

Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN)

Inter-Subject Centre Seminar on Learning and Teaching in Mental Health in Higher Education

Summary Report.

The purpose of the seminar, held in York on 8/9 April 2002, was to initiate a debate about how learning and teaching in mental health in higher education might be enhanced. The objectives were: to develop a shared understanding of different approaches to learning and teaching, to identify strengths, development needs and other drivers for change, to explore ways of improving teaching and learning within and across different disciplines, to test assumptions and explore perhaps unforeseen problems and consequences, and to consider how to take the work forward and the role the LTSN might play in this.

Five or six participants were invited by each of the four LTSNs (Health Sciences and Practice; Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine; Psychology; and Social Policy and Social Work - SWAP), all of whom had a special interest in mental health issues in learning and teaching.

After introductions, each LTSN Subject Centre gave a brief report of their work to date. Participants then worked in groups to establish common ground about the teaching and learning of subjects associated with mental health. All groups acknowledged that this is a contested domain, subject to variable understanding and constructions. There was agreement that developing a user focus was important; this could be achieved by involving users in HE, enabling users to access HE, and valuing user experience.

On the second day participants discussed how to develop the network and deliver improvements in learning and teaching for Mental Health including course design, content, delivery, assessment, validation and evaluation. In particular it was agreed that all courses should aim to be user focussed, evidence based and that all courses should include learning about diversity, social inclusion, respect and user experience perhaps taught across a number of disciplines and possibly in an interprofessional context.

It was agreed that the four LTSN centres could build on the seminar by collecting and disseminating information to the wider network of people involved in HE and mental health. This might include holding national and or regional conferences, and perhaps developing recommendations for courses for all those studying mental health (e.g. on values, social inclusion, listening, interprofessional understanding and collaboration and diversity issues). Guidelines for user involvement in teaching and learning, placements, teaching and assessment might be developed to include better understanding of diverse approaches to mental health and different professional perspectives. In advance of the seminar a bid had been made to the LTSN Development Fund for further work (since the deadline was before the event), which would enable the agenda forward.

Participants worked hard to get to know each other and to exchange views and experience with people from different professional and education perspectives. There was lively debate about the extent to which values across disciplines and professions might be shared, and how to respond when they differed. On an organisational level, it was recognised that working towards

interprofessional education can present a real challenge to the entrenched institutionalism and departmentalism between and within Universities and between professional bodies.

In order to influence the wider HE community seminar participants agreed that

1. Communication with others involved in HE and mental health is needed to build a broad coalition. A discussion list and a dedicated web-site could be established to enable this. Participants identified existing networks to which this initiative might link, and other imminent events.
2. To move the agenda forward, further participation would be needed by those present and by others.
3. Disseminating and acting on the values and principles expressed at the seminar, especially those of interprofessional/interdisciplinary learning and user involvement could be achieved by individuals and groups working in their own institutions to gain the support of leadership, circulating information about the LTSN initiative and applying for funding to improve learning and teaching. There is potential for mental health to lead the way in interprofessional working and the involvement of users, survivors and carers.
4. Examples of innovative courses that involve users and are interdisciplinary need to be collated, debated and disseminated to stimulate change.

Throughout the seminar, discussion moved frequently from education to practice to research; there was debate about whether changes in practice came from wider changes in society, from developments in policy, organisations, research, or from education and training. Overall, participants were committed to enhancing learning and teaching in mental health in HE, which might then contribute to the improvement in service provision to those experiencing mental distress.

May 2002