



Empowerment College Manual

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ImROC, UK

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Purpose of this manual

This manual describes the aim and guiding principles which underpin an Empowerment College. It provides an outline of who an Empowerment College is for, how students might best access and use the College and the practicalities which the service provider will need to consider in setting up and delivering an Empowerment College. It should be read in conjunction with the 'Curriculum' guidance which provides great detail for trainers on course development, facilitation and review.

Section 1:

What is an Empowerment College?

1.1 Aim of the College

The aim of the Empowerment College is to provide learning opportunities for people who experience mental health challenges, their family members, staff who support them and members of the public with an interest or involvement in mental health. These learning opportunities are all focused on increasing understanding, confidence, coping strategies and behaviour to enable people to manage their own lives, conditions and treatments as far as possible so that they can live the lives they wish to lead.

Extending access to those beyond those using and delivering mental health services affords the opportunity to facilitate the learning of a wider audience which will increase knowledge and understanding about empowerment, recovery and mental health. Furthermore, a shared learning environment can enable issues such as stigma, discrimination and rights within society to be explored. Engagement, within the learning environment, with those from the wider community may also create opportunities for individuals using mental health services to actively participate in political, social and cultural conversations which connect individuals to their wider communities and promote citizenship.

The goal of the College is to both empower people and support them in their own recovery. The definition of Recovery is probably best summarised in the WHO definition given in their Mental Health Action Plan (2013)¹:

.... "From the perspective of the individual, recovery means gaining and retaining hope, understanding of ones abilities and disabilities, engagement in an active life, personal autonomy, social identity, meaning and purpose in life and a positive sense of self. Recovery is not synonymous with cure..... The core service requirements include: listening and responding to individuals' understanding of their condition and what helps them to recover; working with people as equal partners in their care; offering choice of treatment and therapies, and in terms of who provides care; and the use of peer workers and supports, who provide each other with encouragement and a sense of belonging, in addition to their expertise".

Empowerment is closely linked to recovery but takes a less individualist approach. It encompasses the political, social and cultural action necessary for personal recovery so according a role not only to the individual, but to their communities as well. This is well summarized by WHO Health Promotion Glossary (1998)²:



“Empowerment may be a social, cultural, psychological or political process through which individuals and social groups are able to express their needs, present their concerns, devise strategies for involvement in decision-making, and achieve political, social and cultural action to meet those needs. Through such a process people see a closer correspondence between their goals in life and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes”.



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Section 2:

Guiding principles of an Empowerment College

Coproduction - **Location** - **Education** - **Inclusive** - **Recovery**

2.1 Co-production

Coproduction lies at the heart of every aspect of an Empowerment College. This refers to the partnership between experts by profession or training, and experts by experience. Empowerment colleges are neither professionally led nor user-led; they are defined by their commitment to bringing together different types of expertise and experience relevant to the subject.

ImROC has defined coproduction in terms of its principles. These provide a more comprehensive description of the way that coproduction works within an Empowerment College:

- We recognise people as having human **assets**, strengths, resources and networks that reach beyond the labels we use to describe their 'position' within a system or hierarchy.
- We build **mutual and reciprocal relationships** in which expertise is recognised amongst all parties, no longer the exclusive domain of the professional. Looking beyond these conventional labels, we strive to break down barriers, blur boundaries, and share responsibility in the design, delivery and improvement of services.
- We nurture and mobilise peer, personal and professional **networks** around a diverse community of interest, in order to share learning, build understanding, generate ideas and explore possibilities.
- We seek to **catalyse change**, and we have that vision for services too. We believe that it is for the individual to define and lead their journey, with services acting as supporters and facilitators of resources, expertise and networks that help both in the short and longer term.

(Lewis, King and Herbert (2017)₃ page 3).

Thus, Empowerment Colleges bring together relevant people with experience of mental health challenges, family members, mental health staff, educationalists and administrators to *co-design and co-deliver* a local Empowerment College. They bring together relevant experts in each of the course topics to co-produce courses and select a training team with relevant experts by experience and by profession to co-facilitate courses, similarly relevant experts co-evaluate the College.

There are a number of reasons for this singular commitment to coproduction:

- a. A wide range of relevant experience and expertise can only be found among a mixed group who bring different perspectives and ideas.
- b. The differential power of different groups results in one perspective dominating – and thereby perpetuating and consolidating this power imbalance. In mental health the traditional psychiatric approach, led by psychiatrists and based on a medical model predominates, and the experience, ideas, values and expertise of people who live with mental health conditions is largely ignored. Empowerment Colleges model a very different way of thinking about mental health because they place equal value on the view of professionals and people with mental health problems which vastly increases the material that can be usefully shared in the classroom.



