



Consultation on the National Strategy for Higher Education

Guidance Document

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Submission to Phase 1

Consultation on the National Strategy for Higher Education

Introduction

The Mental Health Commission (MHC) is an independent statutory body established under the Mental Health Act, 2001. The principal functions of the Mental Health Commission, as defined by the Act, shall be *‘to promote, encourage and foster the establishment and maintenance of high standards and good practices in the delivery of mental health services and to take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of persons detained in approved centres under this Act’*. Mental Health Act 2001 Section 33 (1)

The Mental Health Act 2001 has been described as the most significant legislative change for mental health services in Ireland for over 60 years. In addition, the 2001 Act provides for the appointment of an Inspector of Mental Health Services. It also provides for the licensing of all in-patient facilities providing care and treatment for people with a mental illness or mental disorder. Other provisions in the Act refer to rules pertaining to treatment and regulations for approved centres. The 2001 Act has undoubtedly introduced radical reform within Irish mental health services. It has introduced comprehensive human rights protections for those admitted involuntarily, thereby leading to a high level of accountability and external scrutiny.

The MHC commissioned a study to identify “the current education/training available for professionals working in mental health services in the Republic of Ireland”. Findings from this study suggest that while there are a variety of courses for professionals working in mental health to choose from there are still a number of gaps in education provision. Based on the outcomes of this study the MHC propose the following; course developments to meet contemporary and future needs, service user involvement and research as the three most significant changes for consideration by the National Strategy group.

Introduction to Mental Health Services

Mental health practitioners are facing some of the greatest challenges ever encountered. Throughout Europe, mental health services are shifting from an institutional model towards a comprehensive, integrated, community based mode of delivery. Similar to mental health services in other European countries, the Mental Health Services in Ireland are also undergoing unprecedented levels of change and are responding to the recommendations of the national policy document ‘*A Vision for Change: Report of the expert group on Mental Health Policy*’ (Department of Health and Children 2006) and the reforming Mental Health Legislation (Government of Ireland 2001). Recent policy initiatives and guidance documents have continuously emphasised the provision of a quality service, highlighting the need to develop a holistic, seamless, socially inclusive, recovery and empowering oriented service, which fosters active partnerships between service users/carers and professionals (Department of Health and Children 2006; 2007; 2008; Mental Health Commission 2005; 2007; National Economic and Social Forum 2007). Prominence is also placed on future services that are delivered in the

context of the best available evidence and interdisciplinary working (Department of Health and Children 2006; Mental Health Commission 2006; 2007).

1. Course developments to meet contemporary and future needs

Increasingly there is recognition that the education and development of the workforce is a critical step in the provision of the kind of care envisioned. Having a high quality, well educated and motivated workforce is key for the successful implementation of the directives outlined in '*A Vision for Change: Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy*' (Department of Health and Children 2006) and '*The Quality Framework for Mental Health Services in Ireland*' (Mental Health Commission 2007). One of the quality markers identified, by users of mental health services, in the document '*Quality in Mental Health - Your Views*' was the need for services to be delivered by highly skilled multidisciplinary teams (Mental Health Commission 2005). The emphasis on staff expertise is also reiterated by the Mental Health Commission in '*The Quality Framework for Mental Health Services in Ireland*'. Theme 7 of this document identifies staff skills, competencies and expertise as the key enablers required if service users are to experience a quality mental health service (Mental Health Commission 2007). Practitioners working with people who experience mental health problems not only require core values, attitudes, knowledge and competencies, but they also need the ability to apply these in practice, across a range of clinical contexts. Therefore, the provision of high quality education and training that is responsive, relevant, accessible and evidence based is critical, if the modernisation agenda, and the vision for quality mental health services articulated in all of the recent publications, is to be realised.

- In the current economic climate, training and education for mental healthcare professionals must continue to be developed in an integrated manner and in liaison with healthcare providers.
- Course development needs to take place in line with contemporary service requirements, aligned to service policy and needs.
- There is a need for more imaginative ways to marry health service needs as regards maintaining contemporary skills, with the individual needs of students. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) should be encouraged and supported in the development of a variety of flexible learning approaches and methodologies.
- The creation and delivery of stand alone modules could offer students a greater degree of flexibility towards Level 8 and Level 9 programmes of study.
- Online and blended learning would facilitate student to engage in programmes through the process of distance learning and enable student to access learning materials at their convenience.
- Education programmes need to be underpinned by a recovery and social inclusion philosophy of practice, and greater emphasis placed on policy and practice documents that are fundamental to service development and delivery.
- Ongoing evaluation and quality assurance strategies are a key element of governance.

