



SoFMH

SCHOOL OF FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH

Learning and Development Strategy 2023 - 2028

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INTRODUCTION

Established in 2007, under the direction of the Forensic Network, the School of Forensic Mental Health (SoFMH) offers teaching, training and research support to all professional groups and associated agencies involved in the assessment and care of individuals with a mental disorder who come into contact with forensic services.

As a virtual school, we have a clearly defined model which involves expert clinicians who are active in the forensic field, developing and delivering short courses. Prior to the creation of the SoFMH, there were no bespoke training programmes for forensic practitioners. However, through collaboration with Higher Education providers we have been involved in the creation and delivery of formal qualifications and also provide a range of introductory programmes to support those new to working within the forensic mental health field (e.g. New to Forensic suite). We also have a strong research focus and strive to support the dissemination and commissioning of research in order to establish an evidence base for future service development within forensic mental health services.

AIMS

The SoFMH supports the overall aim of the Forensic Network to improve the quality of response, care and treatment and outcomes for people with a mental disorder who come into contact with, or whose behavior puts them at risk of contact with, the criminal justice system.

There are four main ways in which the SoFMH seeks to do this: -

1. Promote high quality forensic mental health care delivered on a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency basis
2. Improve public safety through enhanced risk assessment and risk management
3. Enhance clinical practice through the development and promotion of findings from research projects
4. Offer multi-level and progressive provision of learning across the college and university interface

STRATEGIC DRIVERS

Over the past 15 years the SoFMH has become an invaluable resource, providing forensic training and cost-effective solutions to teaching across Scotland. We have become the primary educators in the forensic field in Scotland and have actively supported the promotion of research and development of an evidence base for practice through our annual research conference which showcases achievements from across the forensic mental health estate. We have also developed strong international links, with representation on the board of the International Association of Forensic Mental Health Services (IAFMHS). Every year, we create a comprehensive Annual Report that highlights our accomplishments and successes while summarizing our goals and objectives for the upcoming 12 months.

Since the SoFMH was established, the forensic mental health landscape in Scotland has undergone a number of significant changes and further transformation is anticipated over the next five years. As a

result, there are a number of current drivers for change which have influenced the development of this strategy.

Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services

In February 2021, an [Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services in Scotland](#) was concluded, with a number of recommendations being made regarding the future of services, including the creation of a single system through a 'Forensic Board' to improve strategic governance and oversight. The final report contained 67 recommendations in total and made reference to the work of the Forensic Network and SoFMH. Specifically, it commented on the success of the SoFMH and noted that the learning and development opportunities provided by the SoFMH were highly praised by staff working in forensic mental health services¹. The report included a clear recommendation that *"a new Forensic Board must support the work of the School of Forensic Mental Health to continue developing and progressing education, training and research activities within Scotland's forensic mental health services"*.² This recommendation was subsequently supported by Scottish Government in [their response](#) to the final report.

Following the Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services, the Scottish Government established a short life working group (SLWG) to propose changes to improve support for planning, collaboration and improvement of forensic mental health services in Scotland. A final recommendation was put forward for the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care in late 2022 and a final decision is awaited at the time of publication. Regardless of the final Ministerial decision, the comprehensive Review report and subsequent engagement with stakeholders across the Forensic Network indicate that the Review process has generated momentum for change. If a new governance arrangement is agreed upon, it is likely to lead to significant changes in the forensic mental health landscape in Scotland. These changes will have a profound impact on patients receiving care from forensic mental health services and on practitioners and staff working within the sector.

The SoFMH is uniquely positioned to support the development, review, and evaluation of these changes as and when they are implemented. We have the necessary resources to provide support for staff training and development through our delivery of educational and short professional courses. Additionally, we offer opportunities to support research projects that will be crucial as a consequence of any major changes within the Scottish forensic mental health field.

