

CENTRAL PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS FOR NURSE TRAINING

**Report of a Conference held on 23 March 1979
at The King's Fund Centre, London**

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CENTRAL PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS FOR
NURSE TRAINING

REPORT OF A CONFERENCE HELD AT THE KING'S FUND CENTRE
ON 23 MARCH 1979

AIM

The aim of the conference was to ascertain the support for setting up a working party to consider a central system of processing applications for nurse training.

Organised by South East Thames Regional Nurse Training Committee following meetings with the North East and North West Thames RNTCs.



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IN THE CHAIR

Miss M D Green MA
Chairman of South East Thames
Regional Nurse Training Committee

SPEAKERS

Mr L R Kay
Secretary, Universities Central Council
on Admissions

Miss B B Whyte
Director of Nurse Education
The Thomas Guy School of Nursing

AUDIENCE

Officers from the four Thames RNTCs.

Directors of Nurse Education from the four Thames Regions.

Two representatives from the remaining ten Regional Nurse Training Committees in England and the Nurse Training Committee for Wales.

Representatives from the Department of Health and Social Security, Nursing and Hospital Careers Information Centre, Health Service Careers Teachers Association.

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INTRODUCTION

Mr W Graham Cannon, Director of the King's Fund Centre, kindly opened the conference by welcoming those present. He expressed the hope that they would enjoy a thoroughly stimulating and interesting day and that they would go away refreshed and invigorated.

MISS M D GREEN

Miss Green welcomed those present and expressed pleasure at being asked to chair the conference which she realised was or could be, a somewhat controversial one because the question of a central office for nurse recruitment had been the subject of discussion over a number of years. It had been considered under all sorts of headings one of the more emotive being "a central clearing house" because at best that sounds like a customs shed and exceedingly impersonal. There were all sorts of other names that could be produced for this conference and indeed in previous discussions we, in fact, have used as our title "the central processing of applications for nurse training". The last time that this subject was under major consideration by the profession was at a conference at the King's Fund, the old hospital centre in the Edgware Road, ten years ago. It was interesting to know that we were back again, not actually at the same venue but under the same support system. At that conference in 1969 there were 90 participants and today about 92 so we have gained at least two. She had been fascinated to look at the original list which started with Miss H Allen who was then Principal Tutor of Addenbrookes Hospital, and is today the Assistant Director of the King's Fund; also a bit lower down on the list was a Miss D Green, who was then a Tutor of the Education Division! One of the things evident from the list were the tremendous changes there have been in the nursing profession; in those days there were Matrons, Deputy Matrons and an Assistant Nursing Officer etc, but that was ten years ago and one tends to forget they existed. It must be accepted that there have been considerable changes but in the report of that conference Mr Constable's closing remarks at that time indicated the success of that conference and the qualified approval of the Senior Nursing staff and added that he hoped their recommendation for further prompt work on the subject be taken up by the central bodies. There had been no prompt work, and in fact no work, and perhaps the reason for that was that there was only qualified approval which was the significant point. A lot of discussions

have been undertaken and certainly there has been a lot of discussion at meetings of the South East Thames Regional Nurse Training Committee. Obviously the problems are not unique. Most schools have problems on nurse recruitment, and certainly over the years S.E. Thames has had a very special problem, being a Region that has three Teaching Hospitals in one AHA(T), but the problems are not related merely to the Teaching Hospitals. Certainly we have found within S.E. Thames there has been a tremendous duplication of effort and this became highlighted recently when four District schools amalgamated into one Area school, and centralised their recruitment, and from 4 plus staff in the various schools undertaking work on recruitment after the amalgamation only 2.5 staff were needed. As well as that particular experiment we have undertaken various other investigations within S.E. Thames about the amount of work that is involved in processing applications and I would not presume to quote to this august gathering all the figures we acquired except just one and that is, to obtain 2,372 learners starting training, an estimated 198,729 letters were written, that is a pretty significant figure because that is just letters, and does not take into consideration the enormous amount of time that is involved in dictation of letters, work undertaken by tutorial staff in the interviewing and indeed the GNC testing; there is a hidden amount of work that is very difficult to explain but perhaps you are more able to do it than I. It was these sort of investigations that prompted us to really formalise the proposals to re-investigate the possibility of some sort of central recruitment and about two years ago we suggested a meeting between the four Thames RNTCs because they seemed to be the natural gathering point for us anyway in the South East. Nothing really came out of that meeting and subsequently the RNOs also developed their own particular interest in this problem and they visited UCCA; and about the same time the S.E. Thames again got itchy feet and thought perhaps we had better convene another meeting between the Thames RNTCs. We did not have absolute support in arranging the meeting but we did have a very useful meeting which, in fact, gave rise to this conference, because we thought we ought to test the market. Following that meeting S.E. Thames RNTC visited UCCA and indeed met with Mr Kay, and we really became very convinced at that time that further investigation was needed into the subject and that is why we are here today. Attendance today extends beyond the Thames Regions, and since we found we could meet at the King's Fund Centre which would hold more people, we decided to invite each other RNTC to send 2 people. We felt it was important to sound

out the whole country and not just the limited area, what we would like to try and do today is to get some sort of commitment on this matter, do we want to go on and set up a working group to consider whether we should progress in this matter, or do we want to shelve the whole matter for another ten years, or forever. What we would certainly like is to have some indication from this group whether they would like us to go on and that is the reason you have all been circulated with a decision paper. I got a bit nervous when I saw a decision paper because it looked as though we were going to tidy the whole thing up which is not the intention. What we are after is a decision today on whether or not we want to take the next step because it is important to see whether there is a commitment for this concept, certainly within the RNTCs and from Directors of Nurse Education; if we don't get commitment it means that somebody might beaver away and work hard on something that is not at all acceptable and this is the most crucial thing. We have got to find out whether we want to go further or not. If I may just make a comment on the decision paper, and that is that if anybody leaves early, would they mind filling in the paper before they go, because I think it is important that having been here it would be very helpful to us if you would fill in this paper, and if you would not mind leaving it at the desk that you signed in at. Having tried to sketch a little of the background before the speakers start on their particular addresses I would now like to introduce Mr L R Kay who is, in fact, Secretary of the University Central Council on Admissions. I was, in fact, privileged to hear Mr Kay speak ten years ago and I said to him today are you using the same paper; he replied - really things have not changed very much - but I think probably they have to a certain extent and I am very grateful to you Mr Kay for coming to speak to us today.

MR L R KAY

Madam Chairman, ladies and gentlemen; I feel rather over exposed and I hope not indecently so but having read the papers of this meeting I felt that my name appeared rather too often and that somebody coming fresh to this might have the impression that I was arrogantly trying to establish a takeover bid for the nursing profession. I would like to make absolutely clear, if that is necessary, that I have no such intentions. I know nothing whatever about the problems of nurse education although I have a very great respect indeed for the difficulties that must be involved. I have simply a certain amount of experience in running a clearing house, a central clearing house, in a field where the problems do not seem to be all that different, but it is entirely for you to draw the conclusions and say whether the problems are the same or not, and I am perfectly neutral about the question of whether there should be a central scheme or not. It is my job I think to simply draw attention to some of the problems, the advantages and disadvantages as well, and say a little about our own experience.

