



# Professional Standards and Guidelines

for the Assessment and Accreditation of  
Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs

# Professional Standards & Guidelines

## Professional Standards and Guidelines for the Assessment and Accreditation of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs

### Recommended Reference:

ACMHN (2016) Professional Standards & Guidelines for the Assessment and Accreditation of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs. Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, Canberra, Australia.

### Prepared by Project Consultants:

Emeritus Professor Margaret McMillan. RN BA M Curr St (Hons) PhD OAM  
Associate Professor Penelope Little. BSc MEd

### Project Manager & Editor:

Ms Peta Marks

### Project Steering Committee:

Professor Michael Hazelton  
Adj Assoc Prof Kim Ryan  
Mr Greg Neilson  
Ms Peta Marks

### Expert Reference Group:

Professor Mike Hazelton, University of Newcastle, ACMHN Accreditation Committee (Chair)  
Ms De Backman-Hoyle, National Mental Health Consumer & Family/carer Forum  
Ms Julianne Baddenoch, Australian Practice Nurse Association /Coalition of National Nursing Organisations  
Professor Wendy Cross, The Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery, ACMHN President  
Dr Lynette Cusack, Chair Nursing & Midwifery Board Australia  
Professor Brenda Happell, Central Queensland University, ACMHN Board Member  
Associate Professor John Hurley, Southern Cross University  
Mr Mike Kilshaw, Nursing Director, Metro North Mental Health, TPCH, Queensland Health  
Ms Allison Kokany, National Mental Health Consumer & Family/carer Forum  
Professor Eimear Muir-Cochrane, Chair of Nursing (Mental Health), Flinders University  
Mr Greg Neilson, Queensland Health, ACMHN Credentialing Committee  
Associate Professor Karen Nightingale, State Head of School (Victoria), Australian Catholic University  
Mr Padrig O'Lunaigh, Nursing & Midwifery Office, Queensland Health

### Acknowledgements:

The contribution of a great number of individuals and organisations is acknowledged in the preparation of the Standards and Guidelines, including:

- The Framework development was guided by the Expert Reference Group, and benefited from the contributions of mental health nurses and other key stakeholders who contributed to the online survey and through the key stakeholder workshop.
- The Council of Ambulance Authorities (CAA), which has generously permitted use of their document templates in the development of accreditation processes.
- The universities that generously participated in the pilot project to evaluate and refine the Standards, Guidelines and accreditation processes.

Thank you also to the clinicians and nursing administrators who facilitated and participated in the initial scoping exercise conducted by Prof Margaret McMillan and A. Prof Penelope Little, for so generously sharing their time and expertise.

The ACMHN would like to acknowledge the funding support provided by the Nursing & Midwifery Office, Queensland.

# Professional Standards and Guidelines

## for the Assessment and Accreditation of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs

### CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	5
<b>1. The Development of the Professional Standards and Guidelines for the Assessment and Accreditation of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs (the Standards &amp; Guidelines) .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Background .....	6
1.2 Consultation and Pilot Processes .....	7
1.3 Using the Standards and Guidelines .....	7
<b>2. Characteristics of the Assessment and Accreditation Process .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Purpose and Aims of Accreditation .....	8
2.1.1 Accreditation as a quality assurance mechanism .....	8
2.1.2 The aims of program accreditation .....	8
2.2 Guiding Principles of the Assessment & Accreditation Process .....	9
<b>3. Standards for Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education Programs .....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 The Context of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education Programs .....	11
3.1.1 Governance .....	11
3.1.2 Academic leadership .....	11
3.1.3 Educational budget and resource allocation .....	11
3.1.4 Partnering with consumers, families and carers .....	12
3.1.5 Collaboration with the sector .....	12
3.1.6 Collaboration with the profession .....	13
3.1.7 Interaction with other sectors .....	13
3.1.8 Teaching-research nexus .....	13
3.1.9 Inter-professional research .....	14
3.1.10 Staff resources .....	14
3.1.11 Staff appointment, qualifications, promotion and development .....	15

# Professional Standards & Guidelines

3.1.12	Staff indemnification	15
3.2	Outcomes of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs	16
3.2.1	Goals and Objectives	16
3.2.2	Program Learning Outcomes (Graduate abilities)	16
3.2.3	Work readiness	17
3.3	The Curriculum consistent with the National Framework	18
3.3.1	Curriculum framework	18
3.3.2	Curriculum Structure	18
3.3.3	The continuum of learning	18
3.3.4	Assessment of student learning	19
3.3.5	Monitoring and evaluation	19
3.4	Curriculum Implementation according to Benchmarks	20
3.4.1	Admission policy and selection	20
3.4.2	Pathways, entry points and credits	20
3.4.3	Student intake	20
3.4.4	Student support and counselling	20
3.4.5	Student representation	21
3.4.6	Student indemnification	21
3.4.7	Educational resources	21
3.4.8	Educational exchanges	21
3.4.9	Professional experience	21
<b>4</b>	<b>The Accreditation Process</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1	Accreditation outcomes	22
4.2	Accreditation Process	22
4.2.1	Reporting	23
4.2.2	Non-approval for accreditation	24
4.2.3	Appeals process and independent review	24
4.3	Administration of the accreditation process	24
4.3.1	Site Evaluation Teams	25
4.4	Final Decision on Accreditation	25
	<b>Appendices</b>	<b>26</b>

## Executive Summary

The Standards and Guidelines are used to facilitate the assessment and accreditation of postgraduate mental health nursing education programs for Australian higher education providers.

**Guideline 1** puts the accreditation process in context by:

- Providing background to the development of the Standards and Guidelines;
- Describing the consultation and pilot processes; and
- Explaining the use of the Standards and Guidelines.

**Guideline 2** describes the characteristics of the assessment and accreditation process by stating:

- The purpose and aims of accreditation; and
- The guiding principles of the assessment and accreditation process.

