



EUGANGS 90 HOUR VET PILOT PROGRAMME WALSALL COLLEGE REPORT

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Project No: 539766-LLP-1-2013-1-UK-LEONARDO-LMP

JUNE, 2016

New skills and competences to address skills gaps and mismatch within the sectors working with Gang and Youth Crime across Europe (EUGANGS). (539766-LLP-1-2013-1-UK-LEONARDO-LMP/ Grant Agreement 2013 3382 /001-001). This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Background

The Walsall College EUGANGS 90 hour VET programme was piloted between 23rd April 2015 and 23rd February 2016. It consisted of 26 x 3-hour face-to-face sessions, plus online activities and individual mentoring support. Face-to-face sessions took place on Tuesday evenings at Walsall College.

The Walsall programme was devised and delivered by tutors who had attended the Train the Trainer Training held at St George's and Walsall College in 2014: Amanda Wood (youth violence and exploitation consultant and community activist), Colin Isham (project lead), Joe Jackson (football coach and community activist), Keith Blackburn (security guard and community activist), and Mark Stephen (detached youth worker).

Recruitment

The nature of the EUGANGS programme meant that professionals working in the area of youth support and gang crime would see immediate benefits of participating. However, given the ABCD¹ basis of the EUGANGS project, it was a priority to engage with members of the communities affected by gang and youth violence to help design and also participate in the pilot VET programme. The research and consultation phases of the research had, on the whole, seen participation by professionals, some of whom were nevertheless also members of the communities they worked in. The Train the Trainer programme also had some success in engaging community representatives, but there was still a concern the programme was practitioner heavy. We took several steps to address the balance:

- announcements at community meetings in Walsall and Wolverhampton
- explicit requests to professionals who were interested in attending to partner with and bring along a member of the community they worked in
- trainers actively sought out community members they were aware of who would benefit the programme.

To a large extent these approaches succeeded. Of the 35 people who expressed an interest in participating in the VET programme, 13 could be identified as community members, and a further four as professionals (youth workers etc) as 'of the community' – ie living in communities affected by gang crime and youth violence.

¹ Asset Based Community Development



Reasons given by community members for expressing interest in the course were predominantly either to develop practical skills in engaging with young people, understand the reasons why young people join gangs and community dynamics, and to prepare for a job role in the field. The fact that the course was being offered free also added to its appeal:

As I am working with young people it is important for me to be able to identify those who may be at risk of joining gangs or getting involved in anti-social behaviour. I am keen to understand the reasons that gang cultures develop in a community.

[I'd like to find] out what I need to know for the job roles I'd like to get into, being able to afford courses in youth work or peer mentoring.

Professionals who expressed an interest in participating in the pilot, did so mostly to develop knowledge about gangs and youth violence and associated skills which would help them in their existing role. Several had a primary concern to prevent young people moving into criminal activity, and felt the course would help them do this. Some, particularly Police Community Support Officers, saw the course as an opportunity to gain a level three qualification to support career progression:

I feel that this course will help me understand gang culture more and enable me to work more effectively with these youths in an effort to divert them away from the gang and a life of crime.

Working at a strategic level, I want to learn more from communities and different organisations about their perceptions and experiences in order to inform my own practice and that of my team.

Eventually, a total of 28 people enrolled on the programme and participated for some or all of the course. In broad categories, their roles were:

- community (13)
- police (10)
- youth work (7)
- local authority co-ordination (3)
- education (2)

Structure

The programme was piloted from April 2015 to March 2016, and consisted of:

- 26 three hour face-to-face group sessions from April to December
- individual and small group support to develop study, research and assignment writing skills
- a parallel online programme so that students could engage with the course at times they were unable to attend face-to-face sessions.

