

Academic review of UK higher education: reviews for health care programmes

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the QAA) helps to provide public assurance that quality and standards of higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced by conducting academic reviews of higher education provision.

In developing its method for academic review, the QAA has published a wide range of materials designed to provide a background against which the reviews can take place. These are:

- *Framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland;*
- *Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;*
- Subject benchmark statements;
- *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education;*
- *Guidelines for preparing programme specifications.*

For the reviews, a wide range of other materials have been used by the reviewers and participating stakeholders to inform the review process. These include the relevant professional and statutory regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.

The major review process

The Department of Health (DH) has contracted the QAA to develop and organise the process to review NHS-funded healthcare programmes. The QAA and the DH have worked closely with PSRBs, workforce development confederations (WDCs), and higher education institutions (HEIs). Part of this work has involved a prototype review process that was piloted at six HEIs. From this experience, the process was refined and developed further to ensure that it meets fully the needs of the stakeholders.

The process reflects the fact that healthcare programmes are composed of two complementary and inter-related elements – theory and practice. Both are taken fully into account.

The review is a peer review process. It starts when institutions evaluate, in a self-evaluation document (SED), their provision, both theory and practice, in the identified healthcare programmes. This document is submitted to the QAA for use by a team of reviewers, made up of academics and practitioners, who gather evidence to enable them to report their judgements on the academic and practitioner standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Review activities include meeting academic staff, practitioners and students, scrutinising students' assessed work, reading relevant documents, examining learning resources and visiting practice placements.

Full details of the process of major review can be found in the draft *Handbook for Major Review of Health Profession Programmes*, QAA, 2002.

Judgements

The range of judgements that reviewers may use when they have completed a review are summarised below. The judgements on the standards and quality of learning opportunities in each aspect encompass both theory and practice. Further details can be found in paragraphs 81-90 of the *Handbook*. There are opportunities to differentiate judgements for a programme, level and/or mode of delivery.

Academic and practitioner standards

Reviewers make one of the following judgements on standards:

- **confidence**, which may be expressed as **limited confidence**; or
- **no confidence**

A separate judgement will be made for each benchmarked area.

To reach this judgement, reviewers look at:

- learning outcomes;
- the curriculum;
- student assessment; and
- student achievement.

Reviews for Health care programmes

Autumn 2002

SR [Code]

[Reports team to insert]

Nursing, Midwifery, Health Visiting, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Radiography

University of Beeston in partnership with the Ashburton NHS Workforce Development Confederation (WDC): A Composite Report based on Prototype Reviews of the provision of Health Care Education in six Higher Education Institutions; undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, on behalf of the Department of Health

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Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of a review of the academic and practitioner standards achieved, and the quality of the learning opportunities provided, in nursing, midwifery, health visiting, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and radiography programmes at the University of Beeston. The review was completed in the academic year 2001-02.

A Subject provision and overall aims

2. The provision lies within the School of Nursing and Health Care. The following programmes were reviewed:

- Pre-Registration DipHE Nursing (Adult);
- Pre-Registration DipHE Nursing (Mental Health);
- BSc (Hons) Pre-Registration Nursing;
- BSc (Hons) Pre-Registration Midwifery;
- BSc (Hons) Community Health Care Nursing;
- BSc (Hons) Pre-Registration Occupational Therapy;
- BSc (Hons) Pre-Registration Physiotherapy;
- BSc (Hons) Pre-Registration Diagnostic Radiography;
- BSc (Hons) Pre-Registration Therapeutic Radiography;
- Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma/MSc Radiography;
- Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma/MSc Medical Ultrasound;
- MSc Clinical Practice;
- MSc Health Care Practice; and
- MSc Physiotherapy.

3. The School was established in 1997 as a result of the merger of the University with three National Health Service (NHS) educational institutions, the Rylands Medical School, the postgraduate and research centre Chitwell Unit, and the Dovecote Nursing and Midwifery Training School. As a result, it is a large and multidisciplinary School, one of five within the University, situated on a single new site. Programmes have been developed in close collaboration with the Ashburton WDC to provide excellent, sustainable clinical education and practice. In 2001-02, there were 1,431 full-time equivalent students on pre-registration programmes within the School, 416 on post-registration programmes, of which 127 were registered on taught postgraduate programmes.

