



Decision precision or holistic heuristic?: Insights on on-site selection of student nurses and midwives



Colin Macduff^{*}, Audrey Stephen², Ruth Taylor¹

School of Nursing and Midwifery, Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road, Aberdeen, AB10 7QG, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 28 June 2015

Keywords:
Selection of students
Nursing and midwifery
On-site processes
Interviewing

ABSTRACT

Concerns about quality of care delivery in the UK have led to more scrutiny of criteria and methods for the selection of student nurses. However few substantive research studies of on-site selection processes exist. This study elicited and interpreted perspectives on interviewing processes and related decision making involved in on-site selection of student nurses and midwives. Individual and focus group interviews were undertaken with 36 lecturers, 5 clinical staff and 72 students from seven Scottish universities. Enquiry focused primarily on interviewing of candidates on-site. Qualitative content analysis was used as a primary strategy, followed by in-depth thematic analysis.

Students had very mixed experiences of interview processes. Staff typically took into account a range of candidate attributes that they valued in order to achieve holistic assessments. These included: interpersonal skills, team working, confidence, problem-solving, aptitude for caring, motivations, and commitment. Staff had mixed views of the validity and reliability of interview processes. A holistic heuristic for overall decision making predominated over belief in the precision of, and evidence base for, particular attribute measurement processes. While the development of measurement tools for particular attributes continues apace, tension between holism and precision is likely to persist within on-site selection procedures.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The selection of suitable candidates for educational programmes that prepare health professionals for registration with their professional bodies continues to be a topic of much importance internationally. Practices for selection vary within and across countries and disciplines, with the question of who to select being bound up with questions about the what, why, how, where and when of selection (Taylor et al., 2012). Since the millennium research studies in Israel (Ehrenfeld and Tabak, 2000; Ziv et al., 2008), Canada (Salvatori, 2001), and Australia (Harris and Owen, 2007; Wilson et al., 2011) among others have variously examined

criteria, methods and outcomes relating to the selection of candidates for medicine and/or for nursing.

Within nursing in the UK, the past ten years has seen an increasing number of research studies on selection, driven initially by concerns over student attrition (e.g. McLaughlin et al., 2007). More recently commissioned reports into the quality of care being delivered in the NHS (e.g. Francis, 2013; Keogh, 2013) have raised questions about whether nursing is recruiting and preparing students with the right qualities and skills, particularly in regard to compassion. In turn this has generated more initiatives and related research around recruitment and selection. However the evidence base for most on-site selection processes (OSSPs) in terms of best practice for achieving outcomes remains weak in nature and scope (Taylor et al., 2014).

This is particularly true in relation to the use of interviews in on-site student selection processes. As the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2011) require that there is face-to-face contact with students prior to recruitment, individual and group interviews are extensively used in the UK. While this enables universities to fulfil these statutory requirements, the nature of these encounters and their subsequent influence on overall decision making remain

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 01224 262935.

E-mail addresses: c.macduff@rgu.ac.uk (C. Macduff), a.i.stephen@rgu.ac.uk (A. Stephen), ruth.taylor@anglia.ac.uk (R. Taylor).

¹ Professor Taylor has moved since this work was undertaken. Present address for Professor Taylor: Acting PVC and Dean, Anglia Ruskin University, East Road Campus, Young Street Site, Cambridge CB1 1 PT, UK. Tel.: +44 0845 196 5355.

² Tel.: +44 01224 263150.

somewhat of a mystery. Indeed there remain very few substantive research studies eliciting insights from faculty and students about the dynamics of selection processes as enacted at university sites. This paper reports qualitative research from a case study based evaluation of selection practices in Scotland conducted in 2012, with particular focus on the perceived validity and reliability of universities' interviewing.

Background

Within the context of the issues outlined above it is perhaps surprising that the most substantive qualitative study of interviewing processes that emerged from our search of the literature dates back 20 years. Writing in 1994, Land reports a study of the student selection experience in three British colleges where interviewing was at the heart of the on-site processes. Thirteen focus groups were carried out with a range of students at different levels of progression (1st to 3rd year), three focus groups were carried out with nurse teachers, and two focus groups were carried out with clinical managers involved in the selection interviews. This enabled a comparison of perspectives that yielded a range of notable issues.

