



Alcohol Focus Scotland response to the Scottish government consultation on mental health and substance misuse

Alcohol Focus Scotland welcomes the report which accurately describes the inconsistency of the current situation for people with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health problems. The 24 recommendations provide clarity on what *needs* to happen, if we are to improve the level of help on offer.

The report quite rightly highlights that the previously published Executive reports have been well received, but that there is very little evidence of their recommendations being implemented and so problems persist. Our comments relate specifically to training issues which we feel are at the heart of the reason for the recommendations not being implemented by alcohol services, as follows:

- The report (p28) states that STRADA offers specific modules on substance misuse and mental health for substance misuse services. We understand that STRADA courses are heavily in demand and can be extremely difficult to access by alcohol services staff as a result.
- Recommendation 11 states: "*a training strategy which equips substance misuse staff with the values, knowledge and skills required to deal with co-occurring substance misuse and mental health problems should be developed by NHS Boards and partner agencies, including NHS Education Scotland....*". But it fails to provide details about how and when this will be developed and delivered or who will take it forward.
- The arbias/SAMH identification checklist and guidelines are very good for detecting the presence of potential acquired brain impairment and would be very helpful if adopted as a national standard.
- For some alcohol counsellors, the shared assessment form from CAT teams is considered as holistic as it can be in recording incidents of self harm, medication etc., but some counsellors feel unsure what to do with some of that information. This is where training is essential to ensure that consistency is applied across the country and workers feel able to progress a client appropriately.

To summarise, for consistency to be achieved we would suggest that the recommendations on a Training Strategy must ensure sufficient appropriate training opportunities are available to practitioners working in all of Scotland's urban and rural communities. The Training Strategy must ensure that sufficient funding is made available to ensure that there is sufficient training capacity to meet training needs and this should involve full consultation with, and effective joint working between the range of substance misuse training providers.

If STRADA is to be considered the main provider of training for substance misuse services then we must have clearer timescales on when STRADA training can be delivered across the different areas of the country.

Previous reports and the current consultation are excellent documents for outlining how we should be working to ensure better care and treatment for individuals, but Alcohol Focus Scotland would argue that we need to get the training of workers right to ensure that they feel sufficiently well equipped to deal with this significant issue.