- c. For students who lack confidence or have a limited sense of their own possibilities, the experience of learning from someone who has similar experiences to them can radically shift their identity and their personal ambitions.
- d. For students who hold prevailing social stereotypes about mental 'illness' the experience of learning from a professional and a person with lived experience who clearly value one another's' views and experiences, who work in equal partnership and demonstrate the synergy of coproduction can inspire hope for their own recovery and shift self-stigmatisation. Similarly, students who are family members or members of the public can begin to see new possibilities and review their beliefs about mental 'illnesses'.
- e. Coproduction is not about getting any professional and person with lived experience to work together, it is about inviting the best people for the job to work together to coproduce something new, something that draws on everyone's expertise to offer new ways of solving old problems. This means that Empowerment Colleges should develop partnerships with community facilities and organisations to coproduce courses on aspects of life outside mental health services (for example, looking after your home, managing your money, food and mood, applying for work....).

Coproduction does not just happen. All those involved in the Empowerment College – trainers who are experts by profession or training, and experts by experience - will need to participate in learning about coproduction with exercises to practice and experience ways of working together, what helps and hinders the development of equally valued contribution.

2.2 Education

An Empowerment College is an educational resource rather than a health service or day centre. It involves a different kind of relationship between professionals and people using services: from a patient or client to a student or tutor, from a therapist to a student or tutor who makes available their expertise to those who might be interested. It does not provide care management or risk assessment. People are not referred to a College on the basis of a professional judgement about what might be good for them, they choose courses from a prospectus and register for the ones that interest them. This approach encourages individuals to assume responsibility for the direction of their own recovery at the earliest stage of engagement with the College. There is no selection based on diagnosis or clinical condition. It runs along educational principles, using educational processes, approaches, methods and language. As such, it needs to be co-developed and delivered with the contribution of an educational advisor who has experience and expertise in education.

Empowerment Colleges cannot and should not be a substitute for mainstream education and other learning and training opportunities. Their purpose is to help people to rebuild their lives with a mental health condition not to provide qualifications recognised by employers by replicating, in a special and segregated, setting, the type of courses available to mainstream education. However, they may equip people to move into mainstream education/training opportunities that could provide the qualifications recognised by employers (if that is the person's choice). Indeed many Recovery Colleges provide 'return to study' or 'return to work' courses specifically to assist people in these endeavours.

Although Recovery Colleges have largely been developed in Health Services it is essential that they provide high quality learning opportunities so all trainers need to have access to bespoke training in order to plan and deliver quality courses. Different countries have different training courses available for trainers. In the UK staff and peer trainers access a standard City and Guilds 'training for trainers' course (see www.cityandguilds.com/.../7300-introduction-to-trainer-skills). We



recommend that further training days are developed and provided by the Empowerment College to prepare potential trainers to teach a mixed group of students, many of whom will experience mental health conditions.

It is equally important for Empowerment Colleges to develop a system of quality assurance to monitor the quality and impact of the courses provided.

- a) Individual Learning Plan (ILP) - An ILP can be used as an aid to individual goal setting, course selection, record of achievement and discussion about study support. *(See appendix 1).*
- b) Module and Session plans - All courses and sessions need to be developed on standard templates to ensure that necessary processes take place. Course planning teams must agree aims and learning outcomes, make a clear time plan for sessions, utilise a variety of different learning methods including time for students to share their own experiences and ideas; build in a process of reflection and evaluation. *(See appendix 2 – Module Plan and appendix 3 – Session Plan).*
- c) Trainer evaluation – Although it may be simple to keep running the same course in the same way, it is important for trainers to reflect on what worked, what could be improved and what they will do different next time. This ensures that courses are continually being improved and developed.

2.3 Location

The development of Recovery Colleges has strongly advocated “a physical base (building) for the College, with classrooms and a library/computers where people can do their own research”. This provides tangible evidence of commitment to the model – but it is much more than that. It provides a place with an address where people can visit and explore what is on offer. It is an administrative hub where the College team can meet and plan and arrange to register and enrol students. It provides a clear identity and it can look like a college with notice boards to display events, courses, opportunities in the local community. The physical base may be a central hub with courses running in ‘spokes’ around the locality. In a rural area, the physical base might be a mobile unit. For example in West Cork in Ireland a restored bus is used for classes; in rural North East Ireland, a partnership has been formed with the library service.

The absence of a physical base makes it hard to provide people with a Recovery Library (with materials selected by people with lived and learned experience), and internet access, where people can do their own research. The aim of such libraries is not to replace local libraries, but to specifically make available to all professional and peer literature and recovery resources that are often lacking in public libraries. If people do not have access to the literature, resources and computers they need to do their own research then they are dependent on the facilitators to provide all information.

2.4 Inclusive

An Empowerment College is founded not only on the principle of co-production and co-delivery, but also of co-learning. This is discussed further in Section 3.2.