**Guideline 3** refers to the educational standards for postgraduate mental health nursing education programs relating to the:

- Context of postgraduate mental health nursing programs;
- Outcomes of postgraduate mental health nursing programs;
- Postgraduate mental health nursing curricula, and
- Curriculum implementation.

**Guideline 4** outlines the accreditation process in terms of:

- Accreditation outcomes;
- Administration of the accreditation process, and
- Final decision on accreditation.

## 1. The Development of the Professional Standards and Guidelines for the Assessment and Accreditation of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs (the Standards & Guidelines)

### 1.1 Background

Jurisdictions in Australia, like most countries around the world, face the challenge of having the workforce they need to provide equitable, accessible, sustainable, timely and safe health care. The issues in common include workforce shortages, mal-distribution, keeping up with changing models of care, and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement and flexibility. The key drivers of change include operating environment/demography; new technologies and healthcare; empowered consumers and resources, and capability.

In Australia postgraduate mental health nursing education is currently provided by a number of higher education institutions. Expectations are changing as services are being challenged to move towards a primary health care and social care model focused on recovery. This has significant implications for postgraduate mental health nursing education.

Unlike undergraduate nursing education, postgraduate mental health nursing has not had an external accreditation system. Until now there have been no national Standards or Guidelines for the assessment and accreditation of education programs leading to a qualification as a specialist mental health nurse. The issue of accreditation of these education programs has been difficult to address because accreditation has been seen to conflict with the autonomy of the institutions within the higher education sector.

From the 2009 scan of postgraduate mental health nursing programs undertaken by the ACMHN it was clear that there was general acceptance by the profession that a process of evaluation of postgraduate mental health nursing education programs and the quality of graduates from these programs was required to ensure that appropriate standards were achieved and that there was a level of consistency in outcomes and core course content across the range of current and emerging educational providers.

The accreditation process is intended to ensure that the workforce skills and competencies required to meet health care needs are properly reflected in education programs.

Both the health care services and the profession believe that diversity in education programs is important and that education programs must be responsive to the needs of consumers and their families, family/carers, the health care service providers, the profession and communities, including the range of practice contexts and workforce needs.

An important part of the process in the development of these Standards and Guidelines has been the consideration of accrediting processes for the professions, which revealed considerable differences in approaches. Some accreditation bodies have explicit statutory functions, while others fulfill responsibilities delegated from registering authorities. Some of these, like the present project, were established as an initiative of peak professional or industry-based associations.

These Standards and Guidelines for the assessment and accreditation of higher education postgraduate mental health nursing programs are a significant milestone in the evolution of the professional working in the mental health nursing role. The process of their development and the associated National Framework for Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education (2016) (the National Framework) has enabled a better understanding of the need for quality higher education tertiary level programs that prepare graduates on their career pathway with a range of attributes relating to knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes, affecting professional practice and behaviours. The Standards and Guidelines and the National Framework are based on a set of principles, designed to be flexible in their application whilst accommodating workplace innovation/changes and professional role redesign over time.

## 1.2 Consultation and Pilot Processes

The development of the Standards and Guidelines and the National Framework was undertaken in three stages.

**Stage 1** was the development of a detailed project plan and comprehensive communications strategy.

**Stage 2** was the production of the National Framework and an initial set of standards and guidelines (and associated documents) for the assessment and accreditation of postgraduate mental health nursing education programs. The process included a scan and review of the relevant literature and documentation, including accreditation documentation of other professions, iterative consultation with key stakeholders including an Expert Reference Group (ERG); consultative workshop participants; wider consultation with universities and health care service providers.

**Stage 3** took the form of a pilot to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of the initial Standards and Guidelines, particularly the educational standards (Guideline 3) and the accreditation process (Guideline 4). Two participating universities prepared detailed accreditation submissions and were assessed by an interim accreditation committee which conducted site visits. The outcome of the accreditation process was reported. An evaluation of the accreditation process, the Standards and Guidelines and associated documents was undertaken. The result of the pilot was a revised set of Professional Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation.

Other similar accreditation projects have demonstrated the perceptions of participants on the beneficial nature of the processes to the development of their programs through reviewing these against national accreditation standards for the first time. Key participants need to reflect on the pilot accreditation processes including stakeholder management and participation process and whether the pilot provides external validation of the value and standard of their programs.

## 1.3 Using the Standards and Guidelines

The Standards and Guidelines include the educational standards that consumers, their families, family/carers, health services, the profession, universities, other educational institutions and the community broadly agree are expected of postgraduate mental health nursing education providers in order for their programs to be accredited.

The Standards and Guidelines must be used in conjunction with The National Framework for Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education (2016) which defines the values of the mental health nursing specialty; principles of the mental health nursing specialty practice and principles underpinning educational practice for postgraduate curriculum design and implementation; the learning outcomes as abilities of mental health nursing specialty graduates and best practice benchmarks for design and delivery of postgraduate mental health nursing programs.

The Standards and Guidelines set out the principles, educational institutional processes, settings and resources that are requirements considered necessary for successful education programs. It is the responsibility of individual educational institutions to develop and implement a curriculum that will enable students to attain the required abilities of graduates as presented in the National Framework.

Users of this document include:

- i. Universities/providers that prepare students for specialist mental health nursing practice;
- ii. Educators that provide postgraduate students with professional practice;
- iii. Accreditation assessors and site evaluation teams (SET) that evaluate postgraduate mental health nursing education programs.

## 2. Characteristics of the Assessment and Accreditation Process

### 2.1 Purpose and Aims of Accreditation

#### 2.1.1 Accreditation as a quality assurance mechanism

Accreditation is a means to ensure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs, using a set of standards developed by peers. Accreditation is both a process and a status. It involves an external process of evaluation to ensure that the educational standards of any one postgraduate mental health nursing education program meet accepted standards. The result of the successful process is the award of "Accredited" status.

The quality assurance process ensures that postgraduate mental health nursing programs:

1. Are responsive to the needs of consumers, their families and family/carers; the health care service providers, the profession and communities, with consistent and acceptable educational standards;
2. Are aligned to meet the National Framework for Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education (2016); and
3. Prepare graduates who are competent to practice safely and effectively.

