

Pre-registration midwifery education: is ‘cleverness’ the ‘7th C’?

Employers and service users expect midwifery graduates’ values and behaviours to align with the values of the NHS Constitution (Department of Health, 2015), with approved education institutions expecting them to meet the stringent academic and professional requirements of their programme of study (UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment, 2018; Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), 2018a). Library and Learning Services at the University of Northampton is a team that helps midwifery students and staff develop digital capabilities, which enhance communication, project management and evaluation (Jisc, 2019). Developing sound academic skills also helps to strengthen what could be called the ‘7th C’: cleverness.

Library and Learning Services: what we do

At the University of Northampton, Library and Learning Services support each faculty with a range of teams. The Faculty of Health and Society has a named academic librarian and learning development tutors, who work closely with the midwifery team to design their courses and to support digital capabilities. This approach enables students to reach their full potential and the academic and professional demands of their programme of study. Without timely and relevant support, they may struggle to meet these demands; hence why a structured support system across all 3 years of the programme has been designed, developed and implemented (*Figure 1*).

This year, the University of Northampton introduced the integrated learner support model, which embeds support throughout the first year, linking to assessments to help scaffold key information and academic skills (Munn and Small, 2017). This content was planned after discussions with the midwifery team to make sure that it was delivered at the most relevant and effective points in the curriculum (Mostert and Townsend, 2018). The curriculum must be developed to integrate and assess both theory and practice (NMC, 2018a) using a range of learning, teaching and assessment strategies. The curriculum adopts an active blended learning approach, meaning the programme is ‘taught through student-centred activities that support the development of subject knowledge and understanding, independent

Abstract

Pre-registration midwifery education is vocational, requiring the teaching of specific skills and knowledge in preparation for a career as a midwife. In addition to being competent and confident in practice, student midwives are also expected to possess six fundamental values in order to deliver care of the highest quality: care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment—known as the ‘6Cs’.

This article will outline how the University of Northampton’s midwifery team and colleagues in Library and Learning Services collaborate to support student midwives in their academic journey to develop sound academic skills, thereby nurturing the 7th C: ‘cleverness’. Thanks to this partnership, students are aided to pass the programme of study with a BSc (Hons) degree and enter the workforce as a committed lifelong learner.

Keywords

6Cs | Vocational | Digital capabilities | Reflection | Academic skills | Lifelong learners

learning and digital fluency’ (Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2017). Students engage with online and face-to-face learning in a variety of formats such as workshops, seminars, tutorials and clinical skills sessions. In order to achieve their full academic potential, the midwifery team work in collaboration with the academic librarian and learning development tutors, who plan targeted sessions to develop students’ skills (*Table 1*).

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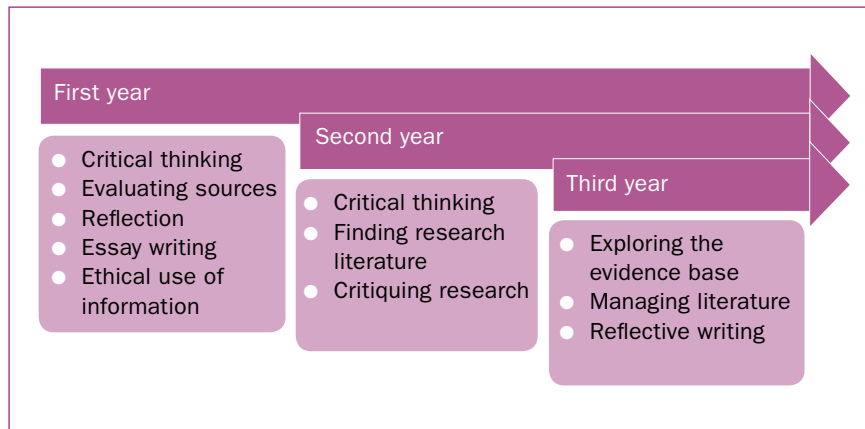


Figure 1. Embedded support from academic librarian and learning development tutors during the midwifery degree

Year	Skill	Description
First year	Critical thinking	Understanding the expectations of the work and how to apply the evidence
	Reflection	Using an appropriate model to critically reflect on their experience in practice
	Evaluating sources	Questioning the quality and reliability of the source
	Ethical use of information	How to use and refer to evidence in an ethical manner (eg referencing)

Library and Learning Services: how we do it

In the first week of term, midwifery students have two hour-long sessions, one with an academic librarian and another with a learning development tutor. These sessions were designed to demystify the expectations of academic skills (Box 1) in higher education and equip them with the study skills to start their academic journey in the best possible way (Harwood and Hadley, 2004).

