

Advancing skills training through DANOS

More advanced drug and alcohol standards and qualifications are needed for jobs with higher levels of responsibility, according to a recent survey. Trevor Boutall identifies the gaps in current skills training and considers how new DANOS units could address them.

Eighty six per cent of the 167 respondents to Skills for Health's questionnaire at the end of last year were in favour of level 4 qualifications for more advanced staff in drugs and alcohol services.

On the basis of these findings, which were largely endorsed by an expert group and key stakeholders, the DANOS steering group, chaired by Bill Puddicombe of Phoenix House, has given the green light to further research and development work to ensure the availability of appropriate standards and qualifications for the following key groups of staff:

- team leaders, supervisors and coordinators of services
- directors and managers of services
- senior practitioners.

The Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards (DANOS) are already widely used throughout the drugs and alcohol field and are included in the Health and Social Care NVQs and SVQs. Practitioner-level standards are included in the Level 3 awards and the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) in England has issued guidance that by 2008, 75 per cent of non-professionally trained staff should be undertaking or have achieved this award.

Skills for Health's survey, and the more detailed analysis undertaken by the expert group in December last year, confirm that the Level 4 Health and Social Care S/NVQ is appropriate to the majority of people working as team leaders, supervisors or coordinators of services. However, there may be some gaps in the range of options from which they can choose; further research will be carried out to ensure there is adequate coverage of risk assessment and risk management within this qualification.

Many survey respondents were trustees, directors or managers of services and felt that a higher level qualification would be appropriate for them. However, a review of existing qualifications showed that there was already a wide choice of academic, professional and vocational qualifications available and the DANOS steering group recommends that those in senior management positions consider demonstrating their competence through the new Level 4 and 5 Management and Leadership S/NVQs or studying for academic or professional management awards.

Senior practitioners – those who have a practitioner role, but have greater experience and provide mentoring, coaching and/or supervisory



Over the next three months, Skills for Health will be working with Skills for Justice, Skills for Care and Development, the Department of Health, the NTA, the Drug Strategy Directorate, the devolved administrations and experts from the drugs and alcohol field to define the required competences in detail and, where necessary, develop new DANOS units.

support to more junior colleagues – are a critical group of staff, both for the quality of services delivered today and the development of the workforce for tomorrow. They appear to be less well served by the current suite of DANOS standards and associated S/NVQs. In particular there do not appear to be standards that adequately describe their roles in:

- assessing risk and managing risk in relation to service users, staff and the organisation as a whole
- assessing substance users with complex needs and coordinating the services to meet their needs
- developing and managing strategies to engage service users, retain them in their care plans and move them towards a future free from the harms related to substance misuse.

Over the next three months, Skills for Health will be working with Skills for Justice, Skills for Care and Development, the Department of Health, the NTA, the Drug Strategy Directorate, the devolved administrations and experts from the drugs and alcohol field to define the required competences in detail and, where necessary, develop new DANOS units. Expert Group meetings are planned for the beginning of March in all four countries to help identify appropriate standards and draft new ones. These drafts will be tested with a small number of pilot sites and a wider consultation will be carried out by e-mail in April. The outcome of this work will be a set of National Occupational Standards describing the competences required of senior practitioners and recommendations for how these should be integrated into existing and/or new qualifications.

As part of the survey carried out last year, respondents were also asked whether they thought standards and qualifications should be developed to cover the following specific therapies which recent research in England and Scotland has shown to be effective in working with substance misusers:

- cognitive-behavioural therapy
- relapse prevention therapy
- motivational enhancement therapy
- family therapy
- community reinforcement approaches
- 12-step facilitation
- coping skills training.

There was much less consensus around this issue, with many respondents pointing out that there are already specialist courses and qualifications available covering many of these therapies. The DANOS Steering Group therefore took the view that practitioners wishing to offer these therapies should receive appropriate training, supervision and qualifications from the specialist institutions and associations involved.

Further information about DANOS and this project can be found on www.skillsforhealth.org/danos. Anyone wishing to be involved in the development and/or testing of these standards for senior practitioners is invited to contact Skills for Health's project manager, Suzanne Fisher, on 07909 893552 or e-mail suzanne.fisher@skillsforhealth.org.uk

Trevor Boutall is Skills for Health technical consultant.