The achievement of accreditation status means that the students, the profession and the public can expect that a program lives up to its promises.

#### 2.1.2 The aims of program accreditation

In summary, these assessment and accreditation processes aim to:

1. Recognise postgraduate mental health nursing education programs that produce graduates competent to practise safely and effectively;
2. Identify educational programs that meet credentialing requirements for specialist practice in the mental health environment.
3. Provide external independent assurance of the quality of higher education postgraduate mental health nursing education programs, based on explicit educational standards.
4. Encourage internal self-evaluation and quality assurance in teaching and learning.
5. Respect the academic autonomy of each education provider and encourage diversity in education programs.
6. Facilitate a system of evaluation and quality improvement towards achieving excellent outcomes for postgraduate mental health nursing education programs in response to community need and professional practice.
7. Provide a qualified mental health nurse whose work practices protect the consumer of the service and members of the public including family/carers.
8. Maintain and further partnerships and collaboration between employers and higher education providers.



## 2.2 Guiding Principles of the Assessment and Accreditation Process

While the purpose of accreditation is largely to evaluate programs to ensure they meet acceptable prescribed standards, it is also predominantly a quality assurance mechanism to inform the design and implementation of programs to produce high quality graduates, who are fit for purpose and of value to the profession and the community. In the process of reviewing postgraduate mental health nursing education programs for accreditation purposes, it is important that in the application of these Guidelines, the following principles are applied. The process of accreditation should:

1. Be based on the principle of equity and justice; the profession, health service and the community should be assured that the standards will be interpreted fairly and without bias;
2. Be confidential with no information disclosed without the consent of both the educational institution involved and the accreditation body;
3. Encourage self-assessment and internal quality assurance processes;
4. Respect the academic autonomy of each education provider;
5. Be efficient and effective and lead to quality improvement;
6. Espouse standards that are realistic and relevant to the context of providers;
7. Align with higher education review processes such as Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA);
8. Provide independent quality assurance.

### 3. Standards for Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education Programs

The standards are structured according to **4 key priority areas**.

**PRIORITY AREAS** are defined as broad components in the structure, process and outcomes of education and cover:

1. The **context** of education programs – governance and administration, research, staff;
2. The **outcomes** of education programs;
3. The **curriculum** – development, assessment of student learning, monitoring and evaluation;
4. **Curriculum implementation** – students, education resources, professional experience.

**STANDARDS** are specified for the elements in each priority area using two levels of attainment:

- **Basic standard:** This means that the standard must be met by each education program and fulfillment demonstrated during the evaluation process.

*Basic standards are expressed as a requirement*

- **Standard for quality development:** This means that the standard is in accordance with consensus about best practice for education programs. Fulfillment of – or initiatives to fulfill – some or all of such standards should be documented by the educational institution responsible for the program. Fulfillment of these standards will vary with the stage of development of the program, the resources and educational policy.

*Standards for quality development are expressed as an **expectation***

Standards are concerned with educational outcomes, inputs and processes. The latter are broad and confined to key elements of teaching and learning, recognising that there is no single model necessary for the delivery of quality education.

**NOTES** are used to clarify, amplify or exemplify expressions in the standards.

NB TEQSA outlines requirements for higher education and more recently the professions

### 3.1 The Context of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Education Programs

A requirement of the qualification is that i) it leads to the completion of an accredited postgraduate award in Australia and ii) it is delivered by a higher education provider registered with TEQSA.

#### 3.1.1 Governance

##### *Standards*

The governance structures and functions of the academic organizational unit delivering the educational institution's postgraduate mental health nursing education programs are required to be defined including the relationship within the educational institution.

The governance structures are expected to set out the committee structure that will ensure that the outcomes of the program are met. This structure is expected to reflect representation from academic staff, students, consumers, family/carers, health services and professional stakeholders in decision-making.

##### *Notes*

The committee structure would include (i) a curriculum/education program management committee with the authority to design, manage and review the education program/curriculum within the context of the educational institution's quality assurance process for teaching and learning, and (ii) a course/program advisory committee with representation or input from staff, students, health services, consumers, family/carers, the profession, the community and other relevant key stakeholders.

#### 3.1.2 Academic leadership

##### *Standards*

The responsibilities of the leadership of the academic organizational unit delivering the educational institution's postgraduate mental health nursing education program must be clearly stated.

The academic leadership **is required** to be evaluated at defined intervals with respect to the postgraduate mental health nursing education program's goals, objectives and outcomes.

#### 3.1.3 Educational budget and resource allocation

##### *Standards*

All programs **are required** to be consistent with the TEQSA guidelines for resourcing.

The academic organisational unit responsible for the postgraduate mental health nursing education program **is expected to** have a clear line of responsibility and authority for the curriculum and its resourcing.

### **3.1.4 Partnering with Consumers, Families and Carers**

The educational institution **is required** to ensure the involvement of consumers, families and carers as active partners in the development, the implementation/delivery and evaluation of the mental health curricula.

#### *Notes*

Universities have a range of levels of engagement with consumers/families/carers in their curriculum development and implementation processes.

Principles informing consumer engagement should include consideration of:

- Sensitivity to their wellbeing and safety
- Their rights to privacy and respect
- The alignment of their experiences to the needs of the curriculum and the learner
- Formal recognition of status and remuneration

### **3.1.5 Collaboration with the sector**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required** to have relationships with the sector that are based on a spirit of cooperation and shared commitment to achieving high quality education and research programs.

These relationships should be expressed through a framework document(s) based on an agreed set of principles and which set out the understandings between the parties on arrangements for postgraduate mental health nursing education and research programs.

#### *Notes*

Universities have a range of agreements with various health authorities.

