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1972 - 2012



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Building Capacity in Drugs Education

Insights from the University of Limerick ...

18th April 2013, Dublin

*Dr. Patricia Mannix McNamara
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick*



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I speak to you today on behalf of the University of Limerick and our partner colleagues.

The partnership is the foundation upon which the programme success rests.

Eva Devaney Co-Director of the programme
(UL)

Esther Woulfe, Brid Casey and Aoibhinn King
(HSE)

Christine McElhenny (VEC)





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The data upon which I will base some of my comments are the results of empirical research undertaken by Ms Brid Casey (HSE)

3 areas I would like to touch on

- Partnership
- Student experience/value/motivation
- Positioning of Drugs Education in current climates in Higher Education





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The diploma in Drug and Alcohol Studies is currently offered at (level 7 NQF)...

It is offered in three centers nationally

- ❖ UL campus
- ❖ Dublin (Cherry Orchard)
- ❖ Donegal





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Not a simple case of outreach where we designate centers and transport teachers to each center

Each center has coordinators; experienced in drugs education in their area.

Education from the expertise in the region + UL





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- The programme is **embedded in each region** through the coordinators, **off campus hub...conduit to and from the University**
- The coordinators have strong networks in each region e.g. Task Forces, VEC, HSE Addiction Services, community projects, alcohol forum...





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The partnership has been tremendously successful
(partnership can be complex)

Due to the people and their commitment to
education as building individual and community
capacity

Set of shared values (student centeredness;
respect and reciprocity; presence; integrity;
trust...)

The partnership voices are equal at the table...





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- Constant challenge of consistency across three centers...but flexibility is prioritized
- It is this openness and flexibility that gives the partnership its oxygen





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To date there are approximately 208 graduates of the programme since its inception in 2007

These graduates come from a range of backgrounds employed, unemployed, homemakers, carers, CE schemes, voluntary work, FAS etc...





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Educational attainment of students on programme entry is particularly varied

The survey of graduates shows while many (72.2%) will have attained a primary degree or above, a significant number have below leaving certificate attainment (27.8%) with some of these (5%) completing primary school only.

This brings with it particular challenges regarding student needs





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Students concerns prior to these courses require sensitivity that other programme provision in HE does not grapple with as much:

“As with starting all new courses I did have some concerns about joining a new group... about bringing my own issues into the room in relation to alcohol and also how I would respond to the issues raised by other members of the group.”





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Socio political issues also emerge

“I didn't know if I would fit in because of where I was from but I did”

As do confidence and attainment issues:

“I would have concerns in relation to academic experience”





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So we have made the decision to
begin the programme with group
process and personal development

Response from students
overwhelmingly positive (97.9% rate
this as a very important module to them)





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Active learning is core to the programme as it serves dual purpose...knowledge is being enhanced while simultaneously the building of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills is developing:

“Facilitation skills, group work and the discussions around reflective practice. Also the assignments where we had to research the services and produce presentations on our findings were very informative and useful.”





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Thinking Critically:

“Academic ideas such as “ask questions” went right over my head. I was used to learning something and taking it as was presented. I didn't realise I was expected to examine and poke through a theory. Sounds simple but when you learn by rote in school, the idea of critical analysis is very foreign and took a lot of getting used to. It was the total opposite of my previous learning experience. Gradually I got the hang of it, but not something I realised was expected”





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As partners we are aware of the impact of the programme on students lives:

“I graduated from my diploma 2 years ago and since then my professional life has turned for the best. I am now in full time employment and using my skills and knowledge that I gained from diploma”

Not only is the personal (93.4%) and professional (78.4%) development successful but in turn that ripples out into community practice





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- The location of this programme within higher education is important
- However the value placed on Drugs and Alcohol Education in HE is worthy of further debate and discourse....





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Some challenges coming down the tracks....

- The increasing dominance of new managerialism in HE is requiring more and more output in narrower and narrower fields (ISE; Prestige; Internationalisation; impact factors)
- Where does Diploma education in Drugs and Alcohol education feature in this discourse?...





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- As long as students are funded...
- However, the rationalisation that austerity is bringing could adversely impact the programme
- ...and also in effect change the demographic of our 27.8% ...





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- All of the partners work in this programme in addition to other duties
- The continued success is dependent on the value placed by their respective organisations...needed nationally
- The current discourse in HE about performativity, output and impact serves as a real threat to these type of programmes





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For the future...

- Stronger partnership between HE and voluntary and statutory services
- To advocate and champion this work
- Drugs and Alcohol education is not the “poor relation” and we need a coherent voice if we are to protect it

