

The Regulation of Nurses, Midwives, and Health Visitors

OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

1. This is an overview report of our review of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act (1997). It includes all our main findings and recommendations. Our principal recommendations addressed to government (chiefly those needing legislation or establishing principles for the new statutory body) are highlighted in bold. All our recommendations are listed at the end of this section of the report.
2. Our remit was to review the legislation which regulates the education and practice of nurses, midwives and health visitors and the five statutory bodies which operate it. The bodies are the United Kingdom Central Council (UKCC) and the four National Boards (in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. The 1997 Act is a consolidation of the 1979 Act which established these bodies, and the 1992 Act which reformed their powers and composition.
3. The role of these statutory bodies is to define standards for the education, clinical practice, and professional conduct of nurses, midwives and health visitors; and to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of these standards. Broadly, the UKCC is responsible for standard setting and conduct and disciplinary procedures, including maintaining the Register of professionals deemed fit to practise. The National Boards are responsible, within their respective countries, for oversight of the implementation of education standards and other related functions.
4. There are approximately 600,000 nurses registered with the UKCC, 90,000 midwives and 25,000 health visitors. Many nurses also hold midwifery or health visiting qualifications.

The Review

5. We were commissioned by the four UK health departments in July 1997. We have received evidence from, and had discussions with, many individuals and organisations drawn from all the main interests within the professions; higher education; employers; government; other professions; and patient and consumer interest groups. We have been pleased at the wide ranging debate which the review has stimulated, and at the coverage this has received in the nursing and other professional press.
6. We conducted a public consultation during the first quarter of 1998. We published a document highlighting the main issues and principles relevant to the regulation of these professions. We received over 5,000 written responses to this, many of which were based on extensive discussions within organisations which responded to us. We also conducted focus groups with nurses, midwives and health visitors in each of the four countries.