

**Report of the visiting international expert panel  
on an application by the**

**Institute of Nursing Science (INS)  
University of Basel**

**for accreditation of its programme**

**Master of Science in Nursing**

**21 July 2009**

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Institute of Nursing Science, University of Basel**

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## **Final Report: Accreditation of the Master of Science in Nursing programme, Institute of Nursing Science, University of Basel**

### **Introduction to the programme seeking accreditation**

(taken largely from the Self Evaluation Report)

The Institute of Nursing Studies (INS) of the University of Basel requested national accreditation for its (120 ECTS) Master of Science in Nursing programme in December 2008. Although there is no formal requirement for accreditation of the programme INS has sought this voluntarily for the programme it began delivering in 2001.

To date the programme has produced 76 graduates and there is currently an intake of 25 students per annum into the (60 ECTS) pre-programme which is designed to aid the transition of experienced nurses into the demands of the MSc programme. The 'drop out rate' through the 3 (equivalent) years of study is remarkably low, although there is a tendency for students to transfer from full-time to part-time study during the final (equivalent) year.

Until recently, nursing education in Switzerland was based on 3-year diploma programmes that could include a range of specialist studies, often delivered through hospital based nursing schools and regulated by the Swiss Red Cross (SRK). In 1992 a fundamental revision to nursing education was implemented leading to generic 4 year and 3 year programmes still under the auspices of SRK. In 2005 the regulation of nursing education was transferred to the Federal Office of Professional Education and Technology (BBT) thus integrating nursing education alongside all other regulated professions. Within the new federal framework the remaining generic nursing diploma programmes were set to be phased out and replaced by 3 year professional diploma programmes (to be offered through vocational colleges) AND 3 year Bachelor of Science in Nursing programmes (to be offered by universities of applied sciences). Swiss universities were however not involved in delivering nurse education programmes.

In parallel developments (from 1990) the University of Basel through its Faculty of Medicine had been developing the concept of, and raising support for, the development of an Institute of Nursing which was finally launched as the first academic nursing institute in Switzerland in 2000.

Today two types of nursing education programmes exist: in the German speaking areas they are provided mainly through professional college (diploma) programmes whilst in the French and Italian speaking areas programmes are offered through the universities of applied science. Under the new federal regulations Bachelor of Science in Nursing programmes are also now offered in the German speaking regions.

Switzerland was one of the last European countries to incorporate academic nursing education into its university system with the University of Basel the first in the German speaking world to develop an Advanced Nursing (ANP) curriculum. In line with the clinical orientation of its mission INS chose ANP as the final phase of its Masters programme. ANP refers to nursing practice by clinically specialised Master's-level nurses whose expanded knowledge and skills have prepared them for leadership

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roles in dealing with populations with specific clinical concerns and also with emerging care issues.

Advanced Practice Nurses (APN's) are characterized by their graduate education, practices focused on health needs of patients and their families, and their ability to provide direct clinical care. Core competencies of APN's, and thus critical to any evaluation of the programme expecting to develop these, include abilities in: clinical assessment and care management, expert coaching and guidance, consultation, research skills, clinical and professional leadership, collaboration, and ethical decision-making skills. In international contexts APN roles include those of nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse midwives, certified registered nurse anaesthetists and a broad range of roles currently emerging in response to an equally broad range of drivers (e.g. other emerging health care needs, educational programs, clinical practice patterns, workforce issues and policy contexts). Given the clinical orientation of the INS's programmes, interdisciplinary collaboration has also been included as an explicit guiding principle in its strategies.

When the INS was launched there were no options in Switzerland for bachelor's degrees in nursing. Therefore, the INS developed a 1-year (60 ECTS) transition programme (at bachelor level) for nurses whose previous education had prepared them for further study (e.g. they had completed a "matura" (academic baccalaureate), a professional nursing training (a 3-year nursing diploma), and had significant practical experience (at least 2 years of clinical practice)). This transitional programme was mandatory for anyone wishing to enter the 2-year master's programme (120 ECTS) but, from the beginning, it was clear that it would be phased out once graduates from Bachelor of Science in Nursing programmes were emerging from institutions such as UASs. Such graduates started to enter the Swiss health care system in 2006 with increasing numbers expected in the near future.

The INS has also launched a PhD programme, which was initially embedded in the University's Medical Sciences PhD programme (as a joint programme between the Faculty of Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine). Since 2008, however, the Nursing Science PhD programme has been part of the newly launched Medical PhD programme. The Nursing Science PhD programme is thus embedded in the structure of the University of Basel's Medical Faculty.