The session from the academic librarian was a small group, activity-based workshop that supported students to evaluate and explore a range of different sources. This was important to help students develop key information literacy skills (Society of College, National and University Libraries, 2016). The workshop delivered by the learning development tutors incorporated activities surrounding assessment language, clarifying and supporting students to break down assessments (Minogue et al, 2018).

In relation to Library and Learning Services input into the midwifery curriculum, a variety of pedagogical approaches were incorporated into the first-year programme. Asynchronous online tutorials using Xerte software (University of Nottingham, 2008) were

designed to help students to explore key academic skills at their own pace and in their own time (Lage et al, 2000; Bergmann and Sams, 2007; Wilson, 2013). These tutorials were in addition to the content available on the Skills Hub, an open access repository of resources to support students developing key academic skills (Library and Learning Services, 2018). The face-to-face workshops were designed to support students with their assignments (Appleton, 2005). The first of these focused on reflection, as this is a key skill required by all midwives, so they can use previous experiences and the *Code* (NMC, 2018b) to identify improvements or changes to their practice. It is also a requirement of revalidation, the process by which midwives demonstrate that they are fit to practise safely and effectively (NMC, 2019).

In a second session, the academic librarian and learning development tutor delivered a joint face-to-face workshop focused on their first essay. The learning development tutors emphasised planning, essay structure and paraphrasing, while the referencing activity from the academic librarian used a relevant source and imagery (Munn and Small, 2017) to embed the academic skills into the subject content.

The midwifery and Library and Learning Services teams responded to student feedback and adapted the sessions to make sure that they are clearly aligned to specific assessments. The sessions are designed to be active and engaging, allowing students feel to confident to ask questions, offer suggestions and link to subject knowledge. This response to feedback has been well received by the cohort, with one student stating:

'I struggle academically and always worry about referencing: getting it wrong and other things regarding academic writing. Gillian and Sheryl made the session they taught us so informative and settled my nerves about a lot of things surrounding academic writing. They uncomplicated what I felt was complicated and gave me a slight confidence boost. Even though this is their job, the passion they have shines from both of them as ultimately, they want us as students to thrive. I would also now have no concerns going to a private session with any member of the team in regard to any issues I have as they are approachable and are there to help.' (Emma)

Library and Learning Services: why we do it

Input by Library and Learning Services into the midwifery curriculum demonstrates interprofessional working and collaboration across professional areas, as the midwifery lecturers are present in the session and link content to professional areas, requirements and experience. This approach gives credibility to Library

and Learning Services' content and demonstrates a 'super supportive' approach to the curriculum (University of Northampton, 2018:2). In the first year of the undergraduate programme, the aim is to build a solid academic foundation.

Conclusion

Collaboratively, the midwifery team and Library and Learning Services at the University of Northampton want to support students in developing sound academic skills or 'cleverness', so newly qualified midwives not only possess the core values and beliefs outlined in the NHS Constitution (Department of Health, 2015) to provide high quality care (the six Cs), but they also have the academic ability (the seventh C) as lifelong learners (NMC, 2018b) to ensure that care is evidence-based. **BJM**

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Box 1. LLS learning objectives for integrated learner support

By the end of the programme students will be able to:

- Critically analyse and synthesise information to develop an evidence-based argument
- Select and apply appropriate tools and techniques for academic communication
- Gather, assimilate and critically evaluate information from a range of sources, spheres and media
- Evaluate appropriate legal and ethical frameworks surrounding information and make judgements about their selection and application

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