Service User Involvement in the Recruitment Process of Student Mental Health Nurses

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Background

• Service user (SU) involvement in shaping and improving mental health nursing services underpins the philosophy of consumer-based healthcare at practice, political and professional levels.

• SU’s have been involved in a range of educational activities at London South Bank University (LSBU) since 2004. These activities include selection and recruitment, teaching and assessment, curriculum design, programme validation and the User Advisory Group (UAG).
Some benefits of SU involvement for students

• Gaining insights to experience of distress and challenging stereotypes is a powerful tool for learning and developing self-awareness.

• Encourages dialogue, thus greater ease in developing evidence-based practice and assists in reducing the ‘theory-practice gap’.

• Builds students’ confidence and interpersonal skills through ‘active learning’ teaching methods.

SU involvement in Selection and recruitment

• Compared to other areas of SU involvement, studies that focus on this specific area are much fewer in number and, even more rarely, user-led.

• This study sought to elicit views of SU’s and academic staff in involving SU’s in the recruitment and selection process of student mental health nurses, so that the process and outcomes can be better understood, improved upon and replicated in other healthcare fields.
Methodology

• Action Research (AR) paradigm, influenced by McNiff (2010) and Whitehead (1989).

• Living-Theory approach can be seen as a form of self-evaluation; in this case, SU’s investigating their own work with other people e.g. ‘How do I improve my practice?’ - value and accountability.

• Reasons for investigating included: paucity of studies, enhanced understanding of practice – meaning and “effectiveness” – model or practice dissemination and service improvement.
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<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Review current practice</td>
<td>“It’s happening, but we don’t quite know the specifics e.g. What do others think? Is it effective? Replicable? Service users’ perspective on their own practice</td>
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<td>Identify aspects we want to investigate</td>
<td>These included: process, effectiveness, challenges and scope for improvement</td>
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<td>Imagine a way forward</td>
<td>Undertake a study, as an initial point of investigation</td>
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<td>Try it out and take stock of what happens</td>
<td>Explore views, review process, identify gaps</td>
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<td>Monitor and review</td>
<td>On-going</td>
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Data collection

- 8 semi-structured interviews, conducted by a Service User Lecturer involved in recruitment for 5 years.
- 4 SU’s who had been involved in recruitment for at least two years.
- 4 academic staff that included Admission Tutors, Course Director and Senior Lecturer.
- Questions centred around the process of involvement, induction and/or training, benefits and challenges for all stakeholders.
Findings

Recruitment process.

- Some Su’s initially recruited by the Principal Lecturer, then recruited and trained through the VITAL project (Vital Involvement in Training and Learning) delivered in partnership with LSBU.
- Briefing offered from academics and other SU’s.
- Process was not considered challenging in itself, though one SU did comment about an incident where he was embarrassed by a remark - revealing underlying power dynamics - made by one academic member of staff.
Benefits

SU’s cited many benefits, which included:

• A chance to offer their perspective within a receptive environment: “I feel that my voice is being heard”.
• Developing skills.
• Demonstrating skills, which in turn led to a sense of increased accountability and recognition by academics.
• Opportunities to extend professional networks.
• Accessing further employment.
• Increased confidence, with a sense of well-being, personal accomplishment and worth, whilst challenging a common lack of self-belief among service users: “I got used to the idea that I couldn’t do anything because I had not done much in a long time.”
Benefits as viewed by staff

- A more informed and broader perspective “‘Lived experience’ activates sensory radar that we do not have as professionals.”
- Enables students to experience the philosophy of LSBU’s training programme, from the onset (i.e. active UI across the curriculum).
- Improves calibre of candidates and overall quality of recruitment.
- Gives greater confidence in decisions whether to accept the candidate: “The person at the receiving end is the one who is going to reap the benefits, or disadvantages of bad practice.”
- Offers more varied discussions in group activity, whilst also tends to highlight candidates’ values, attitudes and possible prejudices.
- Exhibits how candidates may relate differently to service users and academic staff: service users taking a leading role challenges them!
Challenges

• Initially, one SU felt a hierarchical imbalance.
• Financial commitment – going-rate, reward(s).
• Institutions’ recognition of other skills and attributes that SU’s have, other than just “being a SU” e.g. Individual knowledge-base and skills not being used enough.
• SU’s often have to carefully schedule competing demands, due to the part-time nature of the work and the limited money ring-fenced for involvement.
• Divergence of opinions between academics and SU’s were not seen as a challenge for they seldom occurred. When and where they did, they were resolved through effective communication.
Improvements made

• Specific monies allocated for SU involvement.
• Greater understanding of the contribution of SU’s in recruitment and selection processes.
• Enhanced partnership working and greater equality in involvement (academic/SU/clinician).
• SU’s other skills and attributes being used more frequently e.g. assessment, facilitation, research.
• VITAL training delivered for the 2nd time at LSBU.
• Appointment of a SU Co-ordinator for the MH department (over a limited period of time).
• Model being replicated in other areas of educational practice.
Recommendations

- Involve SU’s in all aspects of recruitment and selection, for optimum benefits and outcomes.
- Establish a clear induction programme/training.
- Ring-fence money to enable meaningful and regular UI, in line with legal requirements.
- Establish clear roles and expectations that takes account of SU’s experience and skills, and that are funded accordingly.
- Undertake/support further research in this area.