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RECOVEU: A participative approach to curriculum development for adults in addiction recovery across the European Union.

Progress Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The aim of the RECOVEU project is to develop Exemplar Learning Activities within the framework of an 'Access to Learning' Course for people in addiction recovery. The activities will form a 'taster' representative of a complete syllabus which will seek to support participation in adult learning and enhance opportunities for social inclusion for people in addiction recovery.

The main target audience for the project is adults in addiction recovery and the service providers that support them, together with education providers and policy decision-makers.

A key feature throughout the project is the active involvement of service users and providers; project objectives have been developed to support this and are aimed at creating a dialogue between educators, people in recovery and drug treatment providers.

The project consortium is made up of partners based in England, Ireland, Romania, Italy and Cyprus; together these have combined experience in research and adult learning provision. All have experience in qualitative field research and data analysis, and the development of educational programmes. Accessibility to adults in recovery and service providers is a key aspect of the project and partners were chosen specifically because they were able to ensure this.

The approach used within the project seeks to draw on partners' expertise to maximise the input from service users and providers. The methodology includes a review of policy and practice, and focus groups with adults in addiction recovery and service providers within each of the five partner countries. Drawing on the data generated, a number of exemplar learning activities are being developed which take into account the specific barriers this particular group of potential adult learners may face. Alongside this an Evaluation 'Toolkit' is also being developed which will allow providers to assess the effectiveness of the learning activities. Both the exemplar learning activities and toolkit will then be piloted with service users and the feedback from this will be used to inform development of the final Course Pack which will include digital learning materials.

The main outputs to date have been the Policy and Practice Review and a summary of the focus group data. A draft analysis of this data has also been produced. Among the key findings that have emerged in the five partner countries is that there are no Access to Learning programmes designed specifically for people in recovery and few specific opportunities for them to engage with employability programmes. Although all partner countries are guided by EU policies and strategy on drugs and addiction, there are clear differences in what has been implemented and the focus for this within the individual countries. As such, all are affected by the lack of consensus on addiction treatment and recovery.

Future plans for the project include the development of a 'Train the Trainers' module to support effective delivery of the course. Both the 'Access to Learning' Course Pack and trainers' module will be fully accessible on a multi-lingual E-learning Platform which will be available at the end of the project. A conference is also planned for the end of 2016 together with a series of Round Tables for learning providers and policy-makers to raise awareness of project outcomes.

- Further information is available on the project website: www.recoveu.org

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1. Project Objectives

The project objectives are as follows:

1. Conduct a review of policy and practice in relation to drug recovery programmes in the five partner countries
2. Involve adults in addiction recovery and service providers in focus groups and use their views to inform the development of learning activities
3. Develop Exemplar Learning Activities for an 'Access to Learning' Course Pack
4. Develop an Evaluation Toolkit to assess the effectiveness of the Exemplar Learning Activities
5. Pilot the Course Pack and Evaluation Toolkit with service users and providers
6. Use feedback from the pilot studies to revise the Course Pack and Evaluation Toolkit
7. Develop an E-learning Platform to contain the Course Pack, Evaluation Toolkit, and a Train the Trainers Module to support the use of digital resources
8. Ensure that the project has an EU-wide impact using a range of dissemination and exploitation activities

RECOVEU seeks to benefit two particular groups: potential learners, in the form of adults in addiction recovery, and those delivering support to such adults. Social reintegration is a key factor in addiction recovery. Alongside housing and employment, adult learning is a critical element in supporting social reintegration. However, to date the recovering addict's perspective on what might be helpful when returning to education has not been explored and although there are a number of programmes focusing on adults in recovery, many national social inclusion plans do not specifically address the educational needs of drug users. Similarly, although adult learning services exist for marginalised groups, a more targeted approach is needed for adults in recovery because a defining characteristic tends to be long periods of social isolation and exclusion. This project therefore aims to develop innovative learning activities to help adults in addiction recovery prepare for, and succeed in, college or university. Successful engagement in learning has the potential to increase their employability and social reintegration, and most importantly, support their ongoing recovery.