The face-to-face sessions consisted primarily of collaborative pair and group work, to maximise the opportunity for participants to contribute their own expertise and examples of issues and practice to the whole group learning. Publicly available video clips, for example introducing approaches to mentoring, and key concepts, such as those of emotional intelligence, provided the specialist input of the course, complemented by the expertise of the trainers, and access to reports and relevant websites. Alongside this, students were introduced to a range of tools for working with young people, and evaluated the validity of psychological and social theories in the light of evidence and their own experience.

Trainers from the Train the Trainer programme delivered several sessions related to their area of expertise:

- Keith Blackburn: safe working and interpersonal communication
- Joe Jackson: policy and law implementation
- Amanda Wood: policy and safe working
- Mark Stephen: safe working and gang typologies.



While the creation of online resources was required for testing as part of the EUGANGS project, additional impetus was given to this by a request from the police for an online version of the entire course, to accommodate the fact staff were on shift work.

In practice the availability of an online version of the course was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it meant that a number of participants completed the course and qualified who otherwise would not have been able to. It also meant that, if someone missed a face-to-face session, they could catch up online. On the other hand, the online programme became part of an early exit route from the course for some, where participants saw in it an alternative to the difficulties of making the journey to college, eg because of work demands, but then did not have the support provided by

face-to-face sessions, leading to withdrawal. Several participants were also frustrated by technical issues they experienced with the software.

The course covered the five outcomes identified by the EUGANGS project: policy, safe-working, interpersonal communication, social factors, psychology, and was structured to prepare students for the City and Guilds Level 3 Certificate in Community Safety (Working with Gangs)². Participants were required to complete a total of 11 written assignments. These often required participants to respond to a scenario, create leaflets or guidance packs, and draw on theory and knowledge acquired on the course, as well as their own knowledge. The assignments had recommended word ranges, meaning in total, participants would complete 7,800 to 11,000 words of assessed writing over the course of the programme.

² See appendix for the schedule and more detailed description of course content. Online resources can be viewed at: <https://goal.walsallcollege.ac.uk/course/index.php?categoryid=561>

