Midwife Judith Nicholas last week received the £41,270 compensation she won recently after proving she was racially discriminated against at work. She successfully fought an industrial tribunal against Epsom Health Care NHS Trust.

**NURSING STUDENTS ARE BEING ASKED TO KEEP A PORTFOLIO TO DOCUMENT PROVEN SKILLS**

**Trusts look for proof of basic nursing skills**

By Adele Waters

NHS TRUSTS are insisting nursing students keep a portfolio of clinical skills because they believe nurses need to practise basic tasks before they qualify.

The issue was raised at the RCN Association of Nursing Students' annual conference last week, with many students revealing they had undertaken 'skills-mapping' projects.

But fears of a return to task-orientated nursing care have been dismissed by the RCN.

Sally Thomson, RCN assistant director of education, said: 'Purchasers want some assurance that basic skills are carried out by diploma nurses.'

But she said the trend had also been influenced by the need for learner nurses wanting to feel clinically competent.

'Student nurses get anxious about "doing" - being able to give injections, for example. Fumbling makes them conspicuous and it can be humiliating.'

Skills-mapping offered students reassurance, like a 'comfort blanket', she said.

But Dame June Clark, professor of nursing, midwifery and healthcare at Swansea University, said: 'My real concern is that important skills, such as cognitive skills, are not observable.'

**Praise for nursing home detective work**

A NURSING home owner who was forcing elderly residents to engage in oral sex was convicted thanks to a nurse's actions.

Judy Jones suspected the owner of Denison House, a nursing home in Selby, Yorkshire, was abusing residents when she found what looked like semen on a woman's cardigan, according to the annual report of the charity Public Concern at Work.

But as she had washed the evidence off the garment, the police said it would come down to his word against hers.

On the advice of Public Concern at Work, Ms Jones waited until a similar incident occurred, when she and a colleague used a clean swab to take a specimen from a resident's mouth. The charity then paid for a forensic test on the swab.

Within two days the police had arrested the home's owner. He was jailed for four years in February this year.

The charity highlighted the case in its annual report and praised Ms Jones for her actions.

**Limited help for whistleblowers**

RENEWED attempts to protect 'whistleblowers' may be of only limited help for nurses concerned over health service standards, it emerged last week.

It is unlikely a Private Members Bill, being prepared for the Commons, will cover problems caused by lack of resources, although it may stretch to cover cases where it can be shown shortages endanger health.

The uncertainties surrounding the legislation planned by Conservative backbenchers Richard Shepherd MP were revealed as consultations continued with Whitehall officials.

Mental health award

A NEW £1,000 mental health nursing award, co-sponsored by Nursing Standard, was launched last week by Phil Barker, professor of psychiatric nursing practice at Newcastle University.

Unveiling details of the Annie Altschul Award, Professor Barker praised the 'radical legacy' left to mental health nursing by Ms Altschul, emeritus professor at Edinburgh University.

Earlier, Professor Barker told a Network for Psychiatric Nursing Research conference in Edinburgh that a growing 'scientism' was undermining the close working relationships nurses have with their patients.

Details of the Annie Altschul Award, which will recognise a contribution to psychiatric nursing in a published paper, are available from Professor Phil Barker, Department of Psychiatry, University of Newcastle, Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4LP.

Phil Barker and Annie Altschul at the launch of the mental health award