The first question one always asks with University admissions, why do you have a Central Office? The main reasons in the case of Universities are that we live in a highly densely populated country in which there are many Universities, many opportunities, therefore, for further education for young people, and a grant system which encourages people to apply to very many different places within a fairly small area. This produced the factor of multiple applications, we all know what that means, a ghost army of people who vanish, in the case of Universities, with the Autumn mist and you are left about a week before the beginning of term trying to fill one third of your places sending telegrams round all over the country; the Universities came to the conclusion it was not a good way of spending public money and they decided that they had to set up a different system. One point that comes up in the papers, I ought perhaps to mention here, it is often said that the Universities set up a central scheme because they knew that they were facing a period in which there was going to be a great mass of applications - one of the periodic bulges we have, and they were very greatly worried about the fact that the number of applicants was going to be greatly in excess of the number of places; and it is sometimes said - it was said recently in similar discussions that the Polytechnics were having - that you do not need a Central Office if you do not have that factor of excess applications. I wonder if that is true? I rather think that obviously

if it is true of every single institution that you have more places than applicants then probably you do not need a Central Office, there are no problems there. But I think that in almost any profession some institutions are more popular than others and you may get a situation in which while some places, some institutions, have empty places others are over subscribed and you may find that there is a need perhaps for some central arrangements in that part of the system that is over subscribed.

I think about this sometimes because the Universities are going to be facing problems after 1982 or 1983 when the size of the age group applying for University admission will be smaller and one wonders whether we shall be out of a job in Cheltenham, somehow I do not think so, but it remains to be seen. I do not think that the main argument is really related to the number of people in relation to the number of places, I think it is much more related to the habits of people, their interests, what they apply for, how many applications they want to make, or whether their interest is in one institution only, that sort of problem; and one other argument that is sometimes mentioned for a Central Office, it was touched on in the papers that have been circulated, I do not think much of it, this argument that all the other youngsters are used to applying through the Central Offices and so nurses should. It did not seem to me that this was a very good argument, the trendy argument. It might be that there could be tactical disadvantages if the nurses were the only people left out of a vast system of clearing houses and they felt somehow that they were being neglected, but surely there would be other ways of making them feel less neglected than by asking them to apply through a Central Office, so I do not think much of that argument.

Before we go on to the question of a Central Office you might think of other alternatives, of course you may be completely satisfied with your own system of recruitment in which case there is no problem and there is nothing more to be said. If you are not entirely satisfied you might consider devices which the Universities looked at and the Polytechnics have been looking at. In the case of the Polytechnics I think that a move towards the Central Admissions Scheme was halted largely because they hit on the device of a common application form and a common form of reference from Schools and that was apparently so satisfactory to the Schools, who were the people who brought the main pressure to bear

on the Polytechnics, that that pressure has now apparently ceased and although there is still talk among some of the Polytechnics, of setting up a central scheme I think that talk stems from within the Polytechnics themselves rather than from outside. I apologise for talking about institutions that I know little about but the analogy may have some bearing on your own problems so I mention it. Certainly the common application form which the Polytechnics introduced has helped a lot in the Schools dealing with the problems of application. There are other devices of course - publicity; one point that was actually mentioned in the papers the enormous advantages, the enormous value, in maintaining contact with the young if you are able to send an immediate response to their enquiries. We all know what numbers are involved and that maybe impossible but if there are any means of tuning up or toning up the method of dealing with office procedures like that, that might indeed be a satisfactory alternative to establishing a central scheme. I throw this out, I do not know the answer because I do not know your problems.

Now in the papers that have gone round there is a note about a statistical exercise. I would like to spend a moment on this because although it looks highly detailed and technical as it is set out here, it is simply a shot to form a basis of discussion. It seems to me to be something that might be considered not merely as the first step towards setting up a Central Office if that is what you decide to do, but it might be considered even as an alternative to setting up a Central Office, or as a first step that you take before you make the decision because the results of a 'central statistical exercise will obviously tell you quite a lot that you do not know already. It is one thing, of course, to go round counting up the pieces of paper that accumulate through the country and perhaps make a false addition and counting several people many times over without knowing how often you are counting them, it is one thing to do that, it is another thing to establish the facts by a central exercise. An exercise which might tell you just how big the problem is and whether the demand is greater than you thought or perhaps less than you thought, measured over the whole country. Also in what parts of the country the demand exists, and having done that you might then feel free to decide either not to set up a Central Office or to do so and perhaps to even repeat the exercise as a valuable addition to the information that you have about your own profession. I do not know but it seems to me worth considering not merely as something you only decide after you set up a Central Office, it might come before that.

I have mentioned the demographic problems which the Universities are having to worry about, the question whether you are going to have fewer applicants after 1982 or 1983, what effect does all this have on your own considerations I do not quite know. It might be that you will have a situation in which all the professions are competing much more severely for the same recruits or you may find, of course, that the people within the age group who decide to apply for such professions as nursing may increase, it depends a little on the social composition of the age group, there is a certain amount of controversy going around over that. The fall in the birth rate is not evenly spread among all the social groups and I think the Universities in particular are hoping that, although they are not too pleased about the fact, they have a very high middle class component in the applicants, they would much rather be attracting more working class children than they are managing to do, nevertheless it is possible that that factor might keep up the standard of entry to the University, keep up the numbers entering the Universities because it is among those groups that the fall of the birth rate has been less strongly marked apparently; these are all factors I am sure that you must be considering too.

There is a paper which has gone round describing how UCCA works, I do not want to go through all that in detail, a lot of it I am sure is really tedious if you read it straight off. I am sure any description of an organisation is tedious if you read through the whole process from beginning to end throughout the whole year. Could I just pick out one or two of the essential points which determine the way we operate, the essential principles which the Universities had to insist on from the beginning; Universities I am sure would be the last sort of institutions that would ever want to set up a central bureaucracy unless they had to, and the principles that are established are these: A clear division between the process of selection in the Universities and the procedure for admission which is handled by the Central Office. I have nothing whatever to do with methods of University selection. In fact, if the selectors in the particular Universities decided that the best method of choosing their applicants was to toss up a coin I could say nothing about this. I should want to say nothing about it because the University itself is responsible to public opinion for the way it selects its students. Actually the Dutch use a lottery system and find this quite defensible. I think it would be difficult to defend in this country but that is a matter for the Universities to defend and not the Central Office.