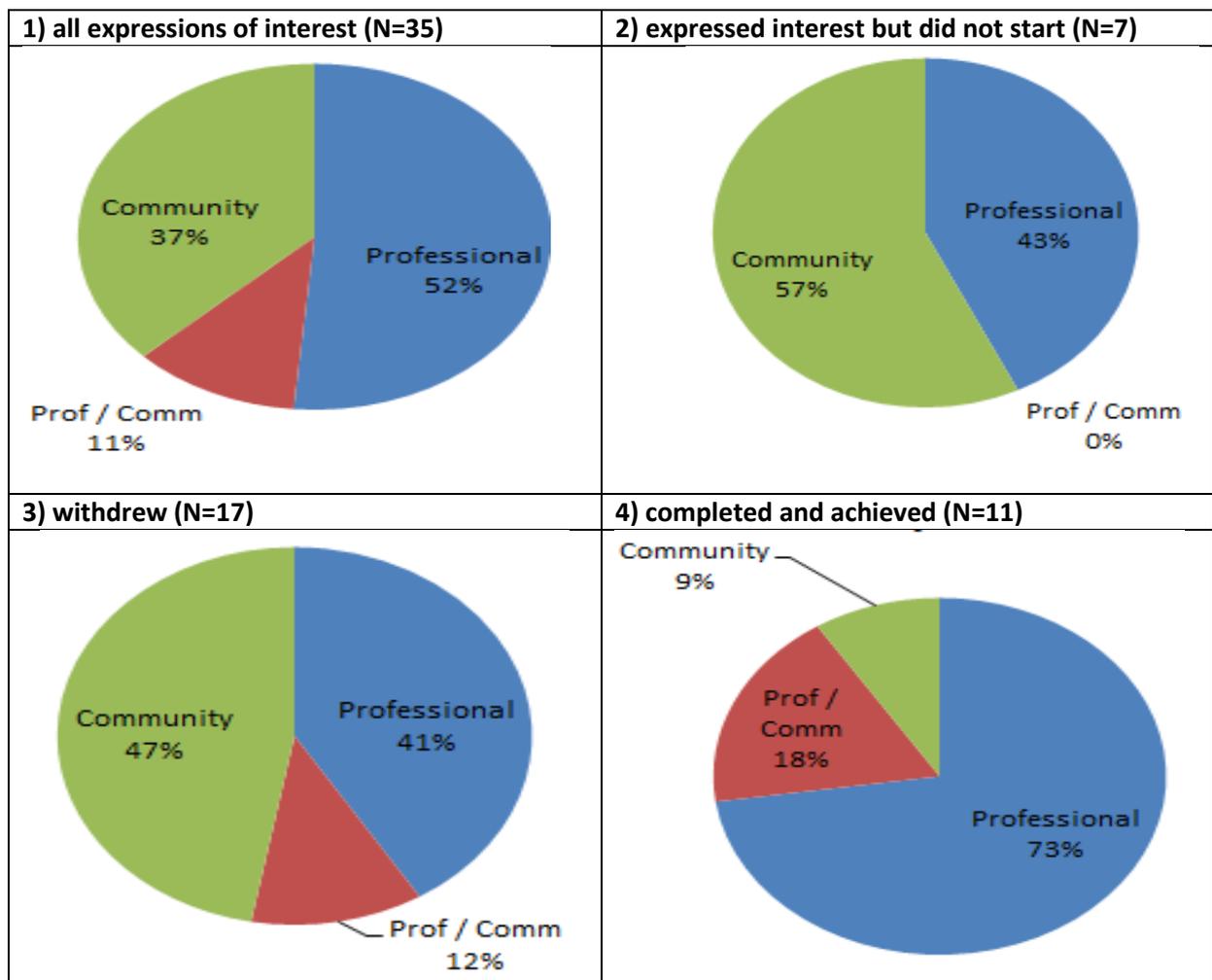
Outcomes

At a headline level, the number of participants who achieved the qualification was disappointing: nine of the original 28 who enrolled achieved the Certificate, and two the Award. Reasons for early withdrawal and non-completion are discussed in the next section, but first it should be emphasised that the headline achievement rate hides a large quantity of work which the majority of the initial cohort completed. The table below shows the number of assignments completed by participants:

Assignment	Word count	Number completed
Interpersonal communication 1	800-1,000	23
Safe working 1	800-1,000	23
Policy 1	800-1,000	13
Interpersonal communication 2	500-750	12
Safe working 2	800-1,000	11
Policy 2	800-1,000	11
Psychology 1	500-750	9
Psychology 2	1,000-1,500	9
Psychology 3	500-750	9
Social Factors 1	500-750	9
Social Factors 2	800-1500	9

It was only those students who successfully completed all of six of the interpersonal communication, safe working and policy assignments who could be entered for the Award, and all 11 assignments, who qualified for the Certificate.

More concerning, given the aims of the project were to engage community members on the programme as well as professionals, was the number of 'community participants' who achieved neither the Award nor the Certificate. The graphs below indicate the proportions of students who were professionals, community, or professionals with personal connections to communities affected by gangs / youth violence (prof/comm), at each stage of the process.



As the graphs show, only 3 of the completing 11 students could be designated 'community'. In the post-course questionnaire³, students (both completers and early finishers) gave a range of reasons for early withdrawal, which included:

- family and work circumstances
- difficulty accessing online lessons and resources
- ability of online version of course to provide appropriate content and support
- assignment workload
- disruption of studying habits due to the summer break in the middle of the course.

Three participants reported family care needs as the reasons they could not continue, one of whom stated they had tried to continue with the distance learning version, but they found it difficult to keep up. Indeed a majority of the comments for why students did not complete related to the difficulties of following a distance-learning only approach:

³ In total, 14 students completed the post-course questionnaire. The findings here reflect analysis of all comments submitted in that questionnaire.