The College must be open to mental health workers, staff and professionals who can also benefit from learning about Recovery – and have much to learn from the experience of people with mental health conditions. If staff are not included as students this conveys the message that staff have



nothing to learn about the lived experience of mental health challenges and recovery. This can reinforce traditional 'them' and 'us' boundaries.

Since Recovery is a journey travelled alongside friends, family members and colleagues, they might also benefit from attending the College, gaining a valuable understanding of the realities of recovery and how people have managed to navigate their way through the many barriers they face.

Finally, there are many people with mental health and related challenges who are not receiving help from mental health services who could benefit from attending the Empowerment College. In addition, some people may wish to continue to use the Empowerment College when they are discharged from services. There are also people with long term physical health conditions who face the challenge of recovering a life. Empowerment Colleges are in an ideal position to bring together people with a range of mental health and related challenges and provide a service to a broader community.

2.5 Recovery focused

All facets of the operation of an Empowerment College – language, environment, messages about the possibilities of life with a mental health problem - should reflect a recovery ethos. Thus all courses aim to support people in their recovery journey by increasing hope, control and opportunity:

- Control - enabling them to manage their condition, their treatment and their life as a whole;
- Hope - inspiring greater belief in their own abilities and potential
- Opportunities - facilitating access to the activities, facilities and resources that are essential to achieving their recovery goals.

In offering images of possibility, it is important for Empowerment Colleges to recognise the very material barriers and disadvantages: poverty, homelessness/poor and unstable housing, ever present fear of having the meagre benefits on which you survive withdrawn, unemployment, social isolation and all the prejudice and discrimination that abound. In recognising these challenges, it is important to actively acknowledge the huge courage and ingenuity it takes to reclaim/claim a meaningful valued and satisfying life and the need to change the society in which people live - not just focus on the individual. Empowerment Colleges must go beyond simply enabling people to manage their condition and their living situations to offer courses that introduce a 'social model of exclusion' that recognises the barriers that exist and assists people to understand and assert their rights.

Some Recovery Colleges offer courses that replicate activities already available in the local community – such as singing, art, rock climbing, bread making We would suggest that this is not the role of the Empowerment College. In truly empowering people to live the lives they wish to lead, the College needs to focus on helping people to identify their goals, enabling people to find out about the activities they want to pursue, and understand their rights to adjustments and support so that they are supported to participate in mainstream activities.



Section 3:

The Students and the Courses

3.1 Who is the Empowerment College for?

Empowerment Colleges are ideally accessible to all people who live in the locality, who have an interest or involvement in mental health. There are sound, evidence based reasons for this open access:

- a) People who experience mental health challenges benefit from choosing their own learning needs and wishes (just as any student attending further education chooses their own courses) and with appropriate support will be able to engage in courses whatever their condition, ability or background.
- b) People who experience mental health challenges share their own experiences and challenges in the classroom so creating a shared learning experience. This has been shown to enhance confidence about what is possible, and what might help; it also reduces self-stigmatisation as students meet others who are living a full life in spite (or because) of their challenges and so change their own identify and relationship with their condition.
- c) Family members learn from other family members in the same way as those who directly experience mental health challenges; they also hear from people who have similar life challenges to those of the person they care for and build up their own understanding of what this is like, why certain behaviours ensue, and what might help.
- d) Members of the public are often uninformed and may be quite fearful of mental health problems. The experience of learning alongside people who experience mental health challenges raises their confidence and understanding and reduces stigmatisation and discrimination.
- e) If we really value the expertise of lived experience on a par with professional experience then professionals have something to learn from people with lived experience and vice versa. This means that it is important for people with lived experience and the staff who provide services to come together in an inclusive learning environment where people can learn from each other. Perkins et al, (2017)⁴ have researched the experience of staff attending a Recovery College and all found it to be a positive experience. For example, the majority said that it had eroded the barriers between clinicians and service users and thereby challenged their views, enabled them to reflect on what 'recovery' means, increased their understanding, empathy and skills and challenged non-recovery practices. 63% also said that it had a positive impact on their personal well-being.

In reality, funding for Empowerment Colleges may target specific groups or be limited to a certain geographical area. Organisations or commissioners of Empowerment Colleges may have limited funding; or may have clear targets so they may set certain exclusion/inclusion criteria. This may limit accessibility of the College so it needs to be taken into account during the development phase of the College. However, it should not deter the development of Colleges, even if they are required by funders to focus on a particular student group.

Consideration to the local context will determine who and how students will access the Empowerment College. Where it is the geographical location of the College which restricts students accessing courses and workshops, consideration of on-line access to workshops and a 'blended learning approach' might be considered to improve equity of access.



3.2 How many courses are running and how many student places are there on each course?

Empowerment Colleges range in size and scope. They will need to start with a small number of courses designed for a minimum of 6-24 students allowing for a supported participatory learning experience; and the opportunity to review progress of the College's development. In order to remain faithful to the core principles of the College they will develop a wider range of courses over time so that they truly offer a range of Recovery focused learning opportunities rather than simply a collection of workshops on particular subjects on a one off basis. The pace at which an Empowerment College is able to develop will be informed by funding availability and the political and social context.

