their credit policies were not reviewed regularly. Of the twenty-six respondents (76%) who indicated that their credit transfer policies were reviewed, sixteen indicated that the reviews were conducted regularly, with the period between reviews varying from every semester to every five years.

Eleven respondents (32%) indicated that credit applications were not resolved before the commencement of the semester in which the credit was being sought. Two respondents explained that early resolution was dependent on whether the applicant submitted the correct documentation far enough in advance. It was also stated that "students [are] sometimes unaware that they can apply for credit until the course commences". Another respondent explained that if "the subject is taught later in the course, application may be made at any time". Two respondents said that automatic credit on the basis of initial qualifications would be processed before commencement, but if additional credit was being sought by the use of challenge examinations then this would occur later.

#### Credit for specific prior qualifications and experience

The purpose of the second section of the survey was to gain specific information about the amount of credit that is granted to students in various types of courses (undergraduate degree, postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, coursework masters degree) for each of a nominated range of prior hospital/health sector qualifications. In each case, the respondents were asked to indicate the amount of credit that would be granted as a fraction of the total course (e.g. 5 units in a 12 unit course).

Table 1 provides a summary of the range of credit granted in each type of university course for each type of prior qualification. The following general observations can be made about this data:

All Australian universities give some credit in undergraduate Nursing degrees for some types of qualification and experience gained in the hospital/health sector.

Most frequently, credit is given for hospital-based pre-registration and second registration courses. The greatest level of consistency in the granting of credit was in respect of three-year hospital-based courses leading to registration. This was the only category of hospital-based course for which every institution gave some credit, and half the institutions gave the equivalent of two years credit in a three-year program. However, even in this category, there was still a wide range in the credit available.

Approximately one third of the universities give some credit for hospital-based continuing education courses.

About half the universities give some credit for courses conducted by Colleges of Nursing.

Very few universities grant any credit for courses offered by private providers.

Very few universities give any credit for hospital/health sector training and experience to students entering postgraduate courses.

For each form of hospital/health sector training and experience, there is a wide range in the amount of credit that universities are prepared to grant to students entering Nursing courses.

Table 1: Summary of amount of credit granted for various

hospital/health sector based courses.

Typical applications for credit

The third section of the survey consisted of three scenarios, each describing the qualifications and experience of a typical applicant to a Nursing program, and asked the institutions to indicate whether the person would be eligible for entry, whether they would be likely to be offered a place, and how much credit they would be granted. In each scenario, these questions were to be answered in relation to application for entry to an undergraduate Nursing degree, a graduate certificate, a postgraduate diploma, and a masters degree by coursework.

The main purpose of the scenarios was to provide a quick comparison of the likely outcomes of applications for credit from typical students who had prior qualifications and experience from the hospital/health sector. This approach was designed to indicate how the general credit transfer policies of each university are translated into decisions in individual cases.

Scenario one

This scenario described a 47-year-old applicant who had one hospital certificate with only average results in the Nurses' Registration Examinations. She gained entry into the hospital course via the now obsolete nurses' entrance examinations. She had no recent clinical practice experience and had been out of the workforce for 24 years. The responses of the institutions to this applicant are summarised

below.

#### Undergraduate Nursing degree

Twenty two of the 34 institutions (64%) indicated that the applicant would be eligible for entry based on the information given and sixteen (47%) would offer a place. The remainder of survey respondents did not consider the applicant to be eligible for a place in their undergraduate courses or did not respond to the question.

The applicant would be granted credit toward an undergraduate degree by 18 of the 34 institutions (53%) who responded to the survey. The range of credit that would be granted was between 50% and 75% of the total course. The average credit awarded to the applicant was 62% of the undergraduate program (which in most cases is 3 years).

When commenting on this scenario, thirteen institutions focussed on the need for the applicant to be currently registered with the appropriate authority. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis (by five institutions) on the need for the applicant to complete a refresher, re-registration or bridging course before she would be considered for any credit for her hospital certificate and commensurate experience. Two other institutions required the applicant to have a hospital certificate. In one case of granting credit a refresher course appeared to be a pre-requisite for a registered nurse who has allowed his/her authority to practise to lapse. The refresher course provided eligibility for renewal of a practising certificate. One university specified that credit would be given on the basis of success of similar students who were given the opportunity. This was one of the few references that were made to the past success of credit transfer policies.