I think if you have relied on distance learning it is harder to understand the subject matter. I know others have not had the internet access.

Two students highlighted the lack of specialist input on the online version of the course, which fellow participants themselves had provided in the face-to-face sessions:

I was finding it difficult to relate the course content to my experience as community worker who had not worked with young people before, so I found it difficult to provide case studies or analyse provided examples.

An attempt was made to address this by creating a discussion forum in each online lesson, but this tended to become a repository of responses to assignment questions, rather than a genuine forum for dialogue.

Several students also commented on the fact they found the virtual learning environment (VLE) not easy to use, including problems with the submitting assignments function, and attempting to access the VLE from work computers, which students found particularly frustrating.

Some students found it difficult to engage with the subject matter at the level it was pitched at, maintain the commitment required of the course, and develop the confidence to engage:

I think some people felt the content was at a higher level of learning and commitment than they could reach.

Child care issues, lack of self-confidence, and change of shift patterns.

At least one student found the timing of the course difficult and would have preferred the option of a daytime session.



In terms of what they felt they had gained from the course, beyond certification, students reported several benefits of attending. These included better understanding of:

- the environment they worked in
- young people's motivation to join gangs and engage in criminal activity
- 'how the brain works'
- interpersonal communication, including specific approaches, such as motivational interviewing
- safe working

- policies, and how they are implemented
- the practices of other professionals and youth workers.

Although the course was designed specifically to address the issue of gangs, participants found the content helped them develop knowledge and principles which could be applied in a range of contexts in which they worked:

I learnt a lot more than I thought I would that can inform my own practice (as I don't work specifically with gang-associated young people) but all of the social factors work, psychology and interview skills were really relevant to what I do.

Students also felt the course provided them with affirmation of existing practice, and new ways of looking at how they interacted with young people.

Interpersonal communication has been the most useful for me in my own work working one-to-one with vulnerable individuals who are sometimes distrustful of services etc. so it was really pertinent and has changed my way of working quite a lot.

Psychology was the most useful as it helped me to rationalise actions I had been taking for a number of years, it was interesting to see that a lot of what was described through the models in the resources were things I had done in practice

Finally, several students commented on 'soft outcomes' which they felt the course had provided, such as increased confidence, and greater reflectiveness on their practice.



Participant perspectives: What went well? What are the lessons learned?

Pitching the course at the right level

Several students found the course challenging, not only in terms of the demands of the assignments, which played some role in early withdrawal, but also with regard to the content. Pitching the course at the right level of intellectual demand was in itself a challenge. On the one-hand the aim of the course was to enable any successful completer who wished to, to move onto an undergraduate



course. On the other hand, the course served as an entry route back into education, where participants frequently needed support and mentoring with research and academic skills, as well as developing understanding of theory.

The approach to enable students to make progress in this context, was to provide a selection of resources in different formats - Youtube clips, reports, summaries, powerpoint presentation -

through which they could access content. Activities were designed so that students engaged in new theory in the light of their own and their colleagues' experience. Student comments on the level the course was pitched at, on the whole indicated there was an appropriate level of challenge:

I found the course very challenging to my thinking and this was something that I have found beneficial. There was a lot more theory than i had expected, but this is not something that is necessarily negative.

The comment from one student, however, indicated some of the content went beyond level 3:

The training resources were of a high standard, I would say diploma level, so very useful.

In terms of encouraging students to stretch themselves and raise ambitions for further study, providing access to higher level materials is beneficial. However, if the presence of such materials created a perception that what is required is diploma level work, this may also account for the departure from the course early of some of the students, underscored by the comment cited in the previous section:

I think some people felt the content was at a higher level of learning and commitment than they could reach.