3.3 How long do courses last?

Empowerment Colleges need to be accessible to people with all abilities, experience and interests in each subject so courses will vary in length and level. Whilst an introductory workshop might be a one off workshop lasting only two hours, there may be courses lasting six days run over 6 weeks which goes into greater depth on the same subject. The length of courses will be informed by aims and anticipated learning outcomes. It is important to plan all courses thoroughly with clear aims and learning outcomes, a range of different learning methods (from lectures and films to exercises, role plays, games, group work etc.) and explicit techniques to include all students of different cultures, backgrounds, abilities and conditions. This information needs to be summarised in information available to students choosing which courses to attend.

As the College extends its prospectus, student feedback regarding courses and workshops; and students identifying new subjects will significantly inform the duration and level of courses to be developed.

3.4 Student journey through the college

The Empowerment College is an accessible, educational resource which provides support to all those enquiring about access or wishing to register for courses. It is therefore necessary for information about the College, enrolment at the College, registration for courses and available courses to be available in paper form and electronically (on-line). This information needs to be clear and logical without jargon and without unnecessary rules and barriers. It is important to offer a phone number for access to advice and information via telephone, as well as the opportunity to meet someone in person to discuss the way the College works, the courses available and any adjustments which the person may find helpful in accessing courses. It is essential that the Empowerment College Team seek feedback from students regarding the content of information provided; and how easy it is to access information about the College.

There are a number of steps to be negotiated in order to attend a course running at an Empowerment College.

- a) **Enrolment at the College.** This is the process of signing up to become a student. It can be done via phone, on-line or in person (or all three). It allows the College to collect essential information about the student (name, address, how they heard about the College, what they want to achieve through attending the College) and it may go further, with students being



asked to complete an 'Individual learning plan' (ILP). This ILP provides an opportunity for students to meet with a member of staff from the college which can be a useful way of reducing fear and allaying misconceptions. It allows a full description and introduction to the college to be provided in a manner tailored to the individual, and it can support them to choose the courses that are best suited to them. The ILP can also provide a useful opportunity to gather more detailed 'baseline' information about the potential student's challenges, life situation and personal goals; and it is an opportunity to consider ways in which they could be supported to make the most of the learning opportunities (such as providing a 'study buddy' for students who find reading and writing difficult, highlighting their anxiety about concentrating for a full hour, clarifying their need to sit near the door, or respond to voices). In this way the ILP can be a useful evaluation tool for the College, a helpful summary of any special needs or adjustments that might help, and a personal record for the student of their first meeting at the college. (See appendix 1 for a template for an ILP).

- b) **Registration for courses.** Once a student has enrolled at the College then they can register on courses of their choice. Some students will find personal support to choose courses helpful; others will feel confident about registering on line. It might be helpful to indicate which courses provide an introduction to a subject and which are more advanced, it may also be helpful to give some advice about the number of course that students might consider registering for in any semester.
- c) **Selecting courses.** Potential students should be encouraged to choose the courses that they feel will be most helpful for them. Some people will find a conversation helpful to determine which courses might be appropriate; this is usefully based on the goals that they identify and their current level of understanding and their experience and ability. It is not unusual for mental health professionals to worry that students will select inappropriate courses that they feel will be too demanding or are not related to the individual's needs. It is, however, important for students to be enabled to make their own choices with relevant information. They will soon find out if a course is not what they expect or inaccessible for them – and just as any student registering for a course can find that they have made a choice that they later find unsuitable, Empowerment College students can leave a course and select alternatives if this is the case.
- d) **Providing support to students to enable them to make the most of the learning opportunities.** When students enrol at the college, it is helpful to discuss their previous experience of learning, how they like to learn, what their worries might be and what might help. Examples can help them to identify the sort of support available. "Some students have difficulty reading or making notes so we can make sure that the teacher is aware of their worries and then they will be sure to read out the written material for the whole group"; or "some students find it hard to concentrate and if we let the teacher know they will be sure to build in frequent breaks"; some students like to sit in a certain place – near the door, or with their back to the wall – so if we let the teacher know they can be sure to save a suitable chair for you". (See section 3 of the ILP appendix for a template that asks about individual study needs).

There will always be a wide range of abilities, experience and challenges in a student group so it is important to consider ways of making all courses inclusive and accessible at the planning stage. This will mean offering a range of learning methods, ensuring that all written material is clear, jargon free and available at different levels of detail; always having



two trainers in the room so that one of them is available to support individuals with particular questions or worries.

