

AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF CRITICAL CARE NURSES

ENDORSEMENT OF CRITICAL CARE COURSES

PROVIDER INFORMATION

ACCCN ENDORSEMENT OF CRITICAL CARE NURSING PROGRAMS

AIM

This document provides guidelines that outline the criteria for education providers seeking endorsement of their postgraduate critical care nursing program. It also functions as a practical checklist to assist providers in evaluating whether their program meets criteria.

Overall, the goal is to ensure the quality of postgraduate education programs that deliver education to prepare qualified critical care nurses in line with Australian College of Critical Care Nurses (ACCCN) endorsement criteria.

PURPOSE

The purpose of developing endorsement criteria for postgraduate critical care nursing programs is to:

- Ensure the quality assurance of critical care nursing programs offered by higher education institutions
- Ensure the expected minimum standard of knowledge, skills, and attributes are achieved on completion of a postgraduate critical care nursing program, aligned with the ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 3rd Edition (2015)
- Recognise programs which prepare appropriately qualified graduates to deliver minimum safe workforce requirements in critical care as recommended in the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses (ACCCN) Workforce Standards (ACCCN, 2016)
- Recognise and maintain the position of critical care nursing as a discrete standalone specialisation.
- Provide a standard of course endorsement which can assist Registered Nurses in the selection of high quality postgraduate critical care nursing programs.

CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT

These endorsement criteria were developed by a consultation expert working group (Appendix 1) through the process of thematic mapping of key documents and synthesis of recommendations and guideline statements.

Key documents used for the thematic mapping process included:

- ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 3rd Edition (2015)
- ACCCN Position Statement on Critical Care Education (2017)
- Standard of Practice and Evaluation of Critical-Care-Nursing Tool (SPECT) (Gill et al. 2014)

Examples of International documents used in the thematic mapping process:

- Critical Care Network National Nurse Leads (2023) National Standards for Adult Critical Care Nurse Education. Version 3. United Kingdom
- Danish Ministry of Health. (2017). *Bekendtgørelse om specialuddannelsen for sygeplejersker i intensiv sygepleje* [Ministerial Order on the Education of Specialist Nurses in Intensive Care Nursing]. BEK nr. 396 af 07/04/2017.

The endorsement criteria development process, was also built on the assumption that Registered nursing standards are continuously met and upheld including adherence to the following:

- The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) Registered Nurse Standards for Practice
- Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia Code of Conduct
- International Council of Nurses Code of Ethics
- The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

For the purpose of this document, the endorsement criteria are limited to the Graduate Certificate Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level 8. It is acknowledged that many critical care nursing degrees are offered as Masters level programs (AQF level 9) and/or nested within Graduate Certificates/Diplomas.

All materials submitted for review will undergo a confidential process of assessment against the criteria for endorsement. Following endorsement, the program provider will be entitled to use the following statement on their course materials:

This course has been quality reviewed by the Australian College of Critical Care Nurses and the graduand has studied a program that meets the criteria for a qualification assessed at AQF level 8.

DEFINITIONS

Critical Care

The term 'Critical Care' in this document refers to the subspecialisation of Intensive Care Nursing (across the span of ages from neonatal, through paediatrics and to adults) and does not include other specialisations such as Emergency Care, Cardiac Care or Perioperative Nursing Care. In accordance with the statements from the relevant professional bodies – College of Intensive Care Medicine (CICM) and Australian College of Critical Care Nurses (ACCCN) an intensive care unit (ICU) is defined as an area specifically staffed and equipped for the ongoing management of patients with actual or potential life-threatening illnesses, injuries, and complications. The needs of these patients include continuous monitoring and intervention, specialised medical and nursing care, and multiple modalities of physiologic organ support to sustain life during a period of acute organ system insufficiency to prevent complications and restore health where possible (ACCCN, 2015; ACCCN, 2017; CICM 2016).

Endorsement

The process by which an independent organisation (ACCCN) officially approves or recognises a program that meets criteria which includes specialist content, quality processes, teaching and standards. The endorsement can add credibility and value to the program which carries the approval.

Faculty

The people responsible for teaching in a program of study.

Preferred criteria

The aspects of a program of study which are desirable to be included but not mandatory and may be omitted due to the context of practice, for example, rurality or smaller critical care setting.