Principles expressed in a framework document should include the following or similar:

- Involvement of consumers and family/carers as major stakeholders
- Understanding and respect for each party's statutory responsibilities and operational environment
- Collaboration in program course development
- Shared focus on delivering high quality postgraduate mental health nursing education outcomes
- Understanding of the resource capabilities of each party
- Commitment to agree on regular measures of performance / accountability
- Open and timely communications and consultation

### 3.1.6 Collaboration with the profession

#### Standards

The educational institution **is required to** demonstrate a collaborative relationship with the profession and its professional body.

Academic staff engaged in Postgraduate Mental Health and Mental Health Nursing education programs **should be** encouraged to take up membership of professional associations e.g. the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN).

There **is an expectation** for formal engagement between universities/providers and ACMHN through representation on appropriate committees and in program development.

### 3.1.7 Interaction with other sectors

#### Standards

The educational institution **is required to** have a constructive interaction and formal relationships with the health and health-related sectors.

The educational institution **is expected to** work with its partners to ensure all their academic staff are integrated and recognize their teaching obligations and responsibilities.

### 3.1.8 Teaching-research nexus

#### Standards

The educational institution **is expected to** foster the relationship between research and teaching in postgraduate mental health nursing education programs.

The interaction between research and teaching **should be** reflected in the postgraduate mental health nursing education program / curriculum.

#### Notes

The *interaction between research and teaching* influences teaching and learning and prepares students to engage in research and evidence-based practice.

## 3.1.9 Inter-professional research

### Standards

The educational institution **is expected to** demonstrate commitment to a multi-professional approach to the conduct of health research, scholarship and graduate research programs in the context of mental health care.

Graduate research degree programs at Masters level **are expected to** be developed in collaboration with other health disciplines.

### Note

Postgraduate mental health nursing education programs are greatly enhanced by an environment in which research is actively pursued. A research ethos attracts high calibre staff members who can engender a culture of critical appraisal and evaluation of existing knowledge.

## 3.1.10 Staff resources

### Standards

The academic organizational unit responsible for the postgraduate mental health nursing education program **is required to** have an appropriate profile of academic and administrative staff to support the postgraduate mental health nursing education program and other activities and to ensure sound management and deployment of its resources.

The management **is expected to** include a program of quality assurance and regular review of staff performance.

Academics and clinical mentors **are required to** have expertise (qualifications and experience) in mental health and mental health nursing. Ideally, they will be Credentialed Mental Health Nurses.

The educational institution **is required to** define the responsibilities of personnel who contribute to the delivery of postgraduate mental health nursing education programs.

Casual and adjunct academic staff involved in the program **should have** the opportunity to provide feedback on the education program and to participate in appropriate teaching training and performance review and development.

### Notes

*Balance of academic staff* includes balance between academics, full time and part time staff, and honorary clinical staff.

Many universities provide clinical academic titles (Honorary and Adjunct appointments) for practitioners involved in teaching and research. In the field of mental health nursing education there should also be opportunities for appropriately qualified consumers to be invited to either contribute to the learning and research in an honorary capacity or where appropriate be part of the profile of the academic unit.

It is standard practice for health agencies to provide opportunities for reciprocal engagement of university staff.

### **3.1.11 Staff appointment, qualifications, promotion and development**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is expected to** have appointment, qualifications, promotion and development policies for academic and general staff consistent TEQSA Guidelines.

#### *Note*

Benchmark 5 of the National Framework for Postgraduate studies in Mental Health Nursing indicates, “Academic staff and clinicians have expertise in mental health and mental health nursing”. This benchmark is in part an expression of the aspiration of the ACMHN for all academics teaching the ‘discipline of mental health nursing’ to hold a Mental Health Nursing Credential.

### **3.1.12 Staff indemnification**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** have arrangements for indemnification of teaching staff in relation to their involvement in clinical research and the delivery of postgraduate mental health nursing education programs.

## 3.2 Outcomes of Postgraduate Mental Health Nursing Programs

### 3.2.1 Goals and Objectives

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** define the postgraduate mental health nursing education program's goals and objectives and make them known to students, health service partners and stakeholders.

The program documentation **is required to** incorporate an educational process that will result in a mental health nurse prepared appropriately to the level of qualification attained and specified level of competence required.

The program documentation **is required to** describe the abilities that students on the mental health nursing pathway will demonstrate on graduation relating to knowledge and understanding, skills, and attitudes affecting professional behaviour.

#### *Notes*

*Stakeholders* include health service, professionals, consumer and family/carers and community representatives.

*Abilities* as defined in the National Framework.

The concept of an integrated educational pathway for the profession into the future recognises the variety and diversity of practice, which is evolving.

### 3.2.2 Program Learning Outcomes (Graduate abilities)

#### *Standards*

The program **is required to** articulate and assess at the appropriate level, the abilities of the graduate expected on completion of the program and in a manner consistent with the National Framework. The learning activities, core content and concepts should be designed and delivered in a manner which allows students to develop and demonstrate the abilities required for practice at the level of the relevant qualification.

The educational program including the assessment tasks **should** demonstrate responsiveness to changes in the Australian education context, specifically addressing the curriculum issues identified as of contemporary importance.

#### *Notes*

Where there are programs with multiple exit points nested within the Masters award, assessment tasks need to reflect the difference in awards (Graduate Certificate/Graduate Diploma – AQD Level 8; Masters – AQF Level 9). **It is important to demonstrate that each separate award meets the specified Graduate Abilities that are also consistent with those within the National Framework.**

Issues identified as being of particular contemporary importance in the Australian context, include for example workforce developments and role redesign and national health priorities, changing demographics and an ageing population.



### 3.2.3 Work readiness

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** demonstrate it has developed an education program with assessment tasks that provide students with sufficient evidence of the educational base for a graduate appropriate to the level of qualification to be attained and at the specified level of competence to meet the requirements for employment as a mental health nurse.

#### *Note*

It is acknowledged universities will establish different models of course delivery, which may include fully on-line programs. All programs would be expected to be consistent with the principles of Work-integrated Learning (WIL) and include:

- Mental health work and what it involves
- The particular proficiency needed to perform the work
- The knowledge and skills that are required to perform the work
- The generic work skills (or employability skills) that are required for graduates.

