



Paramedic education: developing depth through networks and evidence-based research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Paramedic education: developing depth through networks and evidence-based research* was a collaboration between the nine universities that had undergraduate paramedic programs in 2006 and the Australian College of Ambulance Professionals (ACAP). The project proposal was first presented at the 2006 ACAP annual conference in Adelaide. A Steering Committee was appointed and the proposal prepared and submitted to Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, (formerly the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) under the Discipline Based Initiatives Scheme.

The primary aims of the project were three-fold:

To investigate the following two questions:

- i) *What can be learnt from international pre-hospital service providers, professional associations, universities and the research literature that might contribute to meeting the future educational needs of paramedic graduates in Australia?*
- ii) *What international and national models of collaboration and working relationships between ambulance service providers, professional associations and universities offer best practice examples for fostering an ideal working relationship for the education of future paramedics?*

The third aim was to formally establish a paramedic academic network to foster the exchange of educational ideas, and to further collaborative educational practice within the tertiary sector.

Data gathering included interviews with paramedic educators in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada, focus group interviews with key academics, industry leaders and paramedic unions in all states in Australia, and a review of relevant literature.

The Steering Committee met twice; first in September 2007 and then in February 2008 to refine and ratify the project process. The project team and directors meet on a fortnightly basis via teleconference. The inaugural meeting of the Australasian Paramedic Academic Network was held on September 4, 2008 at Victoria University, Melbourne.

Key outcomes of the project are:

- **Future Education of Paramedic graduates**

This report scopes the current issues being addressed by university paramedic programs in Australia and then details international and national developments in the field that address these issues. Importantly, the report canvases ideas for effective paramedic education for the future in line with the COAG reforms and Productivity Commission (2005) recommendations on the future of the health workforce (2005). The two major educational issues identified were i) differences between industry and universities over road-readiness, and ii) the need to identify a signature paramedic pedagogy;

- **Guidelines for relationships with industry**

The report on processes and models of engagement between service providers, universities and the profession outlines strategies engaged in by other professional groups to enhance the smooth transition from university to employment for graduates. This section also reflects on how the profession might respond efficiently to the changing role of experienced paramedics, and address the demands placed on services to respond to COAG and the Productivity Commission (2005) findings. Analysis of focus group data indicates considerable tensions and differences in expectations between industry and the tertiary sector still prevail. A major tension is whether students should be educated for specific services or for a health professional role. Importantly, this study established the paramedic profession as uniquely placed because of the industry's monopoly employer status. This report concludes that much can be learnt from other professions, but the unique status of the industry presents the profession with opportunities for innovation not possible for other professions;

- **The establishment of the Australasian Paramedic Academic Network**

A major outcome of this project has been the formation of the Australasian Paramedic Academic Network. The inaugural meeting was held on September 4, 2008 in Melbourne. This forum provided an opportunity for 62 educators, service providers and professional association representatives from Australia and New Zealand to meet and establish the Network. The development of aims, objectives,

membership, leadership, nomination and election of officer bearers will be completed by 2009 and the group will formally meet in New Zealand at the annual ACAP Conference. The Network will initially seek an alliance and support from ACAP.

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