
ECUs State-wide Partnership Enabling Assistant Nursing Training

Synopsis

Since 2010, Edith Cowan University's Bachelor of Science (Nursing) students have had the unique opportunity to participate in a partnership with NorthMetro TAFE, nursing employment agency (NurseWest) and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Perth. The partnership offers students the possibility to undertake training and employment as an *Assistant in Nursing (AIN)* whilst completing their Registered Nursing studies. This reverse articulation program is one of a kind in Australia, increasing enrolments and retention at TAFE and producing Assistant Nurses that are industry ready and meet critical workforce needs. For students, the AIN program links theory to practice, allows networking with future employers and provides authentic experiences to enhance employability. The ECU students achieve a nationally recognised qualification in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care and have opportunities for meaningful employment whilst studying. This supports their retention in University studies, building a profound sense of purpose as well as securing critical financial support. The success of the *AIN* is demonstrated by more than 800 program completions and successful transitions to nursing positions in the healthcare industry. This partnership sets a benchmark for reverse articulation programs within health disciplines, advancing employability skills and simultaneously meeting industry labour force needs for vocational and professional roles.

‘This AIN Program has put ECU School of Nursing & Midwifery on the map within the healthcare industry as an educational institution willing to offer students this opportunity as a stepping stone within their degree (Professor Di Twigg, Professor of Nursing and Executive Dean, ECU School of Nursing and Midwifery, 2017).’

Overview

The *Assistant in Nursing (AIN)* program is a reverse articulation program, which allows students enrolled in an undergraduate Registered Nurse degree at ECU, to gain a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification while completing, or taking a break from their university studies. A reverse articulation program is one where students studying at higher education institutions complete a VET qualification with credits from their undergraduate degree working towards a VET qualification (Harris & Ramos, 2012). A successful partnership between Edith Cowan University (ECU), NorthMetro TAFE (NMT), Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital (SCGH) and, a nursing agency, NurseWest, has enabled the creation of a student-centred course with an education program that is tailored specifically to the ECU RN student's individual needs and leads to employment opportunities. Students who complete this program are awarded by NMT the Certificate III in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care (HLT33115). Western Australian government hospitals and all nursing home facilities in Australia require this qualification for staff employed as Assistants in Nursing. ECU is a major WA university with more than 30,000 students across three campuses with more than 2700 students enrolled into the Bachelor of Science (Nursing) course, SCGH is one of Australia's leading teaching tertiary hospitals employing approximately 6,000 staff, NMT is the VET provider for the northern Perth metropolitan region with 39,400 students and was recently awarded *WA Large Training Provider of the Year 2018*. The partnership between these organisations is inclusive and engages a broad range of stakeholders.

The AIN program is a benchmark for other higher education providers and health industry partners who may consider offering such training. The need for such a program relates to global, current and projected nursing shortages; increased nursing workloads; increased patient acuity and the lack of hospital resources and funding. These conditions result in the increased use of the *Assistant in Nursing* (AIHW, 2015; Buchan & Calman, 2004; Duffield et al., 2014). In Australia, nursing support roles such as *Assistants in Nursing* are evolving in response to a change in how health care is delivered, emerging technologies and the increasing professionalism of registered nurses. The demand for nursing support workers is growing strongly, as noted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) with significant shortages noted by 2023.

Edith Cowan University and NMT both belong to the Joondalup Learning Precinct and the AIN program is directly linked to a key goal of the precinct: working collaboratively to **strengthen the City of Joondalup as a place to grow and learn**. Through the development of this program, ECU and NMT are attracting students and a skilled workforce to the Perth region, a key goal of the City of Joondalup strategic plan (2017) and noted by the relevant partners in Appendix A (support materials). *Importantly, the success of the program positively impacts upon our existing, long term partnership – The Joondalup Learning Precinct, by meeting key goals of the collective, including - undertaking activities collectively to strengthen and promote Joondalup as a Learning City, attracting research and investment, a skilled workforce, students, visitors and residents (David Pelusey, Head of Programs, Health, NorthMetro TAFE, 2017).*

The AIN qualification enables the recipient to seek employment with partner organisations, SCGH and NurseWest, as well as other agencies including public and private hospitals, rehabilitative organisations and aged care environments. Students who complete reverse articulation programs and gain employment whilst they are undertaking their university studies often have an edge in securing employment upon graduation from their studies (Crevacore, Jonas-Dwyer, & Nicol, 2016; McLaughlin & Mills, 2011). Participants gain opportunities to develop the skills employers are looking for, such as communication skills, teamwork skills, aptitude, and interpersonal skills (Graduate Careers Australia, 2015).

Since 2010, the AIN program has facilitated meaningful employment opportunities for the undergraduate nursing student within the acute care health environment. Networks between ECU's School of Nursing and Midwifery (SNM) and the NorthMetro TAFE (NMT) Health Programs department allowed an investigation and prompted a collaboration between the two organisations. This collaboration identified the Certificate III in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care as an appropriate qualification that could be readily mapped to the first year of the Bachelor of Science, Nursing qualification. Consistent with requirements for awarding national training qualifications, there were areas that did not map and these 'gaps' in the required skills and knowledge of the *Assistant in Nursing* and the ECU undergraduate Registered Nursing student who had completed the first eight units were identified and through collaboration, a 'gap package' was prepared. Completion of this 'gap package' allowed the awarding of Certificate III in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care. Creating this opportunity for ECU registered nursing students and then leveraging the strong industry links that exist between ECU and both Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital (SCGH) and NurseWest (NW) enabled employment opportunities to be created for those students who complete this program. *As the then Head of School, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Postgraduate Medicine, I strongly supported the development of a proposal for an Assistant in Nursing (AIN) program. I was impressed with the initiative behind the concept and at the time, it was evident to me that the program had the potential to transform lives by providing an opportunity for meaningful employment opportunities for our nursing students. The AIN has proven to be a great success and has served to strengthen our partnerships with North Metro TAFE, NurseWest, and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. We now have a robust program which supports the current and future health workforce needs of Western Australia (Professor Cobie Rudd, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategic Partnerships) & Vice-President, 2018).* Figure 1 below outlines the steps required to be awarded the Certificate III in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care.

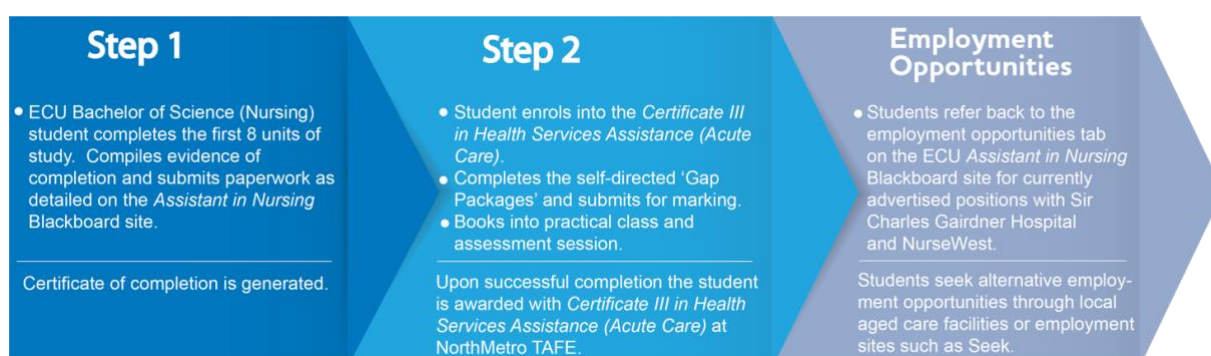


Figure 1: - Steps involved in completing the Assistant in Nursing Program

The outcomes of this program are wide reaching and include benefits to ECU university students, the university as an organisation, NorthMetro TAFE, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and NurseWest as an employment agency. ECU Registered Nursing students report they have improved self-confidence, have gained valuable work experience, developed personal and professional skills and have been able to network with future employers. *“The AIN course has provided me with invaluable real-life paid experiences that has enabled me to become a better nursing student and no doubt better future nurse. The employment I gained after attaining my certificate has immensely increased my confidence as a student and person, and also allowed me to develop important skills including time management that I may otherwise not have been able to.... I would encourage everyone to participate in this program as I really cannot put a price on how my current employment as an Assistant in Nursing will benefit my career.” (Student testimonial 2018).*

The program development and implementation require specialist knowledge of the university and VET sectors coupled with strong industry partnerships. For NMT, the program has deepened the relationship with a university. The AIN has provided many additional student enrolments. The attendance of ECU students at NMT, has helped NMT students understand the opportunities for further education at ECU. Extending the partnership between Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and NurseWest has expanded the opportunities to employ *Assistants in Nursing* who are work ready and understand the importance of developing therapeutic relationships in a timely manner. They have excellent skills and knowledge, and in time may become a Registered Nurse working within their organisation in the near future. These work ready AINs also help to address workforce shortages. *“It is of benefit to the pre-registration nursing student to seek employment in health care institutions and that if possible, they can do so without having to undertake additional training and education when they are already studying” (Crevacore et al, 2017, p.2 – see Supporting Materials).*

The program is a testament to the innovative approach to the strong partnership that has been forged which enables a new student experience at the School of Nursing and Midwifery, ECU, TAFE and in a healthcare worksite. It provides the student with opportunities to harness every learning opportunity whether it be at university or during their part-time employment.