## 3.3 The Curriculum consistent with the National Framework

### 3.3.1 Curriculum framework

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** have a curriculum framework which reflects the practice of the profession, is consistent with the National Framework and includes learning methods that are consistent with the educational objectives of the program.

The teaching and learning methods **should** acknowledge the students' prior experiences and reflect their status as postgraduate students and qualified clinicians.

### 3.3.2 Curriculum Structure

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** develop course/subject descriptions consistent with AQF Levels 8 and 9 outcomes within relevant articulated pathways.

Descriptions **must include** the content, extent and sequencing of the curriculum that guides both staff and students on the level of knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes expected of students at each stage of the program where relevant.

### 3.3.3 The continuum of learning

#### *Standards*

The educational institution is required to clearly articulate to students:

- i. the range of postgraduate education pathways available into the mental health nursing specialist field
- ii. the pathways available for progression from other health professional programs; and
- iii. other academic linkages available.

The educational institution should develop and demonstrate processes to enable students to transfer to other university education programs and environments.

### 3.3.4 Assessment of student learning

#### Standards

The educational institution **is required to** define and document the methods used for assessment of the Graduate Abilities including the criteria for progression in the course.

Approaches to assessment **are expected to** be consistent with the National Framework.

#### Note:

It is acknowledged that providers will have statements of Graduate Outcomes. There is a need to demonstrate consistency with the Graduate Abilities specified within the National Framework within a matrix and also that the assessment tasks demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

### 3.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation

#### Standards

The educational institution **is required to** have a mechanism for program evaluation as part of its quality assurance process that monitors the curriculum, the quality of teaching and student progress and ensures that concerns are identified and addressed.

Program evaluation **is expected to** address the context of the educational process, the specific components of the program and the general outcomes.

Measures of and information about attributes of graduates **is expected to** be used as feedback to program development.

Feedback from academics responsible for teaching, students and consumers/family/carers **is required to** be systematically sought, analysed and responded to appropriately.

Academics with responsibility for teaching, students and consumers/family/carers **are expected to** be actively involved in program evaluation planning and in using results for quality improvement.

Student performance **is expected to** be analysed in relation to the program and its educational objectives.

Student performance **should be** analysed in relation to student background, conditions and entrance qualifications, and should be used to provide feedback to student selection, program planning and student support.

A wider range of stakeholders **should** have access to results of program evaluation and their views on the development and relevance of the education program should be considered.

Feedback **should be** obtained from the authorities/organisations where students work after graduation and from graduates.

The educational institution **is required to** demonstrate formal procedures for regular program review involving stakeholders and updating of its program structure and functions and to rectify deficiencies and meet changing needs in a timely manner.

## 3.4 Curriculum Implementation according to Benchmarks

### 3.4.1 Admission policy and selection

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** have an admission policy including a clear statement on the process for selection of students into programs.

The relationship between selection, the educational program and the desired attributes of graduates **should be** stated. Any framework document between the educational institution and employer organization **should include** agreed student selection criteria. Educational institutions **should be** cognisant of the employment requirements of employer organizations.

### 3.4.2 Pathways, entry points and credits

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** ensure that programs provide defined credit transfer or articulation pathways.

Note:

Templates demonstrating precedents for the award of credit are useful to both staff members and prospective students.

### 3.4.3 Student intake

#### *Standards*

The size of student intake, including international and domestic fee-paying students, **is expected to** be consistent with TEQSA Guidelines

### 3.4.4 Student support and counselling

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is expected to** offer appropriate student support including counselling, health and academic advisory services.

Counselling **is expected to** be provided based on monitoring of student progress and should address students' personal and social needs.

Note

Social and personal needs include academic support, career guidance, health problems and financial matters.

### **3.4.5 Student representation**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is expected to** have a policy on student representation and appropriate participation in the design, management and evaluation of programs and in other matters relevant to students.

### **3.4.6 Student indemnification**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** have policies regarding adequate indemnity for the relevant activities of students.

### **3.4.7 Educational resources**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** have sufficient facilities for the staff and student population to ensure programs can be delivered adequately.

The educational institution, in collaboration with industry employer organizations, **is required to** ensure appropriate facilities for communication and information exchange between sites.

Library facilities available to staff and students should include access to electronic databases, supportive staff and a reference collection adequate to meet curriculum and research needs.

### **3.4.8 Educational exchanges**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is expected to** have a policy for collaboration and resource sharing with other educational institutions eg through cross-institutional enrolment, including the transfer of educational credit.

### **3.4.9 Professional experience**

#### *Standards*

The educational institution **is required to** ensure there is adequate professional experience and the necessary resources to support the student.

Professional experience **is required to** be governed by formal learning agreements between the educational institution and the appropriate health service/organization / hospital / primary health care setting.

## 4 The Accreditation Process

The process for assessment and accreditation of postgraduate mental health nursing programs is based on a collaborative approach. The process is provided by the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) in collaboration with the educational institutions delivering the programs and other industry stakeholders. It is based on a combination of educational institutional assessment and external peer review. The conduct of the accreditation process and the associated policies must be consistent with the Australian Standards for Professional Accreditation Processes (2008) and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) Quality Framework for the Accreditation function.

The accreditation process is the responsibility of the Professional Issues Committee – a standing committee of the ACMHN Board. Its responsibility will be to provide governance over ensuring that accreditation is implemented and administered in accordance with the documented principles and standards as set out in these Standards and Guidelines. The Professional Issues Committee will be supported by an Accreditation Secretariat (AS) – a member of the ACMHN staff.

Guideline 4 outlines the accreditation process in terms of:

- Accreditation outcomes;
- Administration of the accreditation process; and
- Final decisions on accreditation.

### 4.1 Accreditation outcomes

Where possible, the accreditation process will be integrated with each educational institution's internal review procedures. Accreditation requirements will have sufficient flexibility to sit within the framework of internal quality assurance processes and every effort will be made to accommodate the educational institution's requirements.