Some institutions specified that they would not initially give credit to this applicant, but did, however, provide a list of pathways by which it would be possible for this particular student to gain entry, be offered a place and subsequently gain credit toward the degree. One university recognised prior learning by permitting entry into a conversion course but no credit was given. In some cases, credit was provided for recognition of prior learning. Examples of reasons given are: "hospital certificate - registered nurse"; "all registered nurses eligible for entry to post-registration Bachelor of Health

Science"; "would be eligible for the Bachelor of Nursing (conversion) for certificated nurses"; and, "person given block credit for the post-registration Bachelor of Nursing Science".

Other singular reasons for not giving credit were: "The applicant needs to be contextually aware of Nursing practice"; and "the content of the initial Nursing studies do not match the content of the courses that she is eligible to enter". Another reason given was that the "applicant completed initial studies more than ten years ago". Further individual grounds for not allocating credit were the "length of time since studying/participating in continuing education courses". Credit would be given automatically to all registered nurses but the "amount of experience etc [would be] unlikely to [provide] sufficient points

for entry". Another comment made was that the applicant would need a "minimum of one year clinical experience", and in another case the applicant must have a "minimum of 2 years current full-time employment" to be eligible for entry. The most common reason for not allocating credit was that the applicant had not practised as a registered nurse for an extended period of time.

#### Graduate certificate

One university would grant entry and make an offer, but would not give any credit. Another would grant entry and make an offer dependent on the applicant undertaking one or more bridging subjects and an undergraduate research subject, but no credit would be given. At another university, the applicant would be eligible for entry into the graduate certificate course but an offer would not be made. No other university would deem the applicant eligible for entry to a Graduate Certificate course.

#### Postgraduate diploma

One university would grant special entry into their graduate diploma in recognition of prior learning for an applicant without a degree providing the qualifying/bridging requirements were met. Two other institutions would grant entry but not give any credit. Two universities would consider the applicant eligible for entry, would make an offer of a place in the degree course, but would not allocate any credit.

#### Masters degree

No institutions considered the applicant's qualifications and experience as appropriate for entry into a masters program.

#### Scenario two

In this scenario a 22-year-old applicant with one hospital certificate sought entry to a university Nursing program. He had recent experience as a registered general nurse and his results in the Higher School Certificate and Nurses' Registration Examinations were exceptional. The responses of the institutions to this applicant are summarised below.

#### Undergraduate Nursing degree

Thirty-two (94%) of the 34 institutions deemed the applicant eligible for entry and twenty-six institutions (76%) would offer him a place. The applicant would be granted credit by 30 (88%) of the 34 institutions (and possibly by another two who gave conflicting information). The proportion of credit provided varied, with a range of 42% to 76% of the course.

Of the thirty-one institutions that would give credit to the applicant, ten indicated that it was because he was registered, four because he had a minimum of 12 months experience, and five because he had recent practical experience.

In the case of the four institutions that would not give credit, some of the reasons for not allocating credit were: "no specialty area identified", and "prior learning already recognised by provision of entry into the conversion course". This later comment suggests that, in effect, credit would be given.

### Graduate certificate

Six of the institutions surveyed have a graduate certificate course and, of these, five would consider the applicant eligible for entry, but only two of those would offer him a place. Comments made about giving and not giving credit were: The applicant would be "required to complete four qualifying units"; "no specialty area identified"; "must undertake an undergraduate research subject to be eligible for the Graduate Certificate" and "no recent specialty practice".

### Postgraduate diploma

There are ten institutions offering a postgraduate diploma in Nursing that would consider an application from this person. Eight of the ten would deem him eligible for entry into the postgraduate diploma course.

Of those where he would be technically eligible for entry, two would not in practice offer a place, five would offer a place, and one said "yes/no....depends on work experience". Only one university would give credit "up to 25% maximum". Reasons provided for not giving credit were: "need to complete qualifying units", and "no specialty area identified".

### Masters degree

There are no institutions that would consider the applicant eligible for entry into a masters course.