Although not immediately obvious from the SER it became apparent that INS is undertaking a major review of the MSc programme, and considering the lessons learned from the first few years. Whilst the extent of this review is substantial it is anticipated that the resultant changes to the programme are unlikely to be major – more a matter of refining and refocusing of detail. Also, and because of the changes to bachelor level nursing education occurring elsewhere the INS will, in 2011, replace its transitional (bachelor level) programme with preparatory courses designed to facilitate the progression of BSN graduates from UASs into the INS Masters programme.

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### The Self Evaluation Report

The Self Evaluation Report (SER) is well structured and, in addition to providing relevant background information addresses each of the standards specifically and in sequence with considerable detailed further evidence provided in the extensive appendices.

Although largely the work of one individual (Dr Rene Schwendimann) it was evident from various discussions during the site visit that there had been very real discussion amongst a Self Evaluation Steering Group *and* consultation with the wider community within INS and its key stakeholders.

The report provides a helpful preface that summarises the complexities of Swiss nursing education, drawing in the impact of historical aspects on recent, current and future (Bologna influenced) provision. It also provides a helpful background to the changes in the regulation of nursing provision and how the different types of nursing provision fit within the Swiss educational contexts – at federal regional and cantonal levels as well as those elements determined by the types of institutions involved and the programmes they can offer.

The bulk of the report is however rightly concerned with addressing each of the accreditation standards that are set out in “Guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland”.

The report thus sequentially addresses each of the required areas:

- Area 1. Implementation and teaching objectives
- Area 2. Internal organisation and quality assurance measures
- Area 3. Curriculum and teaching methods
- Area 4. Teaching staff
- Area 5. Students
- Area 6. Facilities and premises

and the specific standards that apply to each, and the questions that might be addressed.

For each standard the SER provides a helpful summary ‘boxed’ response under which is further more detailed text providing context and relevant examples. Further detail is provided through a series of well organised appendices.

The panel welcomed the clarity with which the evidence concerning each of the standards was displayed, but noted that on several occasions it might have liked to see a little more *critical* self evaluation. *Critical* in the sense that the SER might have usefully also providing some narrative *reflective* commentary into *why* certain changes have taken place, and also what changes were considered but have not taken place. Similarly, and particularly in light of the major review that was being undertaken at the time of the site visit, it might have been useful to INS as well as the panel, if the SER had also included some of the reasons and reflections on the purposes, bases and anticipated outcomes of that review.

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### **The on-site visit**

The on-site visit took place over 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May. The visit was well organised and the Institute of Nursing Science, University of Basel provided excellent co-operation with the panel and provided the little additional material that the panel wished to see. The panel were not aware of any problems during the site visit.

The site visit commenced with a team briefing provided by an OAQ staff member which gave an excellent summary of the Swiss HE sector and relevant features of the University of Basel within the national and cantonal contexts. This was followed by initial discussions of panel member's comments about the programme's Self Evaluation Report (SER) and the extent to which it addressed the requirements of the accreditation standards. Within the context of an overall view that was initially favourable, the panel identified a series of questions and additional evidence they would like INS to address in order to test their views.

The panel's initial meeting was with those senior staff representing the main programme management team and also the Advisory Board. Following this the panel met a group of current students and alumni all of whom were most impressive and clearly dedicated to their chosen profession. The last meeting of the first day was with course staff who provided detailed information on the infrastructure of organisation covering the programme design and delivery. The panel concluded their day with a meeting at which they exchanged views on the evidence gathered so far and the extent to which this supported the material within the SER in addressing the requirements of the accreditation standards; they identified some further evidence they wishes to see including a range of student theses (of different types), and information on the marks awarded for those theses.

The second day for the panel started with a meeting with Scientific Personnel, External Teaching Staff and PhD students. This provided the panel with a usual insight onto the way in which postgraduate and postdoctoral progression are interlinked with student supervision. The meeting was also useful in providing good examples of the ways in which the programme is interlinked to areas of advanced nursing practice within the various clinics and departments of the hospitals that people are attached to.