Firstly a number of students reported being interviewed by several different institutions and learning to provide interviewers with the information that they wanted to hear. Secondly some female candidates with dependent family circumstances reported being asked searching questions about availability, which clinical managers in turn defended as being reasonable and practical. These managers and the nurse teachers "agreed that it was their experience of interviewing that allowed them to make considered judgements of the candidates and without dissention they felt that intuition was an extremely important part of the experience" (Land, 1994). Finally the way that candidates dressed and presented themselves for interview emerged as influencing final decisions in a number of cases. Based on these and other findings, Land called for selection methods to become much more systematic and much less subjective and intuitive. This would include the use of a range of objective and measurable criteria.

There is some evidence that in the ensuing 20 years UK nursing and midwifery has attempted to do just that. Firstly work has been ongoing to identify key agreed criteria that candidates should meet in terms of knowledge and understanding (e.g. Price, 1999) and attributes and skills (e.g. Waugh et al., 2014). Evaluation studies have researched the implementation of standardised interview assessment tools and any link to outcomes such as course progression (e.g. Donaldson et al., 2010). Moreover there have been recent developments in the nature of on-site selection interviews. In some universities static individual or group formats are giving way to more dynamic processes such as Multiple Mini Interviews where candidates are tested on a range of cognitive and non-cognitive attributes (e.g. emotional intelligence) in a standardised way at a number of different testing stations (e.g. Perkins, 2012). Finally many institutions have sought to involve service users and/or current students in their on-site selection processes.

As such there is evidence of progress which in turn can be used to help rebuff criticism of the inputs and outputs of UK nurse education. However, in the continued absence of a substantive qualitative study of what is going on across a number of institutions, there is a danger that rhetoric may run ahead of reality. Accordingly, 20 years on from Land's study, this paper will focus on interview processes and their influence on selection decisions as perceived by students, academic and clinical staff from Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) involved in the selection of nurses (and, in some cases, midwives).

Design

Aim and ambit

The aim of the study was to elicit and interpret perspectives on interviewing processes and related decision making involved in on-site selection of student nurses and midwives. This qualitative enquiry was part of a larger case study of practice in Scotland which used mixed methods and is reported elsewhere (Taylor et al., 2012, 2014). Within the overall ambit of a sequential explanatory study (Ivankova et al., 2006) this qualitative research was designed to follow on from the findings of initial surveys of the participating HEIs so that more in-depth understandings of perceptions of practice within and across these universities could be developed. The aim was not only to elicit what participants thought and felt but, if possible, why this was the case.

Participants

Seven of the nine main universities involved in educating pre-registration nurses in Scotland took part. At the time five of these HEIs also provided pre-registration midwifery education. A designated link person at each HEI passed on information about the study to our target key stakeholder groups as part of a purposive sampling strategy. The inclusion criteria were: (i) role as admissions tutor (ii) academic staff with role in selection interviews (iii) member of clinical staff with role in selection interviews (iv) student nurse or midwife recruited in most recent intake. Details of participants in this part of the study are provided in Table 1.

Data collection

As can be seen from Table 1, individual interviews were carried out with six admission tutors. Six focus groups were carried out involving a total of 30 lecturers and 5 clinical staff. At one site the intended focus group had to be undertaken as an individual interview due to circumstances on the day. A further 9 focus groups involved a total of 72 students. In addition to including midwifery students, there was representation from branches of nursing such as mental health, children and learning disability. This data collection took place from February to March 2012.

An interview guide was used for both the individual interviews and the focus groups, with minor customisation for each of the stakeholder groups. This was based around an analytic model of selection processes and outcomes (Fig. 1) that had been devised in the first stage of this sequential enquiry. This core model was customised to reflect processes and aspects of outcome relevant to each individual HEI based primarily on previous findings from survey responses.

A copy of the model was given to participants to serve as a focus for discussion. The researchers used a semi-structured schedule in conjunction with this (Table 2).

The individual interviews typically lasted between 45 and 90 min and the focus group interviews were also within these parameters. Audio recordings were made of all the interviews and they were transcribed in full.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approvals were obtained from all the participating HEIs. The study undertook not to name individual participants or participating HEIs in reporting findings. Formal informed consent was obtained via the provision of information on the study and use of a written consent form.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/366801>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/366801>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)