

**Evaluation of Certificate in Addiction Studies
(NUI Maynooth)**

**Delivered by Drugs Awareness Programme
(Crosscare, Clonliffe College)**

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Context of Course

One of the proposals put forward in the National Drugs Strategy policy statement (2001) is that specialist drug prevention training should be made available to individuals interacting with those most at risk. Among the professional groups mentioned are youth workers, teachers, welfare officers and Gardai. One of the points mentioned is that the approach taken should reflect changing attitudes and patterns of drug misuse.

This programme fits broadly into the recommend pattern with particular reference to the community and voluntary sector. A central part of the National Drugs Strategy is that this sector should have a central role and the indications are that Crosscare have a particularly important part to play in this. One of the advantages of the Crosscare agency is that its remit is regional and in this sense, it fits with the emphasis in the National Drugs strategy.

An important feature is the course is accredited by NUIM Maynooth and is one of several courses of that University which are delivered in local communities. As with other courses designed by the Department of Adult and Community Education (NUIM), the needs of **adult learners** are central in the design of the course. In the Certificate in Addiction studies, this emphasis is reflected in the suggested style of delivery, the suggested assessment and in the flexibility that is an intrinsic feature of the course.

The programme as implemented by the Crosscare team placed particular emphasis on the community dimensions of the course. This is shown in the participant profile (considered below)

Overview of Course

From the perspective of the evaluation, a number of considerations regarding the course specifications are important. Firstly, the aim of the course is to provide

participants with a broad overview of key theoretical frameworks in relation to substance misuse and dependence and to enable them to develop basic helping and interventions skills. It is suggested that the content include five modules as follows:

- Course introduction and learning support
- Substance, use misuse and dependence
- Helping and intervention skills
- Social and community issues
- Personal, organisational and vocational issues

With regard to admission, requirements, mention is made of experience of working in a community setting, working with alcohol/drug problems commitment to learning in a group setting and openness to reflect on one's own practice, attitude and beliefs. An absolute requirement is that participants would be 23 years old or more.

The course duration is 100 hours spread part-time over an academic year. The assessment procedures involve a minimum attendance requirement (85%) participation in class and assignments/projects.

Profile of Participants

A detailed breakdown of the profile of participants is shown in Appendix 1. While it is difficult to say what an 'ideal' profile might be, it is clear that there is a good representation in terms of age-group, employment status and level of education. Just two thirds of the participants are female – a pattern that is not unusual in courses for mature students. There is an excellent spread in terms of level of education with a range people who have completed primary only to students who already have a degree. As might be expected the community and voluntary sector is well represented.

Aims and Methodology of Evaluation

The aims of the evaluation were to: (i) examine the extent to which the course contributes to the professional needs of the community and voluntary sector in relation drug prevention and treatment, (ii) evaluate the contribution of the course to the development of the participants both professionally and personally, (iii) to

establish the extent to which the course is guided by best practice in the field of adult learning and (iv) to make recommendations for developments and improvements.

There are four main aspects to the evaluation. In the first part (October 2003), the students on the course were given an initial questionnaire concerning their expectations and experiences to date. The second feature of the evaluation involved site visits, specifically to the classes/seminars of the participants. These occurred during the course of the academic year. The third aspect of the evaluation was the final questionnaire given to students at the end of the course. The fourth feature consisted of focus group discussions with participants in the course (coming towards the end of the academic year).

Each of these is described here together with the main outcomes.

1: Initial Questionnaire

This consisted of open-ended questions concerned with expectations, hopes and worries regarding the course on which participants had just embarked. The results are summarised here under the headings generated from the questions asked.

What areas of knowledge do you expect have acquired when you have completed the course?

There was a common pattern in most of the responses to this question. The participants expected to learn about the effects of drugs, why people experiment with drugs, the nature of addiction, and what interventions are appropriate for prevention and treatment.

What skills do you expect to learn in the course?

A variety of areas were mentioned with the following being especially prominent:

- (i) Counselling and interpersonal skills, with particular reference to helping people having problems with drugs,
- (ii) related to this was a mention of having the confidence to tackle difficulties experienced by people ,
- (iii) relating with drug users and understanding addiction,

- (iv) Some features of community work and networking within communities and with other professionals and
- (v) presentation skills and especially the confidence to explain one's viewpoint and understanding of a problem

In what way do you think the course will help you personally?

