



**MEDICAL SCIENCES COUNCIL
OF NEW ZEALAND**

TE KAUNIHERA PŪTAIAO HAUORA O AOTEAROA

19 November 2019

An Important Announcement from the Medical Sciences Council:

CHANGE TO THE PRESCRIBED QUALIFICATION FOR ANAESTHETIC TECHNICIAN REGISTRATION

In brief:

- The Council has agreed that it is appropriate to move the level of the qualification prescribed for registration as an AT to a level 7 bachelor degree programme of study.
- The Council has therefore agreed to work with the AUT to develop and deliver an AT bachelor degree programme.
- Practitioners who currently hold the diploma level qualification or the certificate qualification will not be disadvantaged in respect of gaining registration and there will be no effect on their current registration nor restrictions on their APC.
- The Council does not intend to review the definition of the AT scope of practice as currently articulated in the New Zealand Gazette.
- As a first step, a meeting has been scheduled for the last week of November with the AUT Head of School (Clinical Sciences) to develop and agree a project plan inclusive of clearly defined timelines and consultation strategies.
- A further communique will be issued once the plan has been finalised with an expectation of being able to provide more detail on ongoing communication measures.

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Change to the Prescribed Qualification for the Anaesthetic Technician Registration

The Medical Sciences Council (the Council) is responsible for setting the prescribed qualification for the purpose of registration in the anaesthetic technician (AT) scope of practice and has accredited the Diploma in Applied Science (Anaesthetic Technology) as offered by the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) for that purpose.

As you may be aware, the AUT recently advised they are unable to continue to provide the AT Diploma study programme in the longer term, and have indicated the last intake into the Diploma programme would be 2020.

The Council is very aware of the need to ensure there will be a New Zealand study programme that graduates NZ-trained ATs into the future and has committed to ensuring this happens. The Council is aware there is an urgency required to resolve the situation.

There are a number of issues that need to be worked through and due to the urgency of the situation the Council has made initial decisions in respect of some of those:

LEVEL OF THE AT QUALIFICATION

- The Council has agreed that it is appropriate to move the level of the qualification prescribed for registration as an AT to a level 7 bachelor degree programme of study. The current competence standards adopted by the Council for the AT scope of practice require practitioners who are able to apply critical thinking and problem solving to their clinical and professional practice. The skills and knowledge required for that will be better provided through a bachelor degree programme of study.
 - Pitching the qualification at a higher level of learning will ultimately produce graduates who are able to practise flexibly within the perioperative environment.
 - Setting the prescribed qualification as a level 7 bachelor degree aligns the learning for ATs with that of other allied health professionals practising within the New Zealand healthcare environment.
 - Practitioners who currently hold the diploma level qualification or the certificate qualification will not be disadvantaged in respect of gaining registration and there will be no effect on their current registration nor restrictions on their APC.
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TERTIARY ENVIRONMENT FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

- While the Council understands that New Zealand polytechnics are also able to provide bachelor degree programmes, the pending national restructuring of the vocational education framework within New Zealand poses a significantly increased risk for time delays in rolling out an AT bachelor degree programme through a polytechnic in the immediate-to-short term.
 - The Council has therefore agreed that in the immediate term the AT degree study programme would be best provided through a university tertiary education environment.
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PREFERRED UNIVERSITY PROVIDER

- While adopting an open market approach to the selection of a preferred education provider fits with best business practice, the Council is very concerned that this would significantly delay the process in getting a replacement programme of study up and running. Time is a critical factor and the rollout of a degree programme needs to be achieved as soon as possible. To do otherwise raises a potential and significant risk for the health and safety of the public in respect of timely access to perioperative services. The Council is very aware that many perioperative services within New Zealand are being impacted by AT workforce shortages and has therefore taken a position of identifying a preferred provider in the immediate term. This does not negate other tertiary education providers from developing an AT-focused degree programme in the longer term.
 - The Council has therefore agreed to work with the AUT to develop and deliver an AT bachelor degree programme. AUT already has experience in providing an anaesthetic technology focused study programme and provides a number of other allied health profession degrees. They also have experience in providing learning programmes based on an apprenticeship model of programme delivery.
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DELIVERY MODEL OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

- The Council has been approached by many healthcare providers who have strongly stated their preference for the new AT study programme to continue to be delivered through an apprenticeship model of learning.
- The Council is committed to working with AUT to look at how the best features of the apprenticeship model of the current diploma programme could be incorporated into a bachelor degree programme. This work will include ongoing liaison and consultation with key stakeholder groups such as (but not limited to) the national group of Allied Health Directors, the Ministry of Health, and relevant professional bodies.

A REVIEW OF THE PRESCRIBED QUALIFICATION DOES NOT EQUATE TO A REVIEW OF THE AT SCOPE OF PRACTICE

- In 2017-2018 a Council review of the AT scope of practice determined there was no need to make wholesale changes to enable more flexibility in the currently defined AT scope of practice. There is an expanded practice policy framework in place that allows for appropriately trained and skilled ATs to undertake additional duties within the perioperative environment and as deemed appropriate by their workplace.
- There is no compelling new evidence to hand that would lead the Council to change its position in terms of the practice parameters as currently gazetted for the AT scope of practice.
- Due to the AUT decision that it is unable to continue to provide a study programme set at a level lesser than a bachelor degree, the Council has no option but to review the qualification prescribed and accredited for the purpose of AT registration.
- The Council does not intend to review the definition of the AT scope of practice as currently articulated in the New Zealand Gazette. It does however recognise that there is room for improvement in communicating with perioperative service providers so they are better informed of the parameters and application of the Council's expanded practice framework for ATs. A review of the informational material in respect of the expanded practice framework has been included into the work-plan over the next few months.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

- The Council is very aware of the potential for there to be a gap between the last graduating cohort of the current AT programme and the first graduating cohort of the new AT programme. All possible measures will be taken to minimise this risk, which is why the Council is treating this matter with urgency and taken the position of making a number of preliminary decisions without first of all undertaking a full public consultation.
 - AUT has reassured the Council that they will work collaboratively to minimise the risk of a "gap/fallow" period where there would be no NZ-trained graduates available to the workforce.
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WHERE TO FROM HERE?

- There is a lot of work to be done and as already stated, time is of the essence. The Council has delegated its Chief Executive to take the operational leadership reins for this project, assisted by the staff team. Council will continue to provide governance and policy oversight of the project.
 - As a first step, a meeting has been scheduled for the last week of November with the AUT Head of School (Clinical Sciences) to develop and agree a project plan inclusive of clearly defined timelines and consultation strategies.
 - A further communique will be issued once the plan has been finalised with an expectation of being able to provide more detail on ongoing communication measures. The Council is committed to engaging with key stakeholders throughout the life of this project to ensure they have an opportunity to be heard in respect of the development of a new degree programme for registration in the AT scope of practice.
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