### Scenario three

This scenario described a 27-year-old registered nurse with three hospital certificates. Her entry to Nursing was via a Higher School Certificate qualification, and since becoming a registered nurse she had acquired a number of continuing education certificates and considerable experience. She was currently employed as a Nursing unit manager. The responses of the institutions to this applicant are summarised below.

### Undergraduate Nursing degree

Thirty-three (99%) of the 34 institutions would deem the applicant eligible for entry and thirty (88%) would offer her a place. The applicant would be granted credit by 33 (97%) of the 34 institutions. The credit allocated varied, with a range of between 20% and 75% of the total course.

Sixteen institutions (47%) would give credit to the applicant based on the fact she has more than the basic hospital certificate and experience. Fourteen institutions would give credit because she is currently registered, and ten would give her credit because she had recent experience. Another two respondents would give credit if she performed well in a challenge examination. Other reasons for giving credit were: "has a current work history, which is varied and extensive and has undertaken continuing education programs"; "conversion course - automatic two year credit for previous qualifications with an additional consideration for management course . . . would consider hours and content when making decision" and "as Jane's general qualifications are within the last ten years she would automatically be

given credit of eighty-eight units (42% of the course)".

#### Graduate certificate

Only six institutions offer a Graduate Certificate in Nursing and all but one of these indicated that the applicant would be technically eligible for entry. Out of these five institutions, only two would in practice offer a place to the applicant. Reasons given for not giving credit are: that she "would need to complete qualifying units for postgraduate level courses"; "eligible for advanced midwifery course but would not be granted credit because of lack of post-certification midwifery experience".

#### Postgraduate diploma

Fourteen institutions (41%) would consider the applicant eligible for entry to a postgraduate diploma. Of this group, twelve would make an

offer of a place in the course. Only one university program provides credit and they give up to 25% maximum. Comments about giving credit are: "credit given on basis of NSW certificate in A and E"; "credit given on basis of previous studies but would depend on content of A & E course"; and "credit would depend on level of College of Nursing course".

#### Masters degree

Two institutions would deem the applicant eligible for entry to a masters course, and would offer her a place in the course. One university would also give up to 25% credit.

#### SUMMARY OF THE THREE SCENARIOS

The scenarios of typical credit transfer applicants were developed in order to obtain a simple comparison between the credit transfer procedures (as opposed to policies) of the institutions in the study. The most striking observation that can be made from these scenarios is that there seems to be a high degree of inconsistency in the way in which the various institutions would respond to the credit transfer applications of these potential students. There also appeared to be some inconsistencies in the way in which the institutions would apply their own credit transfer policies to different applicants. For example, it appears that several universities would give the applicant in Scenario 2 more advanced standing than the applicant in Scenario 3, even though the latter applicant was clearly more highly qualified than the former. The likely outcomes of the credit transfer applications of the three nurses in the Scenarios could be generalised as follows:

#### Undergraduate degree

The applicant who had one hospital certificate and no recent experience would be eligible for entry into the degree if she had been currently registered, had recent work experience of at least 12 months duration, was either currently employed or had recent clinical work experience in the last five years. Additionally if the applicant undertook a bridging, refresher or re-registration course or/and additional

subjects this would enable her to attain some credit toward a conversion undergraduate degree.

The applicant who had one hospital certificate, recent Nursing experience and a good academic record was more successful in terms of entry into the courses described in the questionnaire and in terms of being offered a place and obtaining some credit for his qualifications and experience (prior learning). Acknowledgement for prior learning in this case was on the basis of his up-to-date nurses' board authority to practise (registration), current employment status and at least 12 months clinical practice experience as a registered nurse (which is implied in the scenario but not categorically stated).

Finally, the applicant who had three hospital certificates, several continuing education certificates and extensive and recent Nursing experience would be given credit in most cases, with only a few institutions requiring more information or not accepting the applicant as eligible for entry. For those institutions that give credit, the student must be registered, currently employed, have recent experience in excess of 12 months clinical practice, and some consideration would be made on the basis of other qualifications and experience.