These could be categorised under three main headings. The first was in the cognitive domain...that they would better understand issues and be better able to present them. The second and most frequently mentioned had to do with personal development, specifically a hope of a greater openness and understanding of other people's problems, less judgemental and able to have rapport with people with whom they have an involvement. Another general area had to do with improvements in interactions in various domains including family or in work.

What are your main concerns about the course?

By far the largest number of responses focused on academic matters and especially a concern with the academic demands of the course in terms of essays, assignments, and presentations. Many of the students had worries about whether they could manage this work and they specified what features of this that were likely to cause them problems. Some simply said that they were concerned about 'getting through' the course. Some mentioned the amount they had to read, some with the large number of handouts they needed to understand and some talked about the other matters in their lives that prevented them from giving undivided attention to their work. Some details of the assessment procedures were also mentioned as a cause of concern. One commented that he/she did not know 'how group projects would work out...if some people did not do their share'.

Related to this some expressed their concern about the sheer size of the literature that was available on the topic of addiction and wondered how they would master all this, especially the 'statistics'. One comment was that he/she was 'totally overwhelmed by the amount that was known on the subject'

Aside from academic concerns, a number of other matters were mentioned but not nearly as frequently as the concerns about the academic demands. One student was

concerned about the cohesion of the group. He/she was concerned that the group seemed to be divided and there was a need to talk about that. Another said that the scale of the drugs problem with which they were now aware made him/her despondent at ever being about to do anything about it.

What were the particular circumstances that caused you to apply to do the course?

In response to this item, the majority of the respondents said that their motivation was work-related, at least initially. Many said that their work involved dealing with people with drug problems and it seemed important to get state of the art information on the areas of prevention and treatment of addiction. Some others specifically talked about the value of having an accredited qualification.

A number of the respondents gave a more personal response to this question. One said that he/she was quite overwhelmed by the amount that was known about the topic and this made her knowledge seem limited. In the same way another response was that she/he 'wanted a challenge to my way of thinking about addiction'. Another commented that her/his main motivation was to do something about this major problem for society.

Are you experiencing any difficulties in getting the time to be involved in the course in the way you would like to?

The majority of the respondents simply said 'no' to this and did not elaborate. This and the implication of those comments that were made, indicate that the vast majority seem to have made appropriate provision for this course. As one comment went: 'Time is an issue for me but so far I have succeeded in managing it'.

Others made the point that some features of the course made the process of time management rather easier than it might otherwise be. In this regard, there were very positive comments about the facilitators and how they were helpful and understanding with regard to any problems that arose.

Are there any features in the course that you are particularly looking forward to?

The response to this question could be divided into three categories. The first were those participants who said that they enjoyed ‘everything’. As one said ‘I enjoy every day’ and another who simply said ‘All of it’.

A second category had to do with some kinds of experience of the course. Nearly half of the participants mentioned ‘agency visits’ as an experience that they looked forward to greatly. Most did not elaborate but those who did said that they looked forward to this because it brought the course together. The ‘creative’ project was also mentioned as an experience that quite a number looked forward to as it involved working with others.

Finally, a number mentioned that they looked forward to particular areas of learning on the course. In this regard, a number of students referred to the contribution of visiting speakers. Among the areas of learning mentioned were ‘Counselling’, Theories of Addiction and ‘Family System Theories’.

Are there any features of the course that you are concerned about?

More than two-thirds of the students said that there was nothing in particular that they were concerned about. Of those who expressed a concern the vast majority were focused on certain aspects of assessment. However, there was no single aspect that was mentioned by more than two or three and even in these cases, the level of concern was moderate by comparison with any group of mature students. The creative group project was mentioned not only because it posed a challenge but also ‘because I might let others down as well as myself’. The final essay was mentioned but no specific reason was given as to why made him/her anxious this was scary. Another person mentioned ‘presenting the agency visit’. Finally, one person mentioned ‘assignments in general’ since he/she had not been studying for some years.