A key feature of RECOVEU is that it is developed for, and informed by, the target group. By consulting with adults in addiction recovery, and service users and providers, the learning activities developed will take into account the specific barriers that people in addiction recovery often face. Project objectives have been designed with this aim in mind; to create a dialogue between educators, people in recovery and drug treatment providers. This has been achieved initially by drawing in part on partners' experiential knowledge to produce a review of policy and practice relating to drug recovery programmes in the five partner countries. Service

users and providers in each partner country have also taken part in a series of focus groups which have covered a range of issues including previous experience of learning, barriers to engagement in learning, what is required in an access to learning course (e.g. content, format), and learning outcomes. Direct involvement of the target group will be continued during a later phase of the project which will see adults in addiction recovery and service providers participate in a pilot of the Course Pack and Evaluation Toolkit. Feedback from the pilot will inform development of the final pack and toolkit, which together with the 'Train the Trainers' module, will be fully accessible on a multi-lingual E-learning Platform at the end of the project.

2. Project Approach

RECOVEU is based on a user-led approach which supports the development of a research-based adult education model that is 'fit for purpose'. This approach seeks to add value from an organisational point of view by drawing on partners' expertise to maximise the input from service users and providers. The process is also an iterative one in that the methods used in each stage of the project build upon the knowledge and outputs generated in the preceding stage. The methodological strategy used to date is outlined below. The remaining stages which will take place in the second half of the project are outlined in Section 5.

Stage 1: A review of policy and practice

The aim of the review was to develop a more nuanced understanding of the impact of drug policy and EU strategy in each of the partner countries, with a particular emphasis on how this influenced practice in drug treatment. Initially the EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction) was used to assess existing knowledge of policy and practice; this was then supplemented with the local knowledge of the partners. In order to reflect on similar issues, a structured questionnaire was developed which drew on the EMCDDA Structured Questionnaire 28 on Social Reintegration and Reduction of Social Exclusion of Drug Users. Drawing on this data, an overarching Policy and Practice Review was produced which provided the background for the focus groups and is informing the development of the Course Pack and Evaluation Toolkit. This process has also helped the project team to gain a shared understanding of some of the contextual and structural issues affecting each partner.

Stage 2: Focus groups

One of the major issues confronting policy makers and practitioners in the field of addiction recovery is the lack of specific data on the needs of adults in recovery in relation to the barriers to learning and the learning resources required to enable successful engagement in learning. The aim of the focus groups, therefore, was to obtain feedback from service users and providers on what they want from an access to learning course and to identify key aspects for developing such a course. The aim was also to explore peoples' understanding of adult learning and how they felt it could affect their lives, particularly in relation to addiction recovery. The process of gaining access to focus group participants has been greatly facilitated by the partners in the consortium who are either service providers or work closely with service providers in the field of addiction recovery.

Prior to the focus groups, a discussion guide was developed and piloted. The revised guide was then used as a framework for the focus groups that were held in each partner country. Drawing on the recordings of each focus group, summaries were produced for each partner country together with an overarching summary of the data. This was then analysed and the key themes emerging were identified.

Stage 3: Development of the Draft Course Pack and Evaluation Toolkit

Drawing on the thematic analysis of the focus group data, five main module areas have been identified. The next step in the project, which is currently underway, is to develop a module outline for each of these areas together with one core and one culturally specific Exemplar Learning Activity within each module. It is intended that the activities will be delivered using a blended learning approach (a combination of face-to-face and online learning) but wherever possible, activities will be produced as digital versions to facilitate the development of digital literacy. Alongside this an Evaluation Toolkit is also being developed which will allow providers to assess the effectiveness of the learning activities and their impact, for example, whether participation has increased levels of self-efficacy for education. Development of the toolkit is based on a review of evaluation approaches used in adult learning and addiction recovery. Guidelines for delivery of the Exemplar Learning Activities and Evaluation Toolkit are also being developed in order to support effective practice.

The methodological approach outlined above adds value in a number of ways. Where possible or appropriate, it draws on existing tools and knowledge; for example, the review drew in part on the EMCDDA questionnaire to structure the information search and existing data compiled by the EMCDDA. In addition, partners' experiential knowledge was used to go beyond official policy in order to contrast the rhetoric and the reality. Similarly, partner organisations and networks were, and will continue to be used, to ease access to the target group: adults in addiction recovery and service providers.