Scottish Government Policy

There are a number of Scottish Government policies and publications which have influenced the development of the strategic direction of the SoFMH as outlined in this document. The Scottish Government [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy \(2017 – 2027\)](#) is a 10-year strategy which aims to improve mental health outcomes with the same commitment, passion and drive as physical health problems. A refreshed version [was published](#) in June 2023 and this will build on the Scottish Government [Transition and Recovery Plan](#) as published in 2020. We note the commitment within these documents to supporting young people with mental health problems who have been involved in offending and to increasing the availability of mental health training for non-mental health staff working within health and social care services.

¹ [Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services \(2021\), p87](#)

² [Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services \(2021\), p89](#)

Additionally, the Scottish Government [Vision for Justice \(2022\)](#) strategy outlines the need for collaborative working to improve health and wellbeing in justice settings and the adoption of a partnership and prevention approach to supporting those with mental health problems. Scottish Government's recently published [national assessment of mental health needs among the prison population \(2022\)](#) recommended the introduction of mental health training as mandatory for all staff who work with people in prison, in keeping with the whole-prison approach to supporting an individuals' mental health and wellbeing. As a primary provider of forensic mental health education and training, we recognize the opportunities that these recommendations present and seek to work collaboratively with colleagues from other National networks, including the Scottish Health in Custody Network (SHiC), in order to meet the training needs of staff working across mental health, prison and criminal justice settings in Scotland.

Strategy for Women in Custody: 2021 – 2025

This Scottish Prison Service [strategy document](#) emphasizes the importance of tailoring all aspects of care for women in custody to their specific needs and considering their likely experiences of trauma and adversities. The document includes several strategic priorities, such as conducting a thorough review of current provisions in all facilities that accommodate women and establishing a comprehensive set of quality indicators dedicated to the well-being of women in custody. It also notes the importance of implementing a recruitment and training plan to ensure that all those who work with women in custody understand their role and have the specialist skills, knowledge and motivation to support women in their care.

Scottish Mental Health Law Review

In Autumn 2022, the [Scottish Mental Health Law Review](#) published the findings of its 3-year review into the rights and protections of persons with Mental Disorder within current Mental Health law and suggested a number of recommendations for change. The Scottish Government [responded](#) to the report in June 2023, noting that whilst some of the recommendations could be achieved without legislative reform, some other changes will require years to develop detailed legislation and address the culture changes needed. A new Mental Health and Capacity Reform Programme will be established to drive forward change in the long-term.

As a provider of courses on mental health at a variety of academic levels, we recognize a need to review and update our courses with any changes to the law and practice as a result of this Review. We will require to support practitioners working within forensic mental health to understand changes to practice and the functioning of mental health services.

Training Needs Analysis

In Autumn 2022, we conducted an updated Training Needs Analysis, gathering responses from multi-disciplinary practitioners across the Forensic Network. This analysis will play a vital role in shaping our delivery of short professional courses and driving the development of new courses over the next five years. The feedback received highlighted a strong demand for training in the following areas:

1. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
2. Forensic Aspects of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
3. Personality Disorder
4. Acquired Brain Injury
5. Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)
6. Use of ARMIDILO-S Tool

7. Positive Behavioural Support
8. Trauma-Informed Approaches

Scrutiny and Assurance Arrangements of Mental Health Services

The SoFMH conducted a review of external scrutiny and assurance agencies between 2022-2023. One of the key findings of the review related to the need for greater and more active involvement of people with lived experience (PLE) in our processes. As a training provider for forensic mental health practitioners, we are committed to enhancing the level of consultation and co-production of research and educational materials. By involving people with lived experience in the development process, we aim to improve the effectiveness and relevance of our courses, ultimately benefiting those receiving forensic mental health care.

Sustainability

The COVID pandemic required the SoFMH to review our model and mode of delivery of academic and professional short courses in order to continue to support our students in a practical way during periods of national lockdown. Our position as a virtual school allowed us to demonstrate flexibility in this regard and we quickly rose to the challenge to ensure continued delivery of our educational and continuous professional development courses in a remote format. As we look ahead to the next five years, sustaining our delivery and being adequately prepared to address future challenges to our model will be a key focus for the SoFMH.