After a short break the panel met a group representing 'stakeholders'. Perhaps somewhat narrower in range than some 'stakeholder groups' there were, never-the-less, interesting discussions about the relationship between the programme and its overall quality management, the impact of graduates of the programme on health care delivery in two health care provider organisations and the university and its central management functions. These proved interesting in several regards, and in particular the recent (2008) institutional level evaluation by OAQ, the 'position and roles' of the programmes students within the medical 'hierarchy' and the extent to which there was collaboration between Basel and Zurich.

The last of the formal meetings was with several staff who have significant teaching responsibilities within the programme. The panel then spent some time examining various additional documents that they had requested including some masters theses

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on a range of topics, before having a useful short final meeting with Dr Rene Schwendimann to discuss and clarify a small number of outstanding matters.

Following the panel's detailed discussions, each of the standards was considered against the evidence provided both within the SER and throughout the meetings during the on-site visit. The panel concluded that they should commend the university and the staff and students involved in the programme and recommend that the programme be accredited unconditionally. The panel also identified a number of areas where they felt that they could usefully make some recommendations, particularly in light of the current wide-ranging review of the programme. These conclusions were relayed to departmental staff at the debriefing meeting and the site visit ended.

## **Assessment of the quality standards**

### **Area 1 Implementation and teaching objectives**

#### **Standard 1.01 The programme is carried out regularly**

The programme has been running successfully since 2001 and currently has an annual intake of 25 students to its preparatory course. The number of 'dropouts' is very low with most occurring between the preparatory programme and the masters programme. There are very few dropouts from the masters programme itself although a number of students transfer from fulltime to part time, particularly during the final phase.

Since 2001 the programme has, as would be expected of any new programme, 'evolved' – in terms of content, delivery modes, assessments, student support, etc), but the core of the programme has remained stable

At the time of the site visit INS was undertaking a major review of the programme, and it is anticipated that the findings of the accreditation application will add to the evidence considered. It is widely anticipated that the programme will be further improved as a result of this wide ranging review but it is not anticipated that there will be any substantial changes to the core of the programme.

The panel considered whether it was appropriate to make an accreditation recommendation on a programme which is undergoing significant internal review. There is of course the (theoretical) possibility that there might be significant change to the programme but the panel took the view that this was unlikely and that the programme would remain true to its current aims and objectives and with a core that is at present, and that they could therefore make a recommendation on the application for accreditation of the programme. The panel notes however that should there be any substantial changes to the core of the programme following the internal review then OAQ should be notified of such changes.

#### **The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 1.01**

The panel considered the current programme to be very soundly based and with clear aims and objectives and a structure that meets these; it **recommends** that the programme does not undergo any substantial changes to its aims and objectives and core structure as a result of the current internal review.

**Standard 1.02 The objectives of the programme correspond to the institution's mission and strategic plan**

The programme, and the INS, was conceived within a carefully structured and widely discussed context and was designed within the University's mission and strategic plan. The university has invested heavily in the development of INS and the programme proposed for accreditation. There was clear evidence during the site visit that this alignment of mission and strategic plans of the parent university and the INS is strengthening as INS becomes increasingly well established.

From the outset INS set high aspirations for its MSc in Nursing programme and the early indications are that both INS and the programme are already having a very positive impact on healthcare both with the immediate region and further afield.

The programme has clearly formulated teaching goals and objectives identifying the knowledge and (advanced) skills that each student is expected to attain. The teaching staff and the students are well aware of what is expected and how things can be achieved, and there is well structured support to ensure that the students have the opportunity to make the best of the opportunities available to them.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 1.02**

**The panel considers that the programme meets the requirements of Area 1 concerning implementation and teaching objectives**

## **Area 2 Internal organisation and quality assurance measures**

### **Standard 2.01 The decision making processes, competencies and responsibilities have been determined and communicated to all those involved**

The site visit confirmed the impression from that SER that there is very good communication within the INS with wide-ranging discussions of key issues. The Institute has clear and strong leadership and organisation and with a relatively small and committed 'family' of research active staff there are excellent informal as well as some formal channels.

The panel was a little concerned however that this system, whilst clearly working very effectively with the current staff and size of group, is perhaps a little too 'informal'. It suggests that some consideration be given to identifying more formal (but not overly bureaucratic) arrangements that could cope with the risks attached to any emergencies that might befall the group.