Accreditation may be granted with or without conditions.

Where accreditation is granted without conditions, the educational institution and the ACMHN are able to promote the program as being 'Accredited'.

Where conditions are placed on an accreditation, these conditions are intended to provide guidance on required developments or additional information required to meet the criteria. They do not infer that accreditation will not be granted. Any conditions will be discussed with the institution's team, and an agreed timeframe will be set for the submission of additional information.

### 4.2 Accreditation Process

Accreditation for up to *five* years is granted when:

- the postgraduate mental health nursing program successfully meets the educational standards of Guideline 3
- the educational program is successfully mapped against the National Framework, Standards and Benchmarks, demonstrating that it meets all eligibility criteria
- evidence from a cohort of graduates who have been in the workforce for twelve months is presented. Note: Where graduates have been participating in the mental health workforce for the duration of the program (e.g. mature aged students studying part time), evidence may be collected upon graduation.

The accreditation process involves:

- submission of an application including factual information and a self- assessment report
- a site evaluation team (SET) visit
- report and recommendations from the SET and feedback
- consideration of the report and recommendations made by the Accreditation Committee.

This is subject to there being no major changes to the program in this period of time or any significant diminution of resources available for its delivery.

### 4.2.1 Reporting

Educational institutions are obliged to notify the Accreditation Committee if it plans any major change to its program or if resources for its delivery have been significantly curtailed. The report to the Accreditation Committee should summarise changes made to the program and describe any significant changes to the resources allocated. Such changes may lead to a change in Accreditation status.

A major change in a program could be a:

- Change to the educational institutional setting;
- Significant change in objectives, or a substantial change in philosophy or emphasis;
- Change in the length of the course, especially any reduction of length;
- Major change in the format or overall sequence of subjects of the course;
- Major change in teaching, especially those involving changes to contact hours, or a major change to assessment methods.

Significant changes forced by a major reduction in resources leading to an inability to achieve the objectives of the existing course would also represent a major course change.

Where major changes to an Accredited program are planned, are made, or occur (as outlined above), educational institutions must provide a self-assessment report based on the standards required in Guideline 3.

An educational institution intending to make a major change to an existing program must demonstrate that provisions for current students enrolments are made to ensure parity with those undertaking the modified curriculum.

The submission will be handled in accordance with confidentiality and disclosure provisions and will be evaluated by the Accreditation Committee (appointed by the ACMHNs Professional Issues Committee) and recommendations are formalized by the Professional Issues Committee for noting by the Board.

Review may take the form of:

- Accreditation Committee consideration of the self-assessment report and description of the program changes alone, or
- A site visit by one or two delegates of the Accreditation Committee to discuss matters of concern, where the committee concludes that this is necessary to make a decision.

## **4.2.2 Non-approval for accreditation**

Accreditation will not be approved when there are significant deficiencies and the Accreditation Committee agrees that the educational institution has not achieved any changes required within the specified timeframe (i.e. conditions have not been met).

The Accreditation Committee recognises that all educational institutions aspire to the highest levels of quality and have a vested interest in ensuring that their professional courses meet the requirements and expectations of external stakeholders, including authorities maintaining standards for the profession. In view of this, the Accreditation Committee will seek cooperative solutions where accreditation has not been approved.

## **4.2.3 Appeals process and independent review**

An educational institution may seek independent review of recommendations and decisions concerning accreditation of programs at two stages:

- Within ten working days of receipt of a draft assessment team report; or
- Within ten working days of receipt of a letter of notification of failure to grant accreditation.

The review committee will be nominated by Accreditation Committee and agreed by the institution.

The review committee will review the submission and relevant reports and documentation. It will have discretion to interview staff, students and other relevant people, and to inspect facilities, where it concludes that such actions are necessary for it to make an informed judgment.

The costs of review must be met by the educational institution concerned.

A report prepared by the review committee will be forwarded to both the institution and Accreditation Committee. The institution will be given opportunity to respond to any issues raised in the report, before the Accreditation Committee makes a final decision on accreditation status.

## **4.3 Administration of the accreditation process**

The Accreditation Committee, appointed by the Professional Issues Committee – a standing committee of the ACMHN Board – oversees the accreditation process with the support the Accreditation Secretariat (an ACMHN employee).

The Accreditation Committee:

- Develops and reviews standards, policy and procedures relating to the programs;
- Oversees the governance of accreditation of programs; and
- Encourages improvements in Postgraduate education that respond to evolving health and health workforce needs and practices, and educational and scientific developments.

Membership will be constituted based on skills, experience and commitment required for an effective Committee team.

The primary function of the Committee is to provide governance to oversee accreditation processes for postgraduate education programs in mental health nursing.

The Committee is accountable to support accreditation functions, making formal decisions on accreditation outcomes and is directly responsible for audit procedures and appeals.

The accreditation process is administered by the Accreditation Secretariat.



### **4.3.1 Site Evaluation Teams**

The site evaluation team (SET) will be authorised by the Chair of the Accreditation Committee and will consist of suitably qualified people with experience in the organisation and structure of programs and / or accreditation processes along with an understanding of the current professional requirements for practice:

*The educational institution to be assessed will be given an opportunity to object to any individual on the proposed SET. The reasons for the objection must be clearly set out in writing to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee, and received by the Chair no later than fourteen days prior to the assessment taking place. The final decision on the composition of SET will be with the Chair of the Accreditation Committee.*

