

### Guiding Principles for a Recovery Learning Community

1. All aspects of its culture and operations reflect recovery values, with an overarching purpose of offering support for people to live well.
2. It operates on educational rather than clinical principles and people attend as students not patients.
3. Courses are co-produced: this means they are designed and delivered by people with personal and professional experience working together in equal partnership.
4. It offers complementary approaches to traditional assessment and treatment.
5. It is accessible to all who wish to use it, including people with mental health problems, families, mental health workers and other supporters.
6. It is desirable to have personal tutors who support one another as peer trainers and offer information, advice, guidance and support to students in making personal learning plans.
7. It is desirable to have a physical base (building) where there are classrooms, a library and learning resources.
8. It is not a substitute for mainstream colleges but is about getting back into life and can offer a bridge to taking up studies and training in open settings.
9. It offers a core curriculum designed to provide a wide range of effective supports for personal recovery in key areas .
10. Success will be primarily evaluated by participants in relation to: having a valued and positive learning experience; attainment of personal goals; and people gaining hope, opportunity and control in daily living.

# How can we learn *to* live well?

A guide to core courses and key principles  
for a Recovery Learning Community



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**Endorsed as guidance by the Devon Recovery Learning Community**

**Key reference:** Rachel Perkins, Julie Repper, Miles Rinaldi and Helen Brown (2012) Recovery Colleges.  
Centre for Mental Health. London

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# How can we learn to live well?

## Background

Services focussed on promoting personal recovery are increasingly characterised by a shift in emphasis from 'treating people' to providing opportunities for people to learn how best to look after themselves, often in the company of others with personal experience.

Recovery Colleges, or Recovery Education Centres, arose in the United States America as key drivers for developing recovery-oriented services and core settings that created opportunities to turn lived experience into recovery-supportive skills and expertise. The first Recovery Colleges in the UK opened at South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust in 2009, followed by that at Nottingham Healthcare Trust, whose pioneering work has provided guidance underpinning the national development programme (Perkins et al., 2012). There are currently about fourteen Recovery Colleges in NHS Trusts and Devon's Recovery Learning Community is part of a growing national movement to create effective educational opportunities supporting personal recovery. Devon began with an initial

(June-July) and then extended pilot term (September-December) of courses gathered through an increasingly broad partnership between Devon Partnership Trust and other local educational and mental health providers.

To support the growth and design of the Recovery Learning Community in Devon with a thoughtful review of experience elsewhere, the D-RRIG Open Meeting on 16 May 2013 brought together educationalists, people with personal and professional experience and visiting colleagues from the Dorset Recovery College to consider: How Can Education Be a Route to Personal Recovery? What Have We Learned, Where Are We Now, Where Are We Going?

The subsequent exploration included a review of current publications on recovery education and a systematic analysis of all available curricula from UK Recovery Colleges, which led to a debate on current understanding of key principles and core courses in the light of local experience. This resulting guideline offers a range of useful pointers for service development that will inevitably mature in the light of further experience.

## Core Courses for Recovery Education

(based on recurrent themes and common courses offered by Recovery Colleges in the UK)

### 1. Rebuilding your life

- e.g. Introduction to recovery
- Work, employment, volunteering, education and lifelong learning
- Choosing supports: personal health and social care budgets

### 2. Family, Friends and other supporters

- e.g. Health and wellbeing for carers and other supporters
- Supporting someone's recovery
- Telling your caring story

### 3. Understanding mental health issues and treatments

- e.g. Getting the most from your ... ward round / medication / practitioner
- Living well with ... dementia, psychosis, depression etc.
- Understanding ... diagnosis, substance misuse, self-harm etc.

### 4. Developing knowledge and practical skills

- e.g. Overcoming stigma, developing assertiveness, confidence and self-esteem
- Introduction to mental health law and knowing your rights
- Managing ... money, housing tenancies, fire safety etc.

### 5. Living well and enjoying life

- e.g. Mindfulness and spirituality
- Taking good care of yourself ... self management, diet, exercise etc.
- Creative activity ... arts and crafts, gardening, woodworking etc.

### 6. Getting involved

- e.g. Peer support and peer worker training
- Telling your story
- Participating in the Recovery Learning Community, becoming a tutor