Conclusions from Initial Questionnaire

The information emerging from the initial questionnaire provided reason for the course organisers to be satisfied with their work so far. It was clear that the participants not only had a realistic knowledge of what they will learn in the course, but there was agreement between them about what they should learn and they were confident that they can indeed master what is required of them. With regard to their

expectations it is fair to say that while they have high expectations, they were also realistic and were aware of the complexities of this area of learning.

It was also evident that while the participants have some concerns about the assessment process (as is normal for mature students), none reported being so overwhelmed that they felt unable to cope. The participants were especially looking forward to the most innovative features of the course which involve co-operative learning. They also were interested in the whole range of ideas that are central to work on addiction and prevention. They were confident the course would make a valuable contribution to their professional lives.

Finally, the students were very positive about the skills, dedication, helpfulness and approachability of the tutors.

2: Site Visits

During the site visits the evaluator had the opportunity to observe various activities in the course. These included; (i) a formal presentation on access to data on drug addiction/treatment and related issues, and (ii) feedback from agency visits.

I concluded that the experiences of students on the course were extremely positive and compare favourably with those in other institutions of higher education. I mention a few features. Firstly, the competence of the tutors and lecturers ensures that classes are run smoothly and that the students are confident that they are being guided on the right lines. Secondly, the class is run along a model of real **adult** learning, and takes into account the experiences and prior learning of all the participants. Thirdly, the fact that participants have come from different areas (community, voluntary and statutory sector) allows for high-level discussion of major questions. Finally and perhaps most importantly, there is a great atmosphere of **trust**, both between the participants and between the participants and tutors. One indication of this was the readiness of people to disagree with their colleagues and do so in an atmosphere of safety and respect. This is all too uncommon in higher education and reflects a dedication on behalf of all concerned.

3: Final Questionnaire

The final questionnaire was administered to students on completion of the course. The questionnaire was in five parts. The first part was concerned with information about respondents and their background. The second section sought their views on the organisation and management of the course and the next section was concerned with the content and methodologies of teaching that were central to the course. A fourth section was concerned with the views of respondents on assignments and assessment and the final section with facilitation and tutorial support. Most of the questions were structured with respondents being asked to indicate their satisfaction with features of the course, while other questions were open-ended and asked them to describe their experiences in their own words.

Twenty completed questionnaires were returned and the results are described briefly with reference to the main sections in the questionnaire.

Organisation and Management

Table 1 shows the level of satisfaction of the participants with various features of the management and organisation of the course. The overall pattern of results is extremely satisfactory from the perspective of the participants. In no case does the number of people who express dissatisfaction come near the number who were satisfied. In fact in no case does the number who were dissatisfied exceed three. Indeed, the only case where three people expressed dissatisfaction was in relation to the procedures for selection for the course.

For a number of features of the management and organisation of the course, the full cohort of students expressed satisfaction with the course. This was true with regard to being made aware of arrangements and times and also with regard to having a suitable venue. For each of these 100% of the respondents expressed satisfaction. There were some other features of the organisation with which no participant expressed dissatisfaction (but with some who found it 'hard to say'). These were 'having access to resources necessary for course' and being made aware of any changes in the course.

The open-ended comments on issue to do with the organisation of the course were few in number and should be taken in the context of the very positive outcomes in the structured component of the questionnaire. One person who had commented very positively remarked that the ‘above is an accurate reflection on my opinion ...and not just because I was too lazy to use other categories’. One comment made here but not directly relevant to organisation was that ‘there were four speakers on the course who were so set in their own opinion and bordered on holding right wing viewpoints and not open to challenge’. Another comment relevant to organisation was that ‘...seeing that the DNEDTF was funding the course, the people working in the community sector should get priority’.