You will find in the Universities some differences for example between Oxford and Cambridge and the other Universities, Oxford and Cambridge use their own entrance examinations and the other Universities have very strictly refrained from attempting in any way to interfere or disparage that method which most people think is a very good one, but unfortunately you can't mass produce it and have a separate entrance examination in every University. But there are different methods, almost every selector has his own combination of factors which he takes into account and this means that there is a great diversity despite the existence of a Central Office.

We concentrate entirely on the procedure and believe me there is quite enough to do looking after that and not trying to extend our field beyond it. Perhaps I could just give a personal illustration of how this happens. I say this too because we get a great deal of correspondence which indicates that people do not always understand just how limited our function is, but there was one occasion at the beginning of September when I happened to see an application form, I do not see very many, I tend to see those from people who write to the Secretary of State for Education and then despair and write to me or send me a copy. I look at it and see if there is anything I can do or say in reply and I reply to quite a number of these. This one was from a boy who had very good grades indeed, I think they were grades of 'B' and he had applied to five Universities in the normal way and had not got a place or an offer of a place anywhere. I thought this was rather peculiar because although there is a lot of competition for "English" the grades were very good, so I thought, well lets have a look at the confidential report. Normally I do not look at these but in a case of this kind I felt I had to. I looked at the confidential report and there was a statement, a very rare example this, of a report which I thought was a little bit off. It was something like, well the report was written towards the end of the 1960s which puts it in context. "It is true there is no evidence that this boy has been taking drugs but". I thought that was, shall I say, unprofessional. I rang up the headmaster. The headmaster was on the point of retirement and I spoke to his successor. The successor agreed with me that it was a bit off. I knew that the boy wanted to apply to one of the London Colleges so I rang up a colleague at a College of London University. Usually throughout the UCCA system, there is at least one person in every University whom I know by christian name, I rang him and I said "look, justice must be seen to be done, I don't mind what happens to this chap but somebody must interview him", and my friend agreed, he was interviewed and I am glad to say he was accepted.

My job was not to influence the decision but my job was to make sure that he was properly considered, and I think my responsibility ends there. The University itself must make the decision but I must make sure that among the 160,000 people who apply through the organisation making up to five applications each, that every one of those applications is properly looked after, is properly recorded, is circulated, its progress is monitored throughout the whole system and that everybody has a chance to show his or her achievements to the University's selector and is given a fair chance, and that is quite a sufficient responsibility without having to worry about the responsibility for selection.

Someone says in the papers, and it is often said, that the UCCA system is impersonal, yes it is impersonal, why shouldn't it be impersonal. Why should a central bureaucracy attempt to get in between the youngster and the University's selectors who make the decision? There should be a relationship, of course, a personal relationship at some stage in the process, but it should be between the candidate and the school or the academic people who are going to make the decision of him. That is often done through interview; sometimes by quite helpful personal letters which the University will write to the candidate, the UCCA scheme does not prevent this, in fact it encourages it. It can happen alongside the formal process of making the decisions and very often schools or candidates themselves will write to selectors and will ask questions and want to know what exactly is meant in the prospectus about certain qualifications and so on and what they have to do if they want to defer entry for a year; a great deal of that personal correspondence goes on all the time. It is possible to design a computer letter in such a way, that you get a highly personalised letter "Dear Mrs So and So, you will be glad to know you have been chosen to receive a prize" and your name is neatly printed in by the computer in the fourth line of the paragraph - it all looks very impressive, it is all rather bogus isn't it? If that is what is meant by personal administration I would rather have none of it. What I send out is something that looks like a standard letter, it does not pretend to be anything else and it is printed out in thousands. We can churn these out at the rate of about 3,000 an hour, I think, by the computer. The computer links up information in its own processes with what comes in from the Universities and it is a highly efficient way of dealing with a vast mass of correspondence, which is obviously what all of us have to do these days. Now this does not prevent your dealing personally and humanly with the individual problems that come up and they will always come up, but the

more efficient you are in dealing with your mass correspondence the more likely it is that you have got time to deal with the four or five cases that are outside the rules where it may be necessary to break the rules. We have one motto in the office and that is, our job is not to keep people out of the Universities it is to get them in and if the only way of getting them in is to break our own rules then good heavens we will break our own rules.

There is a note on the paper which was circulated prior to the conference about various types of schemes which you may want to discuss at some stage either now or at the more detailed stage of discussion. Could I just say two words about them. This is the paper a Central Office for Nursing Applications, some basic principles; and I would emphasise this was written by me very much off the cuff after some discussions but not really knowing very much about your problems, but it does mention one or two of the kinds of schemes that are possible. There is a serial issue scheme, the simplest of all. This is one in which no candidate would be considered by more than one school at a time. The advantage of this is that she could not receive more than one offer. You have only one set of negotiations going on between the candidate and the nursing school at the same time and if the nursing school rejects then it goes on to the next one and so on, and a Central Office could operate that, I think, in a very simple and efficient way with the minimum amount of time and fuss and correspondence.

There is a note here of the disadvantages about this which might be described as political, perhaps academic political. Not all institutions might agree to a scheme of this kind because they might think that they were always going to be put down as No.3 on the list and would they get a proper look in, and this is very much an argument the Universities had among themselves. This is one reason why they rejected this - although I am not sure they were right in rejecting it because I think in the last resort the kind of applicants that an institution is able to accept will depend in the long run on the standing and name of that institution throughout the community. In other words on the effectiveness of the work and teaching that is done there. Sooner or later I think this will get known and people will find their own level. You could get market-changes in any case, you may find that in a particular year if it becomes known that institution 'x' is oversubscribed there may be a tendency for people to switch and name another institution as No.1 the next time, so I do not think that those problems are insuperable and I would urge you if you are considering types of Central Office schemes at

all to look at that one first because it seems to me, again on very little knowledge of your problems, that it could be operated quite simply.

The next one, a simultaneous issue scheme which is rather like the one that we adopted in which you have, say, applications to three institutions and the Central Office circulates the copies of the applications simultaneously to all those institutions, and then you have decisions coming from each institution, from each school, to the Central Office and the Central Office then matches them according to the candidates own preferences and according to the decisions that are made by the school. A rather more sophisticated and obviously more expensive scheme but one which you may find meets your problems.

There is a different kind of scheme altogether which is not mentioned here which we certainly rejected right at the beginning and that is I suppose the simplest of all, you might call it a passing round scheme in which you have one application and when School A has finished with it and decided they do not want it, it goes on to School B and then on to School C and so on. We thought that there was a great deal of danger that the application might get lost in the process, or at least sat on too long, but there again you people are obviously very much more disciplined than we are in the Universities and you might be able to operate it. On the whole it is not something that I have really seriously considered as a possibility.

