A national study of selection processes for student nurses and midwives

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ABSTRACT

Background: This paper presents the main findings from a project that aimed to evaluate selection processes for the recruitment of student nurses and midwives.
Objectives: The main objectives were to:

1. Explore the literature regarding the efficacy, reliability and validity of face-to-face interviewing and related selection processes as selection tools for the recruitment of student nurses and midwives.
2. Ascertain the views/perceptions of key stakeholders in relation to the interview and selection process and (where possible) the outcomes of these initiatives regarding their influence on appropriate recruitment, selection and retention.
3. Review existing models of face-to-face interviewing from across HEIs in Scotland against criteria using a structured method.

Design
The evaluation was designed principally to achieve explanation, with multiple case study methodology adopted as the main approach. Within this ambit mixed methods of data collection involving questionnaires and interviews were used.
Participants
Seven of the Scotland-based Higher Education Institutions participated in the research, with participation from Admissions Tutors, clinical interviewers, academic interviewers, and students.
Methods: The methods included: a scoping questionnaire with follow-on questionnaire to elicit views on the strengths and limitations of chosen selection processes; interviews and focus groups to build on these findings. Analytical approaches were congruent with the chosen data collection approaches.
Findings
HEIs typically have rationales for their various chosen approaches to selection. However, our findings indicate that there is a lack of evidence for most selection approaches particularly in relation to interviewing. There is a growing evidence-base for the use of multiple mini interviews, and emotional intelligence testing.
Conclusions: There is a need to work collectively cross-UK to bring together the evidence-base around selection so that processes and decision-making are as valid, reliable, effective and transparent as possible.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the main findings from an NHS Education for Scotland (NES) funded project that aimed to evaluate face-to-face interviewing and related selection processes as valid and reliable tools for the recruitment of student nurses and midwives. The research originated from within an overarching work stream that came from the Scottish Government Health Directorate (originally) through a 'Recruitment and Retention Delivery Group'. What started

as a primary focus on tackling attrition of students, shifted when the context of nursing and midwifery education changed. From 2008 the number of applications to the pre-registration nursing and midwifery programmes increased providing opportunities to focus attention on the selection of students. It was out of this shifting focus that the funded project came. The project focused on the undergraduate pre-registration nursing (Adult, Child, Mental Health ordinary degree/diploma courses and the Honours courses) and midwifery (degree) courses. The research was carried out in 2011–12.

The key aims of the research were:

1. To explore the literature regarding the efficacy, reliability and validity of face-to-face interviewing and related selection processes as selection tools for the recruitment of student nurses and midwives.

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2. To ascertain the views/perceptions of key stakeholders in relation to the interview and selection process and (where possible) the outcomes of these initiatives regarding their influence on appropriate recruitment, selection and retention.
3. To review existing models of face-to-face interviewing from across HEIs in Scotland against criteria using a structured method.

The team developed a formative analytic model (see Fig. 1) from reading of the literature and their own experiences. The model illustrates typical discrete components of onsite selection processes (OSSPs) and was used to outline the specific approaches used across all the HEIs under investigation. The model aimed to illustrate the proximal outcomes from the selection process (the translation of the selection processes into the decisions made) and the distal outcomes (e.g. success and retention of students). As such, the formative analytic model provided a framework which informed the ongoing literature review and the empirical data collection.

Literature review

The literature review was broad in nature, using key word search terms drawn from aim 1 (above) and the following databases: ASSIA, CINAHL, ERIC, SAGE journals online, MIDIRS.

The review revealed that, at the time, there was a dearth of evidence available to support (or refute) the approaches that HEIs take in selecting students. The initial phase of selection involves judgments made as to whether a person is shortlisted for interview and usually these are based on academic qualifications and the personal statement. There is some evidence that grade point average (GPA) is a valid and reliable means for selection (Salvatori, 2001). In addition, GPA predicts academic success on course with some evidence emerging that GPA may be a predictor of clinical success (Timer and Clauson, 2011). Amongst all approaches to selection, entry qualifications emerge as the most effective, reliable and valid as predictors of success (albeit with limitations).

There is some use of emotional intelligence testing for the selection of students with recent evidence of its effectiveness in enabling judgment to be made about predisposition to certain behaviours (Zysberg et al., 2011). More recently Rankin (2013) has examined the predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and practice performance, academic performance and retention in nursing students. He goes as far as recommending that recruitment and selection processes should include a measure of emotional intelligence.