Table 1: Satisfaction with management and organisation

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|--|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| The procedures for selection for the course | 9 | 6 | 2 | 3 | ---- |
| Being made aware of arrangements and times | 14 | 6 | --- | --- | ---- |
| Knowing broadly what to expect in the course | 3 | 12 | 3 | 2 | ---- |
| Knowing how the course was structured | 7 | 8 | 4 | 1 | ---- |
| Being told what each part of the course was meant to achieve | 3 | 11 | 5 | 1 | ---- |
| Being aware of any changes in the course | 5 | 13 | 2 | --- | ---- |
| Feeling that you could discuss any problem you had | 9 | 7 | 3 | 1 | ---- |
| Being able to give feedback on the experiences you had | 9 | 8 | 1 | 2 | ---- |

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|---|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Having a mix of input and other kinds of experience | 7 | 9 | 2 | 2 | --- |
| Having a suitable venue | 14 | 6 | -- | --- | --- |
| Having access to resources necessary for course | 10 | 9 | 1 | --- | --- |
| Speakers being representative of work on addiction | 6 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Students being representative of relevant sectors | 6 | 13 | 1 | 2 | --- |

Content of Course

The respondents were also asked about course content. Specifically they were asked about various aspect of the course content, like the course being ‘relevant to drug issues’ and the course having a ‘good mix of teaching methods’.

The results for these questions are shown in Table 2. A high level of satisfaction with various aspects of the content of the course is evident here. Some of these indicators gave exceptionally strong satisfaction ratings. For example, in the case of ‘making me think about drug issues’, all 20 of the respondents indicated satisfaction and of these 80% were very satisfied. Figures that were quite similar to this emerged in relation to ‘providing access to new information’ and ‘giving up to-date information’ Even for those matters for which the outcome was not as strong as for these, the pattern was still very positive. In no case, was the number who expressed dissatisfaction of any significant size.

Given that the course was specifically aimed at adult learners, it is worth noting what the views of the participants was with regard to the course taking into account that they were adult learners. All of the people who expressed a definite opinion were satisfied with the way in which the course took this factor into account.

The open-ended comments were consistent with these positive views. A typical comment was that ‘...time constraints worked against going in-depth into every topic

in every subject area. However, the handouts meant that you could do so if you wished either now or in the future.

Table 2: Satisfaction with Features of Course Content

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|---|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Course being relevant to drug issues | 8 | 11 | --- | 1 | ---- |
| Course providing access to new information and thinking | 10 | 10 | ---- | --- | ---- |
| Making me think about issues of importance with regard to drugs | 16 | 4 | ---- | ---- | --- |
| Having a good mix of teaching methods | 5 | 14 | --- | 1 | --- |
| Allowing time for discussion | 5 | 9 | 2 | 4 | |
| Sustaining my interest throughout the year | 4 | 13 | 2 | 1 | --- |
| Establishing links with my experience | 6 | 8 | 5 | 1 | --- |
| Allowing participants to disagree if they wished | 13 | 5 | --- | 2 | --- |
| Taking into account that we are adult learners | 14 | 5 | 1 | --- | ---- |
| Giving up-to-date Information | 12 | 8 | --- | --- | ---- |

Topics on the Course

The various topics on the course were listed in the next section of the questionnaire and the participants were asked to say how satisfactory they found each of the topics listed. The results are shown in Table 3. A few preliminary points are worth making. Firstly, the fact that a large number of people indicated that they found it ‘hard to say’

may be an indication that perhaps they may not have been able to participate in that particular session (they may have been absent). It might also be the case that in some instances the recall of the session may not have been very good. These are important caveats to be borne in mind in considering the pattern of results.

It can be seen that almost all of the topics were regarded as satisfactory by the participants. For example, 18 people were satisfied with ‘family systems theory’ and of these 14 were very satisfied. The participants expressed quite a similar level of satisfaction with several other topics. Only in one case did the number who were dissatisfied exceed the number who were satisfied, i.e. pharmacology of substance use. Obviously this is an area that is inherently difficult especially for people who do not have a background in the physical sciences.

The open-ended comments were in line with the results in the structured questions. Some commented that they would have liked more input on various matters including counselling perspectives and motivational interviewing. Others commented on the style of presentation that they preferred: ‘I found most topics interesting ...and preferred those where the speaker had a relaxed style of presentation...’