An integral part of the overall approach is a Quality Assurance and Evaluation Strategy which seeks to ensure both the process and results of the project conform to quality expectations. In addition to ongoing internal evaluation, an external evaluation has also been set in place; both of these adopt a formative and summative approach. This is proving invaluable in helping to identify potential problems or other issues of concern which can then be addressed quickly and effectively. To date, evaluation findings indicate that the project is on line to achieve its stated objectives.

Equally important in terms of project success and sustainability is the Dissemination Strategy. Overall, sustainability is boosted by involving members of the target groups in the design and piloting phases of the project, as well as in the implementation phase. This approach ensures project outputs are informed by service users and providers and meet their needs, thus increasing the likelihood of take-up of project outputs beyond the life of the project. In terms of the Dissemination Strategy, particular attention has been given to reaching a diverse range of service users and stakeholders working with the target groups through the use of online newsletters (including the six-monthly RECOVEU newsletter), press releases, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Information on the project is also disseminated via partners' professional networks. Project outputs such as the Policy and Practice Review are available on the project website and learning materials will be also be freely accessible online through the website which will remain active for two years following the end of the project.

3. Project Outcomes and Results

At this halfway point in the project a number of objectives have been achieved. The Policy and Practice Review has been completed and is available on the project website (<http://recoveu.org/index.php/e-library/category/7-wp3-policy-practice-review>). Among the key findings that have emerged from the review is that there are no Access to Learning programmes designed specifically for people in recovery and few specific opportunities for them to engage with employability programmes in the five partner countries. Although all partner countries are guided by EU policies and strategy on drugs and addiction, there are clear differences in what has been implemented and the focus for this within the individual partner countries, all of which are affected by a lack of consensus on addiction treatment and recovery.

Evidence from the review also suggests that drug users can often be the target of moralistic judgments within predominantly medical treatment contexts – judgments that can affect the way in which policy is enacted, the direction of funding and the availability of services in all the partner countries. We draw on the evidence to argue that a continued focus on what addiction recovery means is necessary; it is only through reaching a consensus on this that service providers can move forward with providing the wide range of interventions needed to support sustained recovery from the difficulties caused by addiction, and which will include both medical and psycho-social support. It is our conclusion that access to higher education can provide opportunities for people to both re-evaluate and re-establish their lives after addiction.

Our second objective of using focus groups to access the views of adults in addiction recovery and service providers in order to inform the development of learning activities has also been achieved. A total of 92 people took part in the focus groups; 44 service users and 48 service providers. Of the latter group, almost a quarter said that they were also in recovery. Almost all the participants in recovery had taken part in some form of learning since leaving school, and in some cases this was on an academic degree programme. However, many had withdrawn because of their addiction or the stigma that they felt was attached to addiction. Participants in recovery identified two main motivations for taking part in learning: to develop their skills in order to get back into employment and to develop personally to enable them to better address the issues of addiction.

Most participants had a high level of active interest in the topic of education, particularly those in recovery from addiction. Engaging in learning was also viewed positively in terms of creating an opportunity to create new social networks, although many participants felt that they did not fit in with other learners. The level of awareness of learning opportunities or programmes was poor or very poor, however, and participants perceived such opportunities as being restricted. Overall, therefore, the data strongly confirms the need for the RECOVEU project. We are currently working towards completion of our third and fourth objectives by using the Focus Group Overview and the thematic analysis of this data (both of which will be available on the project website www.recoveu.org) to develop the Exemplar Learning Activities, the Evaluation Toolkit and the guidelines for delivery.

We are also working to achieve EU-wide impact using a range of dissemination and exploitation activities. The third RECOVEU newsletter is in production and information on the project is also published regularly in partner organisation newsletters. Wider dissemination also takes place through partners' professional networks and through conference and poster presentations. International conferences attended include the Innovative Learning Environments Conference in Cyprus and conferences organised by the Babes-Bolyai University and Alba Iulia University in Romania. National conferences and seminars include those organised by Staffordshire University in the UK and the National School of Addictions in Italy. The project also makes use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/recoveu>).

All the publications and results produced to date are available on the project website and new materials and results will be uploaded as they become available. Other addiction/adult learning publications are also accessible on the website.