<p>Quality of learning opportunities</p> <p>Reviewers make one of the following judgements for each of three elements of learning opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• commendable, (which may include exemplary features); or• approved; or• falling.	<p>The three elements of quality of learning opportunities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• teaching and learning;• student progression;• learning resources and their effective utilisation
<p>Summary of Practice Drawing together all the positive issues and points for consideration in relation to practice which have been identified within academic and practitioner standards and quality of learning opportunities only.</p> <p>Maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards Reviewers also report on the degree of confidence they have in the institution's ability to maintain and enhance quality and standards in the subject under review.</p>	

4. The University's mission is to:

- provide high quality learning opportunities that are flexible, accessible and enhance the employability of its graduates;
- promote scholarship and research of international standard, and to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and practice;
- work in partnership with other national leaders in education and training, thereby contributing to the cultural, economic and social development of the national community;
- deliver equality of opportunity for students and staff through the highest standards of education, service and support, encouraging and rewarding innovation, creativity and enterprise.

In line with this mission, through its diploma, certificate, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in health care education, the School aims to:

- provide high quality educational programmes that foster the intellectual, professional and personal development of students and prepare them for careers as competent health care professionals;
- offer in partnership with NHS Trusts and other health care providers programmes and short courses that meet current and anticipated health care needs;
- in partnership with NHS Trusts and other health care providers, foster supportive and stimulating practice-related learning environments that ensure students meet the requirements of relevant professional and accrediting bodies;
- offer programmes whose curriculum content and teaching strategies are informed by lecturers' educational and clinical experience, professional development, scholarly activity and research relating to health care;
- encourage students, users and health care providers to contribute to the design, delivery and development of curricula that promote the links between theory and practice, and the underpinning of practice within appropriate evidence-based care;
- enable students to achieve nationally-recognised academic and professional awards and, where appropriate, meet the requirements for entry to the professional registers;
- provide students with the knowledge and skills to equip them for a career in their chosen discipline, for self-critical lifelong learning; and with the skills to adapt and respond positively to change;
- ensure the development of problem-based critical and analytical skills, the key skills that prepare students for graduate employment, and for both autonomous practice and teamworking; and develop students' clinical skills for professional practice;
- develop students' ability to identify and critically evaluate relevant research and evidence-based interventions on which to base safe and competent clinical practice;
- provide students with opportunities for multidisciplinary and interprofessional learning;
- promote a culture that enables students to provide a caring and supportive professional, academic and vocational culture.

5. Additionally, for postgraduate programmes:

- enhance and develop further the personal and intellectual qualities, attributes and skills of students;
- facilitate the acquisition of a deep understanding of their specialised areas;

- promote the developing and advanced practice role of students within the health care team;
- develop organisational, leadership and managerial skills that underpin responsible positions held within health care;
- further develop critical research awareness in support of evidence-based practice;
- enable graduates to initiate and sustain a planned and co-ordinated project through which outcomes may inform practice.

B Academic and practitioner standards

B1. Nursing

Intended learning outcomes

6. Intended learning outcomes are stated in the programme specifications and definitive validation documents for nursing programmes. They are also integrated into most individual modules and components. Outcomes are appropriately related to the level of learning, with differentiated outcomes for diploma, honours and postgraduate degrees. Stated intended learning outcomes relate to the School's aims and clearly include knowledge and understanding as well as stressing the acquisition of cognitive, practical and professional skills. Academic and clinical staff, external examiners and students contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes.
7. The outcomes for pre-registration programmes reflect the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC, now the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)) nursing competencies. All pre-registration programmes reflect the *Subject benchmark statements* and articulate with the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)*. Both English National Board (ENB) and external examiner reports recognise the appropriateness of learning outcomes, their relevance to assignments and to professional practice. Pre-registration programme outcomes are designed to enable students to be fit for purpose, fit for practice and fit for award. Post-registration programme outcomes enhance knowledge and skills that relate to particular aspects of clinical practice. Together, these are consistent with the expectations of the emerging health professions framework.
8. Overall, the nursing programmes' outcomes support the achievement of good levels of knowledge and skill and ensure that theory and practice are integrated. The learning outcomes are appropriately communicated to students, academic and clinical staff through programme and module handbooks. Programme handbooks vary in their depth and detail but the development of a common-core framework is currently under development. Students commented very positively to reviewers on the ease of use of programme handbooks and that the documentation provided is appropriate to their needs.

