

Strengthening alcohol and other drug education in Western Australia

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Background: Consultation with Western Australian Network of Alcohol Drug Agencies (WANADA) membership, alongside population demand modelling, indicated multi-level pressures on the Western Australian (WA) alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector workforce. Appropriately skilled and specialised AOD practitioners are needed to ensure the sector's long-term sustainability and expansion capacity. The sector indicated that engaging non-stigmatised, progressive AOD material into tertiary curricula and promoting student placements into the sector may lead to increased employment opportunities.

Description of Intervention: WA and National environmental scanning revealed a dearth of AOD specific tertiary courses, units and content in sector relevant qualifications. WANADA formed a strategic partnership with Curtin University's (Curtin) enAble Institute by applying a relationship and evidence-based approach. The aim was to develop, scaffold and embed innovative AOD content across Health Promotion, Psychology, and Social Work courses at Curtin. Analysis of unit outlines guided integration of contemporary AOD resources, tools and qualitative articles. Case studies, pre-recorded conversations, lecture presentations and panel discussions were also collaboratively developed with specialist AOD practitioners. The project explored challenges and opportunities that the sector faces in recruiting and retaining graduates with specialised AOD skills and knowledge.

Effectiveness: The initiative was well received by the Curtin course and unit coordinators and sector workers, who integrated new content into nine units throughout Semester 2, 2022. There was mutual benefit for unit coordinators and students in improving personal understanding related to AOD skills and knowledge, which support enhanced graduate attributes.

Conclusion and next steps: Outcomes exceeded all expectations given the rigidity of curriculum structures. WANADA aspires to implement similar relationship-based approaches to expand the project into other WA universities to ensure the long-term sustainability and expansion capacity of the sector.

Implication for practice: The value of collaborating with specialist AOD practitioners to produce tertiary content cannot be understated, with reciprocal evidence-based benefits.