

Listening to the voices of student children's nurses

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Aims of the project:

1. Identify and explore children's nursing students' reasons for applying for the course, their expectations, experiences and specific challenges they have faced
2. Develop a toolkit of suggestions to promote retention in year one
3. Identify potential strategies to improve the student experience

Background to the project

- Children's nursing is a very popular field of nursing practice
- Continually more applications than places available
- Cohorts generally small compared with the adult and mental health nursing cohorts
- At the University of Worcester, children's nursing students have historically been the most satisfied of nursing students, but 2019 saw a dip in NSS satisfaction to 77%
- At the University of Worcester, children's nursing had a long record of very low rates of attrition, but 2018 and 2019 saw increased levels of attrition, particularly during the first year

Outline of the Project

- Project initially planned as a 'student as academic partner's' (SAP) project
- Two children's nursing students recruited to help run the project
- University ethical approval granted
- Aim was to recruit 20-25 students to take part in the research project
- Plan - three focus groups with children's nursing students in years one, two and three – led by myself and one of the students
- The two students devised the focus group questions

Outline of the Project (cont)

- First focus group of eleven, year three children's nursing students – recorded and transcribed by one of the student researchers (March 2020)

Then Covid Pandemic

Initially project on hold and then reapplied for University ethics approval as an online questionnaire

- Spring 2021 – online questionnaire shared with the 1st and 2nd year children's nursing cohorts. Completed by:
 - Nine 1st years
 - Six 2nd years
- Total 26 children's nursing students took part in the research project

Questions

Focused on:

- Reasons for applying, selection process, previous experiences and expectations
- The reality of the course, surprises, positives, challenges, support, placement, skills
- Concerns about the course, considered leaving, motivation to continue studying
- What the University could do better

Themes

Year one:

- Previous experience of working with children
- Studying close to home
- Placements (need more child placements)
- Support (or perceived lack of)
- Online learning (lack of on campus teaching)
- Generic content/skills too adult focused
- Organisation & communication
- Motivation (wanting to be a Registered Children's Nurse)

Themes

Year two:

- Previous experience of working with children
- Passionate academic staff/close to home
- Placements
- Support (or perceived lack of)
- Pandemic
- Generic content/skills too adult focused
- Organisation & communication
- Motivation (personal goals, family)

Themes

Year three:

- Previous experience of working with children/having own children
- Friendly university with small class size
- Placements (wide variety)
- Peer support
- Generic content/skills too adult focused
- Dissertation (supervisor to be a children's lecturer)
- Communication
- Time management
- Motivation (nearly there)

Strategies to improve student experiences

- Promoting peer support
- Buddy scheme
- Enhanced Personal Academic Tutor support
- Enhanced University support while on placement
- Ensure generic content reflects children and families equally to other fields of practice
- Increase children's placement capacity/diversity
- Keeping in contact with students who suspend their studies

Further reading

Health Education England (2018) *Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention Report* <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/reducing-pre-registration-attrition-improving-retention>

McKeever, S., Whiting, L., Anderson, D., Twycross, A. (2018) Causes of ATtrition in CHildren's NursinG (CATCHING): An exploratory mixed methods study. *Nurse Education in Practice*. 32. 44-51.

Wright, J., Wray, J. (2012) Exploring the experiences of year one children's nursing students. *Nursing Children and Young People*. 24, 4. 24-28