

# Values-based recruitment and the NHS Constitution: Making sure student midwives meet the brief

## Abstract

Since publication of the findings from the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (Francis, 2013), which identified levels of substandard care and failings from staff in exhibiting core values such as care and compassion, it became evident that improvements in levels of care were needed. In response, Health Education England (2014) published its national values-based recruitment (VBR) framework to encourage higher education institutions to complement their existing recruitment processes with VBR, to ensure applicants to undergraduate health-care programmes, such as midwifery, demonstrate values aligning with the principles of the NHS Constitution (Department of Health, 2015). This article will discuss how the University of Northampton piloted the integration of the VBR framework into its interview process through adopting a multiple mini interview approach.

**Keywords:** Values-based recruitment, NHS Constitution, Pre-registration midwifery, Multiple mini interviews

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This article will discuss values-based recruitment (VBR) in the context of the selection and recruitment of student midwives to a 3-year undergraduate midwifery programme and discuss how the qualities of compassion, the ability to work with others, the ability to demonstrate a commitment to quality of care, valuing the individual, an understanding of the importance of respect and dignity, and a pledge to improve lives can be identified by this process (Department of Health (DH), 2015).

The NHS Constitution establishes the principles and values of the NHS in England. It sets out the rights to which patients, the public and staff are entitled, and the pledges that the NHS is committed to achieving, together with responsibilities that the public, patients and staff owe to one another to ensure that the NHS operates fairly and effectively (DH, 2015).

## What is values-based recruitment?

VBR is defined by Health Education England (HEE) as an approach which attracts and recruits students, trainees and employees on the basis that their individual values and behaviours

align with the values of the NHS Constitution, alongside their skills and aptitude (HEE, 2015). Every higher education institution (HEI) has its own recruitment strategy; however, in 2014, the DH tasked HEE with implementing VBR in the selection of students for all undergraduate health-care programmes (Miller and Bird, 2014). The evidence assimilated by HEE (2015) in relation to what VBR can offer HEIs delivering undergraduate health programmes, suggests that a standardised approach to recruitment should be adopted, while still allowing enough flexibility for individual innovation in its implementation across different institutions.

## Interview preparation

On invitation to interview with the University of Northampton, candidates were provided with weblinks to the HEE (2014) website and NHS Constitution document (DH, 2015) and asked to create a pictorial representation of their interpretation of one of the VBR qualities identified in *Figure 1*.

## Multiple mini interviews

Use of multiple mini interviews (MMIs) in recruitment to health programmes is not a new concept, with an evidence-base spanning more than 10 years (Eva et al, 2004). However, authors such as Miller and Bird (2014) acknowledge some of the possible pitfalls of using this strategy, for example, the possibility for it to become a tick-box exercise, with candidates using 'buzzwords' cited in the NHS Constitution (DH, 2015) without demonstrating any depth of understanding of the underlying concepts and principles. It is suggested that careful planning and design of the activities undertaken and their associated assessment in each of the MMI stations may mitigate against this factor.

In 2014, the midwifery team at the University of Northampton aligned their recruitment strategy with the VBR framework by adapting the individual interview element of the selection process to include MMIs. By conducting the

MMIs in the hospital setting, the recruitment process reflected the standard for pre-registration midwifery education to consist of 50% theory and 50% practice (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2009).

All three stations looked to assess applicants' attributes in relation to VBR, including the 6Cs: care, compassion, commitment, courage, communication and competence (Commissioning Board Chief Nursing Officer and DH Chief Nursing Adviser, 2012). Each workstation was assessed and scored individually by those leading the station followed by a standardisation discussion between the student, senior midwife and lecturer (Table 1).

### What next?

All providers of undergraduate health-care programmes, including midwifery, should embed VBR in their selection and recruitment strategies. Applicants who apply for midwifery undergraduate programmes need to be able to demonstrate the values-based attributes identified by HEE (2014), and there is evidence to suggest that employing the MMI model rather than a single interview format may be a more reliable method of assessment (Eva et al, 2004; 2009; Humphrey et al, 2008; O'Brien et al, 2011; Pau et al, 2013). The qualities of VBR must be



Figure 1. Values defined within the NHS Constitution (Department of Health, 2015)

Table 1. Multiple mini interviews (MMIs)			
MMI station	Facilitator	Task	Rationale
Station 1	A current student midwife ambassador for the university	A simulated exercise with the student midwife acting as a woman in early labour telephoning delivery suite for advice. Applicants were required to gather and document key elements of information, for which a template was provided	This MMI was designed to evaluate written communication skills and assess the candidate's ability to demonstrate a caring and compassionate approach in a pressurised environment
Station 2	A senior midwife	Required the applicant to explain and justify how their pictorial representation reflected the chosen VBR quality (Figure 1)	This MMI was designed to evaluate the candidate's ability to effectively and competently communicate their interpretation of the quality identified as well as demonstrating commitment to the selection process in the form of a well-conceived, well-designed resource
Station 3	A lecturer	Consisted of the lecturer asking a series of questions and presenting mini scenarios for discussion	This MMI was designed to elicit the candidate's motivations for entering the midwifery profession, as well as evaluating communication, care and compassion. The mini scenarios provided the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate understanding of the concept of courage and its appropriate application

assessed; however, it is up to individual HEIs to decide their preferred method of assessment.

The pilot discussed in this article aimed to adopt a flexible approach in its design and implementation of MMIs to promote—rather than stifle—the candidates' individuality, creativity and innovation in order to successfully recruit student midwives who, on qualification, will positively affect the nature and culture of maternity services.

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