The panel notes that, as is already recognised by INS, its quality assurance model is driven to a large extent by 'input measures' and **recommends** that further consideration be given to finding ways in which there is greater involvement of 'output' aspects. Such measures are already in place regarding course evaluation and development, and include student feedback on programme units and the staff who teach them, but these might also be, for example, integrated with analyses with student progression rates and grades achieved, and subsequent graduate career pathways. Together with wider use and more formal note of reports/feedback from employers and other stakeholders could usefully further support decision making regarding programme evaluation and evolution, particularly with regard to the potential to impact on (advanced nursing) practice. Staff achievements are discussed and recorded but these might be incorporated into a more structured staff appraisal and development programme, targeted to support specific aspects of management (including the provision of 'emergency cover').

The panel also considered that the Advisory Board might usefully play a stronger and more 'pro-active' role in this aspect of INS leadership and management discussions.

### **The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 2.01**

### **Standard 2.02 Measures are taken to ensure the active participation of the academic staff and of the students in decision-making processes affecting education and teaching.**

The panel found clear and impressive evidence that the staff play an active role in conceiving and developing the programme as well as in assuring its quality, and similarly that students play an appropriate role in its further development and quality assurance.

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The panel notes that much of this excellent work is the result of the commitment of the relatively small group of highly motivated staff and students, and INS has all of the characteristics of 'a fresh and blooming organisation'. It was a little concerned however that whilst the 'implicit' system works very well, and certainly to the students' satisfaction at present, there is less by way of formal procedures than might be desirable or even necessary as INS moves into the next ('consolidation') phase of its development. INS should consider how it can further develop a staff workload model to include all aspects of responsibility with greater use of terms of reference and membership of groups and the expected responsibilities (and authorities) of those involved. Other activities where staff and students could benefit from more explicit guidance/guidelines might include an overview of course management identifying roles, responsibilities and 'reporting lines', policies for managing student feedback in a more consistent way, and more explicit guidelines for dealing with students in difficulty.

The Institute has attracted highly motivated and committed staff and students – but the numbers are still quite small. The panel suggests that the management consider the risks associated with the current size, and of any possible expansion based on current successes. It suggests that INS undertake a risk analysis related to future development, and its likely resourcing, to identify the critical issues and their associated risks and assist in identifying ways in which they may be addressed in a more structured and 'explicit' manner. Whilst suggesting, for example, that formal course management procedures and mechanisms for regular internal review are recorded, the panel would however not wish to see any loss of the current dynamism with the development of any excessive bureaucracy.

### **The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 2.02**

### **Standard 2.03 Quality assurance measures exist for the programmes. The institution makes use of the results to periodically revise the programme.**

The SER identifies quality assurance as a central element in the INS's education programme management. Responsibilities for quality assurance are clearly indicated. Course evaluations are used for close (individual) monitoring, for continuous improvement and for further development of the programme, and the students recognised that their 'voice' was heard in such evaluations. Alumni also play an important part in quality assurance and quality improvement.

The panel noted however that whilst there was thorough evaluation at the 'micro' (at the level of modules and even individual units / members of staff within modules in some cases) there was greater opportunity for a more synoptic (a 'helicopter') view across related clusters of modules and the integration of these into the whole programme. It appeared that discussions were held at such levels but these processes (and the impact of any outcomes) might be more effective,

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and would certainly be more transparent were these discussions held in a more formal and more widely based contexts.

The panel was however surprised to note that there was little discussion within INS and certainly no obvious discussion at faculty and institutional level of the quality assurance of assessment. This is of course an important area but not one that is well developed within a Swiss context. Perhaps inevitably such discussions await the development of a qualifications framework with its generic descriptors that can be applied at the level of the award to distinguish for example the key characteristic that differentiate masters from bachelors. But, whilst there was some general view about what masters should represent there was no clear articulation of this in relation to agreed assessment criteria, and there is thus the potential for quite significant differences in marking from module to module and marker to marker. Whilst the panel could of course only view a small proportion of the masters theses it appeared that there was some variance in the allocation of marks even within a very limited 'scale'.

The panel therefore makes **two recommendations**:

- Firstly that INS, within the context of the faculty AND the institution starts to discuss the sorts of criteria that could reliably and transparently be used to discriminate between different levels of student performance.
- Secondly, that the INS considers an extended marking scale that could more effectively distinguish between partly similar but actually different levels of student performance.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 2.03**

**The panel considers that the programme meets the requirements of Area 2. Internal organisation and quality assurance measures,** although it has a number of recommendation in these aspects (see above).