Criterion 1: Distinctiveness, coherence and clarity of purpose

The *Assistant in Nursing* Program is the only **one of its kind** in Australia. The purpose of the partnership was to, provide an opportunity for Registered Nursing students to achieve an additional nationally recognised qualification during their undergraduate RN studies and to seek meaningful employment opportunities whilst completing their studies; increase student enrolments for North Metro TAFE in an industry shortage area; provide industry ready Assistants in Nursing to help with workforce demand for both Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and NurseWest. It is distinctive as it serves the students, educational providers and industry in creating meaningful employment opportunities for students and benefits for each of the partners involved.

The strategy from the outset to provide a streamlined pathway for students to participate, has been a significant benefit to ECU nursing students who wish to gain employment as an AIN with NurseWest, this has assisted NurseWest in our recruitment processes by engaging with enthusiastic students who submit applications of a high standard, whilst students from other universities are often challenged by the recognition of prior learning mapping exercise to achieve their certificate III in acute care. (Paul McEleney, Manager Corporate Services, Workforce, NurseWest 2017).

Coherence is a necessary feature of this partnership. All four organisations have a clear and distinct purpose and role. The organisations have unique strengths that when linked together have been able to develop a clear and concise program that is mutually beneficial to all parties. The capabilities of the organisations serve to align with and reinforce each other, all clearly focussed on the goal of the program.

Industry partners – SCGH and NurseWest were eager for other Western Australian universities to offer this articulation program to their student cohort, however no other university to date has been able to successfully partner with a Vocational Education Training provider to map and articulate this program. This is despite NorthMetro TAFE offering their services to other universities who teach the RN qualification.

Horizontal coherence is demonstrated through the **successful accreditation** of the 'Gap Package' by the Training Accreditation Council Western Australia. *It was easy from start to finish. The two Blackboard sites that we worked with outlined the process so that I was able to work independently to complete the required work. The turnaround time with the paperwork and my assessments was much quicker than was listed. This allowed me to get into a face to face session and complete the qualification before I had expected - which meant I got my job quicker too! (Student feedback, formal evaluation, May 2017).*

Ensuring students are able to easily navigate the online learning environments across the partnership setting adds to the success of this program. Students want to be able to work independently through activities in a timely manner with answers to their questions readily available. The inclusion of checklists, flowcharts and Frequently Asked Questions pages facilitate this process (see Figure 2 and Appendix A). *The course work that I needed to complete was well laid out and I knew what I needed to do. The final assessment brought it all together and covered everything that we had learnt. (Student feedback, formal evaluation, 2017).*

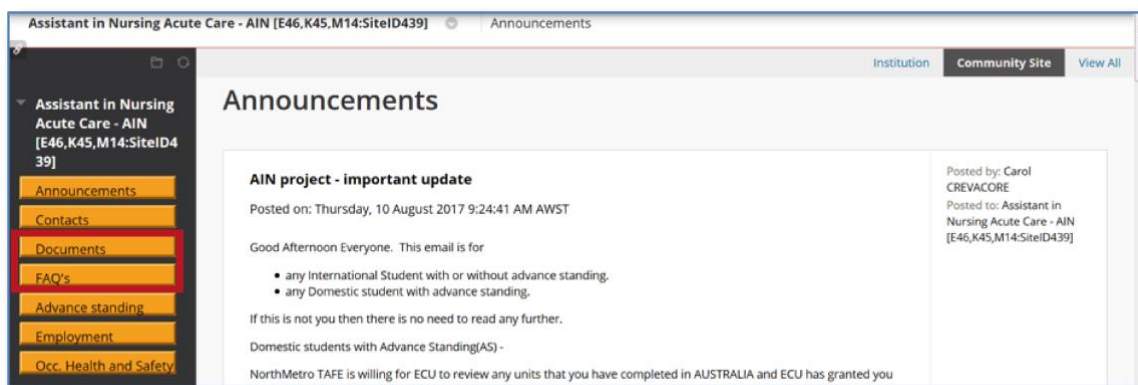


Figure 2. A snapshot of the Assistant in Nursing Community BlackBoard site developed for managing the processes involved with step one.

Industry partners also identify the AIN program as being streamlined, which allows the student to gain this qualification and subsequent employment without extensive additional work. *In the case of ECU students, through a structured and streamlined process they have gained a qualification and subsequent employment within the health sector, while continuing their Nursing studies. (David Pelusey, Head of Programs, Health, NorthMetro TAFE, 2017).*

Criterion 2: Influence on student learning and the student experience

Undergraduate nursing students globally struggle with bridging the 'theory – practice gap' (Chang & Daly, 2012; Kellehear, 2014; Scully, 2011). This program allows the students to bring experiences from their meaningful employment back into the classroom environment which helps the student bridge the '**theory to practice gap**'. *One aim of our new service was to offer student nurses with an opportunity to gain casual employment as an AIN which would provide clinical experience and assist in developing essential skills in a role closely related to their career choice (Paul McEleney, Manager Corporate Services, Workforce, NurseWest).* Through sharing their experiences in their own words with their peers, they are able to facilitate

the learning of others. The act of articulating ones understanding of a situation builds **self-confidence** and instils in the student their abilities. Many of the students in ECU's nursing program are first in family to attend university (55%, ECU SES data, 2018). The benefits of this program are extensive and comprise those **essential employability skills** highlighted by nursing recruitment staff, including prioritising and organising, effective communication, clinical reasoning and role socialisation. Importantly, AINs are paid approximately \$25 per hour. *It has enabled me to work within my chosen industry. I have gained skills and confidence with communication skills, time management skills, ward practices and more. Overall, it has opened doors for me with employers and raised my self-esteem. My critical thinking skills have developed while working as an AIN and studying for my RN degree. I feel much more confident during my pracs and feel I am more able to link theory to practice - both in the classroom and on prac (Student feedback, formal evaluation, May 2015).* Students find the AIN program helps to increase their confidence in their abilities. Their part time employment in a clinical setting allows them to **conceptualise theoretical situations**. Additionally, their employment affords them learning opportunities they may not necessarily have had. *I have a high level of confidence in my nursing skills. I can relate new learning to patients and therefore apply the learning to a practical application. I am exposed to illness and disease that I study so that I can understand the learning better (Student feedback, formal evaluation, May 2014).*

Students regularly contact the AIN Coordinator early in their university program, as they are readily able to **identify the potential impact** working as an *Assistant in Nursing* in the acute care setting can have on their current role as a nursing student and future role as a nurse. *I'm interested in working as an AIN whilst studying the Bachelor of Science (Nursing) at ECU. I've got good standing for the first 4 units in stage 1 and am due to commence stage 2 this semester. Please can I have further information on working as an AIN whilst I study as I am extremely interested (Student email, 2016).* The health industry has identified the value of this program to the RN student recognising the importance of consolidating clinical skills, being a member of a multidisciplinary team and gaining valuable work experience all help to bridge the identified theory-practice gap. It helps the student transition in their role from the undergraduate student to the Registered Nurse. *Students have reported the experience gained gives them a "head start" in communication, honing nursing skills and how to be a functional part of a team. Exposure to the acute health sector gives valuable skills to assist in transition from student to novice Registered Nurse. The experience working with acute patients and RN's & EN's and the whole healthcare team also provides valuable insights, experience and teamwork for the student undertaking the AIN role (Nurse Manager, SCGH, email 2016).* Working in meaningful employment means the student is able to practice and apply the skills and knowledge gained in their undergraduate studies whilst they are working as outlined by student feedback. *The benefits of doing the AIN certificate before finishing registered nursing, is that I can get part time work in a field that is related to my nursing studies and I will gain valuable experience and confidence in working in a hospital environment, and consolidate my foundational nursing skills that are important to my future career (Student comment, 2016).*

Criterion 3: Breadth of impact

The *Assistant in Nursing* program has unique benefits for each of the organisations within the partnership hence creating a breadth of impact.

The AIN program has provided benefits across the partnership. NorthMetro TAFE, NurseWest and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital all report **positive outcomes** for their organisations directly related to this program. Figure 3 highlights the benefits of the AIN program for each stakeholder.