PROVIDER ENDORSEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Program providers will need to submit evidence of meeting the ACCCN criteria as included in this document at a minimum of AQF level 8. The key requirements to be included are evidence of:

The curriculum

- Learning outcomes
- Content of units
- Practice requirements

The qualifications of faculty teaching the program

- Content teachers
- Teachers/support in practice

The assessments

- Mapping to learning outcomes
- Rubrics

Procedure

Prior to submitting the program for review, the following should be considered noting that:

1. If the assessment panel have any questions or require further details, the panel chair will reach out to the contact person indicated on the application.
2. The applicant should review and confirm that each criteria statement has been addressed by ticking the corresponding box in the 'Assessment' column. Additionally, they may be required to provide further evidence to support the criteria as indicated in the 3rd column.
3. This application form is completed by the program co-ordinator (or appropriate delegate) and submitted to ACCCN along with the supporting evidence requested.
4. The fee for assessment is required at the time of the application submission.
5. All materials will be handled privately and sensitively on submission to ACCCN.

CHECKLIST FOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Critical care graduate level programs must be designed to align with AQF level 8 and delivered in a format that is accessible to the targeted learner.

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE
<p>ADMISSION REQUIREMENT</p> <p>The program is open to registered nurses (RN) employed in a critical care environment. It is recommended that students enter the program with a minimum of one year of experience as an RN.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><i>Provide a statement of the admission criteria and/or include a hyperlink to the program and course pages.</i></p>
<p>DURATION</p> <p>Program duration is a minimum of 6 months (equivalent full-time study load) and 1year (equivalent part-time study load) with a requirement to complete the program within a maximum of 3 years.</p>		<p><i>Provide a statement of the program duration and/or include a hyperlink to the program and course pages.</i></p>
<p>CONTENT</p> <p>The program includes a minimum of 600 hours of learning (ASQA, n.d.) with a combination of theory/knowledge building and clinical skills training</p>		<p><i>Provide a description of the learning hours.</i></p>
<p>EDUCATION PROVIDER</p> <p>The program provider is listed on the AQF National Registry for the award of Graduate Certificate (Level 8)</p>		<p><i>Nil required.</i></p>
<p>PROGRAM DELIVERY MODE</p> <p>The delivery mode(s) demonstrates a balance between learning strategies which foster student engagement, innovations and self-directed learning and accommodating diverse student learning styles.</p>		<p><i>Provide a brief description and rationale of the program delivery mode(s) (campus/online/hybrid).</i></p>

CURRICULUM CRITERIA CHECKLIST

Critical care nursing postgraduate level programs must provide a balance between clinically oriented content and broader graduate skills and attributes that enable the RN to make a valuable contribution to the specialisation of critical care. The curriculum should be scaffolded for students to extend their knowledge from foundational to more complex concepts in critical care nursing. Learning objectives and specialist practice learning outcomes should be assessed to ensure graduates work within critical care nursing practice with the clinical knowledge, skills and attitudes at a standard expected by industry and the peak professional body, ACCCN.

CRITERIA <i>For further information around the curriculum criteria below, please refer to the ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 3rd Edition (2015) and the SPECT (Gill et al. 2014).</i>	ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE <i>In addition to the evidence requested, please attach the course curriculum for review.</i>
Overall Objective/Philosophy A documented curriculum philosophy that includes concepts related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical care nursing context and scope of practice • Education/Learning theories • Constructive and scaffolded alignment of the program components such as learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment tasks. 		<i>Provide a brief summary for each bullet point along with a rationale for its extent, depth, and sequencing of content. Please attach an overview of the curriculum, outlining what is covered in each week/module of the program.</i>
Professional Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program acknowledges the importance of holding critical care nursing practice to the highest professional, legal and ethical standards. • Theory and practice are explored while acknowledging the additional challenges (e.g. critical nature of patients and high technology demands) in the critical care environment. 		<i>Provide a brief summary for each bullet point.</i>
Provision and Coordination of Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program embeds a holistic patient and family-centred approach to clinical practice. • The program addresses meeting physiological, psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs of the patient within the critical care environment. 		<i>Provide a brief summary for each bullet point.</i>

