School of Nursing and Midwifery
Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements (Practice-based Learning) Guidelines and Procedures

1. Definitions

In this document the following definitions apply:

“Access Plan” is an agreed document which outlines the impact of a student’s disability, mental health or medical condition on study. It also specifies specialised services to be provided and exam adjustments. It is developed in agreement between the student and Disability Adviser and reviewed by Program Directors. It is used to assist in the negotiation of reasonable adjustments.

“AHPRA” means Australian Health Practitioner Registration Authority;

“APPM” means University of South Australia (UniSA) Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual;

“Business day” means a day on which the University is open to the public for normal business operations;

‘Clinical placement’ means a placement experience in the HHHS, a hospital or health service/clinic setting that is required as part of a unit where the student undertakes clinical training (another common description of a clinical placement in this context includes, but is not limited to, “a practicum”);

“Course Coordinator” means the person appointed to lead a course of study in a program who works closely with the Program Director to ensure learning and teaching practices in the course are consistent with the Code of good practice for University teaching.

“Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements” means the requirements of a program (clustered under eight domains) that are essential to undertake nursing and midwifery placement activities in a range of practice-based learning environments (including the HHHS, hospitals and health services/clinics) and are described in further detail in the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placement Requirement document (refer to Appendix A);

“Head of School” means the Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery;

“Horizon Hospital and Health Service” (HHHS) the on campus simulated hospital and health service spaces where students undertake workshops related to particular theory courses or preclinical workshops.

“Practice-based learning” as described in Section 4 of the UniSA Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual.

“Program” or “programs” means a program leading to entry to practice as a nurse or midwife where completion is required for professional registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia or a specialist program or course requiring clinical placement;

“Program Director” means the person appointed to the role of program director in the School of Nursing and Midwifery or alternative staff member nominated by the Head of School;
“National Law” means the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (South Australia) Act 2010;

“NMBA” means the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia;

“Reasonable adjustments”. A measure or action (or a group of measures or actions) taken by an education provider that has the effect of assisting a student with a disability, taking into account the individuals circumstances, the costs and benefits of the adjustment and the impact of the adjustment on others, whilst maintaining the academic requirements of the course or program, and other requirements or components that are inherent in or essential to its nature.

“Reporting person” means the person reporting concerns that the student may not be able to meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements of their course.

“Student Engagement Unit (SEU)” means the UniSA unit providing student support services.

2. Introduction

These Guidelines and Procedures establish fitness for practice clearance process for all students and describe the processes to be followed when concerns are raised regarding a student’s ability to meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placement requirements of a program and/or course. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to academic staff and students regarding the physical, sensory, mental, emotional and behavioural requirements needed to undertake nursing and midwifery work place learning. This document should be read in conjunction with Section 4: Practice-based learning of the University of South Australia (UniSA) Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM).

The UniSA School of Nursing and Midwifery is committed to supporting the rights of all people who wish to pursue a career in nursing or midwifery. The Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placement Requirement Statements (Appendix A) have been developed to identify the essential abilities, knowledge and skills needed to achieve the core learning outcomes of accredited programs required for professional registration with the NMBA through the APHRA inclusive of programs that require a clinical placement experience to meet the program/course learning outcomes (e.g. Graduate Diploma in Mental Health Nursing; Master of Nursing: Nurse Practitioner).

Nursing and midwifery programs include substantial practice-based learning elements in which students are exposed to clinical practice and the public. The School of Nursing and Midwifery has an obligation under the National Law to notify AHPRA if a student enrolled in an approved program has:

“an impairment that, in the course of the student undertaking clinical training, may place the public at substantial risk of harm” (Clause 141 (1) (b).

The Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements Requirement Statements have been developed to advise potential applicants and students of the requirements necessary to undertake a clinical placement as a student in preparation for entry (registration) into the nursing and midwifery professions or for specialist/advanced practice. All students must confirm that they meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements on entry to the program and before they undertake a course related clinical placement. It is important to note that the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements of the programs are not necessarily synonymous with an impairment requiring notification under the National Law.

Students with a disability or chronic health condition may be able to have reasonable adjustments made to teaching and learning, assessment, clinical practice and other activities to enable them to participate in their course and meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical...
Placements requirements. However, reasonable adjustments should not fundamentally change the nature of the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements.

