

Teaching Excellence – a chance to influence.

Now that Nursing has become an all-graduate intake for programmes leading to Nurse Registration, what is it that students should expect from Universities? In May 2016, Jo Johnson, Minister of State for Universities and Science described the purpose of universities as: “Powerhouses of intellectual and social capital. They create the knowledge, capability and expertise that drive competitiveness and nurture the values that sustain our open democracy” (BIS 2016, p5).

So, in addition to creating knowledge through research, universities also seek to develop the capability of students to think critically and creatively to become discerning users of knowledge, which will ultimately assist them to achieve their career aspirations. With the ending of student number controls at universities, allowing universities to take the number of students they can accommodate according to their resources, more students than ever before have access to university study. Additionally, Registered nurses are expected to engage in their continuing professional development by undertaking university study. Increasingly, to achieve more senior positions in practice nurses require to complete a masters degree and for those in research and education, doctoral studies are expected. However, within England, university fees have moved from £3000 annually in 1999 to £9000 from 2012, with the majority of funding supporting tuition, now coming from students. So, are students getting value for money?

Since the 1980s, universities have been measured by the quality of their research activities, initially through the quinquennial Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and more recently through the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Whilst universities seek to gain financially as well as reputationally from a good outcome from the REF, there were no similar arrangements for the assessment of excellent teaching – until now. The introduction of the new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), set up in 2016, will now link funding of teaching in higher education to quality rather than quantity, just as it does for research.

The Teaching Excellence Framework will provide clear information to prospective students about where teaching quality is outstanding. Through a set of established metrics over the previous three years, institutions will be recognised and rewarded for high quality teaching and students will be able make informed choices about their future place of study.

Year 1 of the TEF was introduced in May 2016 with all universities complying with Approved Provider status, eligible to take part in the process. Approved providers required to achieve successful quality assurance (QA) through the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and a range of other quality measures as identified in BIS (2016). From Year 2 of the process, students will become an integral part of all submissions, ensuring that their expectations are at the heart of assessing what *they* consider excellence.

Year 2 submissions are due 26th January 2017 and each institution is judged on its merits, with the results being published in May 2017. Building on the current system of monitoring by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), now the responsibility of the new Office for Students at government level, all institutions will be graded on 6 core metrics drawn from the National Student Survey (NSS), data on student retention, student completion and their subsequent employment or further study. Additional data will be collected to encourage HEIs to address inequities in student groups relative to their peers

and essentially highlight areas of good practice and identify where work needs to be done. The reward for those institutions which meet the eligibility criteria in Year 1 and are graded as *meets expectations* in subsequent years, are eligible to increase their fees by forecast inflation (2.8%). Ultimately from Year 4, scores will be considered at discipline level and away from overall institution level to allow students to make clear decisions about the quality of the teaching in their chosen subject area.

This radical change for England, comes at a time when, in September 2017, nursing and many allied health professional students will require to pay fees for the first time. However, my paper published in December (Rosser 2016) on the new financial arrangements for students illustrates just how manageable repayments will be for new students, with central and local support and guidance to anyone who requires it. Additionally, subsequent employment opportunities are second to none.

It does feel like, now more than ever, Universities will be under the scrutiny of much more stringent quality assurance measures, particularly where it matters, in the teaching of their students. I am confident though, that those faculties which deliver nursing and the wider health programmes are already scrutinised more than most. The regulatory bodies of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) require strict annual quality assurance monitoring and will be prevented from delivering their programmes without the achievement of high quality standards. Nevertheless, where human relationships are involved, few are totally fulfilled. So, I would urge all students in academic study at whatever level, to make their views heard where dissatisfaction exists and not wait until the end of their programme. Not everyone will be satisfied all of the time but if institutions hear of areas of discontent, they are normally keen to change. Students do have a powerful voice, so use it. Be clear about your expectations and ensure they are reasonable and achievable and you will have played your part in influencing teaching for excellence and ultimately, you and your profession will be well served.

References

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