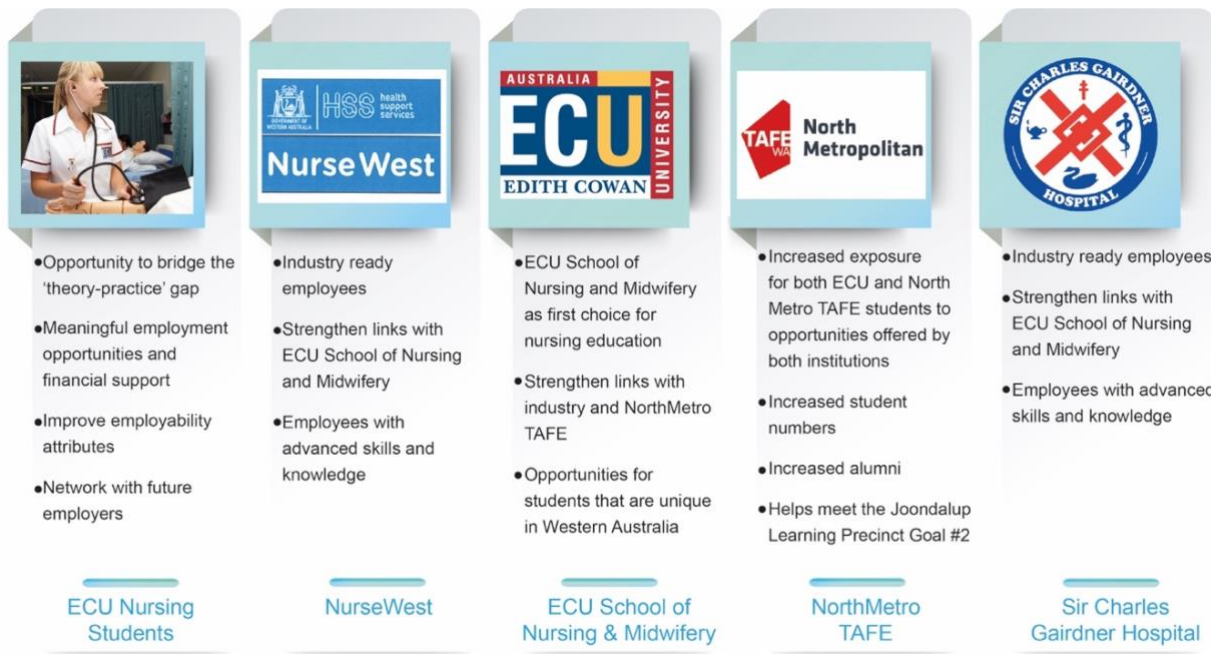


Figure 3. Highlights of the benefits for all stakeholders in this partnership.

As outlined above students have embraced this program and each year and since its inception in 2010 we have seen continued and sustained **growth in students** completing the AIN program. Figure 4 displays the number of students who have completed this program. Students from **other universities struggle** to independently navigate a Recognition of Prior Learning process to be eligible for the award that would enable them to work in the role of the *Assistant in Nursing*. *[W]hilst students from other universities are often challenged by the recognition of prior learning mapping exercise to achieve their certificate III in acute care. (Paul McEleney, Manager Corporate Services, Workforce, NurseWest, 2017).* Students are aware of the uniqueness of this program and the advantages that it can bring to their learning experience. *I am moving interstate in November.... however, the university I will be going to do not offer this type of course (Student email, 2017).*



As mentioned previously this program allows the student to build their self-confidence and self-esteem; hone their clinical skills; build strategies to develop and maintain therapeutic and professional relationships; interact and network with future employers as this unsolicited email from a student indicates. *The AIN program has contributed enormously to my theoretical learning, also when you care for a patient who has results or outcomes that we have just covered - the "penny" drops, I remember the theory because I can associate it to an actual case/patient. It enables me to apply theory to practice - evidence based learning – (Student thank you letter, 2013).*

Figure 4. Number of students completing the AIN program, 2010-2017.

NorthMetro TAFE has been closely involved in this program since its inception in 2010. NorthMetro TAFE identifies the mutually beneficial outcomes for both educational institutions and their respective students. There has been a 99.7% completion rate of the AIN program supporting an increase in NMTs student retention performance. Furthermore, the student who is awarded the qualification is exposed to the **educational opportunities** through a VET provider, broadening their educational experiences and becoming an alumnus of NMT. *The development of this specific relationship between our two education facilities, has meant students from both campuses have been able better to view, access and take advantage of the many and varied opportunities available. In the case of ECU students, through a structured and streamlined process they have gained a qualification and subsequent employment within the health sector, while continuing their Nursing studies. From an NMTAFE student perspective, the relationship we have with ECU has meant students are more aware, and greatly more informed of the further study options available to them once completing their time at TAFE. Carol's strategy from the outset to educate and encourage students to participate, has been the driving force behind the significant and enthusiastic student uptake the program has experienced. (David Pelusey, Head of Programs, Health, NorthMetro TAFE, 2017).*

The students that complete this program are eagerly awaited by the industry partners. They are seen as **valuable members** of their organisations as they have more advanced **clinical skills and knowledge** than an AIN who is not studying to be a RN. The **theoretical knowledge** the student brings to the clinical environment is appreciated by hospital staff. Furthermore, they were able to see the benefits of having their future nursing workforce **enculturated** into the Sir Charles Gairdner way of nursing. *The undergraduate nursing students employed as Casual AIN at SCGH are a valued part of the nursing workforce. The undergrad student group provides a nursing support function which has added value for the organisation due to the educational experience and clinical practical expertise gaining throughout the nursing degree. The students understand the needs of patients and are able to communicate with nurses at a higher level than traditionally trained AIN's or Certificate 111 trained students. The feedback from nursing staff is that this workforce is "worth its weight in gold" because the students can be trusted to undertake directions and tasks at a higher level than staff working in this role at certificate level. (Nurse Manager, SCGH, email 2016).*

NurseWest is the Western Australian Health Department nursing agency which supplies metropolitan and regional hospitals with nurses and AINs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When they were implementing the role of the AIN within their workforce model, they looked to ECU SNM and the AIN program coordinator for **guidance and expert knowledge** relating to the incorporation of the AIN role into their staffing model. *Carol has shared knowledge and guidance on the pathway that had been established with Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital some years ago and clearly understood our need for compliance with the WA Health Operational Directive on the role of the AIN, in particular properly qualified AIN in achieving our aims to establish quality service delivery. (Paul McEleney, Manager Corporate Services, Workforce, NurseWest 2017).* NurseWest currently employs more than 170 nursing students to work as AINs across the Western Australian government health sector as AINs. This equates to 35% of their AINs workforce made up of RN students, with the majority of these coming from this AIN program. This success is a direct result of the AIN program, which makes it easy for the ECU RN student to achieve the required award. NurseWest provides more than 125 AIN daily to the metropolitan hospitals, which will help to ensure that this **program continues to grow** and allows more nursing students to **'earn while they learn in meaningful employment'**. *I have recently taken on the role as the project officer to establish an AIN casual pool for NurseWest and I have heard you are the person to talk to! Our target is aimed at second and third year nursing students entering the workforce. I believe this was a huge success with Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and I'm hoping you can help me to link in with the ECU students? (Administrative Co-ordinator, Workforce Services, NurseWest 2016).*

The students are **eager to be employed** by the healthcare industry partners and are well prepared for the application process (see Appendix A). Step one in the AIN process requires the student to submit a covering letter with their application. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that students understand what is required in a covering letter so that when they apply to industry their application is of a high standard. The

coordinator of this program identifies areas where the student needs to improve and links students in with support services within the university such as Career Hub and Career Services, so the student is in the best position to secure employment. Industry identifies that ECU students are **enthusiastic** and submit an application which is of a **high standard**. *[T]his has assisted NurseWest in our recruitment processes by engaging with enthusiastic students who submit applications of a high standard. (Paul McEleney, Manager Corporate Services, Workforce, NurseWest).*

Finally, for ECU and the School of Nursing and Midwifery, the partnerships that have been forged between ECU and SCGH and NurseWest, supports employability. This AIN program helps the SNM to further **grow its visibility with the employers of their graduates** and strengthen the already strong connections with both NurseWest and SCGH. The AIN program has been utilised previously in marketing campaigns and future student information brochures as a **mechanism for attracting students** to the undergraduate nursing and midwifery courses and adding value to the student experience. In addition to this, as mentioned earlier by the Head of Programs NorthMetro TAFE, the AIN program helps ECU to achieve the second goal as a member of the goals outlined by the Joondalup Learning Precinct. *This AIN Program has put ECU School of Nursing & Midwifery on the map within the healthcare industry as an educational institution willing to offer students this opportunity as a stepping stone within their degree. The success of the Program has relied heavily on Carol's ability to collaborate with industry and be receptive to the changing needs of the qualification. Carol's ability to successfully coordinate this program has given many students employment opportunities during their degree. The course is well organised and smooth from enrolment to completion ensuring the students understand the requirements leading to a successful outcome. (Professor Di Twigg, Executive Dean, Professor of Nursing, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Edith Cowan University, 2017).* The program was recognised in 2017 by ECU Vice Chancellor Awards for Programs that Enhance Learning.