3. Information to applicants and students

Information about the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements (Appendix A) will be available to potential applicants to the Nursing and Midwifery programs on the University website and in the relevant program information and course outlines. Prospective students will be required to confirm that they have read and understood these as part of the program enrolment process.

All students enrolled in programs will be advised of their obligations’ under the National Law, University rules and policies and School procedures associated with practice-based learning through the School of Nursing and Midwifery Clinical Placement Unit website. All students will be asked to confirm their ongoing ability to meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements prior to enrolling in each clinical placement course (usually titled Experiential Learning Activity or ELA).

4. Student Services and Support

The University provides a range of student services and support http://w3.unisa.edu.au/current-students/StudentServices/StudentServices.html Students who have a disability, mental health or medical condition which may impact on their studies are strongly encouraged to Register for Disability Services on accepting an offer into a program.

Students with a disability or medical condition who have an assessment with a Disability Adviser may be provided with an Access Plan (AP). This document will include an ‘Impact Statement’ which details the impact of the student’s disability and supports the negotiation of reasonable adjustments that can be made to assist the student to achieve the relevant program’s Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements aligned to the program learning outcomes and program rules. Disability Advisers can assist students in this negotiation process, providing information and advice regarding support options. The reasonable adjustments in clinical courses are negotiated with the Program Director (or nominee) and may be subject to amendment if the School considers the adjustments proposed are inconsistent with the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placement requirements of the relevant program. The provision of an AP should not be construed as a determination by the University that the student can meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements of the relevant program.

5. Fitness to Practice Procedure

The following procedure must be initiated when concerns are raised regarding a student’s ability to meet each of the eight domains of Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements.

It is essential that any concerns of this nature are properly investigated. Students who are not fit to practice during a clinical placement may pose a risk to the public, clinical placement host staff, UniSA staff and other students if they are permitted to participate in clinical placements. These students may also fall within the mandatory notification requirements under the National Law. The University shall carry out the procedure described below in a manner that is as timely and discrete as reasonably practicable and provides procedural fairness for students who are the subject of investigations. All information collected by the School of Nursing and Midwifery as part of the procedure described below shall be retained and dealt with in a manner that is consistent with the UniSA Confidentiality of students’ personal information.

The following circumstances are examples which could raise doubts about a student’s ability to meet one or more of the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements requirements and potentially cause a student to be unfit to practice during a clinical placement.
These examples are illustrative only and are not intended to be exhaustive:

i. Evidence of chronic drug or alcohol misuse;

ii. Evidence of un-controlled mental illness or other disability which impairs a student’s capacity to meet fitness to practice requirements regardless of reasonable adjustments;

iii. Acting in a violent or aggressive manner;

iv. Intimidation of patients/clients, placement host staff, UniSA staff and fellow students;

v. Fraudulent or dishonest behaviour;

vi. Failure to comply with legislative and compulsory pre-clinical document requirements for clinical placement; and

vii. Convicted or found guilty of an offence punishable by imprisonment in Australia and/or overseas.

6. Requirement for Medical Clearance

Where the Program Director or Head of School decides that a medical clearance from a registered medical practitioner is necessary to make a determination about a student’s fitness to practice the student will be requested to provide within ten (10) business days (or such longer period as may be approved by the Program Director or Head of School) a report from a medical professional. A template form has been developed by the School of Nursing and Midwifery for this purpose (see Appendix C). Through the Program Director or Head of School, the University can stipulate the medical practitioner the student is required to consult for an independent assessment.

Concerns about a nursing or midwifery student’s ability to meet the Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placement requirements of the program and to demonstrate fitness to practice on a clinical placement, will be managed in accordance with the UniSA Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual Subclause 4.3 *Suitability for practice-based learning activities.*

7. Related policies, rules and procedures

1. Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements (Practice-based Learning) Requirements are subject to all policies of the University: [http://w3.unisa.edu.au/policies/policies/default.asp](http://w3.unisa.edu.au/policies/policies/default.asp)

Examples of pertinent University policies and procedures include:

- UniSA Clinical Placement Unit: Students with Disabilities section
2. National Laws
Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia’s Registered Nurse Standards for Practice
Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (South Australia) Act 2010
NMBA Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia (August 2008)

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Edith Cowen University (2016) School of Nursing and Midwifery, Fitness to Practice in Clinical Placements Guidelines and Procedures.