

5. TRAINING AND AWARENESS RAISING

This section is concerned with the measures that can be taken to train members of the institution in different aspects of mental health awareness and to look at other means to raise the general profile of mental health issues among staff and students.

5.1 The purpose of mental health awareness training

- There tends to be great variation in the level of awareness of mental health issues within institutions. By providing at least basic training for everyone, essential good practice, especially in terms of creating a non-stigmatising community, are understood by all.
- Through training the institution can ensure that specific protocols are followed uniformly to ensure a fair and consistent approach to individual cases.
- Training can be very effective in building confidence and dispelling fears, thus enabling people to accept their responsibilities and roles at whatever level they are working.
- As part of the ethos of an institution with an educational mission, there is an argument for an informed and enlightened community in terms of mental health issues.
- A visible and regular mental health awareness training programme acts as a constant reminder of the issues and related policy and confirms a commitment to these issues by the institution

5.2 Who should receive training?

- Everyone in the institution, staff and students, should have some basic awareness of mental health issues to enable them to recognise when and where to refer and to work towards a non-discriminatory community. This awareness may be partly achieved through more general mental health awareness campaigns (see [section 5.6.1](#)). However, actual training is also needed to determine whether the essential messages of mental health awareness (see [section 5.5](#)) are understood.
- Following on from basic training, certain groups of staff or students may benefit from more specific, customised training e.g. Students' Union welfare staff, staff in residences, portering and security staff, academic tutors, specific student support services, secretarial and reception staff.

5.3 Who should do the training?

- Trainers may be identified within the institution especially for basic awareness training. It may be possible to identify some staff who are likely

already to have some experience in this area (e.g. from health or counselling services) or who could attend training themselves in order then to facilitate training in their own institution (i.e. attending a 'Training the Trainers' course). This approach can be cost effective and some staff may be more receptive to training from colleagues who appreciate the specific context within which they have to operate.

- For more advanced training on specific topics, it would usually be appropriate to use external expertise. Many voluntary organisations have local offices which can provide training as well as training materials and national organisations also run programmes which can be taken to institutions (see [section 7](#) for examples). Local health care trusts, mental health promotion workers and other services may be able to work in co-operatively, perhaps opening up training events to a wider audience, sharing costs and allowing useful interchange.

5.4 Embedding training: maximising participation

- One of the key challenges in developing a training programme is to maximise participation. Especially with the introduction of legislation around disability and special educational needs, ensuring that people have actually received training, as opposed simply to having offered training, is of special significance.
- A way to ensure all new staff receive basic mental health awareness training is to build at least an introductory session into the staff induction programme. Those who have participated at this stage are found to be more responsive to further training during their career.
- In addition to new staff induction, liaison with staff development can enable a session to be run regular as part of their programme.
- A more radical approach is that of seeking to make such training compulsory. Although this may not be the common or current ethos, there may be more reason to look at this in the context of related legislation (e.g. Special Educational Needs and Disability Act with reference to the inclusion of mental health difficulties)
- Training tied in to existing programmes of qualification and career development will reach a wider audience e.g. working with teaching and learning strategies or vocational qualifications for teaching staff, front line staff (such as Welcome Host).
- Given time restraints, short, targeted training sessions may be much more attractive to busy staff than whole day events. A series of sessions run in conjunction with departmental meetings may make it much easier for more staff to attend. In such cases, linking training with departmental based discussions can make those attending more receptive to issues which are directly relevant to them.
- Following a difficult situation or a crisis, connected with mental health issues, there may be a good opportunity to offer a relevant training programme to those involved. At these times people may be more aware

of their need for basic guidance on good practice and referral to enable them to act more confidently in the future. Part of the debriefing (see [section 4.1.5](#)) after a crisis situation might therefore include a plan of action incorporating a number of stages of training.

- Co-operation between training initiatives run by institutional services and Students' Unions allows for efficiency of effort and resources and is a positive means of involving the student community in dialogue about best practice.
- Actual training sessions can be supplemented by training materials available in a multiple of formats e.g. web based, written, audio visual. These may be more accessible for those whose time for attending sessions is limited and who may wish to build upon basic knowledge. Other alternatives to standard training sessions could include events or exhibitions in conjunction with academic departments looking at related issues (e.g. related research projects).
- Identifying and using internal expertise, such as that connected with relevant research work, can be efficient in terms of resources but also raise the profile of the issues involved within the institution.
- A questionnaire or survey aimed at defining people's actual training needs may result in greater participation if sessions are perceived as being directly responsive to demand.

5.5 A model for an initial mental health awareness training session

Training in specific areas of mental health will normally be done by professionals, whether internal or external, and various organisations (see [section 7](#)) may be useful sources of training personnel and materials. However, the basics elements of a mental health awareness training session, suitable for all members of the institutional community, are summarised in this section.

