



**Pre-registration midwifery education:  
-background information relating to the new programme and  
its delivery in the Wellington region.**

At the end of August this year Massey University notified Midwifery Council that it would not be providing midwifery education for new students in 2010 but it would enable existing students to complete their qualification. This is because it was clear that Massey's redeveloped midwifery programme would not meet at least one of the Council's new education standards; ie, that programmes be increased to the equivalent of four years but delivered over three extended academic years.

Following Massey's announcement the Council called a meeting of the other four midwifery education providers (AUT, Wintec, CPIT and Otago Polytechnic) to see if any was in position to fill the gap left by Massey. As a result Council announced on 11 September that there would be a programme in Wellington in 2010 and that it would be delivered collaboratively by one of more of the polytechnics. Subsequently the Chief Executives of those institutions agreed that Otago Polytechnic, with support from CPIT, would deliver the joint Otago Polytechnic/CPIT midwifery programme in the lower North Island from 2010 (see below for more on this programme). Council is aware that there has been some misinformation about the Council's new standards and the processes for approval and the information below is provided by way of background.

Approval and accreditation responsibility

Under the Sections 12 and 118 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 the Midwifery Council is responsible for:

- Prescribing qualifications for registration of midwives
- Accrediting educational institutions for the purposes of providing courses leading to the prescribed qualifications
- Monitoring every New Zealand educational institution that it accredits.

All pre-registration midwifery education programmes and the provider Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) must therefore be approved and accredited by both the Midwifery Council and the relevant quality organisation. In relation to polytechnics, this is Institutes of Polytechnic Quality (ITPQ). The role of ITPQ is to provide external quality assurance and audit of programmes offered in Polytechnics. For the university sector the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP), a standing committee of the New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee, is responsible for approving all new programmes and those with major changes. The Midwifery Council has established an MOU with ITPQ which means that in order to maximise resources both conduct their respective approval/accreditation processes together, including a site visit. CUAP declined to enter a similar MOU with the Council and its approval process does not involve a site visit.

## Midwifery Council Education Standards

From 2005 to 2007 Council conducted the first review of pre-registration midwifery education since degree-level education began in 1992. This extensive review, conducted in a context of midwifery workforce shortages, identified issues in relation to lack of national consistency of midwifery programmes including variable levels of midwifery practice experience, lack of training for preceptors, barriers to access for students, poor financial viability of programmes and lack of international consistency. While midwifery graduates were seen as competent, stakeholders believed that increased midwifery practice experience within the programmes would enable students to develop increased confidence as new practitioners entering the workforce.

Council drafted new standards and consulted on these before releasing them in August 2007. The standards were designed to increase national consistency, improve access by requiring flexible delivery modes, promote collaboration between schools, increase levels of graduate confidence by increasing midwifery practice hours, and to better prepare practising midwives for their roles as preceptors. Because Council decided to increase the hours of the programme mainly in order to increase midwifery practice opportunities, it decided to align the new standards where possible with the 2004 revised standards in the United Kingdom and Europe so as to maintain international consistency. This decision meant that the total hours of the programme were increased from 3600 to 4800 or 3 EFT to 4 EFT; each year was extended from the usual 32 wk 'academic year' to 45 weeks; minimum theoretical and clinical hours and minimum skills requirements were set.

From a workforce perspective Council's main strategy is to double the number of graduates from New Zealand midwifery programmes as soon as possible. Therefore more women need to be attracted to midwifery through promotion of midwifery as a positive and rewarding career; women outside the main centres need access to education through more on-line and flexible modes of delivery; and graduates need to continue to enter the workforce after three years. In order to retain midwives in the workforce Council wants to ensure that graduates are not only competent but also more confident; that they are supported in their first year of practice; and that they can work overseas as midwives if they so choose but then can return easily to the NZ workforce. The standards for pre-registration midwifery education support some of these strategies.

The key differences compared to the 'old' standards (previously set by the Nursing Council) are:

- An increase from a 3 EFT bachelor's degree programme (360 credits) to a 4 EFT programme (480 credits); to be delivered over 3 years in order to ensure that graduates still enter the workforce after three years.
- A national framework to increase national consistency:
  - Increase in total programme hours from 3600 to 4800; with increase in minimum midwifery practice hours from 1500 to 2400 and increase in minimum theory hours from 1500 to 1920. This is to ensure all graduates are both competent and confident as they enter the workforce.
  - A minimum of 128 credits (1280 hours) in midwifery practice in the third year of the programme.
  - Delivery of programme over 45 'programmed' weeks of each year instead of 34 weeks in order to maximise midwifery practice opportunities (by accessing available births throughout the year).
  - Increased flexibility in programme delivery in order to increase access to rural, provincial and urban students.

