

ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR LIBRARIANS IN SCOTTISH COLLEGES OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY, EDINBURGH, 5 MAY 1995

Janice White

For the past eleven years, Librarians in Scottish Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery have had the good fortune to have had an annual conference at the premises of the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland (NBS) in Edinburgh. These have been attended, over the years, by Officers and Professional Advisers of the NBS, representatives from the Scottish Office and the Press, and the Chairman of the Association of Scottish Health Sciences Librarians as well as by the College librarians. They have provided a forum for the discussion of domestic matters such as the perennial questions of funding, grading, staffing and also an opportunity to be addressed by a variety of guest speakers on contemporary themes, such as Project 2000, user education, and validation.

Due to the impending change in arrangements in nursing and midwifery education in Scotland following the release in May 1994 of the Scottish Office document(1), which recommended that Higher Education establishments be invited to tender for contracts for the business of nursing and midwifery education, this year's conference is to be the last.

Each conference has been chaired by a College Librarian, on a rotational basis. This year's conference, on 5th May, was chaired by Mhairi McMillan, Learning Resource Manager, Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, assisted by Judith Anderson, Librarian at Dumfries and Galloway College of Nursing and Midwifery.

The morning business consisted of a resume of developments in the past year, by the previous chairman, Marilyn Jeffrey from Forth Valley College, followed by some reports one of which concerned the journal discard scheme, operated through the NBS Librarian, Marie Ritchie. This has provided a valuable service whereby one library's surplus copies can complete another's incomplete runs. Another report gave an outline of the activities of "Libraries for Nursing".

There followed two papers: one discussed past achievements in the College Libraries; the other gave a review of the present situation.

Past achievements were discussed under the headings of: accommodation and opening hours; stock; IT developments; services; staff; finance; and what were termed "hidden extras". It was concluded that the libraries had progressed, in two decades, far from the "one-person band" with a small collection of books and journals (and no computers) to fairly sophisticated services with extended opening hours, mostly in purpose-built accommodation, using state-of-the-art computer systems (in some cases networked across several sites). There had been definite improvements in staffing, grading and (especially in the last 2 years) in funding. The "hidden extras" were considered to be: library staff expertise in the subject area; focussed collections; collaboration and co-operation; and documentation in the form of various reports and conference minutes. It was suggested that Scottish nurses and midwives had been provided with a quality, local, service right across the country. A wish was expressed that, in the future, a means might be found to maintain a local element in a quality service.

Norrie Sandeman from Tayside gave a review of the present situation, comparing it with the position as it existed when the Scottish Office released its document in 1994, in order to see if anything had changed over the 12 months period, and if it had, was it as a direct result of the government's proposals, or were there other factors to be taken into consideration. It was noted that the document had made scant reference to libraries and librarians. A telephone survey of College libraries had revealed little change: where library staffing levels had increased, this was as a result of extended opening hours for the 1992 programme students, rather than a response to the Scottish Office proposals; similarly, increased funding tended to be for special projects, such as automated systems.

If anything had changed in the past year, it seemed to be the intangible "staff attitudes", where a fear of the future has replaced the certainties most people had previously felt in their jobs. It was stressed that this had not affected the professional quality of the service provided. But it did pose the question: how were Colleges, and librarians, trying to remove this aura of fear? Meetings had been held within Colleges in order to give staff the opportunity to discuss and comment upon the Scottish Office proposals. Most staff appeared to "know as much as there was to know". College librarians, under the auspices of ASHSL, had met together to compile a letter, which had been sent to the Chief Nursing Officer. This letter had documented various concerns of the librarians, including the continuation of a service to trained staff, and had contained some recommendations.

One positive aspect that had emerged was the support of staff development, with further studies and degrees actively encouraged. Several Library Assistants are

undertaking SCOTVEC courses in Library and Information Science, and some Librarians are undertaking Masters courses. Norrie's own College is running a programme in conjunction with the King's Fund Centre on "How to handle the prospect of Change".

What was disconcerting was the lack of opportunity to talk to prospective bidders when they toured buildings. However, there had been greater contact between Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery which were in the same geographic bidding area. (Scotland has been divided into 7 contract areas.) Overall, the picture was still uncertain for everyone, though all were fairly well informed as far as they could be. Successful tenders are due to be announced in July. At the moment, however, libraries were carrying on as they had over the years, offering a professional service to the best of their ability.

In the afternoon, there were two guest speakers with the theme of "Future Prospects". Graham Walton from the University of Northumbria gave a very interesting talk on his experience following his organisation's amalgamation with a College of Nursing. After discussing the structure of the organisation, he gave a very informative insight into a "shopping list" of questions to be tackled. Although reorganisation is undoubtedly problematic, Graham's talk was particularly enlightening.

The second afternoon speaker was Jan Howden, formerly Librarian at Glasgow East College of Nursing, now working at the Library of Glasgow Caledonian University. Jan gave a personal view on her experiences of the transition from the Nursing/Midwifery College to University Library environment. She described the structure of the library within the University and the differences she found in the students and in the teaching staff (some students being

impressed by a positive, helping attitude and at being recognised later!). With her stress level down and salary prospects improved, though, this was a very positive contribution.

The conference ended with an open forum for discussion. One point for discussion was how librarians might have a forum for contact in the future. The majority felt that contact needed to be maintained and several suggestions were put forward.

The Chairman closed the proceedings by thanking the NBS for their support over the years.

As this was the last conference, the NBS hosted an evening buffet reception. This was attended by present and past librarians, NBS Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and staff, some booksellers and College Principals. A generous and thoughtful end to an era which has seen great strides forward in the provision of library service to nurses and midwives in Scotland.

Reference:

1. SCOTTISH OFFICE (1993) Nursing and Midwifery Education in Scotland: options for the future. Edinburgh: Scottish Office

Janice White, Principal Librarian,
Lothian College of Health Studies, Edinburgh