



New Zealand
College of Midwives

TE KĀRETI O NGA KAIWHAKAWHANAU KI AOTEAROA

30 May 2024

Master of Midwifery Practice Degree consultation, Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu

Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa | New Zealand College of Midwives

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Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa | New Zealand College of Midwives (the College) is the professional organisation for midwifery. Our members are employed and self-employed and collectively represent over 95% of the practising midwives in this country. There are approximately 3,200 midwives who hold an Annual Practising Certificate (APC). These midwives provide maternity care to, on average, 60,000 whānau each year. Aotearoa New Zealand has a unique and efficient maternity service model which centres care around the needs of the woman and her baby.

Midwives provide an accessible and primary health care service for wāhine, women and people in the community within a continuity of carer model as Lead Maternity Carers. Midwives can also choose to work within primary, secondary and tertiary maternity facilities, providing essential care to those with complex maternity needs.

The College offers information, education and advice to whānau, midwives, Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, health and social service agencies, and the Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora regarding midwifery and maternity issues. Midwives interface with a multitude of other health professionals and agencies to support wāhine, women, people and their whānau to achieve the optimum outcome for their pregnancies, health, and wellbeing.



Lesley Clarke
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Master of Midwifery Practice Degree consultation, Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu

Tēnā koe Lesley,

Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa | New Zealand College of Midwives (the College) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposal to amend the pre-registration programme standards so that they include a graduate entry Master of Midwifery Practice pathway. The College submission is supported by a review of international pathways, similar pathways in nursing in Aotearoa and feedback from members of the College. The College acknowledges the critical shortage of midwives in Aotearoa and the significant impact that this is having on the profession in general. In principle the College recognises and supports exploration of a shortened pathway for existing health professionals to achieve registration as a registered midwife. However, the College is cognisant of the impacts of any new pathway to registration, and these issues are explored in our submission.

The College has a vested interest in education pathways for student midwives that meet both local and international regulatory and educational midwifery programme standards. The current undergraduate curriculum design and pathway for students is integral to the competency of graduate midwives at the end of their Bachelor of Midwifery programme. The College seeks further clarification from the Council that the addition of a graduate-entry

programme for existing health professionals will not be detrimental to the continued success of the current pathways for non-regulated health professionals (RM only pathway).

The navigation of current student placements in practice is complex, particularly with a shortage of midwives nationally and the College seeks clarification and reassurance that the introduction of any new study pathway would be coordinated and managed carefully with the current Schools of Midwifery. It is vital that all students studying midwifery have equal opportunities and equitable access to effective and robust learning and clinical experiences. The College suggests that this is evaluated throughout the first 2 years of any new programme and considers the experiences of the students on the new pathway and also any implications for the current Bachelor of Midwifery degree.

Suggested title: Master of Midwifery Practice

The College considers that the suggested title Master of Midwifery Practice programme is inappropriate for a graduate-entry qualification to become a midwife, and advises the Council that this title is not supported by our membership. NZQA states that “A Master’s Degree qualifies individuals who apply an *advanced body of knowledge* in a range of contexts for research, a pathway for further learning, professional practice and/or scholarship”¹. The proposed programme standards will educate midwives to the *same level of competency* as a midwife who has graduated from a Bachelor of Midwifery programme, rather than an advanced body of knowledge. In the College’s member consultation, concern about the ‘Master’ title was the single greatest point of feedback, being articulated included in almost all comments. It is unusual for member feedback to be so uniform on a single point, which illustrates very strong sentiment in relation to the proposed programme title.

The College therefore recommends that the title of the proposed graduate-entry programme is amended to a Bachelor’s degree, in alignment with the education level of the

¹ NZQA (2023). Tohu Paerua Master’s Degree. <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-and-standards/about-qualifications-and-credentials/masters-degree/>

programme. This would mean that graduates from the new programme have a double degree, rather than a Master's degree.

