

Revising the accreditation of BA programmes in nursing: Quality in practice training

**Berit Kristin Haugdal
NOKUT**

NOKUT carried out a revision of all accredited BA programmes in nursing in 2004 – 2005. The process revealed that this discipline area had not yet established itself at a satisfactory academic level. Since this fact came to dominate the outcome (lack of reaccreditation for nearly all programmes), and hence also the way the reports were written, several other important issues received less attention. Among such issues was the quality of practice training in the programmes. However, this does not mean that these other features were overlooked by the expert panels. This report sums up how the quality of practice training was investigated, discussed and assessed in the revisions. Some main points:

- NOKUT assessed the practice training component by means of a survey directed at nurse candidates now in ordinary jobs, written documentation (specific section in the institutions' self-evaluation reports) and on-site interviews with institutional leadership, discipline teachers, students, practice supervisors and employers.
- Three institutions failed to answer the accreditation standard for internal quality assurance of their programmes, two of them with special reference to the practice training element, the third because there was a total lack of quality assurance mechanisms. These institutions were told to bring their quality assurance of the programmes up to standard within one year.
- The revision process otherwise showed that practice training in most institutions was well looked after and had satisfactory quality. Students were generally very satisfied with this important element in the programme.
- In the interviews employer representatives expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the knowledge and practical skills of fresh candidates.

On the background of these general findings, the experts saw little reason to highlight the question of quality in practice training in their reports. There was nothing in the data that were assembled that indicated that this was in any way a problem area.

NOKUT has used the material that the revision produced to sum up what seems to be important preconditions for high quality in practice training. These can be divided into two broad categories: (1) those that are related to curriculum, teaching plans and resource quality in general and (2) those that are related to the cooperation between the academic institution and the practice field.

Plans and resources

1. *Learning aims:* Clear learning aims and effective evaluations are important in order to achieve sufficient focus on expectations and results.
2. *Teaching methods:* Practice training must be an integrated part of the overall programme, so that students can prepare their practice periods in advance and have opportunities for reflection and dialogue during and after practice sessions.

3. *Organised process*: The thematic and sequential coordination of theoretical and practical studies is of vital importance for good learning results.
4. *Access to practice arenas*: Institutions must have a sufficient number of adequate internship places available for their students and must evaluate these regularly.
5. *Preparations*: The students' readiness for their practice periods must be ensured through aimed and systematic sessions of 'shadow' training before the periods.
6. *Follow-up*: Learning in practice sessions must not become arbitrary or dependent on the practice institution's will or ability to provide adequate supervision.
7. *Knowledge and skills that are up to date*: The internal quality assurance system must have a mechanism to ensure that teachers in nursing theory have adequate knowledge of current nursing practice.

Cooperating with the practice field

8. *A formal framework for cooperation*: Such a framework is of vital importance in order to secure stable and robust educational quality through agreed expectations and active cooperation.
9. *Cooperation contracts with clear distribution of responsibilities*: In addition to regulating formal and practical details the contracts should stimulate a sense of common responsibility for optimising student learning.
10. *Agreed strategies for student supervision*: Course teachers and practice training supervisors must have an agreed understanding of teaching and learning strategies.
11. *Good routines for information exchange*: Information exchange between course teachers and practice training supervisors should be ensured through formal channels.
12. *Good routines for quality assurance*: It is important that the institution's quality assurance system extends to the practice training arena and includes all relevant processes there.

The practice training element was not explicitly mentioned in the accreditation standard at the time when the revision was conducted, which helps explain the relative lack of focus on this programme element. This was obviously an oversight, as practice training accounts for about half the time that students spend in organised learning situations. At the subsequent revision of the standard this was changed through an explicit reference to practice training.

The revision process also led to discussions about the borderline between the accreditation standard and the national curriculum framework for nursing programmes. The curriculum framework was revised in 2008, following up the outcomes of the revisions.

A main conclusion to be drawn from the revision processes is that one of the main challenges to quality in nursing programmes is to do with the way in which the cooperation between the teaching and the practice training institutions is organised and conducted.