Undergraduate registered nursing students working as assistants in nursing within the acute care environment: Program development and discussion

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ABSTRACT

Background: Most pre-registration nursing students require employment during their studies which may entail undertaking another qualification.

This paper describes how one university developed a program whereby undergraduate nursing students complete the national vocational education – HE13315 Assistant in Nursing qualification through recognition of prior learning, a self-directed education package and completion of an objective structured clinical examination.

Objective: To discuss the development of an 'Assistant in Nursing' in the acute care environment program for pre-registration undergraduate nursing degree students using the national vocational education framework.

Design: This program maps the national 'Assistant in Nursing- Acute Care' vocational qualification to the pre-registration registered nurse degree. Upon successful completion of this program students can work as Assistants in Nursing within the acute care environment.

Conclusions: This program enables student nurses to work as Assistants in Nursing within the acute care environment. This provides employment in a health facility and opportunities for students to immerse themselves in the clinical environment whilst continuing their studies. This may assist students to gain a deeper insight into their future role as a nurse, build networks within the nursing community and assimilate into the clinical environment. This program design may prove useful as a template for other nursing faculties wishing to implement a similar program.

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Summary of relevance

Problem – Many undergraduate Registered Nursing (RN) students work as an Assistant in Nursing (AIN) to support themselves while undertaking their degree, which may require completion of an additional qualification.

What is already known – Minimum education requirements for employment as an AIN in the acute setting are not mandated by law. However, employers need to be assured that they are appropriately prepared so as not to impact negatively on patient outcomes.

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The breadth of impact is not limited to just these four organisations but is wider reaching and impacts on both the **health systems and the university sector**. In addition to two conference presentations on the AIN program, a **paper has been published** regarding the development of this articulation process in the Collegian, which is a **peer reviewed scholarly nursing journal** with its core business being the 'promotion and recognition of professional excellence in nursing' (2018). One reviewer commented, *'The author is to be congratulated on exploring alternatives to supplementing the provision of nursing care whilst providing financial support for students.'* A second reviewer commented, *'As the number of AINs increase in acute health services, it is important to understand more about their roles and responsibilities. This paper provides an insight into different ways of gaining an AIN qualification which may benefit the education of RN students.'* A final reviewer of the paper stated *'This manuscript provides a good description of an innovative program to increase access to AIN work for undergraduate nursing students, while maintaining a minimal standard of competence for employing bodies.'*

Figure 5: Scholarly publication demonstrating impact

Criterion 4: Addressing equity and diversity

ECU is a university renowned for its strong commitment to diverse students, with over 15% of its cohort from low socio-economic status backgrounds. The ECU Bachelor of Science (Nursing) is no exception, attracting many first in family students and a more mature age cohort. Retention of this diverse cohort, as noted in the Higher Education Standards Panel Discussion Paper (2017) requires attention to a range of factors, and critically, financial support. **Analysis completed at ECU indicates that the retention rates for Bachelor of Science (Nursing) students who have completed the Assistant in Nursing program are on average, 12% higher over 5 years compared to those students who had not completed the program.** Such analysis indicates that the financial support provided through employment as an Assistant in Nursing, clearly supports ECU's diverse cohort of nursing students. Figure 6 highlights the strong retention of students undertaking the Assistant in Nursing program during their Bachelor of Science (Nursing).

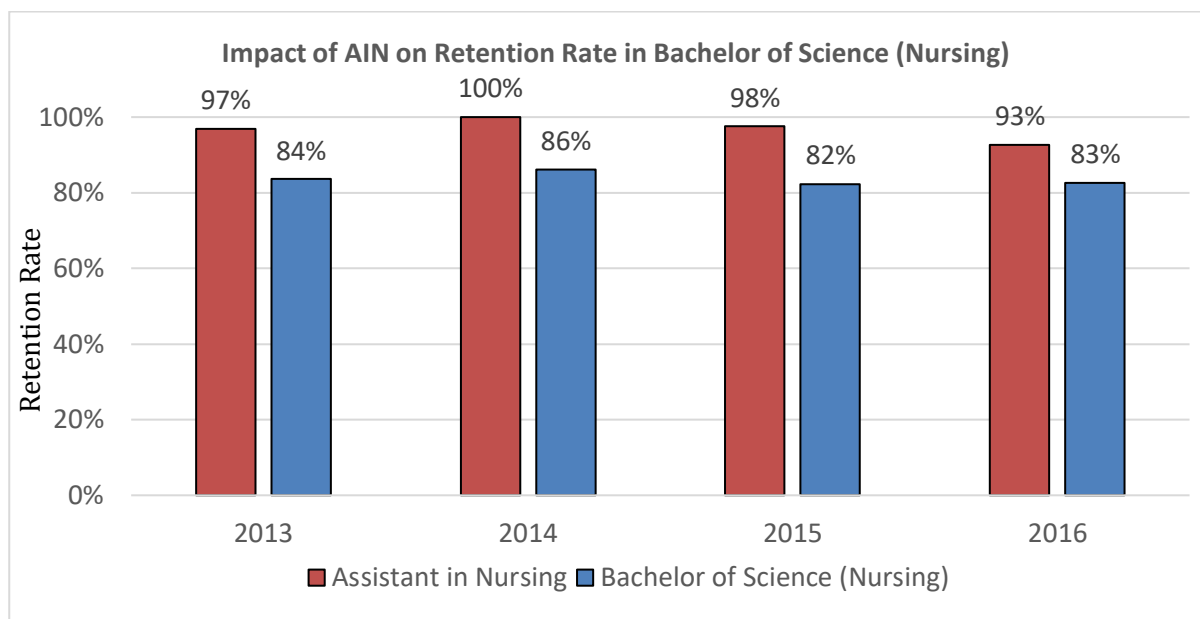


Figure 6: Retention students undertaking the Assistant in Nursing program as part of their Bachelor of Science (Nursing).

The *Assistant in Nursing* program is not just for the academically gifted student; rather it is open to each and every student who has passed the first eight units of study regardless of their academic standing. Furthermore, the program is available to students from across the wider Western Australian region. The partnership with NurseWest has opened up employment opportunities for more students living rurally. Students are able to access employment opportunities in a range of metropolitan and rural government hospitals when employed with NurseWest (see Appendix A). Since the inclusion of NurseWest to the program, who provide AIN to **rural hospitals** such as Margaret River, Bunbury and Busselton, the number of students enrolled into this program who identify with the **South West campus of ECU** being their home campus has grown. In 2010, three students in the South West of WA participated in the program and in 2018 this has grown to nine students.

As the HLT33115 Certificate III in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care is a national qualification students who are studying interstate are also able to complete this program. One student pointed out the transportability of this qualification. *Oh, that's great! I am heading home next year to Adelaide and I can use this qualification in their hospitals (Student communication, 2017).* Students do research their learning opportunities when deciding on where to complete their universities studies, and whilst the University does not want their students to leave, it is reassuring to know that a positive impression has been left with students when they think about the learning experiences that ECU have offered them. *I am moving interstate in November.... however, the university I will be going to do not offer this type of course (Student email, 2017).*

To further accommodate students' access to the AIN, and as a result of the partnership, the program at NorthMetro TAFE is offered at a significantly reduced fee. The current cost of the Certificate III in Health Services Assistance – Acute Care for a full fee-paying student is nearly \$3000, however, the ECU RN student pays only \$500, supporting students to complete this additional qualification. International students also realise the benefit of this qualification. Previously they were able to seek employment with private health care providers however, the industrial labour laws that govern SCGH did not allow for international students to seek employment with SCGH. Different labour laws govern NW which results in international students being able to access these employment opportunities.

As highlighted, this successful collaboration has proven invaluable for all stakeholders by, providing students with meaningful employment opportunities; enabling industry to have work ready AIN to help meet workforce demands; increased enrolments in a core industry qualification and improved retention performance data at both NMT and ECU; and has importantly helped the ECU students gain invaluable employability skills. The partnership personifies ECU's commitment to industry engaged learning and world ready graduates. *'It has consolidated my learning allowing me to make better sense of nursing theory. It gave me focus, direction and purpose'* (Student feedback, 2014).

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TEAM STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION**Team Name: ECU's State-wide Partnership Enabling Assistant Nursing Training****Ms Carol Crevacore – Team Leader - Edith Cowan University - 50%**

Carol Crevacore works in the School of Nursing and Midwifery as a Lecturer and First Year Coordinator. In 2008, she was tasked with the role of developing a casual employment pathway for students whilst they were completing their degree and has led this team since 2010. Together with Haze Neale from North Metro TAFE, she has mapped the Undergraduate Nursing Curriculum and identified the elements of the Assistant in Nursing Gap Package. Carol handles all student enquiries and paperwork. Carol works alongside each partner to ensure the efficient running of the program. Carol liaises with both Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and NurseWest to develop employment opportunities, and to market these opportunities to the undergraduate nursing student.