Curricula

9. There is clear evidence that nursing programmes continue to be developed with the active participation of partners, including WDCs and clinical staff from local NHS Trusts. The School's programme specifications, handbooks, external examiners' reports and ENB reports confirm that the design and content of nursing curricula encourage the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Curriculum content and design are informed by recent developments in teaching and learning and by current research and scholarship focused on both clinical and education practice. Staff are able to identify how relevant national service frameworks are addressed in modules.
10. Nursing handbooks and programme specifications indicate that all curricula integrate theory and practice and that undergraduate programmes favour enquiry-based learning approaches and styles (EBL) with a view to providing graduates who can reflect and innovate. Positive feedback received from clinicians during placement visits suggests that students are fit for practice and that the curriculum meets the needs of employers. Half of the curriculum of the pre-registration nursing programmes is allocated to practice settings, confirming the integration of theory and practice. Effective partnerships with the local NHS Trusts providing clinical placements enable students to integrate theory with practice and to develop and refine a range of clinical skills. Practice educators employed by the Trusts play an important role in ensuring that clinical placements provide appropriate learning opportunities for students.

11. The undergraduate programmes offer clear progression. Level 1 of the pre-registration programmes introduces concepts of professional practice and essential skills with experience in both branches. This year forms a Common Foundation Programme, while the two practice placements allow the opportunity to integrate theory with practice from the start. Concepts of professional studies and methods of research are introduced and modules become branch specific at level 2 while, at level 3, modules are all branch specific with some shared learning. The final six months are undertaken in clinical practice placements. Innovations such as interprofessional learning with medical students have been piloted and are subject to ongoing evaluation. Students reported positively on the interprofessional learning that occurs in the classroom and in the practice placements. The development of interprofessional education is also fostered by the MSc Clinical Practice curriculum, allowing a combination of multiprofessional topics and issues with the study of intraprofessional ones.
12. The curricula are current and continue to be reviewed to meet the changing needs of practice, government policy and national initiatives in nursing practice and education. Key stakeholders are involved in curriculum design and ongoing development activities. There is also strong evidence of a partnership approach demonstrated by the involvement of practitioners and service users in curriculum planning and delivery. Of particular note is the way in which service users facilitate a whole teaching day, and also join a module assessment panel, in the mental health branch of the pre-registration programme.
13. In line with the claims made in the School's self-evaluation document (SED), the reviewers consider that the School is successful in preparing graduates for professional practice. The curriculum is well designed to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Assessment

14. The School's teaching, learning and assessment strategy, reflecting the University's corporate strategy, has recently been reviewed. This includes a clear 'Policy Statement Relating to the Assessment Process' of all health care programmes. Overall, assessment processes used reflect adherence to the QAA's *Code of Practice for assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*.
15. Assessment designed to demonstrate student achievement of the learning outcomes in both theory and practice is clearly reflected in programme delivery. Criteria are set for the minimum standards of performance expected for all programmes. A major focus is fitness for academic award as well as fitness for practice.
16. Undergraduate assessment of theory is primarily through essays, although there are occasional examples of more innovative approaches, such as the use of concept mapping for an assessment in one module and the combined assessment of theory and practice in the Competency-Based Nursing module and the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). A further innovative example, the self-verification tool, is used within the BSc and provides opportunities for students to take a direct lead in their own learning by setting a personal action plan to achieve clinical aims and competence. In a few instances, essays about theory do not measure the achievement of all stated module learning outcomes. While it has recognised this, the School should rectify this shortcoming as a matter of urgency.
17. Grading criteria are available to markers, students and external examiners. The criteria used in the interprofessional undergraduate Professional Issues and Practice (PIP) modules are particularly comprehensive. However, specific marking criteria for individual assignments are not used across all of the provision. The School is currently developing a marking grid that will be used to provide criteria against which all assignments will be marked, as opposed to the subject-level assessment organisation that operates at present. It is important that it should complete this to strengthen confidence in consistency among markers and give guidance to students of the specific expectations of them for each piece of work.
18. The assessment moderating processes are appropriate. Students who achieve Fail and First class marks are routinely double-marked and a sample of those in the middle range is also double-marked. Written feedback provided is constructive and helpful and students report that it is received in a timely manner. There are additional opportunities for oral feedback from tutors that are appreciated by students.

19. Formative and summative assessment of practice is appropriately achieved through the use of learning contracts, reflection and practice portfolios. Assessments are undertaken by assessors who must be on the live register. The School and the Ashburton WDC collaborate to maintain this register. Students are allocated a mentor and an assessor, who may be the same person. Assessors are expected to hold the ENB 998 or equivalent, and attend an annual update, in order to remain on the live register. Students reported that assessors are aware of the assessment process and the learning outcomes being assessed.
20. Assessment overload for students has been identified in the past but the School has taken steps to revise requirements. Students are comfortable with what is expected of them, while current external examiners are confident of the maintenance of standards. Similarly, the reviewers have confidence in the security and integrity of the assessment process in nursing.

