

Conversations with Deans of Nursing

- opportunities and challenges for a practice based discipline in Higher Education -

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Outline of paper

- Setting the scene – pioneering “Deans” and the early days of nursing degrees
- Conversations with UK Deans – aim and approach
- Themes: leadership in context; skills for the job; legitimacy of practice discipline in HE
- Implications and key messages

Setting the scene – sewing the seeds of a legacy



Margaret Scott Wright

Margaret Scott Wright was a scholar, researcher and model leader in 20th Century Nursing



Edinburgh University integrated nursing degree

- Length and scope
- Health and community focus
- Encouraged to ask questions and collect evidence
- Teaching by the best



Conversations with nurse leaders

Aim

To explore the scope of the role and the personal, professional and academic challenges for nurses in leadership roles in universities in the UK

Approach

- Telephone conversations with 10 Deans (nursing background)
- Evenly split between pre-1992 and post-1992 universities
- Most from England – 2 from Scotland
- Size of portfolios varied – 2 combined PVC roles

The Leadership Context

- Working for two masters
- Research quality versus income and student numbers

- *"In the Russell Group universities there is a research-obsessed agenda with claims by the universities of being "dumbed down" by the NHS agenda, whereas in post 1992 universities the polarisation of agendas is about fulfilling the new universities' financial expectations (the money you bring in and the student numbers)"*

- *In the beginning nursing was small and invisible. Staff were practice/teaching orientated. When we won the tender which brought in a huge amount of money – nursing is now the largest income in the university – people in the wider university woke up to the importance of nursing in the university”*

Leadership skills

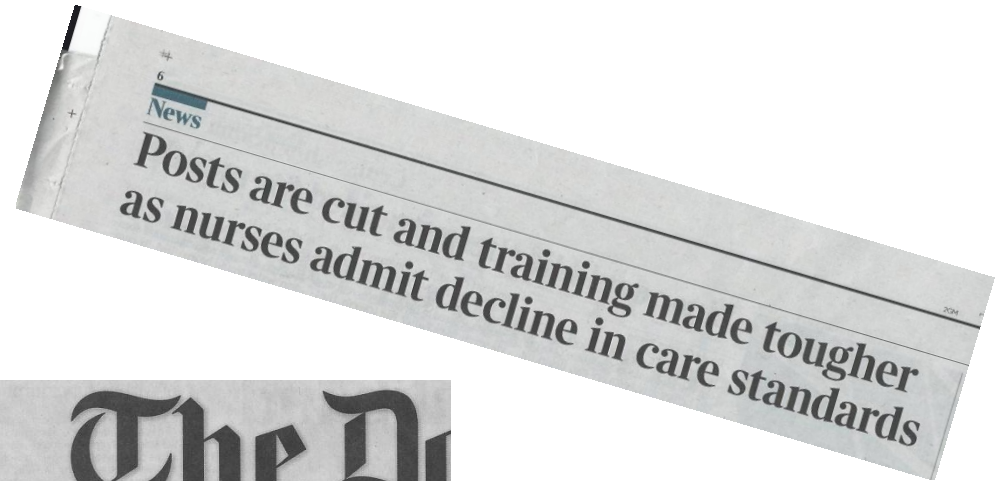
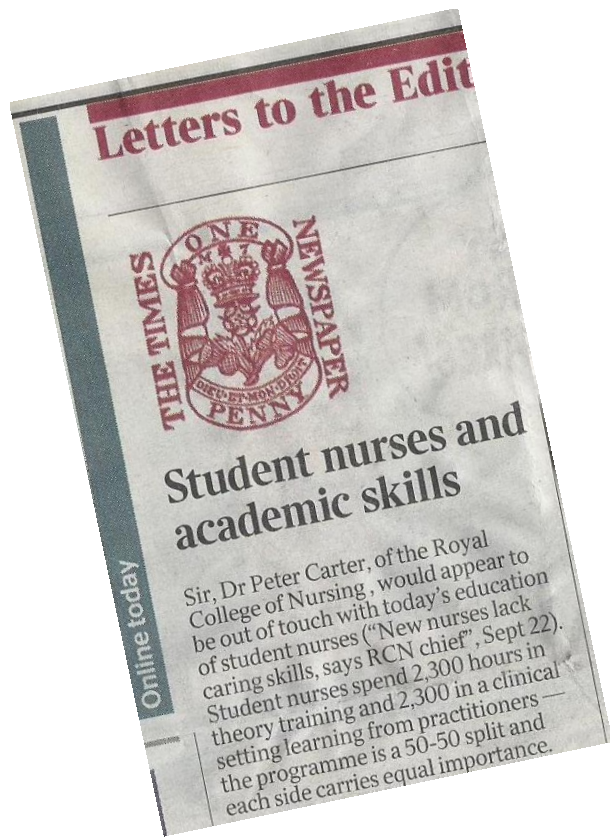
- Standing up and speaking out
- Interpersonal skills and resilience
- Pioneering and breaking new ground

Legitimacy of nursing in higher education

- “What occupation more than nursing has allowed itself to be so routinised and thus allowed its enthusiastic young students to become dull, apathetic and subordinate? It should today be a leader in the field of social science, instead it is fighting for recognition as a profession – to produce imagination, vision and thought, what better place than the university”

(Elsie Stephenson)

Academic nursing contested ground



Challenges to the legitimacy of nursing in universities

“the biggest problem is for health service colleagues who hold deeply entrenched views that universities cannot educate nurses”

(pre 1992 Dean)

“for the vast majority they (the NHS) do not think nurses should be educated at university. In fact, there was discussion in this area related to local Trusts setting up their own “old style” School of Nursing to run courses that they would get validated by our university”

(post 1992 Dean)

Challenges to the legitimacy of nursing in universities

“the university does not see nursing as being a legitimate part.... universities are still male dominated institutions with deep-seated prejudice about nursing”

(pre 1992 Dean)

Conclusions – working to two masters

- Practice disciplines such as nursing need to cope with demands of employers and universities
- Nurse training needs to address changing service demands and complexity
- *"Nursing is made up of little things; little things they are called, but they culminate in matters of life and death"*
(Florence Nightingale)

Conclusions – challenges for nurse leaders

- System smaller and better quality or will some universities disinvest?
- Differentiation between leadership focusing on research (pre 1992) v. leading through engagement with Trusts (post 1992)

Conclusions – are there grounds for optimism?

- New vision for refashioning relationships with Trusts – partnerships for knowledge production and workforce development
- “There is a need to create the nurse leaders of the future – clinically, managerially and academically. I am working on developing an initiative in collaboration with a local NHS Trust to create a “rising star” programme to identify potential nurse leaders of the future and then providing them with a fast track development programme in practice, education and research” (pre 1992 Dean)

Key messages

- Academic nursing come a long way in 50 years, but its legitimacy is contested by universities and employers (for different reasons)
- Different issues for nurse leaders in pre-1992 and post 1992 universities
- If Universities want to retain the income they need to make the case for nursing with a new narrative eg adding value to community engagement; enhancing translational and applied research; quality for patients