<p>CRITERIA</p> <p><i>For further information around the curriculum criteria below, please refer to the ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 3rd Edition (2015) and the SPECT (Gill et al. 2014).</i></p>	<p>ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>EVIDENCE</p> <p><i>In addition to the evidence requested, please attach the course curriculum for review.</i></p>
<p>Critical Thinking and Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program addresses development of specialised knowledge, skills and attitudes in clinical problem solving needed for the critical care environment The program prepares the RN to develop skills for application in advanced assessment, planning, and delivery of evidence-based care. 		<p><i>Provide a brief summary for each bullet point.</i></p>
<p>Collaboration and Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program provides an opportunity to enable the RN to develop knowledge and skills around elements of leadership and education provision. The program underpins the importance of the experienced critical care nurse in undertaking professional development and mentorship of peers, students, and less experienced staff. 		<p><i>Provide a brief summary for each bullet point.</i></p>
<p>Speciality Areas</p> <p>The program addresses the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to provide nursing care to a variety of patient populations in the critical care environment. Specifically, the program builds knowledge and skills that enable the RN to do the following</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates competent nursing care of the critically ill patient with any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> requiring intravenous fluid, vasoactive drugs, blood products, analgesia, sedation, oxygen therapy, non-invasive ventilation, mechanical ventilation, intercostal catheters and pleural drains with or at risk of delirium with arrhythmias, acute coronary syndrome, heart failure may require cardiac pacing with sepsis with shock (all types) with electrolyte, glucose, acid-base, and blood gas disturbances 		<p><i>Provide a brief summary for each of the 3 levels of knowledge and skill acquisition detailed.</i></p> <p><i>Please note that these speciality areas are shaped around the adult patient and any modification of these speciality area knowledge and skills, to suit the neonatal and paediatric environment, needs to be outlined.</i></p>

<p>CRITERIA</p> <p><i>For further information around the curriculum criteria below, please refer to the ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 3rd Edition (2015) and the SPECT (Gill et al. 2014).</i></p>	<p>ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>EVIDENCE</p> <p><i>In addition to the evidence requested, please attach the course curriculum for review.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with gastrointestinal dysfunction • at risk of or actual altered skin integument • with multiorgan failure • with altered haematological function • with renal failure and/or requiring renal replacement therapy • with liver failure • with altered level of consciousness • with raised intracranial pressure • with trauma • with comorbidities following complex surgery • who is a potential organ and tissue donor • requiring resuscitation, including advanced life support <p>2. Has knowledge of the critically ill patient with any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre/post cardiac surgery • requiring interventional cardiology or a mechanical assist device • Pre/post-organ transplantation • acute spinal cord injury • thermal injury • toxins, poisoning and envenomation <p>3. Describes the care considerations for the following populations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • culturally and linguistically diverse patients • patient with obesity • patient with a mental health condition • obstetric patients 		

CRITERIA <i>For further information around the curriculum criteria below, please refer to the ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses 3rd Edition (2015) and the SPECT (Gill et al. 2014).</i>	ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE <i>In addition to the evidence requested, please attach the course curriculum for review.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> paediatric patients 		
Assessment – Overall The minimum program practice outcome is a RN who can independently provide nursing care for a variety of critically ill patients in most contexts, using a patient- and family-centred approach, aligned with the ACCCN Practice standards. This should include a combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes, values and technical abilities that underpin safe and effective critical care nursing care and interventions. Assessment of whether the RN has met the program learning outcomes should be demonstrated using formative and summative assessment processes.		<i>Briefly summaries the assessment components of the program.</i>
Assessment – Achievement of Program Outcomes The program includes assessment processes which measure the achievement of the learning outcomes of the program and are aligned with the standards of practice of a critical care nurse (as defined through SPECT or the ACCCN Practice Standards).		<i>Provide rubrics and other assessment details that show evidence that assessment processes are clearly aligned with program learning outcomes, course learning outcomes, and graduate qualities.</i>
Assessment – Assessment Tools Assessment and moderation structures are in place to ensure integrity, fairness, consistency, and transparency in assessing students.		<i>As above.</i>
Assessment – AQF Level Appropriate assessment strategies should align with the application and clinical decision making expected of a postgraduate student in specialist courses of study (AQF Level 8) Assessments should be aimed at ‘authentic assessment’, requiring the RN to apply knowledge and skills in a real-world context and beyond standardised tests or checklists		<i>Provide a brief a statement as evidence.</i>

FACULTY AND PARTNERSHIPS CHECKLIST

Critical care graduate level programs must be developed by those appropriately qualified in the field of critical care. In addition, to academic qualifications a holistic approach would also need to include some element of consultation with clinical partners and consumers representatives.