Mrs Hazel Neale – North Metro TAFE - 30%

Hazel Neale is the Acting Head of Programs, Health, at NorthMetro TAFE. Her role in this partnership focusses on the educational component for the Health Services Assistant - Acute Care. She has worked with Carol Crevacore to map the ECU Bachelor of Science, Nursing, program to the Health Services Assistance – Acute Care curriculum. After identifying the gaps that existed between the two programs Hazel developed a Gap package to ensure the 'Essential Skills and Knowledge' are met by students completing the program. The gap package involves both online learning and a simulated learning assessment. Hazel is responsible for ensuring this gap package aligns with the requirements of AQTF Australian Quality Training Framework and all assessment requirements sit under standard 1 of the RTO standards.

Mrs Fenella Scott- NurseWest - 10%

Fenella is a Recruitment Officer within NurseWest specifically dedicated to facilitate the recruitment process of Assistants in Nursing to the existing regulated temporary nursing workforce. Fenella liaises with Carol Crevacore to ensure employment opportunities exist for the nursing students who complete this program.

Mrs Michelle Dixon – Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital - 10%

Michelle Dixon is the Marketing and Recruitment Nurse Manager for Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. Michelle has worked closely with Edith Cowan University School of Nursing and Midwifery to ensure employment opportunities for the undergraduate nursing student who have successfully completed this program. Michelle is involved with the induction process of the Assistant in Nursing at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

Supporting Material – Appendix A

1. VIDEO

Please go to the following link to watch the 3 minute video of ECU's State-wide Partnership Enabling Assistant Nursing Training:

<https://youtu.be/h8D6OeQ9Po8>



2. SUPPORTING MATERIAL

10 additional pages showcasing industry endorsement and impact.



Government of Western Australia
Department of Health
Health Support Services

Assistants in Nursing Casual Pool NurseWest

NurseWest is looking for enthusiastic and motivated applicants to fill - Assistant in Nursing - positions on our casual pool. Successful applicants will be expected to demonstrate effective communication skills, the ability to work in a team environment and genuine desire to deliver compassionate patient care under the direction of a registered nurse.

Appointment to this position will be dependent on fitness to work, a valid criminal record screening, working with children check. Applicants must hold a **Certificate III Assistant in Nursing – Acute Care Qualification** (HLT 33115)

For Certificate III related enquires please contact Carol Crevacore or Amanda Fowler assistantinnursing@ecu.edu.au

For job related enquiries email nursewestrecruitment@health.wa.gov.au

Successful applicants will be employed on a casual basis over a variety of morning, afternoon and night shifts with the ability to self-roster using the Cascom booking system.

Interested applicants are required to submit a current CV with two professional referees, a copy of your certificate level III qualification and a cover letter addressing what you will bring to the role.

Applications to be forwarded via email to:
Nursewestrecruitment@health.wa.gov.au

NurseWest
81 St Georges Terrace
Perth
WA 6000
Tel: 6444 5300

Our Vision

To be the leader in the provision of quality temporary nursing and midwifery services

Our Mission

Deliver value in providing quality temporary nursing and midwifery services

Version 2 revised 28/02/2017

Reference #1 NurseWest

Reference #2 Sir Charles Gairner Hospital



Department of Health
Government of Western Australia
North Metropolitan Area Health Service



Expression of Interest Assistants in Nursing- Casual Pool Sir Charles Gairner Hospital

Please read the following information **carefully** and ensure you are available for **all required dates** and you meet **all pre-requisites** prior to application

Sir Charles Gairner Hospital is looking for enthusiastic and motivated ECU Nursing Students who have completed a minimum 8 units of 1st year and been assessed for and completed the **HLT33115 CERTIFICATE III IN HEALTH SERVICES ASSISTANCE [ACUTE CARE]** through North Metropolitan TAFE and Carol Crevacore.

Please contact Carol Crevacore (c.crevacore@ecu.edu.au) for assessment of your transcript and booking procedure to ensure you get a placement at North Metro TAFE as soon as possible as courses are limited.

Successful Applicants will be expected to demonstrate effective communication skills, the ability to work in a team environment and a genuine desire to deliver excellent patient care.

Appointment to this position will be dependant on fitness to work, a valid criminal record screening, working with children check, Australian **citizenship or permanent residency** and possession of the HLT33115 Certificate.

Please submit a **cover letter** addressing what attributes you can bring to the role and a current **CV** with at least one professional/educational or work related referee, a copy of your Certificate III qualification, working with children check and a copy of an Australian passport or birth certificate or Citizenship Certificate via email to SCGH.Nursing.Recruitment@health.wa.gov.au by 12 noon Monday the 3rd of December 2018.

Late applications cannot be accepted.

All applicants **must be** available to come to SCGH for a signup session (1-2 hours) which will be negotiated dependant on availability.

Successful applicants are required to attend paid orientation at SCGH on either:

Mon 14, Tues 15 & Wed 16 of January 2019 **OR**
Mon 11, Tues 12 & Wed 13 February 2019 **OR**
Mon 25, Tues 26 & Wed 27 February 2019

Please state which date(s) you could be available for within your cover letter (if successful)

These dates are not negotiable. Please negotiate your release from university/practicum or other commitments to attend if required. There are limited places and the process is very competitive.

Successful Applicants will be able to work on a casual basis up to a maximum of 76 hours per fortnight over a variety of morning, afternoon and night shifts. The current hourly rate of pay is \$27.60 plus casual and penalty loading. (please see job tasks list enclosed)

For job related enquiries contact Michelle Dixon at (SCGH.Nursing.Recruitment@health.wa.gov.au) or phone 6457 4114

Michelle Dixon
Nurse Manager – Workforce
Sir Charles Gairner Hospital

if you wish to work as an Assistant in Nursing - Acute Care, whilst completing your studies please complete the steps below.

1. Ensure you have completed the following 8 units of the C33 or Y78 program.

The units are:

Unit Code	Unit Title
NCS1101	Health and Healthcare Systems
NCS1102	Professional Conduct and Communication
SCN1111	Health Science 1
NPP1101	Health Assessment Skills and Practice
NCS1201	Foundations of Nursing
NCS1202	Evidence Based Practice in Health Care
NCS1103	Clinical Sciences Introduction
CPP1201	Supportive Nursing Care Skills and Practice

2. Obtain an Academic Transcript from Student Central. This needs to list all of the above eight units. If you are providing a copy please have it certified.

3. Provide a photocopy of the front page of the NCAS clinical practicum document for NPP1101 and NPP1201 that clearly states the amount of clinical hours that you have completed.

4. Complete a short cover letter applying for this program including your name, student number and contact details.

Once you have all this paperwork ready you need to submit this information in a large envelope with your name printed on one side and print on the other side to the following:

For the Attention of
 Carol Crevacore / Amanda Fowler
 Assistant in Nursing Program

For Metropolitan students this needs to be delivered to building 21 level 4. As you come out of the lift, look to the right and there is a brown box with a label - AIN Program applications. Place the application into this box.

If you are a Bunbury student please send your paperwork to
 Carol Crevacore and Amanda Fowler
 Edith Cowan University
 Joondalup Campus BLG 21 Room 418
 270 Joondalup Drive
 Joondalup 6027, PERTH WA

Please ensure that you have all the documents listed above. Failure to submit all the paperwork will result in delays in your paperwork being processed. When the processing of the paperwork is complete you will receive an email informing you that a "sign off" form is ready for collection.

Once you have received your certificate you need to attend Kendrew campus Block D Students Services - see the link for location details - <http://www.northmetrotafe.wa.edu.au/campuses/joondalup-kendrew-crescent>. The administration is open between 8.30 and 4pm, Monday to Friday. You will need to take with you the "sign off" form and enrol into the AIN Acute Care Course. The cost of this course is \$500. There is no payment plan option. When you have paid and enrolled into the course of study you will be contacted by the lead teacher for this program who will grant you access to the Blackboard site.

You will be required to work through some short online packages. Following the successful completion of these packages you will be required to attend one 2.5hour education and assessment session at NorthMetro TAFE. After you have been deemed competent in the assessment you will be awarded with the qualification. This qualification will enable you to apply for work in the acute care environment such as NurseWest SCGH etc and also in the Aged Care environment.

Please email assistantinnursing@ecu.edu.au for further queries or questions.

FAQ Sheet

This fact sheet will guide you through the process of being eligible to apply to North Metro TAFE for the AIN Acute Care Qualification.

When can I apply for this qualification?

At the successful completion of the first 8 units of study in the undergraduate Registered Nursing Course.

What are the first eight units of study?

