

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Special Advisory Committee in Nursing Studies

Report of

Working party on the standards and status of the University of London Extra-mural Diploma in Nursing.

INTRODUCTION

1. The University of London instituted the Diploma in Nursing in 1926 and it has made an important historic contribution to the post-basic education of nurses and to the professional development of nursing, by providing an opportunity for the academic study of nursing and its contributory disciplines. It has attracted large numbers of candidates (reaching a peak of 4,027 registered in 1976/77), and has been widely used as a 'first tier' post-experience course for nurses intending to proceed to other professional qualifications (for example as clinical teachers or nurse tutors).

2. From the early 1970's onwards, it became clear to the Advisory Committee for the Diploma that a fundamental reorientation of the Diploma was needed, in order to reflect the rapid and far-reaching changes in nursing studies as an academic field, a view reinforced by the publication of the Report of the Committee on Nursing (the Briggs Report) in 1972.

In due course, revised regulations for the Diploma in Nursing were introduced for a first intake in September 1981.

3. The new course now requires three years of study on a part-time (day release) basis, at a centre approved for the purpose by the University. A 'Centre' is a partnership between a college of Further/Higher Education and one or more schools of nursing. At present, 30 centres have been given approval, mostly in England but including two in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. The Centres include seven polytechnics and one University (Queen's University, Belfast). The numbers of new students registered for the course have been as follows :

1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5
69	362	451	516

The total registered for the current year (across all three years) is 1,083.

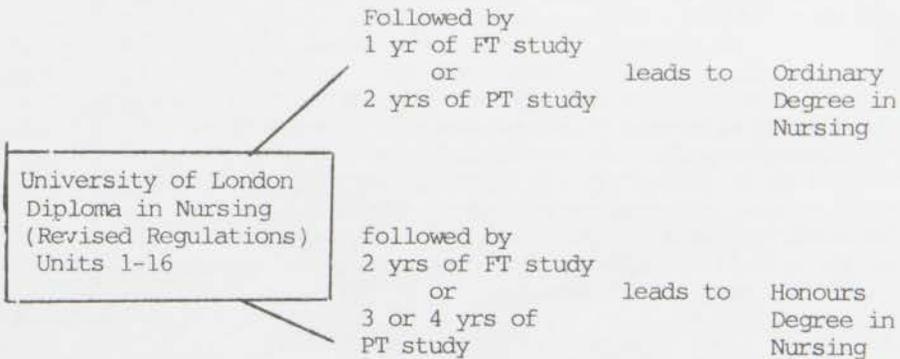
4. It had been envisaged by the Advisory Committee that the form and content of the new Diploma curriculum should encourage and equip students to proceed to advanced academic study, in a situation where opportunities for nurses to take first and higher degrees in professionally relevant fields have been growing rapidly. However, now that the new Diploma has become established, the University is being asked with increasing frequency to clarify the standing of the new Diploma as an academic qualification in relation to other Diplomas and Degrees.

5. As a working party, we have scrutinized a range of documents concerning the new Diploma (including entry requirements; scheme of assessment; arrangements for validation) and we have compared the Diploma with a number of other Diploma and Degree courses both within this University and in the CNA system. We have also been able to draw on first-hand experiences of validation and assessment for the Diploma in Nursing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. In the light of the evidence we have seen, we feel able to put forward a number of recommendations for consideration and approval by the Special Advisory Committee, as follows.

6.1 Successful completion of the University of London Diploma in Nursing (Revised Regulations) at a satisfactory standard should be recognised as conferring eligibility for entry to degree level studies in nursing, with partial exemption as shown in the chart :



Comment Two parallels may be useful here. One is with the University of London Inservice degree for qualified teachers, where "qualified teacher status", plus two years post-registration experience, confers eligibility for entry to the final two years of the University Inservice B Ed (Hons). On this parallel, our present recommendations implies that the new Diploma in Nursing brings a registered nurse, who has at least

two years' post-registration experience, up to the equivalent of "qualified teacher status". The second parallel is with the University of London External degree in Economics, where a holder of an approved extra-mural Diploma of the University has since 1984 been eligible for entry to the final two years (full-time) or three years (part-time) of the B Sc (Hons) in Economics. On this parallel our present recommendatin brings the new Diploma in Nursing into line with these other Extra-Mural Diplomas.

6.2 In order to grant eligibility for entry to Degree studies the satisfactory standard of attainment should normally be a pattern of grades predominantly in the A and B range. They may include two marks of C, but only one in the Year III Units of the Course.

Comment We do not suggest that conventional University/Polytechnic entrance qualifications be required, but rather that achievement on the Diploma itself be "deemed to satisfy". This seems more appropriate to mature candidates in a professional field of study. It is of interest to note the distribution of qualifications among the students registering for the Diploma, which are as follows :

	1981	1982	1983
0-4 O levels only	14 (22%)	84 (21%)	96 (21%)
5 O levels or more (up to 1 A level)	39 (55%)	200 (57%)	260 (58%)
2 or more A levels	16 (23%)	88 (21%)	89 (21%)
degree	0	4 (1%)	6 (1%)
TOTAL	69	362	451

The figures for the grade achieved by the students in the 1983 session are as follows :

Unit No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Grade A	9 (2%)	14 (3%)	16 (6%)	3 (1%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)
B	182 (28%)	161 (35%)	87 (31%)	55 (19%)	3 (7%)	18 (43%)
C	266 (58%)	241 (53%)	128 (45%)	171 (60%)	30 (71%)	10 (24%)
D	53 (12%)	40 (9%)	55 (18%)	58 (20%)	8 (19%)	9 (21%)
(or below)						
TOTAL	456	456	286	287	42	42

We have as yet been unable to examine the extent of correlation between qualifications at entry and grades achieved on the Diploma, but we have this inquiry in hand.

6.3 The University of London should prepare guidelines for appropriate degree level studies which can add-on to Diploma level studies in a coherent and rigorous way. Such guidelines should prescribe a scheme of study and assessment to extend and deepen learning in the broad areas covered by the Diploma, perhaps on a modular or 'unit' basis. Domains to be covered will doubtless include :

- advanced studies in the foundation disciplines (biological, behavioural and social sciences)
- advanced studies in professional nursing subjects (current developments in specialist fields including nursing education and nursing management as well as patient care).
- small scale supervised research projects related to issues of nursing policy and practice in a field in which the student has first-hand professional experience.

Comment It seems to us important for the University to offer clear guidance on academic standards and patterns as they relate to the topping-up of its own Diploma to a Degree. A number of administrative arrangements for doing this appear possible. One is for the Kings College (Chelsea) Department of Nursing Studies to sponsor such a scheme, under which previously external students might perhaps spend a year or more as Internal students although this would limit the geographical catchment area for such students. Another possibility is for the Department of Extra-Mural Studies to undertake the validation of the "topping-up" degree course units (following the prescribed course of study) at a small number of institutions around the country who have experience of teaching nursing studies at degree level. This would give a greater (though patchy) geographical spread, but might be administratively cumbersome. A third possibility is for the University (perhaps through the External Council) to develop a series of distance learning packages to support the prescribed scheme of study, which could be sold to External Students who hold the Diploma and who wish to proceed to a Degree in Nursing Studies. We would welcome discussion of these alternatives.

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