Student achievement

21. The reviewers sampled a range of student work covering course work assignments, portfolios, examinations and dissertations. The academic levels scrutinised covered undergraduate work at Levels 1, 2 and 3 and the postgraduate MSc Clinical Practice. Overall, the assessments demonstrated the students' knowledge and understanding of relevant material and, where applicable, showed the link between theory and practice. The achievements of pre-registration nursing students match both the intended learning outcomes and the level of award. This is confirmed by external examiners' reports, and from discussions with employers and clinical staff. Achievement issues recently identified by external examiners, such as a lack of evidence of critical analysis and referencing skills, have been discussed at subject assessment panels, award boards, module teams and School programme reviews. This has resulted in the criteria for critical analysis being clarified in the document *Assess 2001*. The proportion of students obtaining Upper Second and First class degrees is praiseworthy. Nurses met during clinical practice visits stated that students were fit for practice upon the successful completion of their programmes.
22. Summative assessments for the MSc Clinical Practice indicate that, although it may be a multiprofessional programme, student work demonstrates its application to the individual student's profession. The review of student work from the post-registration and postgraduate programmes indicates a good level of achievement. This is confirmed by external examiners reports.
23. The student learning experience is judged by the external examiners to be of a high standard and the levels of achievement fully in line with expectations of the wider nursing community. Students are prepared for future employment throughout their course. In their final year, to prepare for employment, they use mock interviews, presentations, portfolios and the preparation of curriculum vitae (CVs), all of which they find useful. They are successful in gaining employment after graduation and there is an almost 100 per cent employment record. Most DipHE and BSc graduates take up posts in local Trusts, while most of those completing the MSc move on to take up senior posts in their sponsoring Trusts. Employers gave positive feedback about the students they employed. Discussions with employers during the review clearly indicated that students completing the pre-registration programmes were employable and their underpinning knowledge was good, especially students on the adult branch. University of Beeston students were perceived to be more practical than student nurses from other universities, and the practice educator role was viewed by all to be enhancing and supporting students to achieve and develop clinical skills.

Summary of academic and practitioner standards in nursing in relation to the emerging health professions framework

With respect to academic and practitioner standards, the reviewers conclude that in nursing:

- the learning outcomes are in line with the School's aims, meet NMC Nursing competency requirements, reflect the QAA benchmark statement appropriately, articulate well with the FHEQ, and are consistent with the expectations of the emerging health professions framework;
- programmes continue to be developed with the active participation of partners, including the WDC and clinical staff from local NHS Trusts;

- all curricula integrate theory and practice and undergraduate programmes favour enquiry-based learning (EBL) approaches and styles with a view to providing graduates who can reflect and innovate;
- assessment is designed to demonstrate student achievement of the learning outcomes in both theory and practice. However, in a few instances, essays about theory do not measure the achievement of all stated module learning outcomes;
- while criteria used in the marking of some modules are comprehensive, specific marking criteria for individual assignments are not used across all of the provision;
- the student learning experience is judged to be of a high standard and the levels of achievement fully in line with the expectations of the wider nursing community;
- students are well prepared for employment, employers gave positive feedback about the students they employed, and most of those completing the MSc move on to take up senior posts in their sponsoring Trusts.

Overall, the reviewers have confidence in the academic and practitioner standards achieved by the programmes in nursing at the University of Beeston.

B2. Midwifery

Intended learning outcomes

24. The intended learning outcomes for the pre-registration programmes are clearly set out in programme documentation, are in line with the School's aims, and are designed to produce midwives who are fit to practice safely. They also ensure appropriate engagement with underpinning theory used to inform practice. The learning outcomes in the programme specifications are appropriate to meet expectations in relation to knowledge, understanding and skills for entry onto part 10 of the NMC Professional Register and reflect the integration of individual *Subject benchmark statements*, the FHEQ and PSRB requirements in a clear and coherent manner. The levels are in line with those specified in the external reference points that impact on midwifery education.
25. Although module handbooks contain clear details of them, the reviewers noted that there are too many learning outcomes. It is difficult for students to demonstrate achievement of all of them by the end of a module. Students demonstrate a good level of understanding of the learning outcomes and indicated that these and other requirements are always provided in advance of the module starting. The clinical staff are aware of the learning outcomes that students need to achieve in practice.

