

# Improving services for people with mental health difficulties

**August 2006**

This document is of interest to everyone in the  
learning and skills sector

# Improving services for people with mental health difficulties

1. Mental health difficulties can affect anyone at any time in their lives. Education can be a powerful tool in combating social exclusion and promoting positive mental health and well-being.
2. We, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), made a commitment in our *Annual Statement of Priorities for 2005/06* (LSC 2005) to publish proposals to improve services for people with mental health difficulties. We continue with this commitment in our *Annual Statement of Priorities for 2006/07* (LSC 2006). Our proposals are outlined here. They represent an opportunity for the further education system to respond to the wider social inclusion agenda as envisaged by the recent White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (Department for Education and Skills 2006), to make a difference to the life chances and opportunities available to people who experience mental health difficulties. The proposals also sit within the context of a number of other policies and agendas, including *Every Child Matters* (HM Government 2003); *Youth Matters* (Department for Education and Skills 2005); *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services* (Department of Health 2006); *A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work* (Department for Work and Pensions 2006); our own *agenda for change* (LSC 2005); and, of course, *Through Inclusion to Excellence* (LSC 2005), the report of the strategic review of the LSC's planning and funding of provision for learners with learning difficulties across the post-16 sector.
6. The needs of learners with mental health difficulties also sit within other policies that address the drive for economic prosperity and social justice in this country. As one of the most disadvantaged groups of people in the labour market, skills for employability and economic participation of learners with mental health difficulties are a key issue. Yet policies also recognise that education is vital in building strong communities, promoting social cohesion and inclusion, and for personal growth, empowerment and well-being.

## Policy context

3. The Social Exclusion Unit report *Mental Health and Social Exclusion* (Social Exclusion Unit 2004) is based on a clear agenda to:
  - modernise mental health services so that people experiencing mental health problems will be supported to access mainstream services
  - tackle stigma and discrimination by supporting social inclusion of people with mental health difficulties
  - challenge the culture of low expectations placed upon people with mental health difficulties
  - support achievement and success.

Responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations, including those on education, rests with the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE).

4. *Through Inclusion to Excellence* notes the "huge amount of wasted potential, as disabled people struggle against continual discrimination and barriers" and stresses that "more emphasis should be placed on progression to employment and the acquisition of skills that enable disabled people to play a full and active part in their communities".
5. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which was extended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, gives legal rights to people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including mental health problems, in education.

## Proposals

7. In order to improve services for learners with mental health difficulties, the LSC will adopt four broad aims which align with our *Annual Statement of Priorities* and with the recently published *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*.

### Build the capacity of the further education (FE) system

8. Improving services for learners with mental health difficulties rests on our ability to build the capacity of all providers to promote access and achievement in learning. Central to building the capacity of the FE system will be the need to ensure that we listen to learners/service users. We also need to:
  - raise awareness of mental health across the whole of the FE system, which includes colleges of FE and sixth-form colleges, adult and community learning providers, school sixth forms, work-based learning providers and specialist colleges for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
  - ensure that there are opportunities for providers to share good practice and access training and resources that will help them to meet the needs of learners with mental health difficulties
  - ensure that providers understand how a variety of funding streams can support and maximise the opportunities available to people.

### Boost demand for learning

9. We need to ensure that more people with mental health difficulties, including older learners, offenders and those from black and minority ethnic groups, are supported and encouraged to access the learning opportunities that reflect their needs and aspirations. We will achieve this through:
  - promotional literature, campaigns and activities to inform people of the opportunities available to them, and of the benefits of learning, especially if they reflect the learner voice and experience
  - improved information, advice and guidance (IAG) and learning brokerage, particularly where it is delivered in partnership with health and social care providers
  - working with Care Programme Approach managers to ensure that those adults on Care Programme Approach are supported to access learning opportunities.

### Ensure quality of provision

10. We want to ensure that when any learner with mental health difficulties accesses learning it is positive and successful. Places of learning need to promote and protect positive mental health and well-being. We will ensure quality of provision through:
- listening to and involving learners to understand what they value in learning and what helps and supports their learning and achievement
  - working with, for example, the Quality Improvement Agency to identify "good practice providers" and share good practice to help those providers with less well-developed provision
  - the development of performance indicators/impact measures on, for example, attendance, retention and achievement
  - recognising that different groups of learners need different approaches, for example young people with mental health problems, people who misuse drugs and alcohol, and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities who also experience mental health difficulties.

### Raise the achievement levels of learners with mental health difficulties

11. Key to the work we have to do to improve services for learners with mental health difficulties must be the commitment to ensure that learners with mental health difficulties are enabled to fulfil their potential. To achieve this, we need to:
- strengthen progression routes to and from FE and training into, for example, higher education or employment
  - work with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to ensure that the qualifications framework is flexible enough to allow for learners with fluctuating conditions or more transient lifestyles to mark their progress and achievement.

### Collaboration

12. Collaboration is key to the success of these proposals. The achievement of each one of these aims will require learning providers to work in partnership with a wider range of agencies, including Primary Care Trusts, Mental Health Trusts, Social Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Early Intervention Services, Secure Units, Forensic Services, the Prison and Probation Services, Jobcentre Plus, service user groups and the community and voluntary sector. Integrated support at transition is crucial. In particular, we need to work with the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus to enable appropriate transition for those on Incapacity Benefit, many of whom have mental health difficulties, into appropriate employment. In addition, we need to ensure that we work in partnership with health and social care providers and voluntary and community organisations in order to understand better how we can promote social inclusion through learning.

### What next?

13. The LSC has joined with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and NIMHE to promote access to learning and skills for people with mental health difficulties. A national Task Group has been formed to oversee the work of this partnership, and to monitor the effectiveness of these proposals.
14. Nine regional networks have been operational since 2004 with membership from learning and skills sector providers, health and social care providers, voluntary and community groups, learners and service users and local LSCs. These networks are supported by regional project officers and represent an opportunity to learn, share and disseminate good practice. They are also a resource for further research and development work and can be the vehicle by which we can transform provision for learners with mental health difficulties and make a difference.
15. The project is managed nationally by NIACE so that all increased knowledge and understanding arising out of regional development work can be aggregated nationally and disseminated to all regions to ensure a coordinated approach to improving services for learners with mental health difficulties. It is envisaged that this work on mental health will become integral to the emerging regional strategies for provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
16. Following the publication of these proposals, an action plan will be developed for their implementation. The LSC welcomes any comments the sector, learners, employers and agencies may wish to make. Comments should be sent, by 13 October 2006, to:

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