Table 3: Satisfaction with Topics on the Course

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|--|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Substance use: A pharmacological perspective | 3 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 2 |
| Self-care and stress management | 3 | 12 | - | 4 | 1 |
| Addiction: Theoretical perspectives | 7 | 9 | 1 | 3 | --- |
| Substance use: Prevention and education | 6 | 11 | 3 | --- | --- |
| Approaches to treatment | 6 | 9 | 5 | --- | --- |

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|---|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Working with specific groups ⁴ | | 11 | 5 | --- | --- |
| Motivational interviewing and brief solution focused therapy ⁵ | | 8 | 3 | 4 | --- |
| Substance use – legal perspective | 3 | 11 | 4 | 2 | --- |
| Family systems theory | 14 | 4 | 1 | 1 | --- |
| Mental and addiction | 9 | 7 | 3 | 1 | --- |
| Homelessness and addiction | 10 | 6 | 2 | 2 | --- |
| Perspective on counselling | 3 | 11 | 5 | 1 | --- |
| Working with young people | 7 | 7 | 4 | 2 | --- |
| Community development | 4 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| Viral illnesses | 8 | 8 | 3 | --- | --- |
| Approaches to rehabilitation | 7 | 8 | 5 | --- | --- |
| Substance use and policy | 4 | 10 | 4 | 2 | --- |

Assessment procedure and assignments

The students were asked a number of questions to elicit their views on the assessment procedure for this course. These included the appropriateness of the assessments methods used as well as their satisfaction with feedback and clarity on marking schemes. The results are shown in Table 4.

This table shows that the participants were extremely positive about the system of assessment that was put in place. For example, with regard to two features ‘getting

feedback on early assignments’ and ‘getting advice on assignments when I had problems’, all of the participants expressed satisfaction including three quarters who said that they were very satisfied. Given the importance of getting feedback at an early stage in a course and the significance of being able to get advice when problems were being experienced, these outcomes are very noteworthy.

The comments about the assessment were broadly consistent with the structured question. One commented that ‘...agree with the attendance and participation being counted for the final assessment’. Another would have liked ‘...samples that would have shown the layout of assignments, especially for students new to essay writing’.

Table 4: Views of Course Participants on Assessment

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|---|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Relevance of assignments to the course | 9 | 11 | ---- | --- | ---- |
| Clarity of what was required in assignments | 10 | 9 | 1 | --- | ---- |
| Getting feedback on early assignments | 14 | 6 | --- | ---- | ---- |
| Getting advice on assignments when I had problems | 14 | 6 | --- | ---- | ---- |
| Clarity of marking scheme for assignments | 9 | 10 | --- | 1 | |
| The fact that participation and attendance counted for final assessment | 10 | 8 | 2 | | |

Most useful parts of assessment

The participants were asked which feature of the assessment was most useful to them in enhancing their experience in the course. While there were five possible responses, Table 5 shows that the vast majority of responses fall into either the very useful or useful category. Indeed each part of the assessment was viewed very positively by all of the participants. This was especially the case with the creative group project and

the group agency visit. In both cases, 19 of the participants found it useful or very useful and only one found it ‘hard to say’. Roughly, two thirds said their experiences of these features was very useful. .

Table 5: Most useful Features of Assessment

| | Very Useful | Useful | Hard to Say | Not very Useful | Not useful at all |
|------------------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Introductory essay | 6 | 13 | ---- | 1 | --- |
| Individual essay | 8 | 11 | 1 | --- | ---- |
| Learning journal | 8 | 8 | 2 | 2 | ---- |
| Creative group project | 12 | 7 | 1 | --- | --- |
| Group agency visit | 13 | 6 | 1 | --- | --- |

The students were invited to make open-ended comments on the assessment and these were consistent with the information in the table. One comment was that ‘...the introductory essay helped me to focus’. Another said that ‘...all writing was a challenge to me, but I really enjoyed doing all of them and the agency visit was a brilliant experience’

Perception of Facilitators

Because of the central significance of the facilitators, the respondents were asked to say what their views were of the facilitators with respect to several dimensions including their competence and accessibility. The results are shown in Table 6.

The response of the participants to the work of the facilitators is extremely positive by any standards. It is fair to say that there was unanimity in the high level of satisfaction expressed with regard to each feature of the work of the team. This is a remarkably positive and important finding.

There were a few open-ended comments all of which were in line with the general findings emerging with regard to the structured questions. One comment was the

‘.....facilitators were as helpful as ever I have met in education’. Another was that they were ‘...excellent and very knowledgeable and accessible’. And finally ‘...so professional, lovely manner, so approachable: Excellent’.

