



Speech Pathology Australia Response to Productivity Commission Review of Mutual Recognition Scheme.

July 2008

Background to Speech Pathology Australia

The Speech Pathology Association of Australia Ltd (Speech Pathology Australia) is the sole national peak body for speech pathologists in Australia, representing over 4,200 members. Speech pathologists are university trained health professionals who are specialists in the assessment and treatment of a wide range of communication and swallowing disorders which can present across the life-span.

Speech Pathology Australia is recognised by the Federal Government of Australia, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), as the professional body representing speech pathologists in Australia. As such, the Association is acknowledged as both an assessing authority for those with overseas qualifications and an accreditation authority for university speech pathology degree programs. The Competency Based Occupational Standards for Speech Pathologists (CBOS 2001), developed by the Association, details the minimum knowledge, skills and attributes required for graduate entry into the profession of speech pathology. These standards, similarly, are applied to those with qualifications as a speech pathologist gained overseas and those who are re-entering the profession and do not meet the requirements for recency of practice.

Speech Pathology is a partially registered profession in Australia, with registration only being in place in Queensland. The Speech Pathologists Board of Queensland has adopted the CBOS (2001) standards of the Association and defers to the Association's processes for overseas qualifications assessment and university program accreditation.

In all other states and territories, eligibility for practising membership of Speech Pathology Australia is used by the government, employers and funding bodies to confer appropriate training, qualifications and entry level clinical competency.

As a partially registered profession, Speech Pathology Australia has not been included in the government's MRA or Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Scheme. The speech pathology profession in New Zealand has also not been a registered profession, although is soon to become regulated under the NZ Health Professions Council.





Mutual Recognition of Qualifications has long been of interest to the speech pathology profession. To this end, discussions began in 2001 between the respective Associations of the speech pathology professions across America, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia.

Details of the establishment of a Mutual Recognition Agreement between these countries and current expansion to also include New Zealand and Ireland follows.

Mutual Recognition of Credentials between Speech Pathology Australia, ASHA (USA), CASLPA (Canada) and RCSLT (UK)

In 2001 discussions began between the speech pathology professional associations of Australia (Speech Pathology Australia); America (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association -ASHA); Canada (The Canadian Association Of Speech- Language Pathologists And Audiologists - CASLPA) and United Kingdom (The Royal College Of Speech And Language Therapists - RCSLT). This led to an “Agreement of Intent” to work towards developing an agreement that would recognise equivalence of professional qualifications. Work continued throughout 2002, 2003 and 2004, which was assisted from Speech Pathology Australia’s perspective by the Australian government through a (then) Department of Science and Training funding grant. The overarching aims of these negotiations were to improve recognition processes for Australian-trained speech pathologists in signatory countries.

This work culminated on 31 August 2004 when an agreement of mutual recognition of credentials was signed between the four national speech pathology professional associations of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The Agreement came into force on 1 January 2005 and remains in place in the same form at this time.

The Agreement is not one of reciprocity or reciprocal recognition of qualifications. The Agreement is of mutual recognition that, under some conditions, the four associations have substantially equivalent credentials and that it is therefore possible for certified members of one association to become recognised by the other associations.

The Agreement does not ensure migration to any of the countries as all conditions for migration have to be met nor does it ensure employment in the country which the speech pathologist may wish to visit. However, it provides the possibility of professional recognition of the speech pathologist by the Associations signatory to the Agreement.

The purposes of mutual recognition of credentials by Speech Pathology Australia of speech pathologists who are certified members of ASHA, CASLPA or RCSLT are:

- i. To maintain minimum standards of the speech pathology profession in Australia
- ii. To stimulate maintenance of high standards and continuing improvement in the quality of speech pathology services in Australia
- iii. To provide support and guidance to applicants in achieving competence for practice in Australia
- iv. To enrich the cultural and educational diversity of speech pathologists in Australia





- v. To meet the requirements for assessment for migration of the Federal Government through the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

Details of the Mutual Recognition Agreement and the requirements for Australian based speech pathologists to apply for membership of overseas associations can be found on the webpage below.

www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/Content.aspx?p=214

Current Expansion of the Mutual Recognition Agreement

In 2006-07, Speech Pathology Australia began a new phase of its mutual recognition project. With the support of Professional Services Development Program (DEEWR) funding, work began on expanding the mutual recognition agreement through the engagement of additional signatories, as well as evaluating the agreement's implementation to date.

Discussions and development of strategies to improve the implementation of the MRA has been undertaken. Additionally upon the request of speech pathology professions in New Zealand (the New Zealand Speech-Language Therapists Association) and Ireland (Irish Association of Speech-Language Therapists), negotiations have been undertaken with these countries and the existing signatories to arrive at an agreement between all six countries. These negotiations have been constructive and a proposed new agreement is being considered at this time by the Councils or Boards of the six professional Associations. It is anticipated that the new Mutual Recognition Agreement will be officially signed in November 2008, with implementation of the Agreement planned for the 1 January 2009.

Speech Pathology Australia has welcomed the expansion of the MRA and in particular sees a streamlining of recognition of qualifications between Australia and New Zealand as appropriate and attractive in enhancing the mobility of the profession across the Tasman.

Further details if required can be obtained by contacting:

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