

INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE OF LIFELONG LEARNING, CRIME AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

This submission is based on Kent Drug & Alcohol Action Team's experience in providing the following inclusive qualification programme;

The Progression Award in Community Justice (Drug & Alcohol Services) – now known as the Certificate in Community Justice.

A. INTRODUCTION

Working in partnership with South Kent College, Folkestone, KCC's Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team (KDAAT) introduced a pilot of this qualification in January 2007 for trainee and volunteer substance misuser workers.

Research had highlighted successful programmes running elsewhere in England. KDAAT identified this stand alone award as a suitable and inclusive programme for Kent. This qualification would provide a pathway into education, training and volunteering/employment for all, including ex-service users – some of whom are also ex-offenders.

The first of its kind available in Kent, this City & Guilds Level 3 qualification is a nationally recognized qualification and provides students with the underpinning knowledge for Drug and Alcohol National Occupational Standards (DANOS). It is a practice-based development programme and, therefore in addition to one-day per week attendance at college for 1 year and a commitment to self-study, students need to have paid or voluntary work in the drug and alcohol services field. The course attracts part funding from the Learning Skills Council. The Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team (KDAAT) offer a bursary to help with the remaining fees and some expenses.

The benefits to the students (and the local workforce) include increased knowledge, professionalism, skills and abilities. It has raised the confidence and self-esteem particularly of those who are ex service users as it has given them a focus and provides the opportunity to give something back to the community. The course has assisted many individuals with their own recovery, helped them re-integrate into society and 'feel trusted' again.

In addition, Students have also achieved significant personal milestones e.g.

- regaining their driving licence,
- regaining their passport
- reuniting with family members
- sense of achievement in gaining a qualification – perhaps for the first time successfully obtaining paid employment.

The course appealed to many of our ex-service users because it provides a pathway into employment in a field where personal experience in substance misuse (and in some cases offending) is an advantage.

B. WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE TELL US ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFELONG LEARNING AND CRIME AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

1. The evidence tells us that lifelong learning can help break the cycle of crime and addiction.
2. Colleges are inclusive – they provide learning support for students with additional needs. Spelling and presentation is less important than content and this is enormously helpful for those with e.g. dyslexia who had in the past struggled in or even dropped out of school.
3. For many returning to Education is a daunting experience. The college environment is supportive and provides many additional benefits such as counseling, careers advice, access to a library and IT resources. Skilled and experience tutors play a crucial role in students' induction, ongoing support and motivation as well as the knowledge input.

C. WHAT ARE THE GAPS IN EVIDENCE IN RELATION TO THIS THEME?

- 1 The gaps here are that by the time our students start the course they are already in recovery so their substance misusing and offending behaviour issues have already been addressed in treatment and/or Prison.

D. WHAT KEY MESSAGES FOR THE INQUIRY SHOULD BE EXTRACTED?

This course has helped many get back into paid employment in the drug and alcohol field. It is successful because:

- KDAAT works in partnership with the college, provides specialist tutors, speakers and relevant information and paperwork that would not otherwise be available to the college.
- it is practice-based and requires students to have paid or unpaid work so students can immediately put their learning into practice in the workplace
- KDAAT provides a bursary to help with fees and a hardship grant to help reimburse travel expenses and lunch. (Our students generally are on benefits and so have very limited funds – reimbursement helps them with their basic needs – to get to college and eat a decent meal - and thus also motivates them to attend regularly and assists concentration whilst at college.)
- students gradually regain their confidence, self-esteem and gain additional knowledge and skills in the work environment.
- The qualification includes relevant topics for working in the drug and alcohol field. Other topics help with communication, relationships and managing conflict – all of which are crucial in everyday life; helps them gain an understanding of policies and procedures that have to be followed in the working environment.
- The course has wider personal development benefits e.g. writing assignments helps them develop report writing and IT skills. Two units require students to work as a group and deliver presentations thus developing their team working and presentation skills.

There are also benefits to employers, including:

- Some employers have had success where they have provided stable users with opportunities within the workplace on a voluntary basis as part of their rehabilitation. Such an arrangement brings mutual benefits. For example, it provides an employer with the additional opportunity of a trial period to assess an individual's skills, ability, competence and potential. As is often the case when individuals experience unemployment or long-term absences from work, an individual who is 'in recovery' from drug or alcohol dependence is likely to, initially, have low self-confidence and self-esteem. Resuming or starting employment can be very daunting for them. However, undertaking a voluntary placement or work trial can be key to an individual's recovery and reintegration into the working environment. It gives them the opportunity to rebuild their confidence and skills until they're ready to move from, say, income support to paid employment. In many cases, given this second

chance such individuals have become highly motivated, committed and loyal employees.