- There is a need to develop strategies that explore the impact of education programmes on service provision and health outcomes and incorporate the perspectives of service providers, service users and carers.
- There is a need to explore provision of short continuing professional development courses, either within the HEI or within clinical sites. This may involve the HEI's strengthening links with care providers and delivering programmes on an outreach basis.
- Higher Education Institutions, in partnership with service providers, need to identify core elements of education programmes, including legal provisions underpinning mental health services, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level that are applicable to all professions and suitable for interprofessional education.
- HEIs in partnership with service providers need to develop work-based interprofessional learning initiatives.
- HEIs and service providers need to engage in a consultative dialogue with accreditation organizations and professional bodies so that their requirements and needs are acknowledged from the outset. Long term the development of a single inclusive validation framework may be worthy of consideration.
- Professional accrediting bodies need to adopt a facilitative approach to interprofessional education and enable both HEI's and service providers' autonomy to develop creative and innovative programmes to meet the challenges of today's health care environment.
- Educators need to move away from the traditional didactic lecture approach to a greater emphasis on facilitation and small group learning. This necessitates a greater emphasis

being placed within curricula on interactive and discovery styles of learning, such as action learning sets and problem/enquiry based learning.

2. Involvement of Service Users

Meaningful involvement of service users and carers requires a broad strategy that encompasses users and carers being involved in the planning, design, delivery, evaluation and management of programmes, the teaching and assessment of students in both the classroom and practice area, and the recruitment and selection of students (Barnes, Carpenter, and Bailey 2000; Barnes, Davis, and Rogers 2006; Brooker and Curren 2005; Tew, Gell, and Foster 2004; Townend et al. 2008).

- HEIs in partnership with the relevant stakeholders which include; service user groups, health service providers, and professional bodies need to develop an overall strategy for the involvement of service users/carers in education. This strategy needs to address issues such as educational preparation, support and payment of service users/carers, as well as a strategy for evaluation.
- HEIs should review their philosophy/mission statements to ensure that they are underpinned by an explicit statement of values supporting service user/carer involvement in educational programmes in their institution/school/department.
- HEIs should collaborate with each other and service user/carer groups in the development and delivery of training for service users and carers who are contributing to programmes.
- HEIs need to broaden the scope of service user involvement beyond teaching into more areas of education, including assessment and student selection.

3. Research

Research is of equal importance to the service user, the policy maker and the practitioner. The Mental Health Commission, since its establishment, has actively supported the development of mental health services research programmes. Working with other agencies including the Health Research Board, The Economic and Social Research Institute, third level institutions, service user research groups on an all-Ireland basis, mental health services research will remain a key priority in the MHC Strategic Plan.

The challenge for the Mental Health Commission, in collaboration with all our stakeholders, is to promote research in the Irish mental health services which will be accessible and relevant to those working in the mental health services, involves users, addresses the complexities and changing needs in mental health and encourages innovation and critical appraisal.

Increasingly, calls for research and evidence based practices (EBP) within mental health education and provision are evident in the literature (Cape and Barkham 2002; Craik et al. 1998; Forchuk 2001; Goodheart et al. 2005). Results from the study commissioned by the MHC indicates that evidence based practice was seen by many as a necessary requirement in education provision. Opportunities for the application of research findings to clinical practice and clinical practice-based research into mental health issues were also of significance to many of the respondents. The study team also noted, in the early stages of the data collection process, a considerable number of 'academic/research' PhD's but there was a dearth of Clinical Doctorates available and being marketed.

- HEIs should review their philosophy/mission statements/course literature to ensure that they explicate an active commitment to evidence based practice and implement pedagogical methods which support EBP education.
- HEIs should promote a research attitude and an increase in research capability for practitioners working in mental health in a manner that is cognisant of the specific practice and research context.
- HEIs, in collaboration with professional bodies that hold responsibility for guiding or accrediting curricula in mental health education, have a vital role in promoting curricula which advance research and evidence based practice.
- In the absence of Clinical PhD's, their development needs to be explored in order to provide progression and support for those wishing to remain in clinical practice

Obstacles and Barriers

- As less than half of courses reviewed within the scoping study succeeded in filling their entire course places, this information needs to be carefully examined locally and nationally in relation to course viability and resource effectiveness.
- Post-graduate pathways for certain disciplines, such as Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy need to be explored and developed if there are to be sufficient numbers interested in working in the area of mental health in the future.
- It is essential that student learning, both at undergraduate and post-graduate level should receive adequate funding and other supports.

- In order to promote an educational culture with respect to interprofessional learning, adequate financial resource must be committed to support this change.
- Unless service user and carer involvement becomes part of the process of accreditation, commissioning and funding of courses, their involvement will remain at a limited level and participation at the level of full partnership will largely remain an aspiration.
- The promotion of an evidence-based approach to the provision of mental health services is one of the functions of the Mental Health Commission. However, there is a lack of quality mental health research in Ireland that can direct service development in a strategic manner.

Conclusion

Increasingly there is recognition that the education and development of the workforce is a critical step in the provision of the kind of care envisioned. Having a high quality, well educated and motivated workforce is key for the successful implementation of the directives outlined in legislation, Government policy and MHC standards. Therefore, the provision of high quality education and training that is responsive, relevant, accessible and evidence based is critical, if the modernisation agenda, and the vision for quality mental health services articulated in all of the recent publications, is to be realised.

This submission is focused on the statutory remit of the MHC and it views that the three areas identified; course developments to meet contemporary and future needs; service user/stakeholder involvement and research are relevant to all academic programmes.

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