Rationale:

- The proposed title blurs the current understanding of an academic Master of Midwifery, which is a postgraduate degree that educates midwives to an advanced body of midwifery knowledge.
- Current Master's programmes (Health Science, Midwifery, Public Health etc) are a prerequisite for a PhD pathway, which may not be the case for a Master of Midwifery Practice degree.
- Registered nurses who qualified through a programme that preceded the Bachelor of Nursing may not qualify for a Master of Midwifery Practice degree as they don't have a Bachelor's degree.
- A degree with a Master's title has the potential to dissuade students from the direct entry programme because with one extra year of study they can do a nursing degree (3y) then a MMPrac (2y) and come out with two health professional qualifications including a higher-status Master's degree.
- The College stresses the importance of not creating a two-tier structure where one group is seen as more qualified than the other. There is significant potential for misunderstanding (as the proposed qualification is a Master's degree) that graduates from these programmes will be 'better' or 'different' types of midwives, than those who graduate from a Bachelor's programme. It is essential that a graduate entry pathway to midwifery is understood as another means or way by which midwives can gain registration, (i.e a different pathway to becoming a midwife) as opposed to producing a different type of midwife.
- The required clinical and technical competence and other expectations of graduates should be aligned across all programmes to ensure there is consistency in the quality, skill and competence of graduates regardless of which pathway they have taken to become registered.

Entry criteria

According to the consultation document, the proposed graduate-entry, two-year study pathway will be open for a person registered with one of the responsible authorities appointed under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act (HPCAA). Under the HPCAA there are 18 professional groups that fit this criterion, including midwifery. There is a significant diversity and variation across the 18 regulated professions with some having limited or very different clinical competence with relation to midwifery. For example, the clinical and technical competency of a medical laboratory scientist, podiatrist or psychotherapist will be significantly different to that of a midwife. It will be extremely difficult for individuals from some of the regulated professions to develop the necessary skills and required level of competence within the shortened timeframe proposed. Instead of a standardised one-size-fits all approach to the entry criteria, a more nuanced approach which enables individualised assessment of the level of transferrable competency or skill through robust selection criteria and documented evidence is recommended.

Proposed pathway

The College recognises the increased number of registered nurses (RN) now working in maternity units in Aotearoa. A graduate-entry midwifery degree would enable RNs already working in maternity to become registered midwives and recognise their prior learning and experience.

The College supports the graduate-entry midwifery degree being 240-points and achieved over a minimum of 2 years and maximum of 4 years. However, the College seeks clarification that both the suggested 1,500 hours of clinical experience and 900 theory hours will not be reduced or varied on an individual basis. It is therefore vital that should the graduate-entry midwifery degree pathway be implemented, all students who meet the entry criteria (noting our earlier point about this) follow the same pathway, whatever their previous experience.

The College would like to be reassured that continuity of care is woven into practice hours with midwives, women, babies and whānau throughout any graduate-entry midwifery degree. We note that simulation is currently included in the midwifery skills courses and whilst we recognise the importance of simulation to support students' learning, we also recognise the importance of working alongside midwives in practice (especially in a continuity of care context) and hope this remains a strong focus in any new study pathway.

The College recognises the five existing schools of midwifery have always had a strong focus on providing vocational education that has special emphasis on the skills, knowledge and attributes required to practise as a midwife in Aotearoa. Midwifery is an applied science which is grounded in practice, supported by evidence and applied to learning. We expect that this concept remains within the proposed graduate-entry midwifery degree. Robust implementation and evaluation of any new pathway needs to be a priority.

Timeframes for entry between previous degree and practice experience


The question of whether there should be a minimum or maximum time between the applicant completing their previous health practitioner qualification and entry to the programme is complex. The length and breadth of previous practice experience is also highly relevant. The College recommends that an individualised assessment for entry into programme which considers both previous health practitioner education and practice experience would be more appropriate than a specific timeframe since qualification with their original Bachelor's degree. For example, a nurse with 20 years of practice experience should not be disqualified from the graduate-entry midwifery degree.

Currently all graduate midwives are required by Council to participate and complete the Midwifery First Year of Practice (MFYP) programme which is a funded support programme for all midwifery graduates in Aotearoa. This includes mentoring by senior midwives, further education opportunities and practice experiences which supports growth and development for the individual midwife and strengthens the profession as a whole. The College strongly recommends that any midwives gaining a graduate-entry midwifery degree are also

expected to be part of this programme which supports graduates to consolidate their practice from competent to confident midwives.

Thank you for the opportunity to make provide feedback to this consultation.

Ngā mihi,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alison Eddy', written in a cursive style.

Alison Eddy

Chief Executive