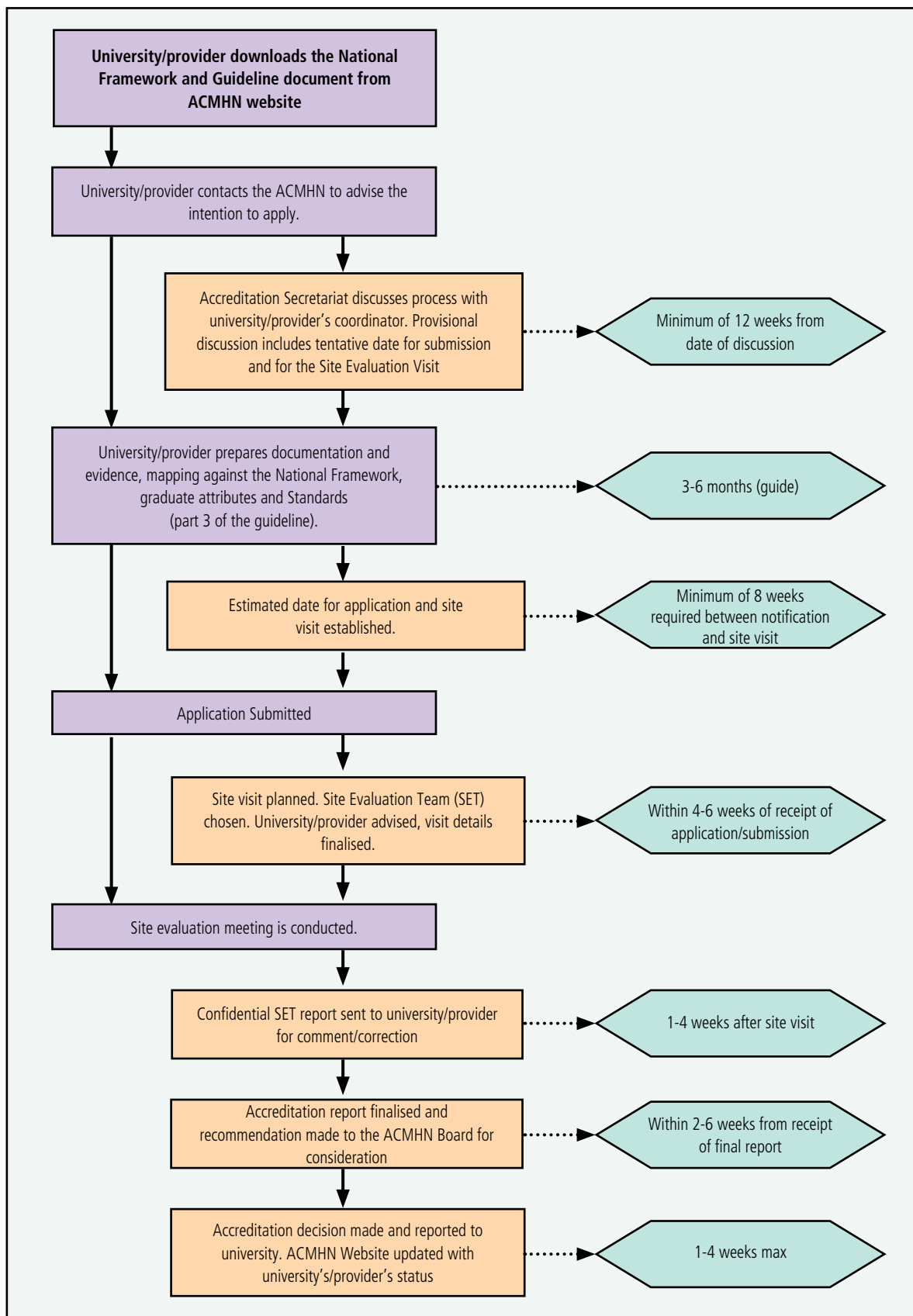
The educational institution must prepare an agenda that allows for discussion and demonstration of the program, in support of the application. Students and consumers must have opportunities to contribute to the accreditation process during the site visit.

The educational institution will be responsible for funding the airfare and accommodation costs of the site evaluation team visit. The educational institutional will also be responsible for all internal costs associated with the accreditation process.

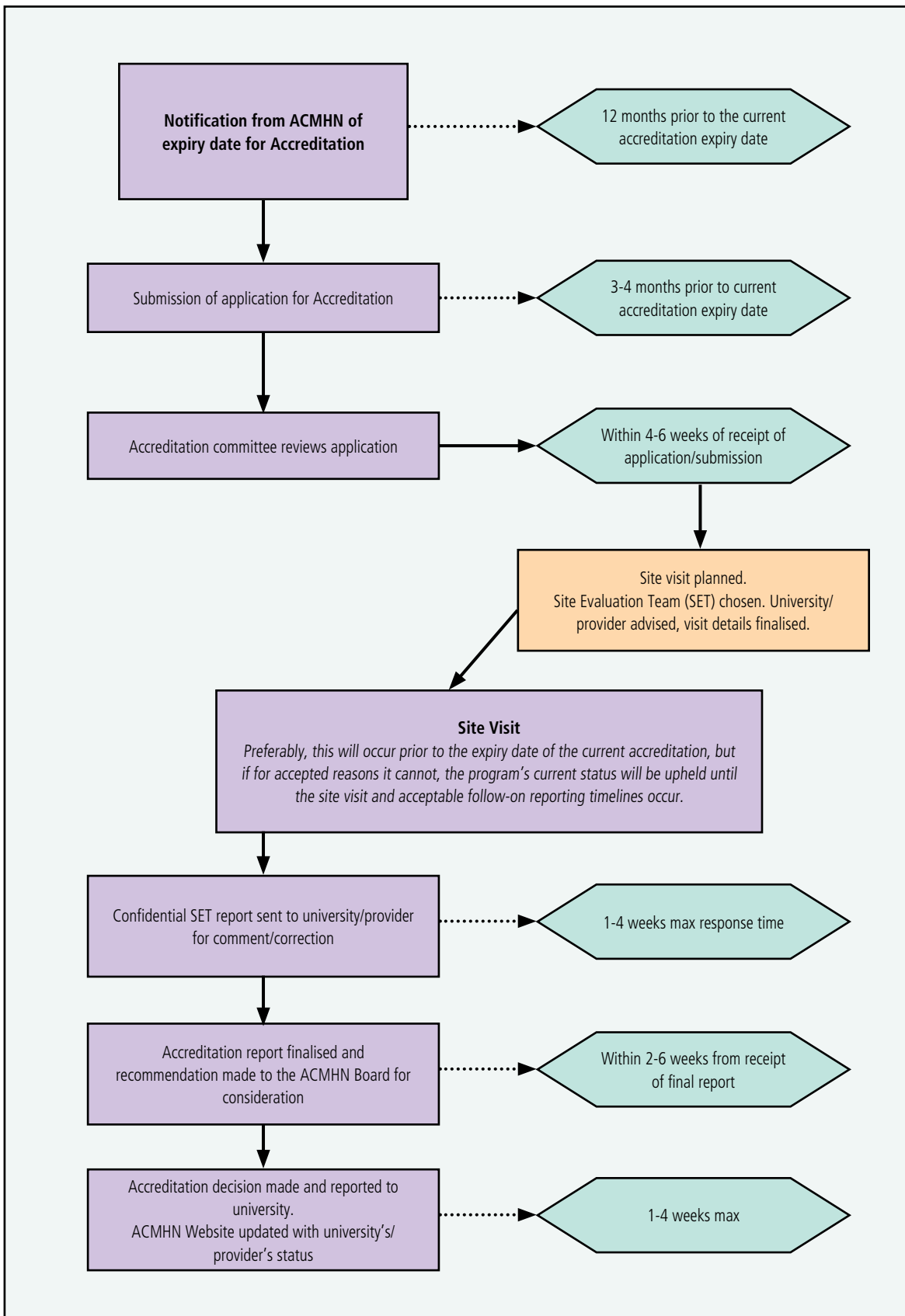
### **4.4 Final Decision on Accreditation**

