Education must reflect diversity

NURSES MUST be informed of students' different skills and educational backgrounds if they are to meet their training expectations and use them effectively on the wards.

Delegates at Mix and Match, a conference on the human resources implications of change in professional nursing and midwifery education, agreed this approach was needed to reflect the wider entry gate to pre-registration training.

Ray Field, director of nurse education at St George's Healthcare NHS Trust, said healthcare providers and higher education institutions must have joint responsibility for pulling together the various learning routes to meet students' needs.

'The problem with widening the entry gate is not everyone has come up to the same level, so some may need further support,' he said.

The RCN's lead management adviser Jean Bailey said informing ward staff of the different training routes should avoid the problems that arose under Project 2000 where nurses were frustrated by not knowing students' skill gaps.

'Trсты can prepare for placement by clustering students with the same skills together so they can be trained on the ward as a group,' she said.

Massive variations in cost of training student nurses

By Bill Doult and Rael Martell

MASSIVE DIFFERENCES in the cost of training nurses from one region to another were revealed to parliament last week.

In a House of Lords debate on nurse education, Labour peer Lord Harrison said that in the north west the average cost of training a nurse was £4,000. But in London that figure was nearer £15,000.

'Not all of that discrepancy is explicable in terms of cost of living, research obligations or the incorporation of building costs in the comparative statistics,' Lord Harrison said. The government should consider publishing the cost of training nurses across the UK, he added.

A spokesperson for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals said the figures were confidential. A joint investigation by the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission into whether the £900 million non-medical education budget is spent wisely will report early next year.

The debate also heard claims from a former professor of nursing, Baroness McFarlane, that a course she pioneered at Manchester University is under threat. Nurses completing the four-year course are technically in breach of UKCC rules.

That course is producing people eminently suited to the modern NHS,' she said. 'These are people whom employers desperately need.' A spokesperson for Manchester University said the course was under threat because of a change in UKCC rules that meant nurses had to practise for a year before starting a course leading to a district nursing or health visiting qualification.

But a UKCC spokesperson said the university had redesignated the course so that it was now technically in breach of UKCC rules. Discussions on its future were continuing, he said.

Lord Mackenzie told the Lords that the diploma courses most students follow do not produce nurses who are safe to practise. Clinical placements, supervision and mentoring all needed to be improved, he said.

He pointed out that final-year students would be paid £10,155 if they had remained in the service rather than becoming supernumerary under Project 2000.