Papers have been circulated about your visit to the Central Office. There are some points I would like to make in later discussions if you decide to have them but general points that occurred to me in reading them; the first one is that no one could possibly be more jealous of their autonomy than the Universities. I am sure you have your own problems, we do in the Universities too, and on the whole, I may be biased, obviously my job depends on this, but on the whole I think we have got an easy working relationship with all the Universities now and we have with the Schools, and believe me we could not have survived without it. The Universities would have been very quick indeed to have abandoned the scheme if they decided it was getting in the way or if the central bureaucracy was usurping too much power and interfering in matters with which it was not concerned.

The second point is, it may be worth saying this, the Universities have to deal with a very wide variety of qualifications and ages of people.

There is a tendency sometimes to suggest that they are only dealing with a very limited age range of people with a limited range of qualifications, it is not true, I mean after all we take in overseas students from 56 at least different countries and they have qualifications ranging from the Iraqi Baccalaureate to Studenexamen and the problems of matching those are immense and the Universities have the problems, we don't, but they all fit into the scheme. We used to have nightmares in the early stages thinking of somebody in the Arabian Desert trying to fill out one of our applications forms. Oddly enough it seems to work; I think they get a lot of help and advice from bodies such as the British Council overseas, from their own student offices, and may I say from us; we have a very busy correspondence with overseas students starting off very often with an attempt to understand their English.

Well I think that is about all that I want to say at this point. There will probably be a lot more coming up in answer to questions, but I would like to emphasise at the end here that if you do decide to set up a Central Office I am sure that the essential thing about it even if it might seem to operate in a rather impersonal way, it must of course be operated in a human way and you have got to have the right kind of sensitive approach in the office to the problems that come up. This is obvious I am sure but it is worth saying that I think the essential motto of people running it should not be "abandon hope all yet who enter here" it should be, I think, "why not".

MISS BRYSSON B WHYTE

Some years ago I was engaged in discussion with a group of second year nurses. Some of you know what this entails, it is more a sort of controlled shouting match in fact and we were doing very famously and at some point I said to them, you do understand don't you that it is impossible to combat a notion with reason, and they all stopped what they were shouting about and they all sat round me and they all nodded, and a horrible thought dawned on me. They thought that they were being reasonable and I.....(laughter), so I would like to make my position clear from the very outset - this morning I am being reasonable! Well, why have a Clearing House? - the thing I think that gets me is here we all are fishing in one enormous murky pool and we don't know anything about what is in the pool, we don't know how many fish there are although we know how many fish are born. You know we don't know how many are labelled with our names, we don't know what size fish there are in that pool. I mean we go on the principle that the more '0' levels you demand the more people you get, which is true actually, but when is that going to run out, are there going to be enough people with 4 '0' levels being born or 5 or whatever it is, so we have no idea of the potential of the pool and the other thing, of course, we don't know how many fish we want for breakfast any way.

They talk a lot at the Department about manpower planning, well women-power planning I suppose it is really, but it seems to me the foundation of manpower planning is in what you get out of that pool, and I don't see how you can possibly begin to do any manpower planning unless at least you know roughly what you think your input potentially could be. Even if we get no further today, even if my reasonable arguments don't persuade you, let us at least have a fact finding 'do' because this haphazard dipping in, is like that thing you do at a fair with a magnet, it does not get us anywhere. We must know what we are up against, we must know how many fish there are in the pool.

Now to come down to brass tacks, supposing we had a Clearing House. Let us eliminate first of all the things that it cannot do. You know like computers, people imagine that a Clearing House is just as magic as people imagine a computer is. It won't, perhaps it is a good thing it won't, reduce all the silly letters, I think we are doomed to those. It may be that one day we will be able to shift them over to somebody else

to take first but let us not kid ourselves, we are not going to get rid of that, unless we want to, unless we ask the Clearing House to, but that would be in our court. It will not stop us sending out brochures, arranging tours round the hospital and talks from the student nurses who come to tell them about training, and interviewing. Those tours and talks and interview days represent a tremendous lot of time and effort and energy but we need to keep the personal link. We cannot do away with them but we could at least streamline them a little bit. It is not going to stop last minute dropouts, the girl whose mother rings you on the morning of..... and says "darling's got chicken pox", well that is your fault you selected her. The girl that creeps in at the end of the first week and says she has decided to marry her fiance after all. They will always be with you, we should be able to see them coming, but you don't always, do you? We shan't be able to make candidates go to hospitals they don't want to, but maybe we should be able to make it clearer when all the hospitals they wanted to go to were full, that they might go somewhere else. If they go somewhere else it may not be to this hospital it may be to that hospital but at least it might make it easier for them to see that there are other hospitals.

So what do I think in my 'reasonable' way that it can do. I do not know whether you think this counts, it is going to make it considerably less stressful for candidates. I am appalled when I go out and talk to candidates, because since I have known about this I have been out and chatted to groups of candidates, at the number of applications they make and the anxieties about "I've got a place there, should I take it or shouldn't I, should I wait for there, that is the one I really want", you know all this sort of thing and this goes for Mum and Dad as well, and if you know any candidates personally outside the hospital you realise what a strain this period is, and I think it chokes some of them off from even pursuing. I maybe wrong there, we've go no facts. It would also make things easier for headmistresses, I just point this out as an interesting fact on the way. It will give more candidates more information about the Schools that are available. When I go out and talk to schoolgirls, which for my sins I do from time to time, I am amazed how little information some Schools have, some of them do not even have the DHSS Directory of Schools of Nursing, and one of the things that attracted me was the idea of the little UCCA type booklet with all the Schools in it which would be sent to every candidate. You may say this will duplicate work that has already been done by the Nursing and Hospital Careers Advisory Service, but it seems to me that

must become part of the whole set up, there might be money saved in that way, that again might be another area of duplication, but I don't know because we don't know the facts.

I think it will help us to match the girls with the training school better especially if we have some form of banding. For example in one of the London Teaching Hospitals which I know quite well, we received over a thousand letters from girls who simply did not measure up to the educational standards that we asked for. Now if those were 'edited' centrally, if that was something we thought we wanted to do, that would save those girls writing an extra letter, it would save some correspondence. The tremendous thing will be the reduction of dropouts due to double booking. Again we have no facts, but my impression is that this has become very much worse in the last three years. The system we run always used to work very well, we give a girl a postcard, we say at her interview, "yes, we would love to have you, how many other places are you going to" and she tells us when her last interview is, and we say, "okay when you have had all your interviews, then send us back the postcard if you have chosen us", and that used to always work. It does not anymore, they still send us back the postcard, they still say they would like to come and they still drop out. I have some figures I will give you in a moment and if it applies to me it will apply to you. This is problem number one, and, of course, reduction of multiple applications will save tutors' time, secretarial time, stationery and even stamps because we have found that most of the girls who come to us had mostly applied to an average of five schools. The top I have met, I think, is 12.

