



Credit for competence

In the second of our series to give a working knowledge of the Drugs and Alcohol National Standards, Trevor Boutall explains DANOS-based qualifications.

DANOS – the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards – describe the standards of performance expected of all those working in the drugs and alcohol field and the knowledge and skills they need to be effective in their work. They can be downloaded free of charge from www.DANOS.info.

Over the past year and a half, Skills for Health has been working closely with the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA), the Drugs Strategy Directorate (DSD), Alcohol Concern, DrugScope, the National Assembly for Wales, educationalists, employers and service users to develop a strategy to give credit for competent performance to DANOS standards through nationally-recognised qualifications.

National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs)

The first of these qualifications, first launched by awarding bodies like City and Guilds, Edexcel and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), is the NVQ or SVQ in Health and Social Care level 3.

This qualification can be widely used across the health and social care sectors as a certificate of competence. It is ideal for those working in the drugs and alcohol field who do not hold a professional qualification. Experienced staff will not need to do extensive training – they will find that, through the NVQ/SVQ, they can get accreditation for their prior experience and learning.

All candidates, wherever they are working, are required to take four common core units:

- Promote effective communication for and about individuals
- Promote, monitor and maintain health, safety and security in the working environment

- Reflect on and develop your practice
- Promote choice, well-being and the protection of all individuals (those working with children and young people take an alternative unit: Promote the well-being and protection of children and young people).

To complete their qualifications, candidates select four optional units – from a choice of 40 DANOS units – which are most appropriate to their work role.

A project worker, for example, might choose the following units:

- Support individuals who are substance users
- Assess and act upon immediate risk of danger to substance users
- Carry out assessment to identify and prioritise needs
- Contribute to planning, monitoring and reviewing the delivery of service for individuals.

A counsellor, on the other hand, would choose a different set:

- Contribute to planning, monitoring and reviewing the delivery of service for individuals
- Counsel individuals about their substance use using recognised theoretical models
- Help individuals address their substance use through an action plan
- Counsel groups of individuals about their substance use using recognised theoretical models.

For details of local centres offering the NVQ/SVQ in Health and Social Care level 3, contact the relevant awarding bodies:

- City and Guilds www.city-and-guilds.co.uk
- Edexcel www.edexcel.org.uk
- SQA www.sqa.org.uk

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Federation of Drugs and Alcohol Professionals Accreditation

Following a pilot process at the end of last year, the Federation of Drugs and Alcohol Professionals (FDAP) is about to launch its new Professional Certification scheme, which is also based on DANOS, but goes further than the NVQ/SVQ.

To become a Certified Drug and Alcohol Professional, practitioners will need to demonstrate their competence in 10 core DANOS units. The first four of these are identical to the NVQ/SVQ core, the additional six being:

- Relate to, and interact with, individuals
- Promote the equality, diversity, rights and responsibilities of individuals
- Support individuals who are substance users
- Assess and act upon immediate risk of danger to substance users
- Make use of supervision
- Carry out assessment to identify and prioritise needs.

To be certified under the scheme, practitioners will also need to demonstrate they are competent in at least one additional specialist unit, selected from a choice of a further 14 DANOS units.

For more details of FDAP’s Drug and Alcohol Professional Certification scheme, contact FDAP at www.fdap.org.uk.

Other DANOS-related training and qualifications

There are over 300 training courses and qualifications linked to DANOS on the Learning Resources Database on www.DANOS.info. Most of these focus on developing students’ underpinning knowledge and skills, rather than assessing whether they can actually perform competently in the workplace.

However, a number of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), such as Bath, Leeds and Leicester universities, are currently exploring ways of integrating the assessment of workplace performance into their substance misuse qualifications, and the National Open College Network and the NCFE awarding body will be reviewing their drugs and alcohol qualifications this year.

2005 will see a growth in the choice of DANOS-based qualifications suitable for practitioners at all levels, including a new Continuing Professional Development Award, being developed by Skills for Health in partnership with awarding bodies, to help those with professional qualifications but no experience in the substance misuse sector quickly to get up to speed and prove they can work competently and safely to meet service users’ needs.

Next Month: DANOS-based Recruitment, Development and Retention – the Middlesbrough Experience.