Table 6: Evaluation of Facilitators

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Hard To say | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Approachability | 19 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Competence | 19 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Encouragement | 18 | 2 | --- | ---- | ---- |
| Being accessible | 16 | 3 | 1 | ---- | ---- |

Contribution of the Course

The participants were asked to indicate how the course had enhanced various aspects of their lives. The results shown in Table 7 shows that the course had indeed enhanced the participants’ lives with respect to the matters set out especially in relation to their understanding of addiction and also their understanding of adult learning. While it was the case that they did not see the course as enhancing their job prospects to the same extent as these others matters, they were nevertheless very positive about this too.

The open-ended comments were consistent with these findings. One comment was that ‘...I am working in this field only for a (short time) and I found the course essential learning’. Another comment was ‘...I am not sure if I wish to pursue a career in this area, but the course has certainly opened my mind and challenged my thinking’. And finally ‘...the course encouraged me to take on further education in the drugs area’.

Table 7: Contribution of Course

| | To a great Extent | To a moderate Extent | To some Extent | Very Little |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Your understanding of addiction and related issues | 10 | 10 | ---- | --- |
| Your insights into yourself | 8 | 9 | 2 | 1 |
| Your understanding of adult learning | 11 | 7 | 2 | --- |
| Your job prospects | 4 | 12 | 2 | 2 |

Overall Conclusions on Final Questionnaire

The participants were very satisfied with the management and organisation of the course; they were made aware of arrangements and they thought the venue to be excellent. Similarly they were very happy with the access to resources necessary for course as well as being made aware of any changes in the course.

There was a high level of satisfaction with the content of the course. The students thought that it made them think about drug issues, that it provided access to new information and gave them up to-date information on drug matters. Given that the course was specifically aimed at adult learners, it is worth noting the participants were very happy about the way in which the course took into account that they were adult learners.

The various topics that were dealt with in the course were regarded as highly satisfactory by the participants. For example, with several topics nearly 100% expressed satisfaction and of these the vast majority were very satisfied. Only for one topic did the number who were dissatisfied exceed the number who were satisfied – an outcome which is understandable given the inherent difficulty of the topic in question.

The participants were extremely positive about the system of assessment that was put in place. For example, with regard to two features ‘getting feedback on early assignments’ and ‘getting advice on assignments when I had problems’, all of the participants expressed satisfaction. Given the importance of getting feedback at an

early stage in a course and the significance of being able to get advice when problems were being experienced, these outcomes are very important.

It is of major interest that each part of the assessment procedure was viewed very positively by all of the participants. This was especially the case with the creative group project and the group agency visit. In the case of the former, 95% of the participants found it useful or very useful. A similar but even more positive pattern emerges with regard to the 'group agency visit'.

The response of the participants to the work of the facilitators is extremely positive by any standards. It is fair to say that there was unanimity in the high level of satisfaction expressed with regard to each feature of the work of the team, including their approachability, competence, accessibility and encouragement. This is a remarkably positive and important finding.

Finally, the participants were asked to indicate how the course had enhanced various aspects of their lives. The results showed that the course had indeed enhanced the participants' lives with respect to a range of matters but especially in relation to their understanding of addiction and also their understanding of adult learning. While it was the case that they did not see the course as enhancing their job prospects to the same extent as these other matters, they were nevertheless very positive about this too.

4: Focus Groups

Finally, on completion of the course, the group was divided into two focus groups with the evaluator as facilitator. The organisation of the discussion of the focus groups was as recommended in the literature in this area. Particular attention was given to the following questions:

- Given their expectations when they began the course, how satisfied were they the course?
- What were their views on the content of the course?

- What were their views on the learning processes in the course?
- How satisfied were they with the supports that were put in place?

In summary, the strong majority view was that the participants found the course to be broadly in line with what they expected. They liked the way that the course followed the adult learning model in the sense that they felt free to disagree with particular viewpoints. They were also happy with the content of the various classes and thought that these were appropriate to the aims and objectives of the course.

Some suggestions were made about particular topics on the course that might be developed and expanded. These included a development of the importance of peer influences in drug use, the role of influences on beginning drug use, family support, models of interventions and the association of mental health and drug addiction.

