



# Cultural commissioning models

## Recovery college model



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## What is it

A Recovery College aims to enable people who have had mental health issues to become experts in their own self-care and develop the skills and confidence to manage their own recovery journey. The focus is on using learning activity to complement traditional treatment approaches. Working practices are founded on co-production and shared decision-making.

A briefing paper published by the **Centre for Mental Health** and **Mental Health Network**<sup>1</sup> identifies that this educational approach:

- Helps people recognise and make use of their talents and resources;
- Assists people in exploring their possibilities and developing their skills; and
- Supports people to achieve their goals and ambitions

Colleges offer courses to people with mental health difficulties as well as those who care for them (family and friends, as well as volunteers).

1 <http://www.imroc.org/wp-content/uploads/1.Recovery-Colleges.pdf>

## How does it work?

The Recovery College will typically commission courses from a range of providers, based on the needs of users. Courses can be one-off workshops or a programme over a number of weeks. The range on offer is very wide, from very obviously health-related topics (for example, 'Understanding depression', 'Alcohol: friend or foe', 'Introduction to psychological therapies'<sup>2</sup>) to those focused more on recovery ('How to get a good night's sleep', 'Confidence in social situations', 'Recovering your wellbeing through creativity'<sup>3</sup>) and on moving forwards with your life ('Using social media to find a job', 'Volunteering and recovery'<sup>4</sup>). At the moment relatively few courses have an arts or culture focus but the potential to do so is significant, as both colleges and clinicians become more aware of the potential for creativity to support recovery.

At the **SLaM** (South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust) Recovery College all workshops are designed and delivered jointly by two trainers – one who has lived experience and expertise of self-managing their

mental ill-health and one who is an expert by profession (usually a mental health professional). Workshops are offered within four subject areas; 'Understanding mental health difficulties and treatment', 'Developing knowledge and skills', 'Rebuilding your life' and 'Getting involved', and all workshops are designed complement the clinical services offered by SLaM.

2 Examples taken from SLaM Recovery College

3 *ibid*

4 *ibid*

## Who are the commissioners?

The commissioners are those managing the programme of courses, within the context of clinical provision. That is to say, funding decisions are often made on the basis of clinical need, weighing up the benefits of more health-focused learning with that aimed at rebuilding lives after illness. They are likely to look for evidence-based arguments if they are to opt for cultural interventions. Students self-select which courses and workshops best suit their interests and needs, so their choices will also influence commissioners' decisions.

## How is the service contract organised?

There are strong links with the sub-contractor model as often a central body, e.g. the college, will be contracted to provide the courses (typically by a NHS Trust, as in the case of SLaM) and will then contract trainers and course providers for individual programmes of learning.

**Creativity Works**, based in North East Somerset, works within a similar model. The charity is commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council to deliver a Mental Health Creative Support Service, as part of the council's Adult Social Care and Housing Wellbeing College.

Creativity Works is one of a number of commissioned partners who offer a variety of courses and groups

designed to help people develop confidence, live independently, and maximise wellbeing. It in turn then works with a range of partners (from mental health practitioners to the criminal justice system) to deliver positive change through its creative projects.

## How is the service evaluated?

The Recovery College will specify the outcomes it is seeing to achieve as part of the commission and will agree with the provider how these are to be measured. In the case of Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council's Wellbeing College approach, the Mental Health Creative Support Service is commissioned based on the agreement that a number of key outcomes will be met around increasing availability and awareness of activities, and widening access. These outcomes are demonstrated by the delivery of certain tangible and measurable services (number of groups engaged, for example). Less tangible outcomes include participants feeling able to express their issues through different art forms, and peer tutors feeling encouraged and empowered to support their own groups. For B&NES, self-observation in this way by participants and peer tutors is evidence enough, but this may not be the case with all commissioners. Commissioners are swayed by different arguments - some focus more on evidence and data, others want to be inspired.

## Building sustaining working relations

Recovery Colleges are founded on principles of partnership working and co-design. The manager of SLaM Recovery College, says that:

'The best examples of co-production and partnership working among those we have looked at are based on:

- Caring about the aim of the work;
- Enthusiasm for the idea;
- Shared vision;
- Mutual vision;

- Recognition of the value of individual partners; and
- Secure relationships between the people involved, especially between those who facilitate and those who participate

## Scalability

The potential here is probably for arts and culture to scale up their contribution to recovery colleges rather than for the colleges themselves to increase in scale. This will depend on their success in making the case for creative interventions to contribute to the recovery process. Case studies of success, such as that of Creativity Works or the film produced by Guy's and St Thomas Charity on the work of Alchemy (who are effectively using dance with young people with psychoses), will be important to achieving this.

## Potential challenges

Those managing recovery colleges will usually come from a clinical background and, while open to new ideas and innovative in their thinking and approach, may not have considered the arts as a delivery vehicle for patient recovery. There will be a finite limit to the number of courses and workshops they can run in a year and they may naturally look more to existing providers, especially if cultural organisations cannot provide the hard evidence some will be seeking. Both SLaM and Creativity Works identified the need to sometimes be able to develop and test a project before seeking commissions, so that there is evidence of its value, but that approach brings resourcing challenges for small organisations in particular.

It is important that arts organisations wishing to work in this field develop their own understanding of mental health issues. Recovery Colleges offer courses that could help with that, but arts organisations may need to be working with them before they can access their courses (e.g. SLaM's courses are open to 'Volunteers and peer supporters working with SLaM'). The co-production approach can help ensure that potential providers understand the needs and develop courses in partnership with mental health experts to meet specific needs.

## Top tips

- Develop a relationship with commissioners and work with them to co-create offers that meet the needs of those they support;
- Seek to provide evidence of success that meets different commissioners' expectations, from hard evidence and data through to inspirational quotes and images;
- Engage commissioners as early as possible in your plans to ensure that you are designing something that will meet their needs; and
- Recognise that your usual methodologies may not fit the system – be prepared to adapt

## Examples

- **SLaM Recovery College** – offers a learning programme to support recovery for people with mental health difficulties, enabling them to have the same opportunities in life as everyone else; and
- **Bath and North East Somerset Wellbeing College** – provides courses, activities and groups to Bath & North East Somerset residents aged 16 or over, or those who are registered with a GP in the area, covering a range of areas including physical and mental wellbeing, stress, nutrition and social support

The Cultural Commissioning Programme, funded by Arts Council England, works with arts and cultural organisations to help them better engage in public sector commissioning, with public service commissioners to help them understand the potential of arts and culture to deliver their outcomes, and also with policy makers and stakeholders nationally. The first phase of the programme (July 13 – June 16) was delivered by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), in partnership with New Philanthropy Capital and New Economics Foundation. A second phase (July 16 – Dec 17) is delivered by NCVO.