



Trends in Nursing Education in Australia

1. Brief Overview of Nursing Education

- In Australia, there are two main categories for nurses: Enrolled Nurses (EN) (who, after an additional 6 months of studies, can become Endorsed Enrolled Nurses (EEN)) and Registered Nurses (RN). Graduates from RN programmes can pursue further education and training to become Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) or Nurse Practitioners (NP). Table 1 distinguishes these categories according to their educational requirements.

Table 1. Overview of nursing categories in Australia and respective level of education

Nursing Education	Nursing Title	Education Requirement
Initial Nursing Education	Enrolled Nurse (EN)	To become an EN, students must pursue 12 to 18 months of vocational education and training.
	Endorsed Enrolled Nurse (EEN)	To become an endorsed enrolled nurse (EEN), a student is required to do the same training as an EN, with an additional 6 months accredited study in pharmacology for medication endorsement.
	Registered Nurses (RN)	To become a RN, students have to complete a Bachelor's degree in Nursing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 years of study for students at undergraduate level 2 years of study for students with prior degree and work experience
Advanced Nursing Education	Advanced Practice Registered Nurse	RNs can pursue further training (post-graduate certificate, diploma or degree) to become an advanced practice nurse. Positions include: clinical nurse specialists, clinical educator and nurse manager. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires additional 6 months to 2 years of study at university level
	Nurse Practitioner	To become a Nurse Practitioner, registered nurses must be an advanced practice nurse and have postgraduate qualifications in their chosen specialty. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires additional training at Masters or PHD level in their area of clinical expertise

Source: Australian Nursing and Midwifery Association, <http://anmf.org.au/>.

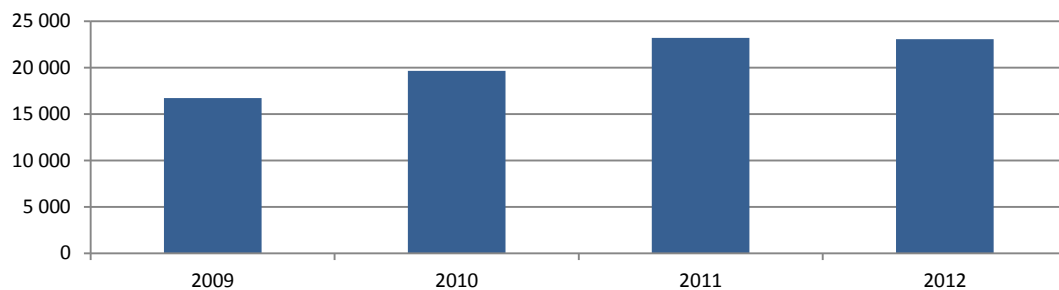
2. Trends in Admissions to Nursing Schools

- There are 69 approved programs to become an Enrolled Nurse and 89 programs to become a Registered Nurse in Australia (AHPRA, 2013).
- In 2008, the Government commissioned a review of the Higher Education system in Australia. The following year, entry into higher education opened up and moved to a “demand-driven” system. The previous quota (i.e., *numerus clausus*) on student admission numbers began to be removed from 2009 onwards for all university courses, except medicine.

Enrolled Nurse Programs

- It is difficult to get accurate numbers on student intakes in enrolled nurse programs due to the nature of enrolment in Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions. According to a 2014 report, admissions in enrolled nurse programs increased between 2009 and 2012, with the number of first-year students rising from 16 700 in 2009 to more than 23 000 in 2011 and 2012 (Health Workforce Australia, 2014) .

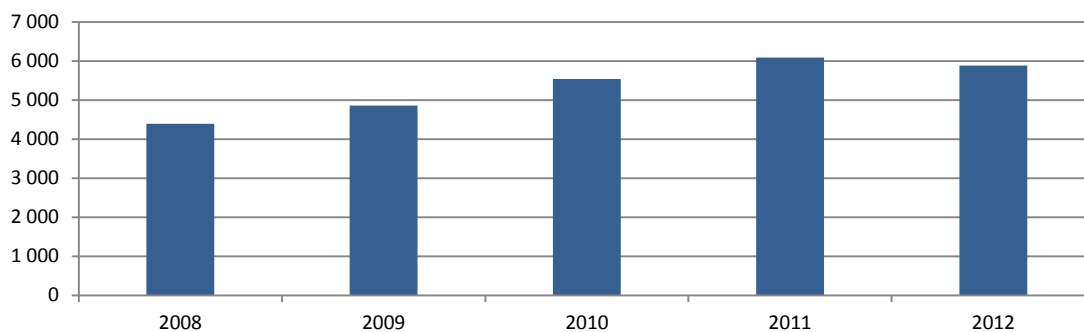
Figure 1: Admissions to enrolled nurse programs, Australia, 2009 - 2012



Source: Health Workforce Australia, *Australia's Future Workforce - Nurses Overview Report*, August 2014.