Considering these drivers for change, we are eager to explore new opportunities to advance education, training, and research in the field of forensic mental health while promoting access and participation for staff at all levels. Expanding and enhancing the range of courses offered by the SoFMH and supporting research within forensic mental health services in Scotland are among our top priorities.

This document outlines our vision for the SoFMH and articulates our key objectives for learning, development, and teaching over the next five years. We remain committed to evolving and progressing in our mission to advance forensic mental health education and research.

IMPACT

The work of the SoFMH is organized into four key domains, which serve as focal points for enhancing our learning, development, and teaching over the next five years. These domains also represent the areas where we aim to make the most significant impact.



For each key domain, we have identified the key overarching outcome we would like to meet over the next five years and detailed a number of actions that we hope to take in order to achieve this. Each domain also has a number of key indicators and KPIs that will allow us to measure our progress and success.

DOMAIN 1: Education

Forensic mental health is a specialised field that requires a high level of expertise and skill. By pursuing advanced education and training, forensic mental health practitioners can expand their knowledge and skills, improve their effectiveness, and advance their careers. As a virtual school, the SoFMH offers teaching and training to all professional groups and agencies involved in the assessment and care of mentally disordered offenders and others requiring similar services. Alongside a range of academic courses, we have access to many experienced professionals and can support services or partner agencies in the development of bespoke teaching materials and courses.

OUTCOME: In light of the Independent Review, further our position as the primary provider for forensic mental health education opportunities in Scotland and continue building on our established strengths to deliver highly relevant and inclusive educational courses.

ACTIONS:

Over the next five years we will:

- In conjunction with our Higher Education provider partners, continue to offer high quality academic courses to meet the needs of staff and students at all educational levels across a wide range of professions.
- Undertake a review of our MSc Forensic Mental Health course alongside University of the West of Scotland to ensure that the course continues to meet high standards of academic rigor and is aligned with current best research and evidence based practice in the field. Course content will be updated to reflect the expanding forensic mental health landscape in Scotland, including content on Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Older Adults.
- Work closely with New College Lanarkshire to broaden access to the Forensic Mental Health Module.
- Continue to work with Higher Education providers to utilise technology in the delivery of our courses to ensure flexibility, accessibility and further the development of a digitally skilled workforce.
- Review the outcome of our 2022 Training Needs Analysis to identify emerging topic areas that require addressing through development of an online course, module or guide, and work with partners to develop these where possible.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS:

1. Growth in the number of students enrolling in our academic courses, indicating growing recognition and demand.
2. Student achievement data that demonstrates a continued high rate of completion for each of our academic courses.
3. Consistent positive feedback from students and Higher Education partners.
4. An increase in students progressing to doctoral level studies, with a focus on areas related to forensic mental health.
5. Evidence of students and graduates securing relevant job opportunities reflecting the practical relevance and applicability of our courses.

DOMAIN 2: Practice Development

Practice development is a process of continuous improvement and innovation that aims to enhance the quality of care provided to individuals with a mental disorder who come into contact with forensic services. It is an important way to promote best practice and improve outcomes for patients. As such, professionals need to be provided with regular opportunities to stay up-to-date with the latest research, treatment modalities and legal developments in the field of forensic mental health. Competent mental health practitioners are essential to the provision of high-quality care and the protection of the public.

As a virtual school, we offer a wide range of short professional courses for practitioners which seek to meet the needs of the current workforce, and to improve public safety through enhanced risk assessment and risk management practices. However, in order to grow, develop and meet the needs of the complex patient population, we endeavor to continue to increase the diversity of courses on offer. We also seek to work collaboratively with other national networks (Scottish Health in Custody [SHiC] and the Forensic Managed Care Network for Northern Ireland) in order to broaden access to courses for those working across the fields of forensic mental health and criminal justice.