- Increase in specified skills/experience that must be achieved within the programme (eg. Facilitated births increase from 30 to 40). These hours/clinical skills bring NZ midwifery education into line with international standards in Canada, UK and Europe.
- Formalised education/preparation of midwives working with students in teaching, supervisory and assessment roles.

Support for collaboration between education providers in order to improve national consistency, access for students and financial viability of midwifery programmes.

Schools of midwifery were notified in August 2007 that programmes would need to be revised in line with new standards and that new programmes must be implemented by 2010 at the latest. Council approval for new intakes in existing programmes would cease by 2010.

### The polytechnics

The first institutions to redevelop their programmes in line with the new standards were Otago Polytechnic and Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) who collaboratively developed a single programme that is jointly owned and delivered. This programme was approved by Council and ITPQ in a joint process last year and funding was approved by the Tertiary Education Commission in November 2008. CPIT/Otago Polytechnic commenced delivery of their new programme this year. The joint ITPQ/Midwifery Council approval/accreditation process for Wintec's new programme was undertaken in September this year and approval has now been given for a start in 2010.

### The universities

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) redeveloped its Bachelor of Health Science (Midwifery) programme in line with the Council's standards and submitted this for approval to CUAP in 2009. CUAP initially declined the programme but then later reviewed that decision and provided approval. In October the Midwifery Council undertook a site visit as part of its approval/accreditation process and this programme has also been approved to start in 2010.

Massey is the only TEO not to revise its Bachelor of Midwifery programme in line with all the Midwifery Council standards. Rather than designing a programme that utilises the extended academic year Massey presented a four year degree that utilises the shorter more compressed academic year, Massey's four year degree was approved by CUAP. However, when it became clear that Massey's programme would not meet the Council's requirement for three year programme utilising an extended academic year Massey decided not to pursue approval/accreditation with the Midwifery Council.

Massey provided four reasons for developing a four year programme, as follows;

1. Student welfare: that many students require intervals between periods of study to earn money to pay for their tuition and other fees. Some have family and care giving commitments such as school holiday child care, which cannot be met in a 45 week programme.
2. Pedagogical principles: that students learn best by maintaining connections with their families, allowing recovery from periods of intensive study and some pacing of self-directed study.
3. Staff research development: staff are required by the university and the Midwifery Council to be research active and the university believes the best way to support this is through a four year programme.

4. Student retention: the university has feedback from some students and Maori stakeholders that values a four year degree timeframe. It accepts that some students may prefer a three-year time frame but considers its proposal allows flexibility and choice.

Council has little disagreement with these principles. The central point of disagreement is whether these same principles can be upheld in the extended three-year programme. The Midwifery Council and four midwifery schools think that they can. ITPQ and CUAP both now agree.

Of equal concern to the Midwifery Council are the following issues:

- that midwifery students can gain enough midwifery practice experience to graduate with competence and confidence;
- that they gain this midwifery practice experience across the whole year in order to maximise learning opportunities from the births which occur 365 days of the year and without the unnecessary competition that occurs with students all seeking experience in the same shorter timeframe. Council notes the significant increase in both medical and midwifery students over the next few years and seeks to minimise any negative impact on student learning opportunities.
- that programme delivery models increase access to midwifery students outside of the main centres;
- that there is consistency between the midwifery programmes in New Zealand; and
- that midwives continue to enter the workforce after a three year programme.

Council's new education standards are designed to address these issues and those discussed above. It is already evident through the approval and accreditation processes to date that the standards will make a positive difference, not only to midwifery education across New Zealand, but also to the midwifery workforce and the maternity services as a whole.

### **Midwifery in the lower North Island in 2010**

Otago Polytechnic, with support from CPIT, will be providing their programme into the lower North Island in 2010. The programme uses a satellite model whereby groups of students are supported to remain in their home locations as much as possible while accessing the Bachelor of Midwifery programme. In 2010 there will be a small group of students (5) based in the Wanganui area, a group (8) in Palmerston North and up to three groups of ten students each in Wellington. These groups may actually be located in the Hutt, on the Kapiti Coast and in Wellington depending on the residence of the students. Each group will be supported by a local practising midwife employed part time by Otago Polytechnic. This midwife (or Student Practice Facilitator) will liaise with local midwives and maternity services to organise midwifery practice experiences for each student and will also run weekly face to face tutorials. The theoretical component of the programme is delivered through online interactive modules and face to face 'intensives' or blocks four times a year. The first week of the first intensive will be held in Dunedin for all students and thereafter Otago Polytechnic will bring the intensives to the North Island. It is not yet decided where these will be held although Paraparaumu is a possibility. Throughout the three years students will gain experience in primary, secondary and tertiary maternity services and will be required to move from time to time for specific placements. However, the majority of the practice experience will be accessed from the closest appropriate services. The selection process is currently under way for students and for the midwives who will be employed. For more information about this programme go to the website [www.midwiferyjunction.co.nz](http://www.midwiferyjunction.co.nz).