- e) **Keeping in touch.** It can be helpful for students to receive written confirmation of the dates, times and locations of the courses on which they have registered. Also, a phone call to remind them about a class that they are booked on; and to reassure them about doubts or worries can help to reduce drop out.
- f) **Ensuring study needs are met.** Each College must develop a system to inform trainers about the particular learning needs of the students attending their class. This information will be collected as part of the student's ILP which will not be accessible to all trainers. A member of staff therefore needs to go through the names of all students registered for each course, making a list of special learning needs and study requirements to let trainers know several days before they run the course.
- g) **Review of learning.** An Empowerment College should run along the same semester principles as any other College. This allows for different courses to be run over the year or to be repeated over the year. It is also an ideal opportunity for students to review what they have learnt and select new courses for the coming semester. The ILP is once again, the best tool to use for this purpose. It provides a template for students to review their personal goals, assess their overall progress since their last ILP and make choices about what next. For some students, it may be an appropriate time to consider moving on to mainstream college, or begin to think about employment; others may want to repeat a course or choose a course on another subject. Students should be encouraged to keep a copy of their ILP so that they can see for themselves how they are progressing. This also provides useful information for the College records and for evaluating the impact of the College for individual students
- h) **Graduation.** Once students feel they have completed as many courses as they wish to attend at the College, they graduate. This needs to be very different from 'discharge' from services, celebrating their achievements and giving them an opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt. Some colleges have a graduation day each Semester when students are awarded certificates stating all the courses they have completed and handed out by someone who they find valuing – perhaps a local dignitary or an inspiring person who uses mental health services. Some colleges include personal goals attained during the time that the student has attended the College – passing their driving test, sorting out housing or access to children. This places their college achievements in line with their personal goals.



Section 4:

Structure and Venue

4.1 Service based or community owned?

Empowerment Colleges ideally offer learning opportunities for a whole community so will be community based and owned. In this manner they can draw on the expertise of local people to work alongside people with mental health challenges and family members to increase the confidence and capacity of everyone. However, most Recovery Colleges have developed within mental health services as a driver for organisational change, and as an alternative to a professionally dominated 'treatment' approach.

Exactly where colleges are situated largely depends on who is funding or commissioning the service and who they are specifically targeted towards. It is possible for one Empowerment College to develop numerous spokes both inside and outside services. For example Nottingham Recovery College has a central base within the NHS Trust Headquarters and 18 separate spokes running in primary (physical) care centres, in community venues for diverse and minority ethnic groups, and in forensic services and prison.

4.2 Hours of Opening

As with location and structure of Empowerment Colleges, hours of opening will depend on who they are for and who funds them. Whilst a College in an inpatient psychiatric unit might best run courses between 9 and 5; a community unit for the general public would be advised to run courses outside normal working hours - evenings and weekends - so that people in employment and those with caring responsibilities during the day are able to attend.



Section 5:

Staffing

4.1 Manager

The Empowerment College Manager will be accountable for the direct delivery of the College and will ensure that the principles, values and strategic vision of the College are embedded in all aspects of service delivery (design, delivery and evaluation). They will be required to ensure that the capacity and capability of the College meets the demands of a broad range of stakeholders including students, College staff, the wider organisation, the community and funders; and that learning from national and international developments in the fields of mental health, Recovery, empowerment and education are reflected in the operation of the College.

The Manager will demonstrate inspirational leadership to those working within the College and external to it, ensuring that the team skill mix facilitates and models true co-production and meets the demands of course subject matter. They will need to ensure that robust recruitment processes are in place; in addition to effective supervision and support frameworks; and structures which support the team's personal and professional development.

The Manager will ensure a robust framework of quality assurance; monitoring and analysing data and information in a timely and accurate manner which meets the reporting requirements (internal, partners, commissioners, potential and future funders).

An ability to flexibly adapt their communication style will be essential as the Employment Manager will be required to develop effective and sustainable partnerships with a significant range of individuals and organisations.

4.2 Admin support

The successful operational delivery of the Empowerment College will rely on efficient and high quality administrative support. Individuals who are appointed into these roles will require similar qualities to their trainer colleagues in addition to proficient technical skills. As the Empowerment College is underpinned by the principles of co-production, recovery and empowerment, it is essential that admin colleagues also appreciate and understand how this informs their work beyond the classroom. They will play a key role in informing the content and design of the prospectus, timetable, communication and marketing materials; all of which will need to incorporate recovery focused language, be jargon-free and facilitate seamless access to the Empowerment College. As they will be first point of contact with the College (via email, by telephone or in person) it is essential that they have excellent communication skills as well as a comprehensive knowledge of what is available in the College.