- There is a large difference between the number of admissions and graduations from enrolled nurse programs. This large gap is due at least partly to the possible progression from enrolled to endorsed enrolled nurses. An enrolled nurse who wishes to become endorsed would initially get into an enrolled nurse diploma, but would then take the additional training to become an endorsed enrolled nurses, therefore not being included in EN graduate numbers. Figure 2 shows the number of graduates from EN programs in Australia from 2008 to 2012. Only about 6 000 students graduated from these programs in 2011 and 2012.

Figure 2: Graduates from enrolled nurse programs, Australia, 2008 - 2012

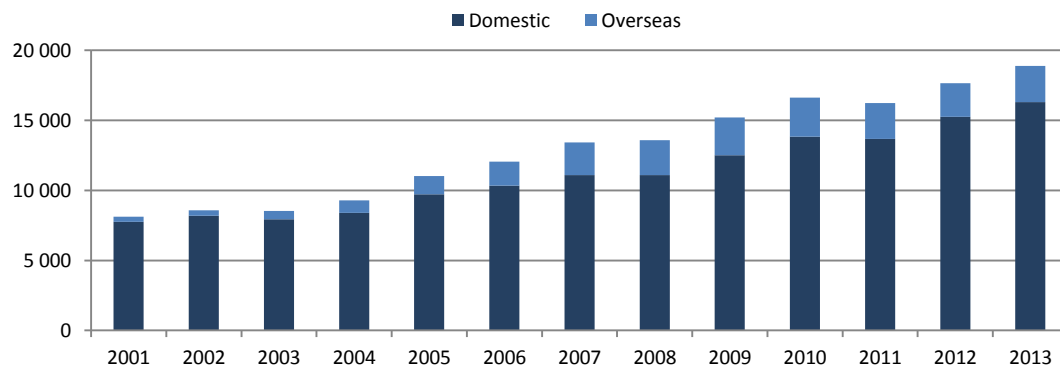


Source: National Centre for Vocational Research, Australia, 2014.

Registered Nurse Programs

- Figure 3 shows admissions in RN programs (Bachelor's degree) in Australia from 2001 to 2013, distinguishing domestic and international students. Overall, there has been a steady increase in admissions in RN programs during this 12-year period, with the number of admission more than doubling between 2001 and 2013.
- As already noted, prior to 2009, governments controlled the number of publicly-funded places for students; however after the Bradley Review in 2008, changes were made to remove the *numerus clausus* policy and move to a demand-driven system, with the Australian government assuring that funding would be available for all domestic students admitted to a public university (Mason, 2013). This has led some universities to lowering entrance scores to attract more students, and possibly also increasing student dropout rates (see box below).
- Since the introduction of the new system, nursing admissions have increased from 15 210 in 2009 to 18 885 in 2013, a 25% increase over 4 years. Most of this growth was driven by an increase in the number of Australian students admitted in nursing programs, while the number of foreign students remained relatively stable. However, the growth rate in recent years was not greater than in the years that preceded the removal of the government *numerus clausus* policy. During the preceding 4 years from 2005 to 2009, the rise in the number of students admitted in nursing programs was even greater than between 2009 and 2013, with a growth rate of almost 40% (from 11 016 in 2005 to 15 210 in 2009).

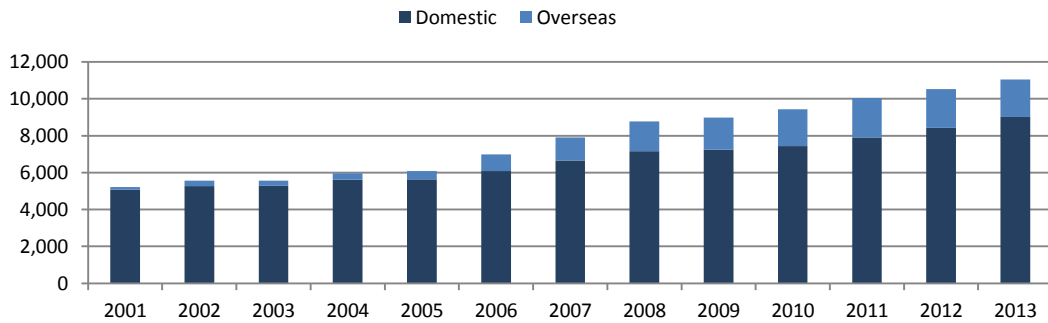
Figure 3. Admissions to RN programs, Australia, 2001-2013



Source: Higher Education Statistics Data Cube (uCube).

- Admissions of international students have increased substantially since 2001, but most of the growth occurred between 2001 and 2009, with the number stabilising since then. The rise during the past decade reflected the combined effect of a growing demand from foreign students to study nursing in Australia and a growing supply of places in Australian universities to attract these students to increase their student numbers and revenues. Fees for domestic students are between AUS\$6000 – 8000 per year; for overseas students they commence from AUS\$23,000 per year.
- Consistent with the trend rise in student admissions, the number of graduates from RN programs in Australia has steadily increased from 2001 until 2013, more than doubling during this period (Figure 4). Both the number of domestic graduates and international graduates have increased, with overseas graduates starting to increase noticeably since 2006, reflecting the increase in admissions from 2004 onwards.

Figure 4. Graduates from RN programs, Australia, 2001-2013



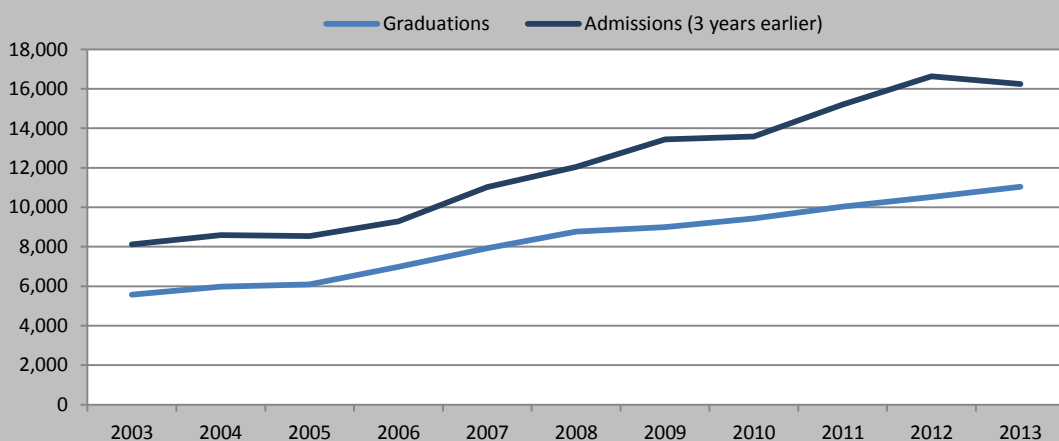
Source: Higher Education Statistics Data Cube (uCube).

- Following these steady increases in the number of students admitted and graduating from nursing programs over the past decade or so, one emerging issue in Australia is that there may no longer be enough entry positions to absorb all the new graduates in the labour market. A significant proportion of new domestic nursing graduates in recent years have been unable to secure suitable employment in at least certain areas of the country (Health Workforce Australia, 2014). In this context, it may also become particularly difficult for international graduates to be able to find a job in Australia after their studies, unless they may be willing to accept a lower-skilled and lower paid job.

Box: What is the evidence about student dropout rates from RN education programs in Australia?

There is a lack of data on dropout rates from nursing education programs. However, it is possible to estimate a dropout rate by looking at the gap between admission rates three years earlier and graduation rates in a given year (based on the assumption that it takes 3 years to obtain a RN nursing degree). Based on this estimate (Figure 5), the dropout rate from RN education programs nurses can be estimated to fall in a range of 25% and 33%, with the dropout rate generally increasing in recent years.

Figure 5. Estimates of dropout rates from RN programs, comparing admissions and graduates (3 years later), Australia, 2003-2013



Source: Higher Education Statistics Data Cube (uCube).

3. Trends in Advanced Nursing Education

- The first Nurse Practitioner was recognised in Australia in rural New South Wales in 2001. Since then, by 2013, there were 20 approved Nurse Practitioner programs offered to Registered Nurses in Australia (AHPRA, 2013). These programs all lead to a master's level degree.
- There is no published data on trends in admissions and graduations from Nurse Practitioner programs in Australia. However, by December 2014, there were 1 165 Registered Nurses recognized as Nurse Practitioners on the AHPRA register, significantly up from 123 only in March 2012 (Nursing and Midwifery Board Australia, 2014), indicating that there has been a strong growth in admissions and graduations from these programs in recent years.

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Read the report online:

<http://www.oecd.org/health/health-workforce-policies-in-oecd-countries-9789264239517-en.htm>

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