OUTCOME: To expand and diversify the range of short professional courses for practitioners, fostering high-quality mental health care delivery through a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach.

ACTIONS:

Over the next five years we will:

- Review and diversify our current portfolio of short professional courses, incorporating the outcomes of our 2022 Training Needs Analysis to ensure relevance for practitioners.
- Proactively identify and develop new courses to empower clinicians in addressing emerging clinical issues, navigating evolving legal landscapes (e.g. SMHLR), and overcoming various challenges. Special emphasis will be placed on courses encompassing intellectual disability, mental health needs across the lifespan, neurodevelopmental disorders and physical health challenges.
- Continue to deliver courses in a dynamic learning environment (remotely and face-to-face).
- Explore the possibility of offering academic credits for completion of short courses (e.g. microcredentials).
- Co-ordinate and formalise links with other national networks in order to provide a comprehensive calendar of events which are relevant and of interest to a broad range of professionals and practitioners.
- Promote active engagement with stakeholders across forensic mental health, third sector and criminal justice services to create an ongoing mechanism to establish training needs and identify opportunities to deliver courses relevant to clinical practice across all disciplines.
- Expand provision to provide opportunities for practitioners outwith Scotland to attend and benefit from a range of short courses.
- Ensure active involvement of people with lived experience throughout the course development process, incorporating their insights through meaningful consultation and co-production. This approach will significantly enhance the effectiveness and relevance of training materials, and foster a more inclusive and impactful learning experience.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS:

1. Year on year there will be an increased range of short professional courses being offered.
2. Continued positive feedback from delegates on the impact of their learning on their practice which is then used to strengthen and develop the courses on offer.
3. Data which demonstrates that short professional courses have been accessed by a broad range of delegates across forensic mental health and adjacent professions within criminal justice and the third sector.
4. Measurable improvements in practitioners' knowledge and skills, as demonstrated through pre-and post-course assessments, where applicable.
5. Higher levels of confidence and competence reported by practitioners in delivering high-quality forensic mental health care.

DOMAIN 3: Research

Forensic mental health is a continually evolving field and high quality research is essential for developing new theories, interventions and strategies for working with individuals with mental disorder who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Research provides empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of interventions and strategies used with patients and can help to promote accountability and transparency in the system by identifying areas where improvements are needed.

Since 2007, we have been committed to promoting and supporting research and evaluation across the Forensic Network in order to develop an evidence base for future service development. We provide a specific research network as a central point of contact for interested researchers through the Forensic Network Research Special Interest Group (FNRSIG); a multi-disciplinary group which also seeks to disseminate information on recent research findings through an annual conference. As a school, we also provide high quality teaching and continuous professional development, specific to research within a forensic setting. We are able to do this through the high level of research expertise contained within the Forensic Network, but also through our partnership agreements with Higher Education providers including the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and the University of Edinburgh.

OUTCOME: To embed a thriving culture of research excellence within Scotland's forensic mental health services by taking a lead role in conducting, supporting, and disseminating impactful research projects at international, national, and local levels.

ACTIONS:

Over the next five years we will:

- Support practitioners and researchers across the Forensic Network to develop, participate, contribute to and complete research projects, which influence patient care and treatment.
- Ensure that research projects are aligned with the corporate aims of the Forensic Network and reflect changes occurring within forensic mental health services in Scotland, for example, as a result of implementation of recommendations from the Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services.
- Contribute meaningfully to the evidence base on forensic mental health and demonstrate impact through increased publication of peer-reviewed research projects.
- Continue to develop and expand membership of the Forensic Network Research Special Interest Group (FNRSIG) in order to provide a forum for those interested in research within forensic mental health settings to embed a culture and community of research excellence.
- Host, promote and encourage attendance at conferences, both nationally and internationally, by researchers and practitioners working within forensic mental health in order to share knowledge and inform practice.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS:

1. Increase in the number of research projects initiated and led by practitioners and researchers from Scottish forensic mental health services.
2. Increase in the number of high-quality publications in peer-reviewed journals.
3. Evidence of implementation of research findings into clinical practice, leading to measurable improvements in patient outcomes.