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE
<p>Clinical Partners The program is designed, developed and reviewed every 2 years in collaboration with relevant stakeholders in clinical practice.</p>		<i>Provide a description of who is involved/consulted and the process of their involvement (meetings, review etc).</i>
<p>Consumer Representatives Oversight of the program includes input from people with critical care lived experience (preferred criteria ONLY).</p>		<i>Provide a description of who is involved/consulted and the process of their involvement (meetings, review etc).</i>
<p>Clinical Learning Environment The program requires the RN to be working in a critical care unit for clinical component which at a minimum allows the RN to be exposed to providing care to critically ill patients. The option to include simulation as an alternative to clinical exposure can be considered but a majority of skills should be performed in the critical care clinical environment.</p>		<i>Provide a description of the criterion used to assess the suitability of the clinical space (including resources for teaching and assessment in the clinical space). Also details the degree of simulation, which is included, if any.</i>
<p>Educators – Academic The program is designed and delivered by individuals who have academic qualifications and clinical experience in critical care nursing. At least one member of the faculty is an ACCCN member (preferred criteria ONLY).</p>		<i>Provide a description (including criteria around attributes and qualifications) of who is involved/consulted and the process of their involvement (meetings, review etc).</i>
<p>Educators – Assessors</p>		<i>Provide a description of who is involved or at least the criterion for selection of assessors in the clinical space.</i>

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE
Assessors of the RN in the clinical environment must be at least one post graduate level qualification higher or equivalence (extensive relevant critical care nursing experience/expertise).		

MONITORING AND EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Critical care nursing post graduate level programs must include planned, quality improvement processes of ongoing review, evaluation, and improvement.

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT	EVIDENCE
<p>Quality Monitoring/Control At least biannual evaluation and review of program content to include contemporary and emerging issues surrounding critical care nurse practice, health care research and health policy and reform.</p>		<p><i>Provide evidence of when the curriculum was last reviewed and evaluated. Briefly describe the process of program evaluation.</i></p>

REFERENCES

- Australian College of Critical Care Nurses (ACCCN). (2015). *Practice standards for specialist critical care nurses*. Available from <https://accn.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Practice-Standards.pdf>
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Nursing and Midwifery Board AHPRA. (2022). *Code of conduct for nurses*. Available from <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Professional-standards.aspx>

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APPENDIX
CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

2025	
Ylona Chun Tie	RN/Academic
Pauline Wong	Senior Lecturer, Master of Advanced Clinical Nursing (ICU Stream Lead), Deputy Director of Education (Operations), Monash University Nursing and Midwifery
Joanne Harmon	RN/Academic Lecturer Nursing University of South Australia
Melanie Greenwood PhD, MN, GradCert UniLearn&Teach, Intensive Care Cert.	Academic and Chair of the ACCCN EAP
Agness Tembo	Intensive Care Lecturer
Anne Mette Adams RN, BN (Hons), GradDip (CritCare), MN, PhD	Lecturer (research and teaching), College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Flinders University, South Australia
Fenella Gill	Professor Acute Paediatrics Curtin University and Perth Children's Hospital, Western Australia
Ellie Johnson RN, BN, MNursing (Crit Care), GradCertEd (Tertiary)	Lecturer, Federation University
Clinton Fildes	Lecturer in Nursing, University of South Australia
Tim Davis	Clinical Nurse Educator (Critical Care) Northeast Health Wangaratta, Critical Care Subject Co-ordinator University of Melbourne
Kim Morris	
Previous	
Simon Edgecombe	ICU CNE
Jessica Best	Lecturer (previous ICU CNC)
MAJ Ben Mackie	Army School of Health
ACCCN National Office Members	
Kylie Thompson	ACCCN National Nurse Educator
Rebekah Napier	ACCCN National Operations Manager
Rand Butcher	ACCCN CEO