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Evaluating the Impact of the Commissioning for Wellbeing

1. Background

The Principles of Commissioning for Wellbeing level 5 qualification, developed by Skills

qualification (57% of those taking the learning disability and autism version and 28% of the generic learners) and it might have been premature for the learners to have applied their learning to practice.

Key themes from interviews with a sample of learners were identified and in addition to reflecting on their experiences of the course, the top six findings in descending order were:

- Commissioning differently
- Understanding co-production
- Personal impact on learners
- Learners' access to course
- Better understanding of commissioning
- Outcomes-based commissioning

While the top themes were identified with similar frequency between both groups of learners, there were also areas of difference. Learners taking the Learning Disability & Autism contextualised qualification appeared less likely to identify some themes compared to learners taking the generic qualification:

29% interviewees identified barriers to implementing their learning; this was true of 36% generic learners, but only 14% of the Learning Disability & Autism learners.

Similarly, 38% of all learners interviewed identified positive career impact associated with the qualification, but this was true of 43% of generic learners, and 28% of those taking the Learning Disability & Autism contextualised version. These findings may reflect the fact that all of the latter group of learners were still completing the qualification, or had only recently finished, compared to the generic learners, where 11 of the 14 (78%) had completed in 2021 or earlier.

All of the interviewees commented on commissioning differently – either expressing their aspirations to do things differently or describing situations in which they had done so as a result of their new skills and knowledge - and an increased emphasis on co-production and personalisation. The scope for changing the offer on the nature and quality of day services was a recurrent theme, as was commissioning home-based support in more imaginative and flexible ways.

Almost all the interviewees were enthusiastic advocates for the qualification and eager to encourage their colleagues to take up the same opportunities. Some employing organisations were more supportive than others, but several learners described an enabling culture in which they were either leading the way or following in the footsteps of other colleagues who had completed the qualification.

Positive reflections on the experience of the course, and particularly the high quality of course tutors, were accompanied by a range of suggestions for improvement either in content or style of delivery. There was a preference for a more blended style of learning from some learners, and an appetite for more systematic opportunities for networking and sharing good practice between commissioners.

The experience of taking the qualification changed learners' perceptions and understanding of commissioning, and prior to taking the qualification many had little or no formal training for their responsibilities, and a patchy knowledge of the underpinning legislation and the purpose of commissioning for outcomes. Having a basic knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of commissioning should be a prerequisite for progression in commissioning roles. Requirements for higher level knowledge – such as through the Level 5 The Commissioning for Wellbeing qualification – could also be linked to career progression opportunities.

The qualification has the potential to transform practice, both at the level of individual learners, and across organisations. Maximising the impact on commissioning practice has implications for the organisational culture of employers which needs to be supportive of individual learners and enable them to apply their learning. Career progression and promotion opportunities for qualified staff are likely to be associated with long-term commitment to the employer, which is particularly valuable in the context of recruitment and retention challenges.

There is scope for building on the skills and experience of learners who have completed the Level 5 qualification through more systematic networking opportunities for alumni. Establishing a Community of Practice to support ongoing exchange of ideas, experience and innovation would be worth considering.

Finally, despite the positive findings of the review and the tangible benefits of taking the Level 5 Commissioning for Wellbeing qualification, there were some limitations of scope and scale in the review. It was not possible to follow up longitudinal impact, or to examine the effect of having successive cohorts of learners in particular authorities. It was also not possible to triangulate the self-reported reflections of learners with the perceptions of their managers, or with the experience of people using care and support services, and therefore to assess whether better commissioning knowledge has indeed led to enhanced wellbeing outcomes.

3.2 Personalised commissioning and co-production

“I think I was person-centred, but I also think I was quite influenced by external pressures, so I think it has made me challenge more in terms of advocating for the person themselves, to say no, actually this is what we need to do.” [NHS Commissioner, #LD&A]

“From what I’ve learnt about co-production and partnership (...) the principles and practices for commissioning for wellbeing, and just putting those in place really. This is the way you’ve got to do it, and because I’m starting from scratch, I’m trying to take responsibility for that. I never do anything without co-production now, and with partners in the CCG.” [Social Care Commissioner, #LD&A]

“I think having done the course, it has encouraged me to try stuff and if it doesn’t work, that’s fine, that’s an OK outcome. And stopping things that don’t work (...) that’s why evaluation is so important, and not just the facts and figures but what difference has it made to people’s wellbeing, their happiness, and as a result have we prevented someone coming to our front door and enabled them to continue to live an independent life making their own choices? That’s what it is all about for me.” [Social Care Commissioner, #G]

“So much of [the course] just helped me remember that in commissioning this is all about people, and some of my commissioning colleagues don’t come from a practice background (...) and it can be a little bit in the ivory tower and behind a keyboard sometimes. So, the whole co-production thing for me – they will be so sick of me banging on – saying ‘have you talked to people; have you spoken to people who actually use the service; have you asked the carers of people who are using the service; what’s our lived experience in this area’? But three years on in post that is something we now do as regular practice.” [Social Care Commissioner, #G]

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