### **Area 3. Curriculum and teaching methods**

**Standard 3.01 The programme has a structure which corresponds to the coordinated implementation of the Bologna Declaration in Swiss higher education.**

The programme fulfils the requirements set out in Swiss law. It was however suggested that, as it has wider European aspirations for the programme, INS should be more aware of (and where possible engaged in) discussions taking place at national and European levels about the development and inter-relationship of qualifications frameworks. There are two; for high education (the development of a Swiss framework to align with the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA), and for VET (vocational education and training) where a Swiss framework will, in due course, align the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).

INS is aware that its 1 year 'Bachelor' qualification, that is awarded on completion of a preparatory transition course to the MSc, is not compatible (in terms of its title) with Bologna and this interim arrangement is being phased out.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 3.01**

**Standard 3.02 The programme covers the major aspects of the field on question. It allows students to acquire scientific working methods and ensures that the scientific findings are integrated. The teaching and evaluation methods are in line with the stated teaching goals and objectives.**

The MSc in Nursing has been designed to address a set of standards established at international level (World Health Organisation and others) and concerning the education needs of health care professionals working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The programme has a particular and distinctive focus on *clinical* aspects of advanced nursing practice. In addition to the advanced technical aspects students the programme covers wider competences concerned with direct patient care including patient assessment and care management, coaching and guidance, consultations, research skills, clinical and professional leadership and the abilities to work constructively within teams of medical professionals to improve patient outcomes.

Such a scope is both ambitious and demanding and whilst the panel was convinced that there was expertise to cover the topics it had some concerns about two aspects:

- that the vision was set more in terms of inputs to the programme rather than the consequent (intended) student 'learning outcomes (LOs)'
- that assessment methods were not necessarily linked as well as they might be to the intended LOs, and were not discriminating as well as they might between different levels of ability.

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The panel **recommends** that INS consider whether and how it might revise its assessment strategies and practices to relate them more closely to the intended learning outcomes and also provide greater discrimination between close but different levels of student achievement.

The panel also considered the programme in detail and suggests that INS considers:

- including a compulsory module on ethical, legal and professional expectations.
- introduce a more formal self assessment framework for the students, and one that is designed to identify and promote the characteristics and competencies related to 'masters level' in terms of general professional and advanced clinical nursing practice
- review the assessment and criteria for evaluation of projects concerned with 'best practice'
- examine the ways in which greater use could be made of IT in terms of supporting the learning environment, providing some 'virtual mobility' (especially for those whose options for 'physical' mobility are limited by work, family and other (non-study) commitments.

The recommendation and suggestions do not however distract the panel from its view that the programme meets the criterion, rather it offers these comments to further strengthen it.

### **The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 3.02**

#### **Standard 3.03 The conditions for acquiring certificates of achievement and academic degrees are regulated and made public.**

The conditions for acquiring records of achievement and academic degrees (credit points, interim assessments etc) are subject to the regulations of the University of Basel and are published, and the relevant information was both available to and known by the students on the programme.

### **The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 3.03**

#### **The panel considers that the programme meets the requirements of Area 3 Curriculum and teaching methods**

## **Area 4 Teaching staff**

### **Standard 4.01 Courses are taught by educationally competent and academically qualified faculty.**

The Programme is taught by highly competent, motivated and research active staff, who also provide the students with a wide range of support services. The senior staff are all very well qualified and doctoral and postdoctoral researchers are used to support teaching. The individuals the panel met were all sufficiently motivated to undertake *optional* pedagogical training.

The panel **recommends** that pedagogical studies should be regarded as compulsory for all of those doctoral and postdoctoral staff involved in teaching on the programme.

The lecturing staff are involved in teaching for at least one whole programme cycle, with an appropriate proportion of the teaching being carried out by permanent staff.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 4.01**

### **Standard 4.02 The workload assigned to teaching and to research activities is defined**

The workload assigned to teaching and research activities is defined for all staff involved in the programme through their contracts and /or job descriptions that set out the relevant proportions anticipated for each area. The amount of working time spent by lecturers on teaching and research roughly corresponds to the proportions set out in the contracts. Whilst recognising that it is 'the Swiss system' the panel noted that many of those involved are engaged on contracts that expect less than 100% time commitment and yet at the same time there were clear indications that the staff contributed far more than their allocated time percentages. The panel was also concerned that the programme is highly dependent on a small number of core staff although was pleased to see the way in which the institute was building up its strength through careful selection of postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers who support the core staff in contributing to the delivery of the programme.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 4.02**

### **Standard 4.03 The mobility of teaching staff is facilitated.**

Mobility of staff is actively encouraged and supported within a well structured and supported programme in which individuals are able to gain further international experience in a way that is planned to meet both their individual professional development requirements and contribute to the further development (and reputation) of INS.