As noted above in the results emerging from the final questionnaire, the participants were extremely happy with the assessment procedure both in the content of what was required and in the assistance that they got. In the focus groups, the fears that participants had in tackling essays was mentioned, especially for the significant number who had no previous experience of essays and assignments. In other words, they thought it important that the sensitive approach that was characteristic of the tutors' approach should be continued.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is evident that the Certificate in Addiction Studies run by the Drug Awareness Programme has been an outstanding success. The participants in the course are carefully selected, highly motivated and are eager to be involved in the course in accordance with a true adult learning methodology.

The content of the course was well researched and the speakers for the various topics were extremely competent, encouraged participation and showed an enthusiasm for their modules in a way that was reflected in the very positive ratings. The assessment procedure was appropriate to the course and all of the students were positive about the benefit they derived from these.

A course is only as good as the people who run/organise it. In the case of the tutors in this course, they were rated by all as exceptionally competent, friendly and accessible. More than any other feature, this is one aspect that is of major importance.

From the perspective of the main stakeholders, it is evident that the course satisfies their expectations and requirements. The course is in line with the philosophy and goals of CROSSCARE. It give excellent value to the funding body (Dublin North Eastern Drugs Task Force) in the sense that it builds capacity in the community and voluntary sector in relation to various features of Drugs policy (prevention and treatment). With regard to NUI Maynooth, not only is it the case that the course fulfils academic criteria but the style and emphasis of the course is especially suitable for *adult* learners. At various times (particular in relation to the site visit) and in relation to various other aspects of the evaluation, I have commented on the particular appropriateness of the course for adults. This was reflected in the spirit of the interchanges between students, and above all in the attitudes of the tutors.

The recommendations made below are made in consideration of the need to keep the momentum that is presently in evidence as well as the need for opportunities for progression among the students in the course. There is no significance in the order of presentation here since the recommendations are concerned with different stakeholders/areas of focus.

The Programme

- The programme should continue broadly along the lines that have been shown to be successful last year.

- The course should be given priority in the Crosscare plan and the necessary supports put in place
- The importance of having voluntary sector agency providing such a course, should be recognised and the necessary resources to sustain the course should be ensured
- The community development ethos of the course should be maintained

Staffing and facilitators

- There is a need to give attention to the professional development of the facilitators. This might involve attendance at relevance courses/conferences and postgraduate work.
- The co-facilitation of the course should be continued
- As far as possible the input into the course and the personnel involved should be as similar to last year as possible taking into account the new developments in the area of addiction

Student intake

- The student intake should continue to reflect the profile of the present cohort.
- There are grounds for maintaining the ‘mature student’ emphasis on the course. Already a number of participants are actively pursuing courses as a result of the programme

Progression

- Given the high level of motivation of the students and the importance of the topic there are grounds for examining pathways through which students would progress to Diploma and Degree level

Amendments based on reflections of course tutors

Having considered a preliminary evaluation report and having been invited to reflect on future development, the course tutors suggest the following goals for next year

- Greater skills-based training
- Identifying barriers to participation e.g. childcare issues and timing of course
- Broadening the course to include forms of addiction other than opiate addiction
- Changing the order of topics to ensure continuity between models and themes
- Exploring the use of creative methodologies in the course

Signed:

Mark Morgan, Ph.D.

September 2004

Appendix 1: NUI Maynooth Certificate Course in Addiction Studies
2003-2004

Participants Profile

| | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----|
| Gender: | Male | 6 |
| | Female | 13 |
| Age-group: | <30 yrs | 5 |
| | 30-39 yrs | 3 |
| | 40-49 yrs | 7 |
| | >49yrs | 4 |
| Employment Status: | Full-time permanent | 8 |
| | Temporary/contractual full-time | 3 |
| | Part-time work | 3 |
| | Unemployed | 4 |
| Employment Sector: | Community | 10 |
| | Voluntary | 3 |
| | Statutory | 5 |
| | Other sector | |
| Level of Education: | Primary only | 2 |
| | Some post-primary | |
| | Completed post primary school | 4 |
| | Some higher level | 8 |
| | Completed degree | 4 |