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A coordinated effort

The future success of Australian health reforms will depend on primary care teams working together, says a UK inter-professional learning expert.

And Australian universities could play a key role in transforming the education of future health care workers, says Professor Debra Humphris, Pro Vice-Chancellor of education at the University of Southampton.

"Universities could provide opportunities for inter-professional team working as a core element of courses," says Humphris, who was in Australia to visit the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute.

"In England, as part of the National Health Service Plan in 2001, the government encouraged universities to address inter-professional team working as part of how we prepare the future workforce."

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) report identifies that the current education of the health workforce 'tends to reinforce professional boundaries and does not adequately foster team-based collaborative models of care'.

"For individuals using health care services, I'm sure they are often unclear about how all the various health care workers are coordinating their efforts," Humphris says.

"The irony is that many of those staff train in the same university, but they don't have any opportunity to learn with, from or about each other and their roles."

Humphris supported the NHHRC report's recommendation that a new framework for the education and training of health professionals should be developed that moves towards "a flexible, multi-disciplinary approach to how we educate and train health professionals".

She also welcomed the report's emphasis on team working and inter-professional learning as a means to support wider changes to the health and social care workforce in Australia. **NR**