I do not know what your experience is, but mine is that the average is about five applications and I have some actual figures of one hospital. This is one year - the total first letters were 8,449, I won't give you the details. Of those over 5,000 were just enquiries. I have the breakdown, all sorts of varied enquiries. Now of the 3,000 odd that were not just enquiries, and that were a very definite beginning of finding out about training, 1,338 were sent a letter of regret. These were all girls who probably had perfectly satisfactory qualifications and we write to them and say "I am sorry, your qualifications are lovely, we are sure you are going to be a lovely nurse, we just haven't got room". Of course we get all the fathers ringing up saying, why?.... But the actual applications, this is the interesting thing, of the 1,862 actual applications that were followed, a thousand were not returned;

fair enough, but all money. 139 were stopped by us, that is, not pursued once we saw the references and that kind of thing - but this is the sad part, 704 were fully processed for 200 places. That means we had fully processed 500 girls for nothing and that means that probably all my mates had processed, or at least five of my mates had processed 500 girls for nothing because they would have processed some that I had got. That is £500 in stamps let alone anything else, because it costs about £1 a head in stamps for full process.

I thought you might be interested in the details of two sets, we have difficulty in filling our January and February sets as everybody does. Here are two sets that both ended up more by good luck than by good management with 50 girls in each, with a lot of going-down-on-knees the week before and telephone calls and things; withdrew before interview 47 - after interview 25. Both of these are perfectly reasonable, why not there is nothing wrong with that. After acceptance 9; discontinued/gave up in the middle 5. We rejected 25 and we accepted 50, so we dealt with 161 girls to get that 50. The next set was very similar. Withdrawn before interview 49 - withdrew after interview 18 - withdrew after acceptance 9. Dropped out 4, rejected by us 45, and we finally ended up with 50, so that we processed 175 to get 50. If we are doing all that extra work, so are all the other people that we are sharing those nurses with, so that is really the foundation of my argument, all the extra work made by the duplication.

I would just like to mention one or two common worries because some of the people who were not able to be here today have written letters and made some points. "Will every hospital have to join". No - I mean it is what we are going to decide. The Universities did not have to join to begin with. I think most of them are in now, but they did not to begin with. A very big problem, "will we have to have fixed entry dates". You couldn't - you couldn't possibly have fixed entry dates, well if you do I am not changing my entry dates to come in line with yours! Some of us take people every 8 weeks, some here and there; you could have a fixed booking year where you could say, for example, if the girl wants to go to St Bloggs she books herself into St Bloggs School 1,2,3 or 4 whichever it is, or School January, February, August, October or whatever, and then she does not just book for St Bloggs but she books for a specific School at St Bloggs, I think you could do that, but you could not have fixed entry dates. All our plans of training are different. We all, like it or not, are bound to a service obligation of trying to

get an even flow through the service areas and, ... well if you do I am not coming! "Will it work if there are more places than people" I think Mr Kay has dealt with this, because this is certainly something people have mentioned.

Now two big headaches - "Teaching Hospitals will get the best". I am not quite clear what the 'best' are, but the Teaching Hospitals will get them, and the girls will not wish to train locally. Now I don't know that these are answerable without further investigation but it is quite obvious that there are girls with good academic attainment, if that is the sieve that you use, who are going to apply for Teaching Hospitals. I would point out though, that Teaching Hospitals can only hold so many, and it may well be that one of the things that will help us is to say how many in each area, and it may be that we can get a better distribution of different types of nurses. That is off the top of my head, that is not real but it is a point. I do not know how a girl is encouraged to train locally but some form of banding might help, you might say girls with over a certain level of attainment could apply anywhere and girls with this level of attainment could apply to certain Schools. There probably is a better way of doing that but there is the potential there for discussion and planning to get the right girl into the right hospital at the right time.

What else do people say, - "there won't be any money", well we can tell you that before we even start. Of course there won't be any money, but until we actually do our fact finding we do not know how much money we are going to save. I still think of the example we have of the four Schools that joined and they saved 38% of their secretarial time on recruitment. I would have thought we could save a tremendous amount of secretarial time. Tutor time saved, of course, will be only just a benefit to us we will not save money on that, and certainly the hospital ought to be willing to pay out for the privilege of having these girls recruited; they ought to be able to, even in the RAWP areas, to pay for the stationery and stamps one would think; but I cannot prove any of that to you and neither can you prove it to me because we do not know the figures.

Now you know me, I spend my life looking at the stars because where my feet are it is so awfully muddy and I have got lots of ideas about spin-offs that we could get from this. I would reiterate, whatever we have is going to be what we want. It is not going to be a University one.

It is not going to be even any of the ones we have heard. It is going to be what the profession decides. We have got to have things. We must have interviews, I do not think you could possibly take student nurses without interviews, that has got to be an integral part. We have got to have medicals in some way or another, that has got to be a part, I do not know what the Universities do. We have got to make special arrangements for all the girls who come to us from University or throw up their job in the middle of the year; the girls who would not fit into the pattern, we must make arrangements for those.

But setting that aside - what fun! Suppose you had an annual booking wouldn't it be marvellous - you know the girl to whom you say "well dear, I think you are going to make a lovely nurse, but I do think you ought to spend a little time as a nurse auxiliary first", and she goes off and trains somewhere else the next week - it would enable us to really do proper trials for the girl who needs to be a nurse; that would up our nursing auxiliaries, it might even provide the staff we need to replace the girls who are out getting the EEC experience; I think it would give more chance for the frail girl to do some time as a nursing auxiliary and somebody else could not pinch her - that is the point, you see, it is this pinching that is difficult! Then I think it might reduce wastage because a girl who has done her time as a nursing auxiliary and there has been time for her to do it, has often either decided she could not be a nurse anywhere or she makes a reasonable nurse when she starts.

The other idea about annual booking which fills me with a wild surmise, we might even be able to fill the May School, think of that, if you can fill the May School you can go halfway towards an even flow of students; you know all our lovely plans of training that go up and down like temperature charts, it is because you do not have an even flow of girls. Annual booking would enable you at least to try to get an even flow of girls and to predict much more reasonably when you were not going to get it, that is a peculiar nursing problem. Banding I have mentioned as at least a way of helping girls to be directed. I do not like the idea of too much direction, it would have to be thought of very carefully but it is certainly something we can think of. Common medical screening - wouldn't it be marvellous if they could all agree? You see we have given up medicals now and we have got a marvellous screening form and arrangements with the GPs to do the tests. Suppose everybody did this, some of us have tried to get together in a limited way but this could be a concomitant thing, it would be marvellous if there could be some agreement about screening and medicals.