5.5.1 Introduction: this will contain the aims and objectives of the session (i.e. raising awareness of the issues, introducing understanding of what is meant by mental health and mental health difficulties and key facts on roles and boundaries, confidentiality and referral). It is also an opportunity to define 'mental health' i.e. as something that everyone has.

5.5.2 Challenging stigma: challenging the stigma and misunderstanding around mental health issues is a key part of basic mental health awareness training. This part of a session lends itself to group activities such as looking at the common misapprehensions around mental ill-health through a group questionnaire, discussions of media portrayal of mental ill-health or hearing the accounts of those who have experienced mental health difficulties (see [section 7](#) for resources).

5.5.3 Definitions and effects: this will cover what is meant by the general terms such as mental health difficulties and mental ill-health (see [section 1.4](#))

and will touch on the difference between mental health difficulties and distress. The stress is on the effects of mental health difficulties and the dangers of labelling. Information on specific 'conditions' has generally not been recommended as part of basic mental health awareness training. However, for those who may wish to learn more, relevant resources (see section 7) could be made available after the session.

5.5.4 How to support those experiencing mental health difficulties: this part of a training session gives some practical insight into who and what can help those experiencing mental health difficulties, with the emphasis that this is not just a welfare or support service responsibility. It will be helpful to look at the range of people and services who can be in a supporting role and, particularly, the appropriate lines of referral, internal and external, specific to the institution. Practical guidelines with institution specific information, in the form of a flow chart may be helpful. This session will need to include basic guidance on confidentiality, roles and boundaries and handling a crisis situation (see also section 3). The use of case studies within this part of the training may be a useful way of gauging how well participants have understood key issues.

5.5.5 Summing up: at the end of an initial training session there may be several individual queries which need to be followed up. Participants could be encouraged to write queries on a card to be handed in so that responses can be given after the event, but also circulated to other members of the group. Further training needs should be identified and requirements for follow up training.

5.6 Other means of raising mental health awareness

In addition to running training sessions, mental health awareness, from issues around mental wellbeing to those concerning mental ill-health, may be achieved through campaigns or events and the development of appropriate resources.

5.6.1 Mental Health Awareness campaigns

- Awareness raising campaigns and events can be particularly effective if tied in with national initiatives, such as World Mental Health Day, as there will be access to relevant national and local resources and messages will be reinforced by activities in the press and media at the same time. Specific initiatives, such as 'Mindout for Mental Health' (Reference: <http://www.mindout.net>)
- Drawing upon local organisations and initiatives is also essential for efficient and wider reaching campaigning. It is worth establishing regular liaison with, for example, the local healthcare trust's mental health promotion staff as well as local voluntary agencies or support groups.
- To maximise student and staff involvement, co-operative working between institutional staff and Students' Union staff is critical.
- Campaigns that include practical activities (e.g. sessions introducing ways to promote mental wellbeing, such as exercise sessions or alternative

therapies e.g. aromatherapy, may be particularly effective in terms of general mental health promotion.

- Campaigns can be tied in to arts and cultural events with themes associated with mental health included. This has been done very effectively in many regions in conjunction with mental health promotion teams in the community, and institutions may be well placed for involvement, especially those with relevant academic departments.
- Institution websites and staff electronic news bulletins are other effective ways of advertising mental health awareness events to the widest possible audience

5.6.2 Resources and materials

- A resource included in the institution's library in addition to distributed leaflets will allow for more detailed material on mental health issues to be available to staff and students
- Resources and materials must be kept up to date especially those that include contact details.
- In addition to an institution's own materials, many voluntary agencies have excellent, free or low cost resources (see section 7).
- It is important that there are materials available as widely as possible, both as leaflets distributed throughout the institution and accessible through the website. Specific details are needed of whom to contact for referral purposes both internally and in terms of external agencies e.g. the local mental health crisis intervention service.

5.6.3 Making an institution wide impact

The critical issue with mental health awareness raising is to make an impact throughout the institution, not only with those who identify these issues as part of their daily responsibility, to work towards a non-stigmatising, well informed community. Training, campaigns and resources are all aimed to achieve this. Other measures may include:

- The involvement of senior management not only in the development of policy and protocol but in backing training and awareness raising events, being present at relevant launches of campaigns and commending participation to colleagues.
- Ensuring that commitment to mental health issues and development of training and awareness is referred to positively in formal institutional documentation, committee procedures and relevant policy (e.g. equal opportunities).
- Encouraging support services to work co-operatively to bridge different professional approaches and hence increase impact as well as effective cross-referral.