



Jul 14, 2025 10:49 BST

Anti-stigma training programme supports public health professionals

A new training course designed to support health and social professionals working with people with experience of substance use has been rolled out across Northern Ireland following a successful pilot in Newcastle.

Addressing stigma – or anti-stigma practice – is a global and national public health priority, with organisations working to develop new ways to understand and address the various forms it can take.

Stigma occurs when negative attitudes and beliefs lead to negative

emotional reactions and can result in discrimination.

Stigma can manifest as unfair stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and avoidance behaviours that can negatively impact on individuals' mental and physical health, and the way they access care. This can lead to discrimination where people are treated differently, ignored or excluded because of their status in society.

[Newcastle City Council](#) has taken a proactive stance in raising awareness of, and addressing, the harm of stigma on others.

Council leaders commissioned Northumbria University to develop and deliver a pilot 'train the trainer' course for those working in public health in the region that would improve understanding of stigma and its potential impact, particularly when dealing with people who have lived experience of substance use.

Two cohorts of staff completed the two-day-long course this year and have reported a positive impact on both their understanding of stigma and on their practice.

The course has now been rolled out to staff from all six local authorities in Northern Ireland and is receiving interest from other areas as a model for effective anti-stigma training.

Steve Wood, Addictions and Mental Health Coordinator at [Recovery College Collective and Revival Newcastle](#), initially participated in the training, before delivering it to the second cohort. He said: "There is no doubt from not only my perspective, but the many others I have met through this programme, that the anti-stigma course is a hugely relevant and important piece of work.

"I have on both occasions left the sessions feeling reflective, informed and empowered. The potential impact cannot be underestimated, as we left asking important questions of both ourselves and others. Questions that beforehand would have not been asked and instead would have led to, in some cases, stigmatisation.

"It feels more than just a programme of essential learning and discussion, it feels like a movement. A movement of connection, self-reflection and

ultimately change. Many times, we hear of the want to eliminate stigma. However, that often comes with a lack of understanding of what stigma actually is. This course not only defines it with clarity but allows you to truly begin the process of eradicating it.”

[Dr Will McGovern](#), Associate Professor for Marginalised Communities within the Department of [Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing](#) at Northumbria University, led the development and delivery of the training programme.



Dr Will McGovern

Dr McGovern said: “By developing this course, we are trying to bring a community of practice together and create a space for people to collaboratively learn about stigma and how it can impact their work.

“Working in the substance use space can be both rewarding and challenging, and we want to empower those delivering essential services by developing their understanding of stigma and the various types of anti-stigma interventions, as well as help them to further their understanding and practice around some really sensitive subject matters.

“Through reflective group tasks, practice scenarios, discussions, case study reviews and the involvement of those with lived experience of stigma we are providing those working in this space with a challenging, rounded and informed view of stigma and its impact.”

During the course participants are invited to identify their own priority areas

in relation to stigma, the concerns they want to challenge and the identify an initial three stage action plan that they will undertake and implement in practice.

Kevin Bailey, Regional Joint Lead for Substance Use with the [Public Health Agency](#) in Northern Ireland, said “I am grateful for our partnership with Northumbria University and the willingness of Newcastle City Council to commission the development and rollout of this new anti-stigma training course designed to support health and social professionals working with people with experience of substance use.

“Our first cohort of individuals with lived and living experience and health and social care professionals have been trained and I look forward to hearing how they collaboratively create the conditions for open and honest dialogue on reducing stigma.”

As well as working with Northumbria University on the anti-stigma training course, Newcastle Council has worked with other regional universities to produce an [anti-stigma awareness animation](#) to help educate viewers and has also delivered a Continuing Professional Development Conference for over 300 practitioners, service providers and community members to promote knowledge exchange and good practice of anti-stigma work from across the region.

The Stigma, Trauma, Substance Use and Domestic Violence Conference involved a range of international, national and regional researchers and academics, including a keynote talk from international anti-stigma lead, Professor Carla Treloar.

Dr McGovern, who is also the Academic Co-lead for Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement for the National Institute for Health and Care Research’s IDEAS-NET National Evaluation Team, is now leading on the evaluation of the training delivery in Northern Ireland and Newcastle.

The evaluation will provide further understanding of the wider impact of the training on health, primary and social care practitioners. It will also recognise the individual behaviour changes that have occurred among professional groups following their involvement in the course. It is hoped that the evaluation will help to secure funding to roll out the course across the region.

He added: “It’s been great to see the immediate impact and the ongoing interest in this training. We’re now looking forward to developing our approach, gathering evidence and considering the evaluation outputs that will allow us to continue to develop and refine the product for future use.”

For more information about the anti-stigma training please contact Professor McGovern at william.mcgovern@northumbria.ac.uk

Northumbria University is dedicated to reducing health and social inequalities, contributing to the regional and national workforce and improving social, economic and health outcomes for the most marginalised in society. Through its new [Centre for Health and Social Equity](#), researchers will be delivering world-leading health and social equity research and creating innovative, evidence-based policies and data-driven solutions to bring impactful change across the region, the UK and globally.❌❌❌

UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2022 (Times Higher Education Awards)

Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria’s undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria’s significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

--- Please contact media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk with any media enquiries or interview requests ---

Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk

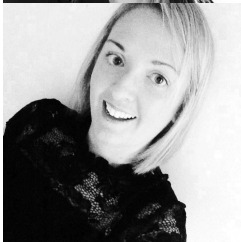


Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk