



JOINT POSITION STATEMENT

From the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN)

The Bologna Agreement and the Tuning Project: Next steps for nursing

EFN and ICN view the Bologna Agreement for Harmonization of Higher Education in Europe and the Tuning Project as important developments that are particularly timely for the profession of nursing. Nurses in Europe and indeed across the world are rising to the challenges associated with demographic change and shifting health care needs. Nurses are increasingly mobile and, as a result, will benefit from the greater portability of qualifications and alignment of educational programmes that the Bologna Agreement will in due course provide.

Whilst this work started as a European Union initiative, interest and work on Tuning has spread beyond the boundaries of the 25 Member States and the other States associated with the process of Bologna. It is for this reason that EFN, which has a European mandate, and ICN, with a global mandate, provide this statement.

EFN and ICN believe that the following issues need to be addressed as part of the next phase of development if potential adverse effects are to be avoided at a later/implementation stage.

- Clarity over the role and credit that practice based education hours will secure in any revised system leading to academic and register nurse award.
- Dependent on the existing educational system in place within Member States, additional workload in redesigning programmes of education based on competencies and aligned to the new European Credit Transfer System will be required. In some countries this will stretch already overworked faculty. EFN and ICN call for the development of tools to facilitate the conduct of country based impact assessment.
- Since nursing is a practice based discipline the parallel impact of these changes in terms of the education needs of existing staff working in practice setting, and who will be required to play a role in competence based models of learning outcome assessment, should also be considered if practitioners fit for practice are to be produced.
- The issue of access pathways will also need to be considered. In some countries there is more than one way to reach registered nurse status. It will be important for these countries to be aware of any impact that these changes will have in terms of workforce composition or agreements that have been reached in terms of articulation of Further Education Provision with that in the Higher Education sector. For example, in the United Kingdom it is possible to undertake a qualification in a further education college that can then be used to give direct entry to year two of the registered nurse programme in the University sector.
- Across Europe not all nurses are educated to degree level at the point of initial registration and not all qualifications carry the same credit tariff. Care will need to be exercised in defining the competencies to make sure that this diversity can continue or, alternatively, there is a managed transition to an all degree position across Europe.
- Closely related to the above point is the need to assess countries whose nursing is not embedded within the University sector. This impact assessment will need to take into account the impact on the non university sector, the availability of teaching staff and the physical capacity to transfer significant numbers of students into degree programmes.
- EFN and ICN have analysed the subject specific competencies developed by the nursing group compared with the ICN competencies for the Generalist Nurse and identified some gaps that need to be filled, some ambiguities that need to be clarified and some linkages that need to be strengthened if patient safety and optimum professional development are to be assured.

Background

Examination of the final reports of phases one and two reveal the magnitude of the work associated with this development. The phase two report also identifies the need to engage a wider range of stakeholders in the process. EFN and ICN concur with this analysis and urge the EU Member States and European Commission, Directorate General Education and Training, to provide the necessary resources to facilitate this process. In particular we would wish to ensure that front line clinical staff, regulators, government chief nurses, civil society, professional organisations and employers fully engage with the further validation processes that are required.

Nursing has been at the vanguard of development in terms of freedom of movement for several decades in Europe. EFN and ICN acknowledge and support the observations made in the phase two report that the EU directives on nursing are showing their age and that the European Credit Transfer System may be a major vehicle through which some of the current historical anomalies resulting from interpretation of the Directives can be addressed. If a solution that is to last a further thirty years is to be found then academics, regulators, government chief nurses and professional bodies need to work together to develop an enhanced approach that builds from the current list of syllabus content and prescribed hours of clinical and theoretical instruction to a creative yet practical competency based alternative which maximises patient safety, optimises resource use and provides a foundation for securing nursing excellence.

Conclusion

Nursing is both an art and a science. It is both an academic and a practice based discipline. To take this work to the next stage requires enthusiasm commitment and support from all key stakeholders. EFN and ICN therefore reiterate their request for:

- Widening stakeholder engagement;
- More detailed validation work on the competencies and an examination of how this might inform an updating of the current general directive on nursing and
- A broadening of the analytical frame to examine potential implementation impact issues.

Statement Sponsors



The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) was established in 1971. EFN represents over one million nurses and is the independent voice of the profession. The mission of EFN is to safeguard the status and practice of the profession of nursing and the interests of nurses in the EU and Europe.

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The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of 129 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. ICN is the international voice of nursing and works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally

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