The thing that would appeal to me is if we could actually have a fixed pattern of intake, fixed for a hospital, I do not mean all join, which was educationally controlled. I still think with great sympathy of my friend in one of the larger London Teaching Hospitals who, 2 months before her intake of 80 was billed to appear, was forced to cancel it. Now it seems to me that this horror of student nurses being on the same money as everybody else ought to go, and if we had some information about how many future learners there were, some kind of rationalisation about how many could enter and which Schools and so forth would be possible because I cannot imagine anything worse than suddenly having to drop an intake; and this really did happen two years ago. The effect has not got through to the Staff Nurses yet, but they are going to have a very uncomfortable time in that hospital in a year's time because they are not going to have any Staff Nurses coming off the pipeline at that time. I think this would help us to have a more rational educational plan for who was going to take students where, and it would not matter about when, and then as many candidates as you had could be matched to the money that was centrally available.

So I will now come down from my mountain top where I have been for the last few moments and just say I believe very firmly that a Clearing House is something that could work. I believe equally firmly that we must be clear that it is our servant and not our master and I think that is a very essential part of our thinking. Even if we have not got any money to do it, even if we cannot progress, I would plead most fervently that we do the fact finding. I cannot bear not knowing, I cannot bear the inefficiency of our present muddy fishing. I must not complain I probably get as good fish as any, but I do think we ought to know how many fish there are even if nobody is going to know how many we need for breakfast. In 1983 we run out of 18 year olds and I would like it if we could get something by then which would give us some kind of clue as to who was coming in and how they should be organised and trained to the best possible advantage. But there is one thing that I have heard this morning which perhaps might be better than all the things I have suggested, if we cannot do any of that, let us just have a lottery!

AFTERNOON - QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Employer/Employee Relationship

Q. If Directors of Nurse Education were concerned solely with education, with students of student status, the scheme could start tomorrow, but District Nursing Officers and Directors of Nurse Education are agents for employers and this complicates the situation. It was questioned to what extent central processing would be open to external influences and whether applicants could be forced to go through a central system. In industrial relations terms the applicant was considered as applying for a job.

A. Miss Whyte agreed there was the extra problem of employer/employee relationships and suggested that the DHSS should be petitioned continuously for the student to be given student status and dealt with out of a separate budget, instead of leading nurse managers into all the pitfalls of disciplinary action, student status would still mean working on the wards, but funded in a different way.

Q. Directors of Nurse Education know they would have to continue to sell their own training schools and could not in fact deny anyone interested in nursing the right to go round as many training schools as she/he wished. It was considered this would result in increased visiting before the applicants committed themselves to specifying their first, second or third choice. All potential applicants would be tied up on forms yet schools had to maintain an even flow of learners.

Q. What influences are Universities under?

A. Mr Kay said that UCCA was under no influence because the Central Office did not make decisions. Are Universities subject to improper influence when they make decisions? - the answer is 'No'. A conditional offer can be given but the deciding factor is that the candidate has to meet the entrance requirements. Sometimes a decision by a University is questioned i.e. by an MP, but when an explanation is made, for instance that the entrance requirements were not met, this is invariably accepted. In other words public opinion has an extraordinary respect for decisions made by professional people and that they are disinterested decisions. Decisions are made on their merits, there could be exceptions but Mr Kay did not know of them.

Q. Individuals not placed. The question of suitability for nursing arose and assuming satisfactory entry requirements it was presumed the Central Office would be left to deal with those.

Confidentiality

Q. Does a University have to say why a candidate is rejected.

A. This was entirely a matter for each University and its selectors itself. Sometimes it was helpful to a school to give background reasons but a specific reason may not always be given as this could only be done by quoting from a confidential report.

It was pointed out that the official information Bill before Parliament would completely alter the disclosure of information and it was asked if Universities would then have to give reasons for rejection.

A. Mr Kay said he did not know whether reports could remain confidential with new legislation on privacy. This would be a matter for consideration between the Universities and schools. UCCA believed their present system to be of value to the applicants themselves; the formal system could be replaced by informal enquiries which would not be a satisfactory substitute.

Scope of Scheme

Q. The impression was that the scheme was for potential student nurses, was it envisaged that other Registers, and Enrolled Nurses would be included, if so the GNC test would be used for them, if not there were large numbers of learners in other categories still to be processed.

Q. The point was made that it would not be appropriate to put the RMN and SEN general or mental into the central scheme from the start, problems are almost exclusively with the SRN student. If all goes well and surveys indicate that others would benefit then a total scheme would be acceptable.

A. Miss Whyte explained that some form of central test centres were envisaged so that each school would not have to endlessly set tests because at present some candidates take several tests. Test centres could take on students and pupils. Central processing could start with basic training as an exercise to do all the spadework, then

there would be no reason in theory why if the profession wished, other trainings could not be included.

Q. It was questioned who would pay the travelling expenses for candidates to get to test centres and for interview.

A. If unemployed, an applicant could claim for three trips from the Employment Services Agency, but applicants quite often chose to travel to several schools independently for interview, paying their own expenses.

Size of Scheme

Q. The comparative size difference between the University and nurse training was queried.

A. UCCA services 82 admitting institutions with lots of different schools within them amounting to 2,000 courses of study, as against 186 nurse training schools with 7 basic trainings which represented 1,300 courses of study.

Trent RNTC Exercise

The Chairman of Trent RNTC reported that Trent Region had done a good deal of work in the past year having in mind possibly a regional central processing system, before they knew a national scheme was being considered. Different points of view exist outside the major areas of population i.e. in Trent girls wished to train locally and areas want to retain their own recruitment; there are three medical schools in Trent Region but no graduate school. There are important differences in different areas of the country and we do not want a devolution exercise going on in nurse training.

In the Trent exercise towards some form of scheme they had designed a common application form and there was unanimous agreement in that Region on this. The Trent RNTC Chairman advised that banding groups of students should be thought about carefully - he had seen the results of this in day schools where differences between the top and bottom band where there are over one thousand pupils caused discontent and status seeking. One would hate to see this in nursing schools and the social disadvantages of banding should be carefully weighed.

One DNE suggested that a form of banding occurred now in that a candidate who appeared better suited for training at a smaller hospital with smaller groups of learners is advised accordingly. It was suggested this was not banding but natural selection.

Personal Approach

Q. Concern was expressed that the personal approach might be lost in a centralised scheme and DNEs would not like to lose mature students or those rejected by a number of schools yet worth following up, through this; also that central clearing might say a school could do with girls who are not so high academically.

A. Mr Kay said the mature student was one example that some people need special care and personal treatment. He saw nothing in a central scheme to prevent people putting the same amount of dedicated effort into recruitment that existed at present.

Universities have departments that are small and have to make their way in the world and they do this by going round themselves, by sending speakers to schools, by taking a lot of trouble answering enquiries, and by all the methods open at present. There is nothing in the central scheme that stops it; all that the central scheme does is to say that the application goes in a standardised way to the University, the University makes its decision in a standardised form which can be after a long period of private negotiation or personal correspondence, and all that UCCA says is the form of decision should come in a specified way to the central office and it then goes out to the candidate - there is nothing to stop personal recruitment.