Curricula

26. The School's programme specifications, handbooks, external examiners' reports and PSRB reports confirm that the design and content of midwifery curricula encourage the achievement of the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, and cognitive, practical and professional skills. In order to ensure the integration of theory and practice, 50 per cent of the programme is allocated to practice settings.
27. The undergraduate programme is designed to meet the requirements of *Making a Difference* (DH 1999) and *Fitness for Practice* (UKCC 1999). The reviewers agree with the external examiners' view that the curriculum imposes an increasing level of demand as students progress through to their final year. Students reported positively on the multiprofessional learning that occurs in the classroom and in practice placements. The latter are established and agreed after consultation with module teachers, colleagues and managers. Interprofessional education is developed in level 1 through shared teaching with nursing students on the Personal and Professional Self module.
28. The curriculum also fosters reflective practice in order to produce practitioners able to work effectively in a changing NHS environment with a commitment to research. The partnership and positive feedback received from midwives during placement visits suggest that students are fit for practice and the

curriculum meets the needs of employers. This is in line with the expectations enshrined in the emerging health professions framework. There is also strong evidence of a partnership approach demonstrated by the involvement of practitioners and service users in curriculum planning and delivery. For example, the modular scheme has been developed in partnership with Ashburton WDC, allowing a flexible programme responsive to local needs. Student self-evaluation (clinical portfolios) and feedback questionnaires are used to adjust individual student learning objectives and to influence curriculum design. Student feedback and analysis of progress has led to changes in the programmes to include greater elements of clinical work at Level 1.

29. Curriculum content and design are informed by recent developments in teaching and learning and by current research and scholarship focused on both clinical and educational practice. The impact of sustaining professional knowledge and competence, clinical input and academic contracts is challenging for staff. A more focused approach to enable individual staff to focus on fewer agendas might be worth considering.

Assessment

30. A broad range of assessment instruments is employed, including essays, seminar presentations, portfolios, poster presentations and reports. However, student work considered by the reviewers suggested that there was not always good linkage between the assessment design and learning outcomes of modules. Staff are aware of this and have initiated a review of practice in this area. The range of assessment has been mapped to the NMC Midwifery Competencies, the statutory instruments and European directives to ensure that these are properly assessed.
31. Students confirm that assessment outcomes and guidelines for both theory and practice are made clear in handbooks. Additionally, grading criteria are made available to students and students confirmed that they understood the reason why they achieved a certain grade. All of this information is also provided to external examiners. However, marking criteria are not a standard feature. These are being developed on a School-wide basis, particularly for less standard types of assessment such as student presentations. Nonetheless, the reviewers confirm the view of external examiners that marking is rigorous, consistent and that moderation follows the subject's strategy. The reviewers saw some evidence of double-marking in line with agreed School policy. There is evidence of external examiner involvement in the development of assessment, for example within the development of the assessment framework to reflect midwifery competencies (from September 2002).
32. Students' practice is progressively assessed using a criteria reference assessment grid (CRAG) and this forms a part of a comprehensive portfolio compiled and maintained by the students. This portfolio identifies the student's development of midwifery skills and has both formative and summative elements. The quality assurance of practice assessments is secured by the involvement of the practice educator and lecturers. The lecturers are involved in the mid-point assessment and the practice educator is present at the final meeting between the students and assessor. External examiners have the opportunity to review practice assessments at progression points and on completion of programmes.
33. Written feedback that identifies strengths and weaknesses is provided on formative and summative pieces of assessed work. Since the 1999 QAA Subject Review, the School has undertaken developmental work to improve both the consistency of assessment feedback and its appropriateness in terms of correlation with the grade awarded. Students report that feedback now is timely and constructive. They are able to seek additional oral feedback where required.

Student achievement

34. The reviewers share the external examiners' view that the overall standard of the achievement of learning outcomes is fully satisfactory. The review of student work revealed good standards of performance across the range of assessment tasks. The CRAG has been positively commended by both student midwives and assessors as an accurate way of interpreting the criteria for achievement. At level 1, student work demonstrated appropriate knowledge and skills and the ability to integrate theory and practice while, at level 3, students showed the ability to reflect on their own practice and use relevant research to inform their work. Levels of academic achievement are congruent with the FHEQ and external examiners' reports confirm that the standards of work are generally commensurate with the level and with similar programmes in other HEIs.