After considering all the material received, the Accreditation Committee makes its accreditation recommendation to the ACMHN Board, which will consider and ratify the decision. A final report including any recommended actions where applicable is then released to the educational institution advising the result of the accreditation process.

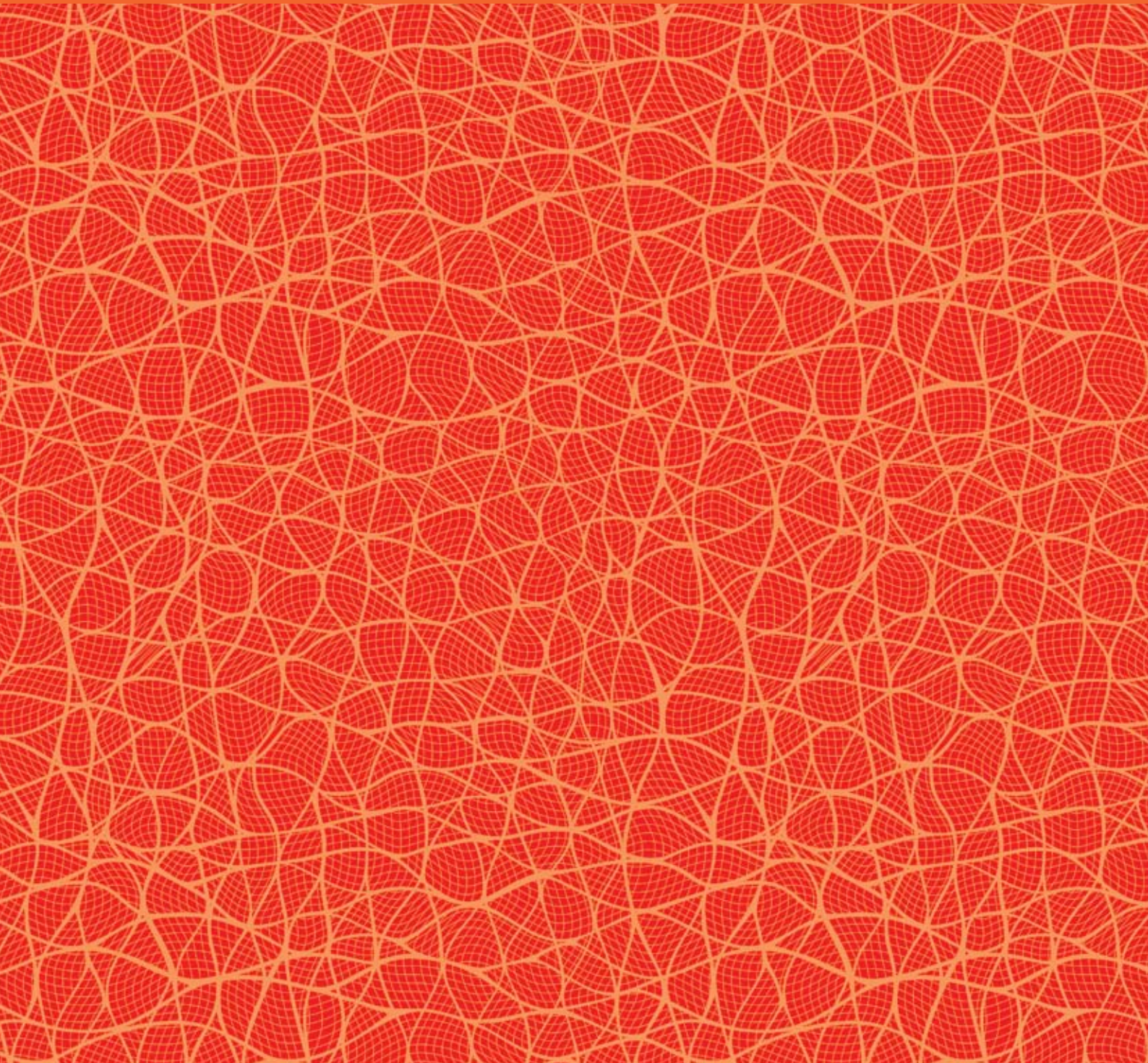
## Appendices



**Appendix 1 – Flow chart/timeline: Accreditation**



**Appendix 2 – Flow chart for Re-accreditation Process**



the Australian College  
of Mental Health Nurses Inc.