A key driver for the selection of students is the desire to make decisions about applicants' motivations for entering the professions. A number of approaches are discussed in the literature and we drew the following conclusions:

- There is a lack of agreement on the requirements for entry to nursing courses, particularly in relation to the attributes or characteristics. This was identified by Price in 1999 and continues to be an issue today.
- Psychological profiling may have a contribution to make to a multifaceted approach to student selection (McLaughlin et al., 2007) but should not be an exclusive approach to decision-making.
- Selection processes should address expectations with the aim of reducing mismatch between expectations and the reality of programmes of study (McLaughlin et al., 2007).

Given that the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2011) require face-to-face contact with potential students prior to recruitment, all the HEIs in Scotland were undertaking some form of interviewing. The literature review identified a number of challenges associated with interviewing namely:

- The reliability of interviews is debatable, particularly in relation to consistency of decision-making (e.g. Ehrenfeld and Tabak, 2000).
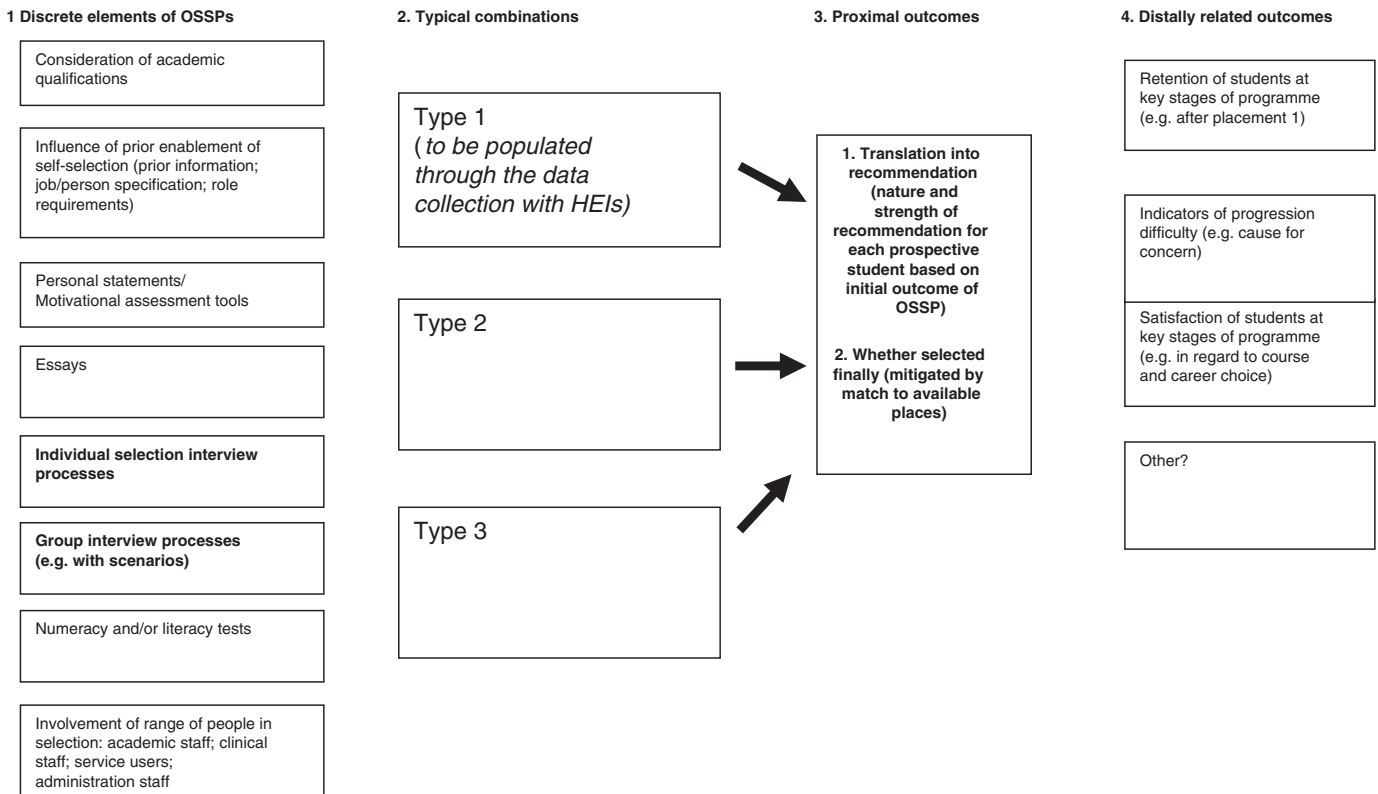

Fig. 1. Analytic model.