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**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of  
Standard 4.03**

**The panel considers that the programme meets the requirements  
of Area 4 Teaching staff**

## **Area 5. Students**

### **Standard 5.01 The conditions for admission to the institution and into the programme have been made**

The criteria for admission to the MSc in Nursing are published and clearly set out the expectations for entry onto the programme, that applicants must hold a Bachelor of Nursing degree (or equivalent - for example, a professional diploma and satisfactory completion of the 60 ECTS INS 'bachelor level' conversion programme) from a recognised university and have at least two years professional experience in clinical practice, and have undertaken

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 5.01**

### **Standard 5.02 Equality of men and women is assured.**

The Institute of Nursing Science within the University of Basel is regulated by and complies with Swiss law in this aspect.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 5.02**

### **Standard 5.03 The mobility of students is possible and is promoted by mutual recognition of credits between universities and between disciplines.**

As the SER notes, and was demonstrated during the site visit, *'The mobility of students is not only possible but is mandatory as various elective courses have to be taken outside the University of Basel. Opportunities are also provided for students to take courses at other universities through for example the Erasmus program.'* For a number of the INS students, however, their 'life situations' (part-time employment circumstances and family commitments, etc) make significant use of such wider mobility opportunities somewhat limited. Discussions during the site visit touched on exploring further possibilities of 'virtual mobility,' where students could observe specific advanced practice in other institutions without necessarily having to undertake inconvenient or impossible travel.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 5.03**

### **Standard 5.04 Measures are taken to ensure adequate learning support and counselling to students.**

The learning support and counselling arrangements are very wide ranging, and the students volunteered very positive comments about both the extent of support and the way they could match it to their needs. They commented positively on the variety of pathways through which support could be accessed, ensuring that each student could gain the appropriate level and type of support. The panel has some low level concerns that the arrangements, although clearly working very well in practice with the current

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student cohort, were somewhat 'informal'. Discussions during the site visit noted that INS would consider providing more formal guidance on access to learning support and counselling should the nature and / or size of the student cohort change significantly.

**The panel considers that the programme complies with the requirements of Standard 5.04**

**The panel considers that the programme meets the requirements of Area 5 Students**

**Area 6 Facilities and premises**

**Standard 6.01 The programme has adequate resources available to attain its objectives. These resources are provided on a long term basis**

The University of Basel has made substantial commitments in establishing INS. The Institute is very well resourced in terms of facilities and premises. As in ALL higher education institutions, space is at something of a premium but the MSc nursing students have a dedicated area where they study and can also form a coherent group that further supports their development as advanced nurse practitioners. The University of Basel has and continues to committed significant financial support for INS to ensure that it retains its current leading role in Switzerland, and established its place as one of the leading centres for academic postgraduate nurse education in Europe.

**The panel considers that the programme meets the requirements of Standard 6.01 and thus of Area 6 Facilities and premises.**

## **Overall impression of the quality of teaching and studies**

The panel was very impressed by the commitment and obvious enthusiasm of the highly motivated and qualified staff and in particular the vision, drive and organisation of the senior management. The vision is ambitious and the implementation strategy focussed and can be seen to be working within a rather short timeframe. The panel congratulates the team and especially its leadership, on the rapid and significant progress made in a relatively short period of time, and the University of Basel for the strategic and practical contributions it has made in seeking to establish the Institute of Nursing Science at the University of Basel as both the pioneer and, as an institute with an international reputation, the sustained leader of this area of academic education in Switzerland.

The programme has attracted equally committed and ambitious students who are keen to further their knowledge and skills in ways that will allow them to develop new approaches to healthcare and patient support.

The core team of staff delivering and monitoring / reviewing / revising the programme is relatively small as are the numbers of students and there is excellent communication within the group as a whole. Such size has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages, particularly where there is a clear commitment to a shared vision, are that communication lines are short, and discussions and decisions can be undertaken quickly and in less formal ways than is possible with larger groups. Progress can be made rapidly and a momentum built up that accretes more and more can quickly develop, with little time for 'deliberative reflection'. The disadvantages of working with a small and like minded team are that whilst agreements may be quickly reached it can be the case that the formal records, particularly of those ideas / activities that were discussed and rejected, may not be so wide-ranging.

