

Meeting the Standard for Teacher Competence in BA Programmes of Nursing; A quantitative study

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The Norwegian accreditation standard for programmes at the BA level requires that at least 20 per cent of the discipline community associated with the programme must have so-called ‘first position qualifications’, a term that includes full professors, associate professors or assistant professors¹. When the accreditations of all BA programmes in nursing were revised in 2004 - 5, this requirement was met by only one out of a total of 31 programmes. All other programmes were given a two-year respite to bring their formal qualifications in line with the standard, which meant a considerable challenge for a majority of the institutions.

When these discipline communities were re-examined in 2007 -8, the institutions had all managed to bring the number of ‘first position qualified’ teachers to the level that is demanded by the standard. Consequently, all programmes retained their accreditation. By examining what strategies the institutions used in order to achieve this, this study will shed light on how NOKUT’s revision process affected the discipline communities.

The study compares the changes that took place inside the nursing *discipline communities* with general developments over the same years in the whole *sector*, in whole *institutions* that provide programmes in nursing², and in whole *faculties* with responsibility for nursing programmes.

Developments in the sector as a whole are characterised by a continuous increase in the percentage of academic staff with first position qualifications. The tendency is particularly strong in the state-owned university colleges³. When the focus is narrowed down to those *institutions* that provide nursing programmes one will notice that the percentage of first position qualified has increased most in those *faculties* that teach these programmes, but also that these faculties still have a lower percentage than the institutions’ other faculties. These tendencies become even stronger when the nursing *discipline communities* are compared with the rest of the institutions. The discipline communities have the strongest increase (from 6 % in 2004 to 25 % in 2007) but still a much lower percentage than the average for the rest of their respective institutions.

These data show that developments in the nursing communities have been relatively much faster than in the sector as a whole. Therefore they must have required very conscious efforts by the institutions. What strategies were employed in order to achieve this? In theory, two main avenues are open: (1) either to recruit new first position qualified personnel externally, or (2) to raise the competence level of (part of) the existing staff. A third possible strategy

¹ These all refer to formal, protected titles in Norway. It normally requires a doctoral degree to qualify for the first two categories, while combinations of documented research and developmental work at doctoral level are required for the third category. (The institutions’ official translation for the two categories below full professor are just ‘associate professor’. The term ‘assistant professor’ is used here in order to separate the two categories, which have different names in Norwegian.)

² University colleges, most of them (polytechnic) state colleges.

³ All of them provide nursing programmes.

might be to reduce the number of (less qualified) teachers, so as to bring about a higher percentage in the top qualified bracket. Finally, there were the possibilities of either reorganising the staff within the nursing and other health-related disciplines or making use of the opportunity to count the relevant position categories in a more 'helpful' way that a slight revision in the standard between the two evaluations provided.

In fact we see that competence development among existing staff represents the main strategy. We also see that a clear majority of those who made the move into the higher qualifications category did so by qualifying as assistant professors. This is only natural, since the two other categories would normally require a doctoral programme, which would take longer to complete than the two years' respite that the institutions were given. In 27⁴ institutions the total number of assistant professors was raised from 20 to 84. But external recruitment also played a significant role: more than one third of the new teachers with first position qualifications came to the programmes in this way, most of them associate professors and including nearly all new full professors. Among those who were recruited externally we find that 12 per cent came from other countries. Nearly all of these came in the categories that normally require a doctoral degree: About one half of all new full professors and one fifth of all new associate professors were recruited internationally, whereas the corresponding figure for assistant professor is less than one per cent. Internal reorganisations and new ways of defining who might be counted seem to have played only a minor role.

When all nursing programmes are taken together, we see that academic staff shows no overall decline. This seems to speak against any theory that nursing programmes shrunk their teaching staff in order to increase the proportion of first position qualified teachers. However, at the level of the individual institution some interesting figures emerge. About one half of the institutions had reduced the number of staff that were engaged in the nursing programmes, while simultaneously increasing the number of teachers who held first position qualifications. There are no significant common denominators that characterise these institutions: they differ greatly in size and location. Nor can the overall reduction in staff be explained as the result of reduced student numbers, which have been stable over the entire period. Consequently, the student – teacher ratio has increased at these institutions. But since this ratio was relatively low in 2004 at these institutions one may argue that they also had room for an increase without jeopardising quality. In any case, precisely these institutions have today considerably more students per teacher than the rest.

⁴ Direct comparisons between 2005 and 2008 can only be made in these 27 (out of 31) institutions