- Employers should note that it is likely that a former substance misuser may have a criminal record/history. Often information that is shared on a disclosure will be dated only around the time they were misusing substances. It would be important to take this into account when assessing employment suitability. Organisations should develop policies on employing people with criminal records and make appropriate changes to their recruitment and employment practices. Many offenders who get jobs turn out to be reliable and committed employees who are loyal and hard working. Employment is often one of the single most important factors in reducing reoffending.

E WHAT MODES OF EDUCATION HAVE BEEN PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN RECIDIVISM AND/OR PRODUCING LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON CRIMINAL ACTIVITY?

Research shows that drug treatment can achieve reductions in offending behaviour. Therefore, this type of qualification programme is an ideal Aftercare provision for some.

This qualification is delivered in a classroom 1 day per week and also requires minimum 4 hours per week voluntary/paid work in the field. Self-study is also required including reading/research as students need to complete assignments, although some time in college is also allocated to assignment writing. Students are encouraged to enter into a learning agreement with their volunteer/paid employer.

Students bond with the class mates over time and provide support for each other. We encourage them to identify a 'study buddy'.

F. WHAT CATEGORIES OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR ARE MOST OPEN TO EDUCATIONAL TREATMENT AND HOW MIGHT THIS BE DEVELOPED?

Criminal backgrounds of students in this field include:

Misuse of drugs, and related crime e.g. Theft, burglary, GBH, ABH, manslaughter i.e. as a result of drunk/drug driving - see case study below:

To protect the identity of the individual, he is referred to as 'B'. 'B' applied for a place on the Progression Award in Community Justice course whilst still in a category D (open) prison. For the first month or so until he was fully released from prison he attended college on a 'day release' basis every week. The prison had carried out the appropriate risk assessment and every week the college submitted appropriate paperwork regarding 'B's attendance e.g. timekeeping and conduct. Once he was released from prison he took up a volunteer position with Turning Point alongside his attendance at South Kent College. He completed the course, was an excellent and participative student and as you will read in his employer's statement below is not in full time employment :

'B' has a history of 21 criminal convictions ranging from theft of motor vehicles, burglaries, numerous robberies and intent to supply class A drugs. He has spent a total of 18 years in prison for his offences. His first custodial sentence was borstal at aged 16 years. His last custodial sentence was 4 1/2 years for robbery. During this sentence 'B' attended a RAPT programme which changed his life. He made a conscious decision to "try something different" as his life of drugs, crime and imprisonment was not bringing himself or his family anything but misery. Whilst on licence 'B' applied to volunteer with Turning Point. A comprehensive risk assessment was undertaken, under Turning Point Policies and Procedures, which included information from the prison. 'B' started with administration duties and soon proved himself to be reliable, honest, enthusiastic, committed, self aware and very eager to make a difference to other peoples lives as he possessed personal experience of the positive effects of making 'right' choices. 'B' continued volunteering and progressing in his role and responsibilities. He applied for a paid position when he was experienced enough to do so and was successful in obtaining employment on his own merit. 'B' has proven to be a very valuable member of staff and his past criminal history in no way impedes the excellent work he undertakes with the clients and the service. His comment is "I'm not proud of my past but I have given myself new opportunities in life and proven myself, I think I deserve opportunities from others"

G WHAT KINDS OF INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT ARE NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN THE PART LIFELONG LEARNING PLAYS IN COMBATING SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

- Anything that helps it easier for employers to establish this type of course – the system is unclear to those outside education. It took me months to track down the right person in the Learning Skills Council (LSC) and then negotiate with a college. Skills for Justice had already developed the qualification but had no

influence locally to encourage colleges to provide the qualification. I was accompanied on an introductory meeting with colleges by Skills for Justice but because neither of us were aware of the system it was only when I spoke with the right person in the LSC that I learnt I needed to liaise with the college which held Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in Health & Social Care. I was the driving force, link and co-ordinator between Skills for Justice, Learning Skills Council and the colleges. If I had given up my battle, deterred by the barriers, this course wouldn't exist in Kent.

- Also funding is an issue – without KDAAT's funding students could not afford the fees or related expenses to attend college every week. Even for those whose course fees are waived and they only have to pay registration and certification, the expense is still too high for these students. Many of the students are vulnerable adults and need lots of support, both financial and encouragement.

KDAAT's budget is also limited. Supporting this course is only one part of my role so my time is also limited.

Although the course is open to anyone in Kent, more funding would enable this course to be replicated in a 2nd college in another part of the County; thus reducing the distance some have to travel and associated costs whilst increasing the number of people whose lives could be changed.

Funding for a dedicated post to act as the link between employers and colleges could also be considered.

- More practice-based qualifications in other employment areas are needed – this programme which provides a career pathway into drug and alcohol services is not suitable for every recovered drug misuser.
- The Government's 2008 Drug Strategy : *'Drugs: protecting families and communities'* Page 30 – 32 describes links with other Government programmes to tackle social exclusion among adults and at risk families. These initiatives are welcome.

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