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4. Partnerships

The RECOVEU partnership was formed in 2011 and is made up of the following partners:

- The Institute for Education Policy Research (IEPR), Staffordshire University, UK: Based in an educational research centre, the project team has extensive research experience with marginalised and disadvantaged learners and expertise in adult learning and drug recovery education;
- The Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development of Educational Technology (CARDET), Cyprus: CARDET has long standing experience in working with public and private organisations who provide services to marginalised groups, including people in addiction recovery, and is a specialist in E-learning development;
- St Dimitrie Program (SDP), Romania: The SDP Programme offers information, counselling and training to adults in addiction recovery and professionals and the project team has extensive experience of developing educational programmes and training manuals;
- Social Cooperative 'San Saturnino Onlus' (SANSAT), Italy: SANSAT has managed training and employment projects working with recovering addicts and provides interventions and services that improve quality of life, and support acceptance of difference and social solidarity. The project team is made up of psychologists with wide experience of the development and management of training and educational interventions.
- Soilse, Drug Rehabilitation Programme, Ireland: Soilse work extensively with people in addiction recovery both in relation to the stabilisation of active drug abusers and social reintegration. Members of the project team have been involved in pioneering work on the response to addiction and are experienced adult educators.

Although the role of learning in the recovery process has been highlighted, there is limited evidence across Europe to inform adult learning practice with people in addiction recovery and there is no data which specifically identifies the barriers they experience or how to support them as adult learners. The RECOVEU partnership has undertaken this innovative project to begin to develop a coherent EU-wide approach to adult learning in the addiction recovery community. Partner organisations have come together because they work in the fields of drug recovery and adult learning, and the project capitalises on our collective work in both these fields. RECOVEU draws on the perspectives of these different organisations and provides a forum for interaction to take place. It supports innovation through sharing reflections between countries who are all at different places in relation to addiction recovery and treatment; an important factor in terms of a pan-European approach.

This cross-European collaboration adds value through its ability to offer new insights into the issues involved in this under-developed area of adult learning and the potential this offers for transferable, innovative solutions. The partnership provides regional coverage and utilises our existing professional international and

national networks to reach all EU countries and beyond. For example, Texas Tech University in the United States is involved in the project as an Associate Partner through one such professional link. The University has successfully run the Recovery Collegiate, which has supported adults in addiction recovery and education since 2005. The Collegiate Recovery Community provides a nurturing, affirming environment in which individuals recovering from addictive disorders can find peer support while attaining a college education. Involvement of the University supports knowledge exchange beyond the EU, enabling RECOVEU to draw on the expertise of Texas Tech colleagues.

The RECOVEU consortium is well placed to develop partnerships with adults in addiction recovery and service providers. It brings together educators, drug advocacy workers and adults in addiction recovery to facilitate knowledge transfer across the different countries involved. This type of collaborative approach to curriculum development and delivery is rare in the partner countries and is therefore challenging current ways of thinking, as well as providing an evidence base that is currently lacking. RECOVEU focuses on the development of core and culture-specific course content located within a pan-European policy and intervention framework and which can be delivered across the EU. Further customisation by service providers beyond the project will be possible in that the basic philosophy of individual activities will be transferrable, while the content will be adaptable to a specific country context. Project outputs will also include an Evaluation Toolkit, particularly important given the current economic climate within which attention must move towards efficient and effective investment. Supporting the social reintegration of people in recovery requires evaluated programmes enabling the identification of good practices that can be fully exploited across Europe, thus ensuring that *all* citizens are able to successfully engage in adult learning.

5. Plans for the Future

At this halfway point in the project there are a number of stages remaining to be completed in order to fulfil all the project objectives. Continuing from Section 2 these are as follows:

Stage 4: Pilot Phase

Once the draft Course Pack and Evaluation Toolkit have been developed (Stage 3) they will be tested in the field through a series of pilot studies involving adult learners in recovery in each partner country. The pilots will provide an opportunity to assess the materials in a 'real life' context and obtain feedback from service users in order to refine and further develop both the Course Pack and the Toolkit. Feedback will be collected on three key aspects that will provide a comprehensive synthesis of the enablers and barriers to effective delivery:

- i) Course delivery;
- ii) Qualitative feedback on the course experience and perceptions of effectiveness and impact;
- iii) Accessibility and validity of the Evaluation Toolkit..