A breadth of technical administrative skills will be required to support the Trainers; and this is likely to include the following areas:

- Enrolling and registering students on the learning management system
- Coordinating and preparing packs for Individual Learning Plan sessions



- Organising and setting up for Empowerment College courses including room layout, equipment, refreshments
- Preparing and making available course materials, including handouts, registers, certificates and evaluations
- Preparing and sending out of letters/emails of course confirmation to students.
- Inputting data such as enrolment forms, access needs, attendance records and evaluation forms
- Designing and preparing posters/information for courses
- Producing, maintaining and supplying prospectus and timetables
- Dealing with enquiries, concerns, complaints and compliments
- Contributing to the audit and evaluation of the Empowerment College e.g. producing reports

Recovery Colleges in the UK have found that there are considerable admin opportunities which can be created to support those using services to acquire or develop skills in this area, within this recovery-focused work environment.

4.3 Trainers: staff, peers, professionals, family members

Empowerment Colleges create an opportunity to draw on a vibrant and extensive knowledge and skill base resulting from recruiting trainers who bring a range of perspectives, all of equal value, through their learnt, lived and life experiences. It is essential that whether in paid or voluntary roles all trainers are able to draw on their expertise and deliver high quality learning opportunities. It is essential therefore that the College provides access to standard training courses available to all trainers; and further development opportunities which enhance their skills in delivering training.

Empowerment Colleges are in an ideal position to bring together trainers who in addition to holding knowledge of their subject matter are able to recognise and challenge stigma and discrimination which may emerge in classroom situations; and 'model' a new conversation and way of working (co-production and empowerment) between students, College staff, services and communities. The personal qualities and commitment to working in a recovery-focused way are equally important and Assessment Centres are routinely used to recruit trainers to the UK Recovery Colleges; in addition to an interview process. An example is given below.

Empowerment College Trainer Assessment Centre (8 applicants)

1. Welcome and introductions by Empowerment College team members (10 minutes)
2. 'Introductions' icebreaker – each person in the group introduces themselves by telling four facts about themselves. One of them must be untrue; the rest of the group must guess which fact that is. (30 minutes)
3. Candidates pick a scenario out of a hat, read it out and then describe how they would respond. 3 minutes per scenario. The rest of the group then has the opportunity to contribute their ideas. (1 hour and 30 minutes)
4. Candidates work in pairs and spend 15 minutes preparing a 5 min presentation to give to the rest of the group. Example of topic: **Barriers to student learning and how we would contribute to helping students overcome these?** (1 hour and 15 minutes)
5. Written exercise. Individuals answer the question 'Is recovery for all?' (15 minutes). This will provide the assessors with an opportunity to test spelling and grammar and help to determine if the trainer might have learning needs to undertake required written work as part of their role



4.4 Contracts and agreements

It is essential that the Empowerment Colleges provide standard contracts and agreements, for all staff engaged in the delivery of the Empowerment College, which outline the arrangements of their employment (paid and unpaid arrangements).

4.5 Training the Trainers

Training may comprise a number of different elements offered in different courses depending on access and availability in the location.

1. All staff, trainers and administrative staff must be familiar with the operation of the College; this might be delivered as part of an induction programme for new starters. It may be that potential trainers need to attend an 'Introduction to the Empowerment College' (1/2 day workshop) in order to understand the principles of the Empowerment College.
2. Training course – 3 day accredited course (UK - City & Guilds) This is a generic course, offered in mainstream colleges that focuses on how to be a trainer. It usually includes:
 - Different learning methods
 - Session planning
 - Devising learning outcomes
 - Ensuring the session is inclusive
 - Methods to deliver the training
 - How do you assess whether learning outcomes have been achieved?

Assessment includes preparation and delivery of a 20minute training session.

It is recommended initially that such a training programme is commissioned from an external 'training provider' as they are likely to have more expertise in training and teaching.

3. 2 day training programme which focuses on the skills and knowledge required to offer training in an Empowerment College

This will need to include:

- How to manage the classroom – difference, conflict, pessimism, co-production
- Maintaining the culture of appreciation, positivity and recovery principles – Hope, self-management, opportunity and control.
- Dealing with conflict
- Facilitating learning for those who use services, those who support them and staff (and possibly the general public)
- Focus on education and not therapy/treatment.



4. A 'Peer Trainer' should have undertaken some training in relation to peer support to ensure they understand how to use their lived experience; how to support students when they share their lived experience.

5. If an experienced trainer (often an existing member of staff) works with the College, they are encouraged to attend other courses; and must attend the course they are interested in delivering if it has already been co-produced.

In addition to the Trainers, the Empowerment College might engage those with 'lived experience' in other ways such as Peer Learning Advisors, 'Classroom Assistants', 'Study Buddies', administrators. Training, supervision and support in their roles will be equally important.

In the beginning it might be useful to deliver a trainer course which includes all sessions named above in once. The Trainer Course piloted in Germany within the project is described in the intellectual output Trainer Course.