Whilst everything is fine this may not be a problem but there are attendant risks with such a small core team (key individuals becoming unavailable for a variety of reasons for example) that any successors to senior managers may find it difficult to determine precisely why certain things were done in the way that they were done. The panel is concerned that INS should take a slightly more formal approach to the way in which it plans and manages its affairs. This will be increasingly important as the impact of institution-wide strategic plans, regarding for example quality assurance, become more effective. In a similar manner it is now the case that there are a number of channels through which students can express their problems, although in a rather 'informal way'. The panel suggests that there is a need for more explicit and formal regulations to cover the future growth and maturity and that, whilst there are not obvious major problems at present it would be better for INS to act proactively in the current successful situation rather than find itself having to develop more formal procedures if and when problems occur. Whilst some examples are suggested above they fall within a general category of providing clearer descriptions of: the hierarchy of course leadership roles and responsibilities and the procedures for appointing to such roles; more formal procedures for incorporating student feedback/student experience into course management; and a more formalised set of procedures for dealing with student complaints (about academic and professional matters), appeal processes, and for making claims for mitigating circumstances in examinations and other assessments.

## **Profile of strengths and weaknesses**

(including any special features)

The report above identifies numerous strengths and some weaknesses, many of which are consequent on either (or both) the relatively small size of INS and its very rapid progress in developing and delivering an extremely ambitious agenda.

In summary they are:

### **Area 1. Implementation and teaching objectives**

The programmes and its teaching objectives seek to introduce a new paradigm to nursing education in Switzerland. With excellent leadership and a small team of highly competent and motivated staff the programme is clearly succeeding with both its ambitious objectives and timeframes, and is clearly already having an impact on Swiss health provision. The students and alumni the panel met were equally impressive – keen to be ‘path finders’ and aware of the very special responsibilities that come with this. The programme, as all new ones do, is evolving with the addition of more components and expectations, and opportunities for students and staff.

The weaknesses are related to this very rapid and substantial development by a small team. The programme has not formally considered the risks posed by the possible loss of key individuals and does not have formal procedures in place to cope with ‘threats and problems’ that may arise. It does have very good informal communications and mechanisms that cope with minor problems effectively but largely informally.

### **Area 2. Internal organisation and quality assurance measures**

Quality assurance is effective in so far as the ‘student learning experience’ is highly regarded by the students themselves and they are clearly of the view that their ‘voice’ is heard and that changes occur as a result.

The QA model is, however, still based to quite a large extent on ‘input’ parameters. Whilst the programme leadership is aware of this and is seeking to shift to more emphasis on ‘output’, the absence of clear national parameters (for example in the form of a national qualifications framework) and awareness and implementation of the institutional level QA framework means that whilst QA is effective it is largely implicit and localised. Bologna and other international expectations require a more formalised ‘explicit’ approach and INS is encouraged in its current efforts towards this to support its wider national and international ambitions.

### **Area 3. Curriculum and teaching methods**

The curriculum is comprehensive and matched to international benchmarks, and the students regarded it as largely well taught with good resources. The integration of study with clinical practice, both within the university and other institutions that students are attached to, appears to work very well.

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The panel had some concerns about the transparency, consistency and detail of assessment practices, and have made some recommendations in this regard. The general field of advanced nursing practice is developing rapidly with increasing amounts of significant new and important knowledge and practice being developed. The programme thus has the potential risk of trying to include too much material – the current review is examining this but it will be important that in any revision of the programme the students and staff are not asked to undertake more than their already heavy load.

### **Area 4. Teaching staff**

The teaching staff are outstanding – in terms of qualifications, experience and commitment. This ‘expert enthusiasm’ is clearly ‘infectious’ as far as the students are concerned.

As mentioned on several occasions above, the obvious weakness is that the programme is highly dependent upon a small core of staff and it is not immediately apparent how the programme would cope with the loss of one or two specific individuals or the loss of a cluster of others. Some risk analysis and strategy has been suggested

### **Area 5. Students**

The students and alumni the panel met were without exception – outstanding. Highly motivated – even dedicated – they were keen to develop their personal and professional education and skills to levels that would allow them to be pioneers in the development of new models of healthcare in Switzerland. It is clear that they will need to use all of their abilities, enthusiasm and determination to forge new roles and establish such a new ‘position’ within the hierarchy of Swiss medical establishment

The workload demands that the students commit to are very heavy – particularly bearing in mind that they have their ‘day jobs’ and many also have family or other outside commitments. It is not surprising that a significant number shift to part time study for the final phase of the programme.