Stage 5: Production of the Final Course Pack, Evaluation Toolkit and Train the Trainers module

Drawing on the data generated by the service users and providers involved in the pilot, the Course Pack, Evaluation Toolkit and Guidelines for Delivery will be revised to produce final versions of the materials. Alongside this a module will also be provided for trainers – an online 'Train the Trainers' module. This will enable trainers delivering and evaluating the learning activities to be trained in their effective delivery.

An E-learning Platform will also be set up at the end of the project. This will be a specific area on the website where the Course Pack, Evaluation Toolkit, Guidelines for Delivery and the Train the Trainers module will all be freely available both in the partner languages, as well as French (which will support wider use). The digital format of the materials will provide hands-on learning opportunities and promote self-reflection through tutor support and guidance. In addition, this will enable learning to be contextualised to meet the needs of different service providers. Project outputs will, therefore, be flexible and adaptable to other EU contexts. Development of the multi-lingual E-learning Platform will enable access across the EU, facilitated by the use of social networks, resource data bases and resource-sharing tools. This will allow further contributions from stakeholders beyond the life of the project, thus enhancing sustainability and exploitation.

Dissemination will continue via the RECOVEU newsletters, partners' professional networks and conference presentations, and a number of academic and practitioner journal articles are also planned. A closing Conference aimed at practitioners and policy-makers will also be held in Cyprus. This will represent a major milestone in terms of dissemination and sustainability of project results. Alongside this, a series

of political recommendations are being developed on an ongoing basis throughout the project and these will form part of the conference proceedings. The political recommendations are at EU and national levels, and emphasise access to learning issues and best practice models of treatment, recovery and educational initiatives that are aimed at supporting sustained reintegration into the wider community. At the end of the project each partner will also deliver a Round Table event in their own country. These events will be targeted at service providers and trainers and will focus on how they can use project materials within their own services.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The RECOVEU project contributes to a number of key EU objectives relating to addiction and social reintegration. The overall aim of the EU Drugs Action Plan is to reduce drug use and its associated negative consequences among the population. The changing policy focus for addiction treatment is moving towards recovery strategies which enable people to reintegrate into their communities, thereby supporting social cohesion. This focus is evident in the national drug strategies of Member States. Adult education with its capacity for transformation has a key role within this paradigm shift. RECOVEU's aim of developing asset-based education directly supports both the EU Drugs Action Plan and the national drug strategies of the Member States.

The project also supports the aim of broader EU policy to promote social cohesion by widening participation to adult learning for all, especially those who are socially excluded and marginalised; often a defining characteristic of habitual drug addicts. RECOVEU is aimed, therefore, at a target group which is particularly vulnerable to social exclusion. Moreover, the project emphasises the ongoing involvement of adults in addiction recovery and service providers as a way of identifying barriers to sustained engagement in lifelong learning.

Internationally, the 2000 EC in Lisbon set a strategic goal for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010. The 2006 Joint Interim Report on progress under the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme stresses that all citizens have to acquire and update their skills throughout life, particularly those at risk of social exclusion. This was also underlined in the EU Commission publication *Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn* (2006) which emphasised the importance of adult learning in relation to increasing employability, raising skill levels and supporting social inclusion. Similarly, the EU 2020 strategy aims to increase the number of 20-64 year olds in employment and significantly reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Of the seven flagship initiatives which address the priority areas set out in this strategy, one is based on a digital agenda for Europe. Integral to this is developing individuals' digital literacy and skills. RECOVEU directly supports EU 2020 strategy through its emphasis on digital literacy and social reintegration of the target group.

Recent evidence from the EMCDDA suggests that approximately 20% of problem drug users in treatment are early school leavers and that educational attainment is consistently lower than in the general population. This association is part of the rationale for targeting education at such users; an approach endorsed by the EMCDDA and in line with the EU Drug Strategy and Action Plan under the heading of social reintegration. The issue of educational attainment is an increasingly significant one given the impact of the recent global recession which may render some problem drug users even more marginalised within a competitive employment market. RECOVEU outputs are being developed with and for adults in addiction recovery in order to support successful engagement in lifelong learning. As such, they contribute to the wider EU aim of addressing issues of low educational attainment, unemployment and social reintegration.