4. Inclusion of research findings and evidence-based practices from Scotland's forensic mental health services in national and international guidelines or policy recommendations.

DOMAIN 4: Quality Assurance and Improvement

As a dedicated education provider focused on delivering high-quality courses, we follow clear governance processes to ensure transparency in our decision-making, responsible use of resources, and accountability to our stakeholders and the wider public. We operate a School Governance Committee comprised of a wide range of external stakeholders, including representatives from our Higher Education Partners (e.g. Edinburgh University, University of the West of Scotland and New College Lanarkshire), NHS Education Scotland and NOTA Scotland. This Committee is responsible for oversight of all SoFMH activity and is a key mechanism through which we drive continuous improvement and focus on maintaining high standards of quality in the education and training courses we offer. The School Governance Committee reports to the wider Forensic Network Advisory Board and Scottish Government, providing a further level of scrutiny and accountability.

Supporting the work of the SoFMH is an Operational Group which meets bi-monthly and is tasked with continual review of all SoFMH activity and associated feedback. It provides a forum for new course and Clinical Fora generation and allows the team to identify potential risks and develop strategies to mitigate them.

OUTCOME: Attain and sustain excellence in quality assurance for the SoFMH, ensuring ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement to deliver top-tier education, research and professional development opportunities for practitioners and students.

ACTIONS:

Over the next five years we will:

- Continue to develop our extensive network of experienced lecturers and trainers to ensure delivery of high quality education and training.
- Enhance our feedback mechanisms to facilitate continuous improvement and timely implementation of necessary changes, with the aim of increasing the standard of courses.
- Build a culture of Learning from Experience (LfE) to ensure that any issues impacting course or event delivery are reviewed and incorporated into future planning.
- Conduct a thorough review of SoFMH internal processes in order to ensure efficiency and productivity and identify areas where quality can be improved.
- Ensure that the findings of key reports are incorporated into the work of the SoFMH, where applicable. For example, the findings of the Independent Review into the Delivery of Forensic Mental Health Services.
- Seek to undertake regular benchmarking and comparison with other reputable educational institutions, demonstrating that the SoFMH remains at the forefront of delivering high quality education, research, and professional development opportunities in forensic mental health.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS:

1. Consistent positive feedback from practitioners and students regarding the quality of education, research, and professional development opportunities offered by the SoFMH.
2. Regular assessments and evaluations demonstrating improvements in course materials, teaching methods, and resources based on feedback from stakeholders.

3. Recognition from relevant educational and professional bodies, affirming the SoFMH's commitment to quality assurance.
4. Robust feedback from the School Governance Committee and external stakeholders.
5. A clear set of internal processes which are efficient and streamlined.

IMPLEMENTING OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy will be supported by annual operational plans outlining development priorities for each area. These plans will serve as a guide for the school's activities and progress, with updates reported in our Annual Reports. To ensure continuous monitoring and advancement, the SoFMH Governance Committee and Forensic Network Advisory Board will provide oversight on a biannual basis.

Effective collaboration with key partners, including Higher Education providers and National networks, will play a vital role in achieving our objectives and successfully implementing our plans over the next five years.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, the SoFMH is dedicated to offering a more efficient, yet expanded and enduring service that meets the requirements of staff working within forensic mental health and criminal justice services. Our commitment lies in upholding high quality delivery standards, with the ultimate aim of enhancing practice through educational provision.

By continuously engaging with People with Lived Experience (PLE), we aim to embrace change and ensure our courses are relevant, sensitive, and aligned with the experiences of those in the care of forensic mental health services. Our educational programs will be continually enriched by the incorporation of new and emerging evidence derived from research.

Together, we envision a future of continuous improvement and excellence, ensuring that our educational initiatives remain responsive to the evolving needs of practitioners and can contribute significantly to the advancement of forensic mental health services.

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