Fact sheet

Updated December 2019

Transition to a new assessment model for internationally qualified nurses and midwives

Introduction

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) undertakes functions as set by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The NMBA regulates the practice of nursing and midwifery in Australia, and one of its key roles is to protect the public. The NMBA does this by developing standards, codes and guidelines which together establish the requirements for the professional and safe practice of nurses and midwives in Australia.

As part of its public protection role, the NMBA in partnership with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) is responsible for assessing registration applications from internationally qualified nurses and midwives (IQNMs) to ensure they are suitably trained and qualified for registration in Australia.

This fact sheet answers common queries about the new model of assessment for IQNMs applying for registration in Australia.

Background

Prior to the start of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme in 2010, the assessment of IQNMs was undertaken by the state and territory boards. In 2010, AHPRA developed a national model for the assessment for IQNMs. Following a review of assessment processes, the NMBA developed an interim model of assessment for IQNMs which has been in place since 2014. The interim model was based on eight qualification assessment criteria and resulted in a more equitable and consistent assessment of IQNM applications.

Transition to a new model of assessment for IQNMs

The NMBA is moving to a permanent approach in the assessment of IQNMs. Changes under the new model include a reduction in the assessment criteria from eight to three, which took effect in January 2019. This change streamlines the assessment process; however, the outcomes from assessments remain the same as under the previous eight criteria.

In early 2020, the NMBA will also transition to an outcomes-based assessment (OBA) for IQNMs who hold a qualification that is relevant but not substantially equivalent or based on similar competencies to an Australian approved qualification (and who meet the mandatory registration standards). This will replace the current need for bridging programs.

The NMBA undertook an extensive research project to explore the factors and requirements to establish an OBA which made recommendations that:

- the overall assessment process includes both a cognitive and behavioural component
- the cognitive assessment must be passed before the behavioural component is attempted, and
- an orientation program is established to orientate nurses and midwives to working in the Australian healthcare context.
1. **What is the new model of assessment for IQNMs?**

The new model of assessment has some new components to how we assess IQNMs wanting to register in Australia. The assessment of qualifications will continue to be against the current three criteria.

IQNMs who are assessed as holding a qualification that is substantially equivalent or based on similar competencies to an Australian approved qualification (and who meet the mandatory registration standards), will be eligible to apply for registration.

IQNMs who are assessed as holding a qualification that is relevant but not substantially equivalent or based on similar competencies to an Australian approved qualification (and who meet the mandatory registration standards), will be required to successfully complete an outcomes-based assessment (OBA) prior to being eligible to apply for registration.

All IQNMs will be required to complete the orientation program.

2. **What is the OBA?**

The OBA is a two-step assessment process: a multiple-choice exam and an objective structured clinical exam. IQNMs must pass the first assessment before moving to the next assessment.

Part one is a cognitive assessment, which is a computer-based multiple-choice exam. IQNMs must pass the exam to move to part two of the OBA.

Part two is a behavioural assessment in the form of an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). The OSCE has been developed to assess that an IQNM demonstrates the knowledge, skills and competence of a graduate level Australian nurse or midwife.

Part three is an orientation program.

3. **Will all IQNMs need to complete the orientation program?**

Yes. There are three stages to the orientation program.

Stage one is an online assessment to introduce IQNMs to Australia and the Australian healthcare system.

Stage two covers the diversity of Australian culture and will be completed once registered with the NMBA and will be a condition of registration until it is completed.

Stage three is provided by the IQNM’s employer, based on NMBA guidelines.

4. **Who is the OBA for?**

The OBA is the assessment process for IQNMs who wish to register in Australia and who are assessed as holding **relevant but not substantially equivalent qualifications** (and who meet the mandatory registration standards).

5. **Will all IQNMs have to go through the OBA?**

No. All IQNMs will have their qualifications assessed. **IQNMs holding qualifications which do not meet all the required assessment criteria will be directed to the OBA pathway.**

IQNMs that do not hold a relevant qualification (under section 53 of the National Law) or do not meet the assessment criteria will need to complete an NMBA approved program of study before being eligible to apply for registration.

6. **When will the OBA for IQNMs start?**

There are two phases for the transition to the OBA:

1. **From 1 October 2019 until 31 January 2020,** IQNMs who hold relevant but not substantially equivalent qualifications (and who meet the mandatory registration standards) will have the choice to be referred to a bridging program or to the OBA.
2. The new model of assessment will start in March 2020, and all IQNMs with relevant but not substantially equivalent qualifications (and who meet the mandatory registration standards) will be referred to the OBA and will no longer be referred to bridging courses.

7. If I get a referral to the OBA, when will I be able to start the process and how long will it take to complete?

IQNMs with a referral to the OBA will be able to begin the OBA process in March 2020.

IQNMs undertaking the OBA must pass each assessment before undertaking the next assessment. The time taken to complete the OBA is dependent on how quickly the IQNM can progress through the assessments.

8. What if I already have a referral to a bridging course, but I want to do the OBA instead?

IQNMs who hold a current referral to a bridging program will be able to contact AHPRA after 1 October 2019 to request a referral to the OBA instead. IQNMs should contact the Registration Officer named in their referral letter. Please note that IQNMs will not be able to start the OBA process until March 2020.

9. What if I have already started a bridging course?

IQNMs who have already started a bridging course should continue to complete the program.

10. Do all IQNMs still need to meet the NMBA’s mandatory registration standards?

Yes. All IQNM’s will need to provide evidence of meeting the NMBA mandatory registration standards.

11. What will be the costs of the new outcomes-based assessment?

Information on costs will be available on the NMBA website in January 2020.

12. Where will I be able to do the OBA?

More information about OBA providers will be available in January 2020.

13. Are there still bridging programs available for IQNMs?

Bridging programs are expected to continue until 2021 for IQNMs who hold a referral to bridging. IQNMs will no longer be referred to bridging programs from 31 January 2020.

For more information

- Visit the Internationally qualified nurses and midwives section of the NMBA website
- Visit the Registration standards section of the NMBA website
- Visit www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au under Contact us to lodge an online enquiry form
- For registration enquiries: 1300 419 495 (in Australia) +61 3 9275 9009 (overseas callers)
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