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Section 6:

Course Development

6.1 Course planning

- a) **Selecting courses to run.** The question for many new colleges is ‘where do we start?’; what are the first courses we should run?’. It can be useful to start by reviewing existing workshops, groups and courses that are run in your organisation. There may already be WRAP (Wellness and Recovery Action Planning) courses running with staff and people using services both facilitating and attending these; there may already be coaching courses available for staff; there may be workshops running for people who use services that focus on preparing for an interview, building confidence etc. If there are Recovery focused courses already available, then these might be the first courses to run in the college. However, it is important to ensure that they run according to Empowerment College principles (i.e. they are coproduced, meet quality standards, have clear learning outcomes, a range of learning approaches, are inclusive and are evaluated). Once a number of existing courses have been reviewed and amended to run in the College, the College team can meet to determine a small number of courses to develop alongside existing courses for the first Semester. To some extent the courses selected will be determined by the targeted students, but everyone will benefit from courses that support students to develop their own wellbeing plan, and/or crisis plan.

It is much easier to select what courses to run after the first Semester because the demand for different courses will inform numbers and level of courses required and students and trainers will have a better idea about what is wanted and needed. Trainers may well suggest running an introductory or more advanced course on a certain topic; students will ask whether there is anything to help them with certain challenges that they face.

Many Recovery colleges have developed courses in four distinct areas:

- *Understanding and managing my experiences* e.g. hearing voices, anxiety, paranoia, low mood, ‘bipolar’ Understanding my risk assessment/care plan ...
 - *Developing Life skills:* e.g. managing my tenancy, managing my budget, eating well, sleeping well, telling my story, developing my personal recovery plan, creating an advanced statement/crisis plan...
 - *Moving on: Life beyond mental health services:* e.g. Accessing employment, maintaining employment, getting into further education, accessing art in the local area, safe dating...
 - *Getting involved:* e.g. coproduction, chairing meetings, becoming a trainer...
- b) **Setting up a course coproduction team.** Different courses require different expertise. If a course focuses on hearing voices then the coproduction team should include people who have experience of hearing voices and managing them in different ways, and professionals who have experience of working with people who hear voices and a good knowledge of research evidence underpinning various therapies and treatments. If a course focuses on housing issues, then the coproduction team should include staff from a well-regarded local housing organisation, a tenancy support worker and people who have experience of finding and living in different types of housing. It is important that the team also includes a member of College staff who is confident about course planning and educational requirements.



- c) **Planning the course.** It is a good idea to agree on the title, aims and learning outcomes of the course first, then agree on the length of the course (how many sessions over how many weeks). It is then possible to generate a list of areas to be covered and begin to break this down into what needs to be covered, in what order. After this, each session needs planning in detail to ensure that it has its own structure, clear learning outcomes, time to review thinking since the last session, time to introduce a new subject, explore it from different angles using different techniques (a presentation or film might be followed by a discussion or a quiz or small group work), and a review of learning. Self-explanatory session templates are very useful to assure the quality of this process and record different sources of evidence and the contribution of different members of the coproduction team. (*See appendix 4*).
- d) **Ratifying the Course.** The Quality Assurance system must include formal approval of a course before it is run. Appendix 5 is an example of a Checklist which could be used to ensure that all courses which need to be ratified are consistent. The College Manager plus one or two other members of staff must ensure that the course plan meets all the points required on the course template. If it doesn't then the team can be asked to make a few changes.
- e) **Evaluation** of the course needs to include the experiences and perspectives of both students and trainers. There must be a recorded response to this evaluation to demonstrate a constant cycle of improvement and development.

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Section 6:

Prospectus

Empowerment Colleges need to produce a prospectus to **inform potential students** about:

- The philosophy and aims of the college
- Who it is for
- How to enrol at the college
- How to register on courses
- How to contact the college
- What support is available to students wishing to attend the college
- Details of courses including brief outline, learning outcomes, level and duration of courses.

For examples of UK Recovery College prospectus see the below website links:

<https://www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/nottingham-recovery-college> Nottingham Recovery College

<http://www.swlstg-tr.nhs.uk/south-west-london-recovery-college> South West London Recovery College

<http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/recovery-college/> Central & North West London Recovery College

<http://www.slamrecoverycollege.co.uk/> South London & Maudsley Recovery College

<https://www.sussexrecoverycollege.org.uk/> Sussex Recovery College

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Section 7:

Gathering information and data (evaluating the Empowerment College)

It is essential for Empowerment Colleges to both constantly develop and to assure a high quality standard of teaching and learning. To achieve this they need to develop systems for gathering and responding to feedback from students and trainers, to the needs of the local communities and requirements of commissioners.

Although it might be possible to invest in external evaluation, for most Colleges, it will be most cost effective to collect relevant information as part of routine service delivery.

Consideration will need to be given to how information is routinely gathered – paper based or electronic feedback.