Q. Schools on the edge of London have a recruitment problem because they are too close to London. It was felt a central office would assist them more than it would hinder them getting recruits. Another DNE saw the central system of applications as her salvation this being the only way she would get the sort of applicants she wanted in her school which bordered central London.

Q. When candidates are interviewed a decision is often made that they can or cannot become students, this is a joint decision. It was questioned how central processing would deal with a two grade situation.

A. The profession would have to make its own rules, this is a crucial point which would have to be considered and we might well do as the Universities and make conditional offers.

Effect on Present System

Q. The situation exists where an applicant is offered pupil nurse training in one place and student nurse training at another.

A. The difference if going through central processing would be that the school offering pupil training would at least know the applicant had gone elsewhere and was not coming to them so they would be free to offer the place to someone else.

Q. In a central system what would happen to overseas nurses who apply and are perhaps turned down by their first, second and third choices? There are hospitals on the periphery which could end up with an imbalance of overseas to local population.

A. Mr Kay said there is a difference between decisions made at central office to refer a candidate in the clearing system to an institution, and the final decision made by the institution. UCCA on the whole discourages overseas applications in the central clearing scheme because of the time factor, there is a very short timescale and Universities cannot interview. But total numbers referred are Applications 26,000
Out of these 18,000 are referred to University because they have reached above a certain minimum level of qualification.
The Universities accept 10,000
This means that there is a fair mountain of choice even at this last stage - the decision is entirely for the school to make.

Mental Illness Services

Q. There are problems in psychiatric and mental handicap recruitment and most of these nurses are from overseas. If there is going to be a clearing house we would like to see a fair share right across the board.

A. DNEs wish to retain the right to choose their own students and not be directed from where they should take students.

Q. Two psychiatric schools within one county find it difficult to recruit, much is done at the last minute. It is not a question of processing a year in advance but of finding students perhaps two weeks before the course begins. Would there have to be two methods of recruitment to cope with this?

A. Miss Whyte said a nursing scheme may need some special way to deal with people who have worked, or been to University and quit. All schools take in quite a proportion of such people and will continue to do so. It may be if at school they hear about the procedure for applications the trend might change to them booking ahead. If a scheme started rolling people would see where they would fit into a longer term booking process.

Q. Most of these are local people with domestic commitments who would not dream of moving away and are not prepared to wait six months for the next course.

A. There would have to be provision to accommodate these.

A. Mr Kay said people think the University arrangements are rigid and to some extent you want them to think that and to apply by a certain closing date in order to get the vast mass of correspondence through, but he recalled dealing with a late application for a course where there were still vacancies and it was past the time to send a formal application through central office. He gave a list of Universities and advised the applicant to go to see the one she was interested in. Although too late for UCCA clearing, if they wanted to accept her they could go ahead, and she was accepted. Recruitment can be flexible even if processing machinery is set up.

Q. One questioner put the following points to give people an opportunity to air some of the problems they think they would face in being worse off recruiting than they are now.

It is obviously possible if the applicant is restricted in the number of withdrawals he/she can make, to control entry in that

way, it is also possible to control in another way i.e. if the view is taken that nurse training should be regarded as a national resource rather than a parochial resource - to operate some form of proportional filling up system, whereby it could be said, once a School of Nursing reached a 50% fill up of places that school would not get first choice applicants referred. Those applicants would be referred to second choice schools and this could obviously operate some control of filling up.

Q. Another speaker supported the motion that the feasibility of a central office for applications should be investigated. He thought that the deployment of labour would happen in future in that if a candidate cannot get into schools A, B and C he will want to be considered for D, E and F so there will be natural deployment of labour.

A. (From the Floor) - That is the candidate's choice, not the school's.

A. Most of the discussion this afternoon has been centred round the needs of schools who make a contract between two people. It is very wrong and disturbing that already there have been comments which indicate there is some support for direction of labour.

Others present indicated they would not want to be associated with any form of direction of labour.

Q. One DNE gave the reasons why she was in favour of a central scheme, which she added were purely selfish. One, she thought there would be saving of work and time; two, in the long run there would be saving of money, but she was worried about the statement that in a school that centralised recruitment money was saved. She believed this could be so but to institute a central system money would have to be available initially and absolutely safeguarded until people were ready to give up a post. She felt reassured by Mr Kay that answers to initial enquiries were dealt with quickly, most schools endeavoured to do this. But she thought they would fall down badly if money was not made available to set up an efficient system. Otherwise she was very keen and did not share the worries expressed that there could be some interference with selection of students, she could not see this happening.

Q. A senior tutor from a school which appoints to degree courses explained that candidates come in through UCCA for these whilst the other courses are processed by the hospital. The thickness of the file processed by the hospital showed the amount of time, trouble and postage involved - the UCCA applicants come in for interview with just one form in the folder. It is a very efficient scheme, much more efficient than the hospital scheme, it is also very flexible. Her record to date for swiftness being, interview on Monday and the applicant started the course on the following Monday.

Q. One DNE had kept statistics and from the point of offering an interview over the last eighteen months, the number of people withdrawing before coming into school has been steadily increasing. At interview they are asked where else they have applied, but the school does compete with London hospitals and to a degree with the local hospitals. Recently there has been a noticeable trend of wanting to train nearer home. It has become quite distinctive that a lot of reasons given for withdrawing are to go to hospitals nearer home, and from addresses of those who start training it has been noticed they are local people - it seems a lot of country people want to stay in the locality they are used to.

Q. Another DNE had also noticed the trend that recruitment was tending to become more and more local. Her small training school being reasonably near to London was in competition with the London training schools, but despite apparent disadvantages the recruitment picture is healthy. However, they suffered exclusively from last minute drop-outs simply because of the competition with London. Not only is the trend to want to be near home but often this is given as the reason for transfer of training. She did not think schools should worry that they might be deprived of local candidates by joining a central scheme. The same DNE is also involved in selecting for an undergraduate scheme and confirmed how simple it is doing selection at the University with an UCCA form. As a small training school her recruitment and processing statistics are the same as one of the very large London schools, but the small school has less resources and therefore proportionately a heavier workload under the present system.

A. It was suggested from the floor that recruitment becoming more local might well be related to rising costs of rail fares. Students want to get home and the more expensive it becomes so they draw in their range of possible training schools.

Waiting Lists

Q. Normally the Teaching Hospitals have a two-year waiting list whereas others are waiting for staff, in what way would a central office deal with this? It could still be possible to have a person prepared to wait for a year to go to the place they want.

A. Miss Whyte thought that the best way to deal with this was to do one year's booking at a time. This would give a reasonable time to wait but stop the pernicious thing of hanging on, and would help candidates to spread out into other schools. The spin-off would be they might work as auxiliaries whilst waiting.

Medical Examinations

Q. One DNE with two general training schools in two districts said the criteria laid down by medical people involved differed. A central system would have to resolve that problem.

