

Targeting Library and Information Services - Strategy for the Future

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Introduction

I was pleased to have been invited by Tony Shepherd, the Project Director of NURLIS, to offer my own personal reflection on the report - "Library and information services to support P2000" and to make some suggestions on how services can be further improved for nursing students.

Before I actually embark on this onerous task, I would however like to take this opportunity publicly to thank many of my colleagues who were so very helpful with this project especially when I was conducting my field work on behalf of the NURLIS research committee.

My thanks are due to :

- Janet Jackson of Lanarkshire College of Nursing and Midwifery in Scotland who gallantly undertook to carry out the field work for me;
- Richard Kimber and, Patricia Watt in Northern Ireland for their enthusiasm, help and hospitality especially during my visits to Northern Ireland; and
- Dr Oliver O'Slevin, the Chief Executive of the National Board for Northern Ireland for his warm welcome and assistance in making the research committee's work possible.

A Chief Executive's comment on library resources

The Chief Executive of the ENB said

"many of the 61 colleges approved for Project 2000 before Autumn 1991 lack resources to develop proper library services" (Nursing Standard, 1993, p12).

Although it was pleasing to see such public support in the nursing press, the recognition comes really far too late. The deficiencies were recognised by many librarians in 1990. Many unfortunate students have suffered frustration through inertia and lack of support from the right quarters.

The Extent of Difficulties Experienced by Librarians

1. Wide variation in funding

Figure 2 (NURLIS, p60) shows a wide variation in per capita expenditure, ranging from £5 per head to £241 per head. The per capita expenditure on books ranges from £4 to £97 per head. It is difficult to explain why such a wide variation is allowed to exist. A basic question should be raised with regard to funding policy.

What role did the National Boards play in regulating funding? What role did the senior education managers play in highlighting the needs for improvement prior to the implementation of P2000? How important were and are library and information services perceived by the course validation committee?

The report also shows that some libraries spent just £1570 (NURLIS I p61) annually for journal subscription. Again, the variation between the "rich" and the "poor" is unacceptably wide, e.g. it ranges from £1570 to £30,779 (NURLIS, p61). How can those grossly underfunded libraries be expected to provide the same level of services as those which are well endowed? The inequitable distribution of funding inevitably affects student morale and learning and consequently, the standards of clinical practice.

2. Multi disciplinary versus mono disciplinary provision

As far as libraries are concerned, I have been spoilt! I have been used to well run and well resourced libraries with an attractive range of journals, books, search facilities and staff who are well qualified to assist me when I am stuck with my enquiries. Having carried out some aspects of the field work for the research project, I was further convinced that there is little or no comparison between a multi disciplinary and uni-disciplinary library. One might argue it is really a question of what one has become used to. The response to such a complacent comment is to ask why some student nurses in the British Isles should be subjected to below par facilities. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that all nursing students are afforded the same level of resources?

3. Increased demand and library staffing

One does not need to conduct an audit in order to ascertain the level of demand created by the introduction of Project 2000 courses. My preliminary calculations in 1990 indicated that the demand on library resources would be 5 to 6 times greater than the apprenticeship type training. This has also been compounded by the fact that the "old system" of training has been running concurrently which causes further demand on library staff time.

4. Ethos of colleges of nursing and midwifery

As well as inequitable distribution of funding in library funding throughout the British Isles, the involvement of librarians in curriculum development is fairly disparate (NURLIS, p39-40). Phrases such as "friction between librarians and tutorial staff", "lack of opportunity to participate", "being pushed aside by educationalists", "we are undervalued", reflect the fact that the expertise of librarians is not recognised by educationalists. If the expertise of the librarians are not sought while the curriculum is being developed and subsequently implemented, how will the curricular intentions be achieved?

It would appear that the limited involvement in curriculum planning experienced by librarians is not solely related to the attitude of tutorial colleagues, it also corresponds with the library staffing level where immediate work load takes precedence over long term objectives. In addition, the infra structure of colleges which does not appear to permit library staff to participate in relevant committees where their concerns can be heard and subsequently appropriate action is taken (NURLIS, p39-40).

Several other issues which are directly related to ethos have been highlighted in the report, namely, user education, IT in-service training for nurse lecturers (NURLIS, 1990, p36), involvement in the preparation of reading lists (NURLIS, p37), current awareness services for teaching staff, involvement in book section (p39).

5. Physical environment

It is difficult for a research such as the one referred to, to highlight all the issues raised by librarians and users. Many libraries are physically too small to accommodate the number of students. Many managers indicated that students would enjoy more space for private study. The noise level in some, was regarded as unsatisfactory for private reflection and reading.

Little attention has also been paid to the ergonomic aspect of libraries, eg the physical design, floor covering, study carrels, suitable furniture for the use of VDU (Health and Safety Act of 1974, EC Directive 90/270).

The Future

1. National audit

The intention of this paper is not to increase the work load of librarians, but to attempt to make some helpful suggestions on what can be done to improve the current situation. It would seem imperative that a national audit should be conducted involving all libraries in the four countries within UK. The purpose of such an exercise is to review the current provisions, identify the shortcomings and for each library to make recommendation to their board of studies or faculty board.

2. The Profession must be pro-active:

Local level - there should be a senior library representative present at relevant board/s of studies or academic committees where pressure may be exerted to ensure library policy is implemented to the full.

Regional level - most regions in England have a regional librarian and there are posts which carry some "regional responsibilities" in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. They are the key people to push policies at higher level with access to the National Boards. The level of activity promulgated by these senior librarians must articulate with that at local level.

The Royal College of Nursing - (the research (NURLIS Phase I) was commissioned by the Royal College of Nursing in London) may have a role to play. There is a need perhaps to co-ordinate future activities with the other three countries in the UK, so that the campaign to improve library services is perceived as a UK based campaign.

Policy for the future

It might be beneficial for all libraries to produce a 5 year plan outlining the current position and future aspirations, incorporating growth where necessary. Some financial forecasts should be detailed in the plan. There might be difficulty for some colleges to produce this type of long term plan as some regions are in the throes of amalgamating schools or merging with higher education, it is important to state one's preference with regard to the future development of library and information services for nurse education.

The Library Association may have a very important role to play in this as members of the LA will need help to enable them to negotiate for better pay and conditions in cases of merger with higher education.

A National funding policy

It is a matter of urgency for the appropriate authority to produce a national funding policy to eliminate the apparent gap in resource allocation to bring underfunded libraries in line with the base line library requirement (NURLIS, p2, Cheung, 1990), and to ensure that further allocation will be based on an agreed per capita formula.

The following factors should be taken into account when arriving at per capita formula designed to ensure that equitable distribution of resources across the four countries in the UK is achieved:

- number of students
- number of teaching staff
- number of qualified nursing staff requiring library service
- number of other course offered by the college
- ratio of student/qualified library staff
- ratio of qualified versus non qualified library staff
- base line facilities including up to date technology
- opening hours
- multi site library provision
- library merger with higher education
- uni-disciplinary nursing library with a tenuous or no link with higher education

Conclusions

As a non librarian, I see the period ahead as exciting, but possibly frustrating. However, the frustration could well be overcome if the strategy for change is prepared and adopted by every country in the UK. So good luck and enjoy the challenge.

References

CPI (1992) Library and information services to support Project 2000 - NURLIS Phase I. Stamford: CPI Ltd

Nursing Standard (1993) Vol 7, 17 March, p12: "Inadequate resources still daunt Project 2000 courses".