Student outcomes

One way of assessing change in students is by asking students about their current situation at enrolment and then asking them again at the end of each semester or when they graduate. Questions might focus on their personal goals – thus giving their assessment of *personal goal* achievement whilst attending the College; and on change in levels of *hope, control and opportunity* (proxies for Recovery) and in *living situation* (housing, employment, education and social relationships. Section 4 of the ILP (Appendix 1) gives an example of a set of questions used at Nottingham Recovery College to assess progress. A copy of this is used for evaluation, one copy is maintained for College reports and one is kept by the student.

It is important to repeat the ILP at the end of each term; or when the student leaves the College.

Course evaluation

In order for courses to develop appropriately, a system of gathering students' views and trainers' experiences and reflections should be built into the coproduction and co-delivery of courses (see Appendix 6. A Sample Student Evaluation form).

Quality indicators of the College

- Indicators of the quality of service provided by the service include:
- Numbers of students enrolling (how does this compare with expectations?)
- Number of students who drop out after enrolment (how can drop out be reduced?)
- Students' socio-demographic and mental health characteristics (are there certain age groups, cultural groups or geographical areas who do not attend?)
- Where students heard about the College (how can this inform future marketing?)
- Personal goals (what does this tell us about other services in the area?)
- Evaluation (students: ILP, use of the Empowerment College, course evaluation integral to course via feedback, trainer experience, impact on wider organisation and community)
- Attendance figures (social demographic)
- Localised categorises – e.g. community use,
- Data collection, collation and analysis: student personal data and activity in college



Section 8: Safety

- **Student charter**

A student charter is a statement of the Empowerment College's aspirations and mutual expectations of College staff and students, as they work together to achieve the Empowerment College's mission. These expectations can be drawn from the Empowerment College's policies and procedures.

The student charter details the partnership between the College and its students. The achievement of the Empowerment College is only possible through the respectful interactions of all members of the Empowerment College community. It applies to all students.

The student charter provides a framework that facilitates a learning environment in which enquiry, exploration, learning and personal development can flourish; and demonstrates the Empowerment College's commitment to valuing all contributions of those engaged with the College.

(See appendix 7 for an example of a Student Charter).

- **Code of conduct**

The aim of the code of conduct is to ensure that everyone who engages with the College has a positive, enriching experience and will want to return. It should set out the expectations for behaviour and how matters will be resolved when behaviour is unacceptable. This might include that everyone attending the College:

- Behave in a responsible manner that fosters mutual respect and understanding between all members of the college.
- Respect the rights, life choices, beliefs and opinion of others and promote freedom of speech.
- Not behave in any way that may be considered threatening or disruptive, or be likely to lead to physical or emotional harm to any students or staff.
- Refrain from the use of alcohol or un-prescribed medication when using the College.
- Not behave in any way that prevents or disrupts learning or other activities within the College locations.
- Not use violent, disorderly or offensive behaviour or language.

Student wellbeing

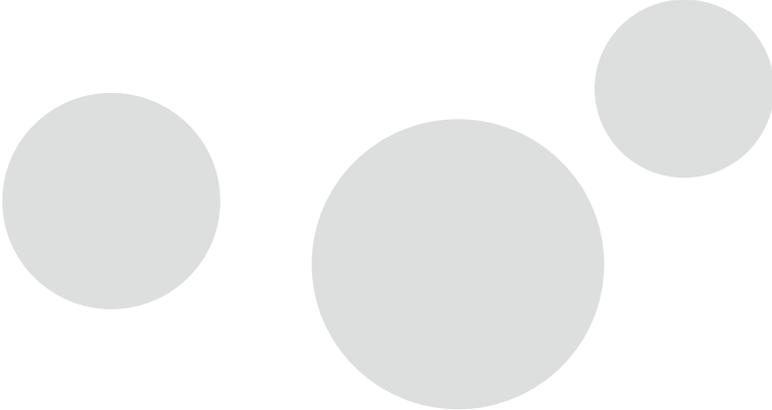
One purpose of the Empowerment College is to provide an environment and curriculum that support students to develop knowledge and skills to manage their own health and wellbeing and to support that of others; it is therefore important that the College provides an integrated and comprehensive curriculum approach that incorporates equitable opportunities for all students to enhance their own and others' wellbeing through the learning environment.

The wellbeing of students must be considered from initial engagement with the College. As previously mentioned, the ILP provides an opportunity for students to meet with a member of staff from the College which can be a useful way of reducing fear and allaying misconceptions. It facilitates a conversation about any special needs, concerns or adjustments which need to be considered in order to maintain the individual's wellbeing whilst accessing the Empowerment College.



As the College follows an educational model and is not a clinical treatment service, clinical responsibility of care lies with the team or service that the student may already be using. It is important that procedures are in place for the team to follow in the event of urgent concerns about a student's physical or mental wellbeing.

It will also be important to ensure that the location of, and the arrangements within, the Empowerment College promote and ensure the physical safety of all students and trainers.



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