NPP1101

NCS1101

NCS1102

SCN1111

NPP1201

NCS 1201

NCS 1202

NCS 1103

Can I apply if I have not completed the eight units of study?

No

What if I have an Exemption or Advanced Standing for a unit of study?

Students with advance standing from an Australian university can apply. Each application is on a case by case basis. Students with AS from a university outside of Australia can not apply.

Do I need to complete anything other than the first 8 units of study?

You will need to complete 5 small online training packages with NorthMetro TAFE and a face to face assessment

How long will it take for the paperwork to be completed?

Two weeks from the time you submit it. (Ten working days)

How will I know if the work I submit is appropriate?

We will contact you via email for collection of the ECU SIGN OFF FORM. If the paperwork is not correct we will also contact you

How do I get the qualification?

You need to enrol into the NorthMetro TAFE HLT33115 Certificate III in Health Services Assistance (Assistant in nursing work in acute care)

Is there a fee associated in obtaining the AIN from North Metro TAFE?

There is a fee. The current fee is \$500.


I am just completing my first 8 units and am awaiting my results and academic transcript. Can I apply now?

No. Just to clarify, in order to apply for the Assistant in Nursing qualification from North Metro TAFE you need to have completed the first eight units of study. You cannot apply until you have your academic transcript which states that you have passed these units. If you are currently studying one of these units you can not apply until you have the academic transcript stating successful completion. You will need to wait until you have completed the units and then apply.



Blackboard site - Assistant in Nursing Acute Care - AIN

Employment Opportunities

Employment **Magnet Hospital SCGH is looking for AINs!**

Enabled: Statistics Tracking

Attached Files:  [AINCasualECUAd201819.pdf](#) (105.838 KB) [AIN duties2018.pdf](#) (111.018 KB)

Are you looking for meaningful employment during your studies??

Do you want that edge when you are applying for RN positions??

At SCGH you can become an assistant in Nursing and work alongside the health team to deliver quality care. Please see the attached document for further information. Please be aware that you must have the AIN qualification as listed to apply for this role. You are welcome to email me on assistantinnursing@ecu.edu.au if you need clarification with anything AFTER you have reviewed the AIN BB site.

Regards and good luck.

Carol

**NurseWest Employment Opportunities**

Enabled: Statistics Tracking

NurseWest is ready to employ students who hold the current AIN qualification. Please do not contact NurseWest until you have completed all of the steps in the process. It does not demonstrate that you are able to follow the process and will reflect poorly on your application.

Please review the documents below if you are interested in applying for future AIN employment opportunities at NurseWest

[AIN Scope of Practice](#)

[CURRENT JOB DESCRIPTION - Assistant in Nursing](#)

[NurseWest Advertisement - ECU.pdf](#)

Advance Standing

Advance standing **Advance Standing Domestic Student Process**

Enabled: Statistics Tracking

Hello Everyone.

It is great news that NorthMetro TAFE will allow us to review each AS situation independently to identify eligibility for the AIN Acute Care Program.

So what we need you to do is the following

1. Compile all paperwork relating to your AS. This needs to include the unit plan/outline of the original unit that you completed and used for AS at ECU. For example- you completed a human biology unit at UWA and you received AS for the SCN1111 unit at ECU. This needs to be completed for each unit that you received AS for.
2. Complete the process outlined in the documents tab to the left of the screen (the normal process that all students complete).
3. Submit your AS paperwork and the AIN paperwork to ECU SNM (follow the instructions outlined in the normal process). Lack of paperwork will only hold up the process. Incomplete paperwork will be returned to the student.
4. Be patient as we process your paperwork. Each AS will take considerable time to complete.

Thanks

Amanda and Carol

Announcements

New employment opportunity!

Posted on: Monday, 29 October 2018 11:48:34 AM AWST

Good Morning Everyone

Please click on to the Employment tab on the AIN BB site regarding employment opportunities as SCGH for the AIN. If you have any queries about this opportunity please read through the information on the AIN BB site listed under the community section of BB prior to emailing me.

Kind regards

Carol



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Collegian

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/col

Undergraduate registered nursing students working as assistants in nursing within the acute care environment: Program development and discussion

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ABSTRACT

Background: Most pre-registration nursing students require employment during their studies which may entail undertaking another qualification.

This paper describes how one university developed a program whereby undergraduate nursing students complete the national vocational education – HLT33115 Assistant in Nursing qualification through recognition of prior learning, a self-directed education package and completion of an objective structured clinical examination.

Objective: To discuss the development of an 'Assistant in Nursing' in the acute care environment program for pre-registration undergraduate nursing degree students using the national vocational education framework.

Design: This program maps the national 'Assistant in Nursing - Acute Care' vocational qualification to the pre-registration registered nurse degree. Upon successful completion of this program students can work as Assistants in Nursing within the acute care environment.

Conclusions: This program enables student nurses to work as Assistants in Nursing within the acute care environment. This provides employment in a health facility and opportunities for students to immerse themselves in the clinical environment whilst continuing their studies. This may assist students to gain a deeper insight into their future role as a nurse, build networks within the nursing community and assimilate into the clinical environment. This program design may prove useful as a template for other nursing faculties wishing to implement a similar program.

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Summary of relevance

Problem – Many undergraduate Registered Nursing (RN) students work as an Assistant in Nursing (AIN) to support themselves while undertaking their degree, which may require completion of an additional qualification.

What is already known – Minimum education requirements for employment as an AIN in the acute setting are not mandated by law. However, employers need to be assured that they are appropriately prepared so as not to impact negatively on patient outcomes.

What this paper adds – Description of a program whereby RN students are able to complete a national vocational education qualification through recognition of prior learning enabling them to work in the acute care hospital environment.

1. Introduction

Internationally, the increasing cost of delivering health care coupled with current and projected nursing shortages (AIHW, 2015; Buchan & Calman, 2004; Duffield et al., 2014) have resulted in a growth in the use of unregulated workers in a range of health care settings, including acute care institutions. In addition, many nursing students seek employment in the health industry working as patient care assistants, nursing assistants and the like (Cavendish, 2013; New South Wales Department of Health, 2015;

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Lee, Mawdsley, & Rangeley, 1999; Salamonsen & Andrew, 2006). The lack of professional regulation of these roles (Duffield et al., 2014; Francis, 2013; Keeney, Hasson, McKenna, & Gillen, 2005) results in a lack of standardisation in the education they receive (Francis, 2013; Health Workforce Australia, 2012) which can vary widely from on-the-job to a one year program (Canadian Nurses Association, 2005; Cavendish, 2013; Munn, Tufanaru, & Aromataris, 2013). It is of benefit to the pre-registration nursing student to seek employment in health care institutions and that if possible, they can do so without having to undertake additional training and education when they are already studying.

There are many advantages of nursing students being employed in a health care facility while completing their degree. Besides the obvious financial gain, many are concerned with their 'readiness to practice' on graduation and see working in a health service as a way to increase their self-confidence and skills (Hasson, McKenna, & Keeney, 2013) and to fill a 'perceived' gap in learning from their undergraduate studies; Chang & Hancock, 2003). Moreover, nursing students are sometimes disappointed with the range of experiences to which they are exposed in their studies (Algoos & Peters, 2012) and employment in health during their program of study offers more variety. The literature cites a range of benefits of employment for nursing students in a nursing-related capacity including familiarity with hospital routines; access to potential future employers; understanding the layout of clinical areas and documentation associated with clinical care; developing important contacts and knowledge about the organisation and its structure (Cleary, Horsfall, & Happell, 2012). The nursing student may also have the opportunity to practice and improve their skills within their scope of practice, to transfer theoretical knowledge into practical skills and to network within the clinical setting (Burns, 2009; Chow & Miguel, 2010; Hasson, McKenna, & Keeney, 2013). Likewise, meaningful work opportunities may enable student nurses to apply and develop problem-solving skills and to improve their interpersonal skills (Harvey, 2016; Rea, 2015; Stombaugh & Judd, 2014). The Registered Nurse who has worked as an AIN during the course of their studies may understand, support and value the role and function of the AIN more with this exposure (Francis, 2013).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the process used to enable students enrolled in a pre-registration nursing program to gain a qualification during their course which assists them to work in the acute care environment as AINs. Specifically, the mapping of the national Assistant in Nursing (AIN) Acute Care, Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification to an undergraduate nursing degree (pre-registration) qualification was undertaken. The development of a training package was designed to bridge the gap in knowledge and, upon successful completion, enabled the student to be awarded the VET AIN qualification. The mapping and development of a training package will be discussed.

2. Background

Globally, AINs are strongly represented in a variety of health care settings. Currently there are more than 1.5 million AINs in the US, and it is projected that by 2026 more than 1.7 million will be required to care for the ageing population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). These figures mirror those in other countries. In the UK for example, the Department of Health reports AINs account for nearly 25% of the entire UK National Health Services workforce with almost 332,000 support staff (Department of Health, 2013). Australia reports its unregulated nursing workforce accounts for 25% of its health workforce (ABS, 2013). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), nearly 56% of these workers are part-time or casually employed, making the role compatible with

university study. A debate regarding casualization of the nursing workforce is outside of the scope of this paper.