Whilst there are good and increasing opportunities for students to engage in some ‘mobility’ during their studies, the real opportunities for physical mobility are limited for some because of domestic and other arrangements. The institute is encouraged to investigate other (eg ‘virtual’) opportunities that would allow such students to experience the benefits of ‘study mobility’.

The panel has made note above of the arrangements concerned with the funding of applications for ethical approval where student projects need this.

### **Area 6. Facilities and premises**

INS and the programme are very well resourced .

## **Recommendations for enhancing quality**

In summarising here the formal recommendations made in the sections above, the panel is keen to note that these recommendations *must* be read within the context of a report that is overwhelming positive about the way in which INS has established and continues to run its MSc in Nursing. The recommendation should not be read as the basis of substantial criticism but rather for the further improvement of some aspects and, in a few cases, filling 'gaps' that align to the expectations of quality assurance systems that are more 'mature' than could have yet been possible to develop within INS.

### **Area 1 Implementation and teaching objectives**

#### **Standard 1.01 The programme is carried out regularly**

The panel considered the current programme to be very soundly based and with clear aims and objectives and a structure that meets these; it **recommends** that the programme does not undergo any substantial changes to its aims and objectives and core structure as a result of the current internal review.

### **Area 2 Internal organisation and quality assurance measures**

#### **Standard 2.01 The decision making processes, competencies and responsibilities have been determined and communicated to all those involved**

The panel notes that, as is already recognised by INS, that its quality assurance model is driven to a large extent by 'input measures' and **recommends** that further consideration be given to finding ways in which there is greater involvement of 'output' aspects.

The panel also considered that the Advisory Board might usefully play a stronger and more 'pro-active' role in this aspect of INS leadership and management discussions.

#### **Standard 2.03 Quality assurance measures exist for the programmes. The institution makes use of the results to periodically revise the programme.**

The panel therefore makes **two recommendations**:

- Firstly that INS, within the context of the faculty AND the institution starts to discuss the sorts of criteria that could reliably and transparently be used to discriminate between different levels of student performance.
- Secondly, that the INS considers an extended marking scale that could more effectively distinguish between partly similar but actually different levels of student performance.

### **Area 3. Curriculum and teaching methods**

#### **Standard 3.02 The programme covers the major aspects of the field on question. It allows students to acquire scientific working methods and ensures that the scientific findings are integrated. The teaching and evaluation methods are in line with the stated teaching goals and objectives.**

The panel **recommends** that the INS considers whether and how it might revise its assessment strategies and practices to relate them more closely to the

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intended learning outcomes and also provide greater discrimination between close but different levels of student achievement.

The panel also considered the programme in detail and suggests that INS consider:

- Including a compulsory module on ethical, legal and professional expectations.
- Introduce a more formal self assessment framework for the students, and one that is designed to identify and promote the characteristics and competencies related to 'masters level' in terms of general professional and advanced clinical nursing practice
- review the assessment and criteria for evaluation of projects concerned with 'best practice'
- Examine the ways in which greater use could be made of IT in terms of supporting the learning environment, providing some 'virtual mobility' (especially for those whose options for 'physical' mobility are limited by work, family and other (non-study) commitments

### Area 4 Teaching staff

#### **Standard 4.01 Courses are taught by educationally competent and academically qualified faculty.**

The panel **recommends** that pedagogical studies should be regarded as compulsory for all of those doctoral and postdoctoral staff involved in teaching on the programme.

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**Recommendation on accreditation**

The panel unanimously recommends that :

**The programme Master in Science in Nursing at the Institute of Nursing  
Science, University of Basel is granted .. unconditional accreditation**

**The panel :**

**Dr Nick Harris**

(HE consultant and former Director of the Quality assurance Agency UK; chair)

**Professor Marieke Schuurman**

(Professor of Nursing Science, University Utrecht/University Medical Center Utrecht, the Netherlands: subject area specialist)

**Professor Mark Avis**

(Professor of Social Contexts of Health and Head of School  
School of Nursing, Midwifery & Physiotherapy, Faculty of Medicine & Health  
Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK; subject area specialist)

**Nathalie Baillieul**

(Student Master of Science in Nursing; University of Ghent, Belgium ; subject  
area and student member)