

The Regulation of Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This is the report of our review of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997.
- 1.2 The review was commissioned by the four UK health departments. It was announced in Parliament in July 1997. The terms of reference are reproduced at Appendix A.
- 1.3 Our remit was to review the roles and operation of the five statutory bodies established under the Act. These are: the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) and the four National Boards for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting (one for each country - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, abbreviated to ENB, NBS, WNB, NBNI).
- 1.4 Our work was guided by a steering group which oversaw the process of the study. The steering group met seven times and provided valuable comments on our plans for the study and our emerging conclusions. The group was chaired by Christine Beasley, Director of Nursing at North Thames Region, NHS Executive.
- 1.5 Our recommendations are our own responsibility, based on the work described below, and on our professional judgement of the most effective way to ensure public protection through the regulation of these health-care professions.

Work undertaken

- 1.6 We began work in July 1997. We spent the first part of the review, during 1997, in an extensive investigation of the way the current Act and the five statutory bodies operate; in initial meetings with the main stakeholders in the regulatory process; and in defining the range of issues which needed to be included in the review. During this period, we received written evidence and submissions from over 200 individuals and organisations.
- 1.7 In January 1998, we circulated a paper describing and commenting on the issues which we had identified and inviting comments. This paper was written in terms of the basic principles of professional self-regulation and in a manner to provoke debate and comment, and it did not make recommendations. It included a questionnaire to help those who might otherwise not have responded to such a consultation. We distributed about 8,000 copies of this consultation paper.
- 1.8 During the first quarter of 1998, we attended a large number of meetings where the consultation paper was discussed. There was also extensive coverage of the issues raised in the professional journals normally read by nurses, midwives and health visitors. The Nursing Standard, for example, published a questionnaire based on our paper, and both the Nursing Times and the Nursing Standard ran a series of articles during the consultation period on different issues raised by the review. The main professional associations and trade unions all consulted their members as part of this process.
- 1.9 We conducted focus groups with practising nurses, midwives and health visitors in all four countries, including those working in both hospital and community settings.