More than 300 titles have been used to describe unregulated workers in nursing (Johnson, Allsop & Clarke, 2002), leading to confusion (Cavendish, 2013). Some of these titles include unlicensed assistive personnel (US), health care assistants [Australia and the United Kingdom (UK)], unlicensed care providers (Canada) and patient care attendants (Australia), often referred to generically as nursing support workers. For the purpose of this paper the term Assistant in Nursing (AIN) or Assistants in Nursing (AINs) will relate to those people who support the registered and enrolled nursing workforce (Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council, 2013).

In Australia, there are two divisions of nursing which are regulated, Registered Nurses (RNs) and Enrolled Nurses (ENs). Registered Nurses complete a minimum three-year undergraduate nursing degree at a university or equivalent higher education institution. In contrast, ENs complete a minimum 18-month Diploma of Enrolled Nursing qualification at a vocational education institution (Health Department of Western Australia, 2009). The EN works under the direction of an RN to provide basic nursing care to patients. This role is similar to the role of the Licensed Practical Nurse in the United States (US) and the Licensed/Registered Practical Nurse in Canada. Whilst the EN implements the care and collaborates with the RN in developing a care plan, the responsibility for the development of the care plan and delegation of care lies with the RN (Nurses and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2016). The AIN supports both the EN and the RN to deliver nursing care. Assistants in nursing remain under the supervision of the RN (Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council, 2013).

Requirements for training for AINs differ significantly across the world and there is no agreed standard. In the UK, there is no mandated training requirement; however, AINs are able to complete formal training to meet the National Vocational Qualifications as set by the Department for Education and Skills (Cavendish, 2013; Francis, 2013). The Australian Government recommends that the minimum education standard for all AINs working in the aged care environment is the VET qualification titled 'Certificate 3 – Assistant in Nursing' (Aberdeen, 2004), however there is no legally mandated minimum standard of education for the AIN working in the acute care environment. Nevertheless, there are several examples of pre-registration nursing students working as AINs in the acute care environment in Australia exist (Chow, San Miguel, LiDonni, & Isbister, 2010; Cleary, Horsfall, O'Hara-Aarons et al., 2012). However, none of these programs mandates a minimum level of education for the acute care environment, despite the existence of a nationally recognised training program for this role.

Across the US, there is a range of training requirements for the AIN but generally the AIN requires high school graduation and 6–12 months of work experience as a home care aide (Employment Development Department: State of California, 2005). In Canada, there has been movement towards a standardised curriculum within jurisdictions (Canadian Nurses Association, 2005) but a national qualification is still lacking.

Reverse articulation programs allow university students who may have 'equivalence with units within VET qualifications' to gain a vocational education qualification whilst completing their undergraduate studies (Bogna, 2016, p. 6). Reverse articulation programs recognise skill sets within university courses that allow students to 'validate skills required in particular workplaces' such as the hospital environment (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scates, 2008, p. 212). There are many documented examples of cross institutional partnerships in the literature that have developed successful reverse articulation pathways for their students including the areas of Work

Health and Safety (Bogna, 2016), Education (Taylor, 2016), Nursing (Hull, 2018) and Engineering (Saad, 2017).

3. Development of the assistant in nursing acute care program

The AIN program was created with the aim of offering undergraduate nursing students meaningful employment opportunities after completion of the first 8 units (first year) of a 24-unit Bachelor of Science, Nursing degree. The majority of the essential skills and knowledge required in the 'Certificate III in Health Services Assistant - Acute Care' are covered in the undergraduate curriculum by this point and it would allow the student to work for at least two years prior to registering as a Registered Nurse.

The 'Certificate III in Health Services Assistant - Acute Care' (VET award: HLT33115) is a VET qualification which prepares the AIN with the necessary skills and knowledge to assist the regulated nursing staff (both RN and EN) with the care of clients specifically in the acute care setting (Department of Education Employment & Workplace Relations, 2017). VET qualifications are designed to provide practical and work-oriented skills and knowledge specific to a range of workplaces including trade, office, technology, hospitality and health (Australian Government, 2018). A university can only offer this qualification to its undergraduate nursing students if it partners with a local VET provider which has the qualification on its accredited list of educational courses. The content studied within the undergraduate nursing degree must match the content of the VET qualification so that recognition of prior learning can be applied, and the qualification awarded by the VET provider.

The VET sector specifies that the AIN Acute Care course must contain 12 core units. Course providers then have the opportunity to select 3 electives from a range of suggested options. In the program described here the three electives that were included were chosen based on two factors:

- 1 The skills and knowledge that the undergraduate nursing student would already have by the end of their first year of study so as to limit the amount of extra learning and assessment that would need to be completed by the student in order to receive this qualification.
- 2 The units were also currently being offered by VET provider, thereby reducing the need for additional educational materials to be developed.

See Table 1 for the unit details that comprise the AIN acute care qualification.

Together with the VET provider, a mapping process was undertaken to identify similarities between the first year units (8 in total) in the pre-registration Bachelor of Science (Nursing) program at the university and those in the AIN acute care training package. The completion of the first 8 units of study was chosen as this was the earliest point in the undergraduate nursing qualification where the majority of required skills and knowledge contained within the HLT33115 Assistant in Nursing would be completed. This process involved identifying the essential skills and knowledge as outlined in the training package for each unit of the qualification against the content in the first eight units of study in the Bachelor of Science (Nursing) Program. The first 8 units within the Bachelor of Science, Nursing cover content such as basic clinical nursing skills and practice, 200 h of clinical placement, anatomy and physiology, introduction into disease processes and the associated nursing care, inter-professional conduct and communication, health care in the Australian context, psycho-social development across the lifespan, and evidence based nursing practice.

Table 1
Course Structure for the AIN Acute Care Qualification.

Core Unit Code	Core Unit Title
CHCCOM005	Communicate and work in health or community services
CHCDIV001	Work with diverse people
HLTAAP001	Recognise healthy body systems
HLTINF001	Comply with infection prevention and control policies and procedures
HLTWHS001	Participate in workplace health and safety
BSBMED301	Interpret and apply medical terminology appropriately
BSBWOR301	Organise personal work priorities and development
Core Elective Code	Core Elective Title
CHCCS002	Assist with movement
CHCCS020	Respond effectively to behaviours of concern
CHCCS026	Transport individuals
HLTAIN001	Assist with nursing care in an acute care environment
HLTAIN002	Provide non-client contact support in an acute care environment
Elective Code	Elective Title
CHCAGE005	Provide support to people living with dementia
CHCCS012	Prepare and maintain beds
HLTAID001	Provide cardio-pulmonary resuscitation

Training packages in the VET sector are very prescriptive and they clearly identify the essential skills and knowledge that need to be taught, the environment (simulated or workplace) in which they need to be assessed, the number of times a student needs to be deemed competent, and dictate that assessors of this qualification hold the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (VET award TAE 40,116 Certificate). As anticipated there was a strong correlation between the content provided by both programs. However, some gaps were identified between the training package and the Bachelor of Science (Nursing) qualification. These 'gaps', the reasons for them and the processes undertaken to bridge them are presented in Table 2. Many of the skills and knowledge areas identified as gaps are either taught in the undergraduate curriculum but are not assessed in the mandated format required by the training package, or, are taught too late in the student's undergraduate nursing program to qualify for RPL.

This program was developed over a period of 11 months by staff across both institutions who had strong knowledge of educational processes within both the tertiary and vocational education sectors, had previously completed many mapping exercises, understood the intricacies of RPL applications and were familiar with the VET governing bodies' requirements. In addition, the VET staff member had been delivering the Assistant in Nursing - Acute Care qualification over many years while the university staff member had previously worked within the VET environment, was the First Year Coordinator within the school and had extensive knowledge of the units of study within the undergraduate degree. This level of knowledge from both parties helped to ensure that policies and procedures within both organisations and their governing bodies were being adhered to whilst developing the program.

The mapping process involved extensive consultation with all staff teaching the first 8 units of study within the pre-registration nursing degree. This was to ensure that the learning outcomes and learning content taught in the pre-registration course were captured by the competency requirements of the VET sector. At times this proved to be difficult as the VET requires extensive evidence of competency achievement which is extremely prescriptive as compared to the learning outcomes and assessment methods adopted in the tertiary environment.

Once the program was developed it was then offered to the more than 1200 enrolled students who had completed their first year of university study. A website was established within the university's

Table 2
Identified gaps with undergraduate nursing degree at the end of the first year of study and the 'Health Services Assistant - Assistant in Nursing - Acute Care HLT 33115' qualification.