Postgraduate courses

For the postgraduate Nursing courses offered by respondents there was a great deal more consistency in terms of the eligibility of applicants, the making of an offer of entry to a course and the giving of credit. This appeared to be so because of the small number of institutions who would even admit the scenario applicants into postgraduate courses. Only one university would offer credit across all courses and for all scenarios. The criteria for entry and for granting credit in postgraduate degree courses is much more stringent than for

undergraduate courses and, in general, applicants must possess an undergraduate degree in order to gain entry.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO THE AVCC

As a result of considering the information presented by the consultants, the Nursing Reference Group made the following recommendations to the AVCC. These recommendations describe minimum levels of credit, and basic policies and procedures. They are intended to complement more generous credit transfer arrangements which may be implemented by individual institutions.

Minimum level of credit

Applicants for entry to undergraduate Nursing degrees who have completed a three-year course leading to registration as a Registered Nurse in Australia should receive block credit of a minimum of two years of the degree course, or the equivalent in specified/unspecified credit. Additional credit should also be considered for pre-registration or post-registration qualifications, but credit for qualifications and experience gained more than ten years prior to entry to university should not be automatic.

Policies and procedures

A standard set of policies and procedures for determining credit for applicants to Nursing courses should be adopted and published by individual universities. These policies should:

- take into account the AVCC Credit Transfer Principles and Guidelines on the Recognition of Prior Learning;
- be incorporated into university handbooks and other information normally available to prospective students of Nursing;
- state clearly the credit available for each common level of hospital qualification and/or experience;
- indicate any time limitations or other factors that may affect the granting of credit;
- ensure that decisions on credit transfer are made prior to the commencement of the academic year in which the student enters the course;
- provide appeal procedures so that prospective students and enrolled students have access to a simple mechanism for appealing against decisions on credit transfer;
- be reviewed regularly.

#### Atypical situations

Applicants who present atypical claims for credit (including qualifications and experience gained more than ten years prior to entry to university) should be assessed individually. Applicants should be provided with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate that credit should be given. These opportunities should include challenge examinations. Decisions on such applications should be made by academic staff involved with the course and should not be the responsibility of one person.

This process may be subject to the ability of universities to recover the cost of such applications.

#### Consistency of credit transfer

Ultimately, it is desirable to have consistent policy and practice on credit transfer into Nursing courses across Australia. It is suggested that this consistency be achieved in three stages:

In universities with multiple campuses, the Deans of Nursing should initiate action to establish consistent credit transfer arrangements at their various campuses.

Within each State, the Deans of Nursing at each university should collaborate to establish consistent credit transfer arrangements which take account of the special circumstances existing in that State.

The Australian Council of Deans of Nursing should be invited to develop a procedure for establishing consistent credit transfer arrangements across Australia.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The overwhelming impression gained from the data in this research is that there is little consistency between the credit transfer policies of Australian universities. For example, on a matter as simple as how much credit to give an applicant to an undergraduate Nursing degree for

a three-year hospital-based pre-registration course, the credit available varied from 33% to 76% of the undergraduate course. For post-registration courses, the variations were even greater. There seems to be no legitimate reason for such variations to continue. One of the major difficulties experienced by the consultants when conducting the research reported here was the problem of locating a person at each university who had the knowledge, authority and time to provide the information that was requested. This problem was compounded by the fact that only 60% of the universities had Nursing credit transfer policies that were published in a readily available form. It appears that in many universities the policies are rather fluid and their interpretation is very much a matter of chance. This was evidenced in the many inconsistencies in the data supplied in response to the three parts of the survey, and in the difficulty of verifying data that was questionable.

For several years, the AVCC has been attempting to convince universities of the merits of developing and applying sensible policies and practices for credit transfer. This thrust seems to have been a qualified success in relation to university-to-university credit transfer, and a limited success in relation to TAFE-to-university transfer. However, the results of this research suggest that most universities are reluctant to seriously address the issue of developing policies for credit transfer on the basis of qualifications and experience from other than the university or TAFE sectors, even in a field such as Nursing where there is a long history of accredited specialist training. Such reluctance is quite clearly disadvantaging many potential students and wasting our valuable educational resources. Unless otherwise indicated, the term "universities" includes Avondale College, La Trobe University College, and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

Unless otherwise indicated, all percentages are based on N=34 (the total number of respondents).