A. Miss Whyte considered that quite independent from anything else the profession could explore and do a lot of tidying up of health forms.

Potential Recruits

Q. It was suggested that some schools do not necessarily reply to all applications for nurse training received.

A. (From the Floor) - With regard to schools not replying to applicants, the unreliable postal service must be taken into account, but it should also be made clear to young people that if no reply is received they should pursue the matter themselves. Whenever there is contact with young people schools should make sure a reply is sent.

Q. If there are only 80% fish in the pond, will some schools get a full complement, or some 60%, or everybody 80%.

A. Miss Whyte said in the end the profession would have to decide but you could balance your fish, i.e. evenly distributing the numbers trained - there are ways but a dangerous subject. Almost on us is 1983 when the reserve of fish shrinks. The profession should be talking now and planning what we are going to do, i.e. are we going to cut the number of training schools or spread recruits more thinly across those we have. Mr Kay said this is a problem but Administrators have done a lot of statistics in attempting to forecast what the trends will be after 1983. General knowledge is that the age group will be smaller, but there are balancing factors, i.e. much against the Universities will, there would be more from the middle classes, and there is necessarily a different birth rate. They are also hoping they will attract a larger share of the further education market than already, because of their own merits. The Universities are not unduly pessimistic, but are certainly having to think about increasing their attractiveness to mature students and think more in terms of part-time courses.

A lot of discussion is going on but Mr Kay had not yet seen much in the way of practical solutions although no doubt this would come.

(From the Floor) - Nursing should take a leaf out of the Universities book and look at the nature of people available and arrange training courses for the manpower available i.e. 25 - 50 year olds.

Statistical Exercise

There was much support for this which would be extremely valuable if it identified the number of potential applicants. We know there are not enough and this would probably be shown up. Others in the NHS i.e. medical and administrators, must also realise that nursing schools are not going to be able to train enough nurses to meet the number theoretically required in a few years. Miss Whyte said finding the facts might cause the profession to agree on what nurses do, are for, what a nurse is and who should nurse the patient.

Q. It was reiterated that it was essential to set up a statistical exercise. At the moment each school returns statistics and we need to find out how many multiple applications are made because this puts the wrong picture of how many candidates are coming forward for nurse training. We have no accurate statistics and can do nothing towards future strategic plans for health care services.

Mr Byrd, who is Chairman of the HS Careers Association, explained that this was an association of lecturers from further education colleges who offer pre-Health Service courses.

He said as a tutor of individuals who wished to go on to nurse training he had a lot of work to do in duplicating reference forms and from the point of view of students he found it difficult to convey any clear impression as to the steps involved in actually applying for nurse training. It is simple to say "write off to a school", "wait for a reply" etc, but we must also advise that at the moment it is well worth writing to several more. This leaves the student a bit confused as to the steps to be taken.

If a central office was preceded by a statistical exercise this would give tutors in further education colleges some information on demand and supply two/three years before the applicant actually gets through to the nurse training. As pre-nursing college courses do seem to be blossoming they would be able to recruit/accept a planned number of students with knowledge of what the demand and supply situation is likely to be in two/three years' time.

Finance

Q. As ultimate decisions depend on money, where will it come from? Schools would still write some letters and we would not recoup enough from the schools participating to be able to set up a scheme.

Bedfordshire has recruitment problems but 95% of learners are recruited locally. Considerable help is given by the Hospital Careers Advisory Service who refer people not accepted in London. A central service could be seen as an extension of what they are doing, and could not some money be saved by extending that service?

A. Miss Whyte said this cannot be answered until we know the facts. If we could prove our need and where any savings might be made we could perhaps get finance from a national source or go in with the Hospital Careers Information Service.

In response to a question, Mr Kay said that UCCA costs £1 million a year; one-third comes from applicants' fees at £2 per head, and two-thirds from the Universities. The proportions are important as they give Universities a major say in the running of the central office.

Q. If UCCA costs £1 million it would cost each of the fourteen RNTCs £71,500 to set up a similar scheme. Have RNTCs this sum to spare?

Q. One school had estimated it could give up one member of staff and use the central processing system, if all schools did this it could mean £800,000 per annum.

Q. Reservation was expressed because one of the constraints about selection at the moment is to provide pairs of hands. When talking about financing the scheme it is possible to lay ourselves open to another constraint because if we give up a secretary we will not necessarily get that money, it will be lost or used in other ways by administration.

Q. It was necessary that great restraint should be exercised when asking for more money. Some could come from a per capita handling charge and if we could calculate the cost of central processing it might be possible to find money within the present system.

A. Another DNE supported this, as a member of an RNTC Finance Committee, schools were constantly being asked to spend up the RNTC money, could not we use the under-spend?

Q. In many schools stationery etc is paid by District, therefore it is unrealistic that that money will be made available to us. Some schools have already centralised their recruitment locally and reduced their clerical officers, they could not give up more.

A. Miss Whyte suggested if there is a service element it would be only fair that a hospital should pay a per capita fee, and no reason why candidates should not pay a fee as they pay out more than the UCCA charge of £2 on fares.

Working Party

Q. If a working party was agreed there would be a great selling exercise to do outside London, in the provinces i.e. Birmingham saw a central office as necessary for London. It was essential the working party should include people from outside the Thames Regions.

A. It would be necessary to do careful sampling. About ten nurse training schools in the country take graduates for shortened schemes of training, who think it a crazy system to have to apply to all the different training schools; these people would quickly fit into a central system and this would be welcomed by these applicants.

Miss Cutcliffe, RNO, said if a Working Party was set up, in view of manpower implications and finance, this should have a nurse manpower expert and service people to look at the finance in addition to DNEs.

Chairman's Closing Remarks

Decision Paper

Miss Green said the aim of the decision paper was to get an indication of whether those present thought a working party should be set up to consider further a system of central processing of applications for nurse training.

It was not asking for a start of the system and it was fully appreciated the audience were divided in that there were a lot of DNEs present from the four Thames Regions and not quite so many from RNTCs around the country.

A report of the day would be sent to RNTCs and if the decision forms indicate that a working party is wanted the RNTCs will be asked for nominations. It would need to be a balanced working party, it is not just an educational issue but a much bigger issue and we must take into consideration finance. We will need money for the working party and statistical exercise, travel and secretarial support and to find out where that will come from. We need to collect facts on those and potential recruitment sources.

Mr Kay has shown us that a service that is said to be impersonal can become personal - a very important point.

PLEASE NOTE

At the end of the Conference, persons attending were asked to complete a decision paper which stated:

"I do/do not support the proposal that the formal task of setting up a working party to consider a system of processing applications for nurse training now be undertaken".

92 people attended the Conference; 65 decision papers were returned at the end of the day, all of which indicated they supported the setting up of a working party. The remainder had requested that they be allowed to return their forms following consultation with their RNTCs or colleagues.

R E Fisher

King's Fund



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