Identified Gap	Process to achieve the identified gap	Why this is not in the undergraduate RN course
Workplace Health and Safety (WHS)	Theoretical component: Completion of an online learning package developed by the vocational education provider. Practical component: WHS issues were embedded in OSCE scenario	The WHS content within the AIN qualification are generic in nature. The undergraduate RN course has a higher level of presumed knowledge than the AIN qualification. The undergraduate RN course does teach WHS issues however the WHS issues taught are specific to the clinical environment and they are embedded in the entire course structure.
Communication with a diverse groups of people	Theoretical component: Completion of an online learning package developed by the vocational education provider specifically relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Practical component: OSCE assessment included cultural contexts	Cultural issues are embedded across the nursing degree and cultural units are taught in the nursing degree however not in the first 8 units of study which were mapped to this qualification.
Nursing care in the acute care environment	Theoretical component: Completion of an online learning package developed by the vocational education provider specifically relating to the role of the AIN in the acute setting. Practical component: OSCE assessment focuses on the AIN role in the acute care environment including nursing activities such as collecting clinical data and assisting clients to meet their personal care needs.	The content here is covered in the first 8 units of study however the conditions surrounding the documentation of competence differs between vocational education provider and the university. The vocational education training package states that assessment of students must occur at least once in a simulated clinical environment

online learning system to disseminate information and manage the potentially large volume of enquiries relating to the AIN program. The site outlined the process for applying for the Assistant in Nursing Articulation program and was made available to all nursing students. Flow charts describing the process for the student were displayed with the aim of facilitating a self-directed approach to application in order to reduce the administrative burden.

For a student to be awarded this qualification there were two steps involved.

Step one consisted of submission of the following documents to a designated AIN co-ordinator within the university school of nursing: -

- the students obtain a copy of their academic transcript showing successful completion of the first eight units of the Bachelor of Nursing program (from a total of 24 units in the degree) at the university where this program exists,

- a copy of the clinical practicum experience documenting successful completion of 80 h or more, and,

- an application letter for inclusion into the program

Following a review of the documents by the AIN coordinator to ensure completeness of documentation and for record keeping purposes, students were issued with a certificate of completion.

Step two involved the student presenting the certificate of completion to the VET provider with whom the university partnered to complete an online education package and an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) that covered the identified gaps as outlined in Table 2 which all students completed. Additionally, education is provided to the student about the importance of ensuring that they stay within their scope of practice whilst working as an AIN regardless of the extra skills and knowledge they bring to the AIN role as an undergraduate nursing student, such as undertaking ECGs (Roche, Duffield, Friedman, Dimitreitis, & Rowbotham, 2016). Once successfully completed students were awarded the Certificate III in Health Services Assistant - Acute Care (VET award: HLT33115).

Besides partnering with the VET provider to award the qualification, the university also worked initially with a Magnet accredited tertiary teaching hospital to develop meaningful employment opportunities for the students completing this course. The hospital had previously incorporated AINs as part of their workforce model but due to the global financial crisis the training program that provided this workforce had been discontinued. The hospital already employed a small number of AINs and contracted AINs as needed from nursing agencies (labour hire firms). This program allowed the hospital to recruit their own AINs whom they knew had completed a standardised training program.

Following the success of the re-introduction of the AIN into the Magnet hospital the government nursing agency (labour hire

firm) partnered with the university to also offer AIN employment opportunities to the undergraduate RN student. The nursing agency adopted the same minimum educational requirements - Certificate III in Health Services Assistant - Acute Care, for all AINs in its employ.

4. Discussion

This program has been very successful and in 2017 was recognised by the Vice Chancellor of the university as a program that enhanced and encouraged student learning. Since its introduction in 2011, 828 students have completed the program as described and have gone on to seek employment in the acute care setting. In 2018 there were 42 AINs at the Magnet hospital and more than 100 AINs who have completed this program are working with the nursing agency. Many more students have gone on to work within Private Acute Care hospitals, Aged Care facilities and the Community Care environment.

As with all new initiatives there were some issues that needed to be navigated in order for the effective implementation of this program. Other universities and VET providers who are considering offering a similar program may benefit from our experiences outlined below.

When partnering with a VET provider, developing a Memorandum of Understanding prior to program development is advisable. This helps to ensure that both organisations have a clear understanding of the terms and details of the project. Establishing a program such as this takes time and commitment from both organisations. Existing partnerships between the university and the VET provider were exploited to facilitate the development of this program. It is essential that staff working in both organisations have a clear understanding of the governance structures to which they must adhere to ensure compliance with the approved program.

The workload involved in developing a program such as this should not be ignored and there should be discussions with stakeholders about how this can be accommodated in workload allocations. Also important to consider for staff workload is that every time there is a new version of the VET course or a university course is reaccredited, mapping of the AIN acute care program needs to be undertaken again. Unfortunately, the timing of these two processes may not always align with one another.

It is essential that the cost of the program for students is worked out in the early stages of program development because if it is not affordable for students, there may be poor uptake and thus inefficient use of staff resources. The cost of the Certificate III in Health Services Assistant in Western Australia is approximately \$2750 (February 2018). This cost would be prohibitive for many undergraduate nursing students as it is payable upfront, however,

utilising the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) pathway, and, knowing that a large volume of students were planning to complete the program (economies of scale) we were able to reduce the cost to approximately \$500. It is important to have a clear scope of practice for AINs. Undergraduate nursing students have an expanding scope of practice as they progress through their studies (Nursing and Midwifery Board Australia, 2007) compared to the AIN (Algoos & Peters, 2012). In Western Australia all government hospitals have an Operational Directive which lists activities that the AIN is able to complete under the guidance of the RN (Department of Health, 2013). The Magnet hospital with whom we partnered is a government hospital and the AINs follow this Operational Circular. Education sessions relating to scope of practice were also included during the hospital orientation to ensure the AIN understood the importance of working within their scope of practice regardless of the extra skills and knowledge they may bring to the role as a nursing student.

Unfortunately, students from overseas wishing to undertake this program continue to face problems. Student visas allow for a student to be aligned with only one educational provider at any point in time. Enrolment into the AIN program would mean that students are enrolled at both the university and with the VET provider. This double enrolment breaches the visa rules making them ineligible to participate.

Some students who are enrolled in the undergraduate nursing degree are granted 'Advanced Standing'. Advanced standing is acknowledgement of successful prior studies completed previously that have equivalence to similar studies within the undergraduate nursing program. Students receive Advanced Standing for individual units of study (Edith Cowan University, 2018). For each individual unit that for which a student has received advanced standing, the AIN coordinator at the university needs to 're-map' the content from the original unit completed by the student. This is to ensure that the required skills and knowledge within the AIN program, were covered in the original unit that the student completed. To date, we have been able to offer this 're-mapping' to those students who have completed their units that they have received advanced standing for at Australian universities. However, in some instances, we have not been able to successfully map the units to the AIN acute care program. Additionally, it can be very time consuming to map each of these students separately to the AIN acute care program. The time taken to complete this needs to be captured in the workload allocation of the staff involved in the exercise. We are currently unable to map units of study for those students that have completed their studies overseas to this program as we cannot identify fully the learning and assessment techniques that may be employed in order to satisfy the VET governance requirements.

A final consideration is the need to identify employment opportunities early in the process to ensure that students will be able to gain employment. Extensive ties exist between the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the Magnet Hospital where this program was initially established which enabled introduction of the program readily into the health care setting. Expansion into rural hospital settings should also be considered so students can return home to country locations or move to them for intensive periods of work during non-semester periods.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the AIN program offers exciting opportunities for higher education institutions, health facilities, nursing agencies and nursing students alike. All undergraduate nursing courses in Australia are accredited by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council and approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. These accreditation standards ensure that all students who complete a Registered Nursing qualifica-

tion in Australia graduate with the required knowledge, skills and attributes to practise as a RN (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, 2013). Therefore, it is logical to use this knowledge and skills to equip our nursing students with an additional qualification – the Certificate III in Health Services Assistant – Acute Care while they are completing their Bachelor studies so that they may undertake meaningful employment. Through development of similar programs across universities, using the nationally endorsed Certificate III in Health Services Assistant – Acute Care it will help to ensure a minimum standard of the AIN working in the acute care environment. Hospitals and nursing agency (labour hire), benefit knowing that educational preparation of the employee through a standardised program has occurred, which ensures they have the minimum skills and knowledge required to complete the activities within their role as an AIN.

Future research into the students' AIN experience is warranted, investigating the impact of this work experience during their pre-registration training and on their transition upon graduation, particularly as it may relate to staff retention given workforce shortages. Research exploring the perspective of the RN working with the undergraduate AIN to identify benefits and issues surrounding the inclusion of the undergraduate AIN into the model of care is also warranted.

Ethical statement

This manuscript is expository in nature and as such does not require ethical approval.

Conflict of interest

Nil.

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