Collaborative learning

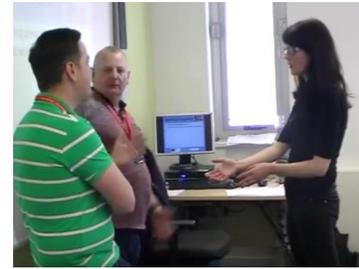
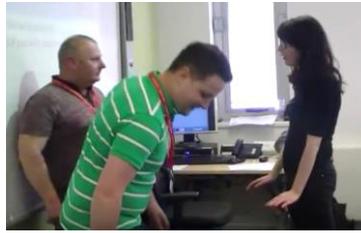
Several students commented on the value they placed on the opportunity to learn collaboratively with colleagues from other roles and background:

The practical skills learned from other students were also beneficial, especially from those that are more experienced than me.

The lessons were particularly useful as we were able to discuss the topics being taught with others working in various agencies.

I guess it just opened to my eyes to the different experiences of colleagues outside the borough where gangs and gang culture is a really significant issue. Hearing some of the

stories, it also made me realise that, at a strategic level, we have so much more to understand about gang culture.



Collaborative working and small group discussions, however, were not always unproblematic, as students were required to negotiate different cultural practices (work and community-based), and engage with controversial perspectives.

Criticality

The most difficult aspect of the course to manage, and yet the aspect which potentially gives rise to the most powerful learning, was around critical evaluation of laws, policies and practice in relation to gangs and youth work. Clear differences of opinion emerged between different traditions of youth work, between those working for statutory agencies, and residents and youth workers who were members of communities affected by gang violence. The engagement of young people in gang activity has a big impact on the young people themselves, their future, and those around them. Getting right the support provided to them and the measures taken to reduce risk, is a high stakes undertaking. Arguments were made during group discussions for the close following of the law and procedure on the one hand, and for greater flexibility for youth workers to operate, and more control to communities, on the other. For several students, these were not comfortable discussions. Two students described how at times they felt they needed to hold comment in order for the class discussion not to escalate into argument, particularly around aspects of safe working.

Other students found the discussions across different professional and community perspectives enlightening:

It was helpful having other professionals attending as you could gain knowledge from them and meant that real life examples would be given. The guest speakers were also very informative as they could also relate the subject matter to real life experiences.

This course was informative and an eye opener for me. I have gained more awareness of the pros and cons of laws and policies and the way they impact lives and the community

For two students, criticality was not a prominent enough aspect of the course.

There could maybe be some more critical assessment of approaches/policies. We did discuss who wrote certain policies and why but maybe looking at say, the police response to gang activity in light of the social factors we've discussed and whether it takes them into account etc.

The opportunity to hear fellow students' thoughts during class discussions I thought were productive; even if the majority of the comments were 'inside the box'.

From the perspective of one student, the concept of 'gang' was not problematised enough:

My expectations were met in the context that it was no revelation that the primary focus/analysis of what constitutes a 'gang' would be focused on the media stereo-type.

From the beginning of the project, the definition of 'gang' had been difficult to establish. However, the viewpoint expressed here takes the problem one step further, and suggests the term 'gang' is used to pathologise certain groups – young people in particular – whereas others, in particular those in a position of authority, are considered 'legitimate' and remain unproblematised. It should be said, the psychology module of the course did provide students with opportunities to consider how youth gangs display group behaviour which is very much in keeping with the behaviour of other human groupings. Secondly, the session on media representation of young people and gangs actively invited participants to take a critical stance on this, as did the session on law and policy.

Understanding local gangs

Several students commented that the course could have provided more insights into local gangs and the perspectives of young people:

I think that I didn't learn as much as I thought I would about the reality of gangs locally, though there was a lot of really interesting stuff I learned from speaking to peers, I thought more would be part of the course itself.

The comment suggests more could have been done to bring to students' attention the initial research, which contained this information, and also to plan input along these lines with the trainers who were working with young people. It also suggests adaptations to the assessment criteria should be made, requiring participants to find out about and describe local gangs explicitly.

Two points made by students in the feedback suggest this could have been achieved through the introduction of a practical element to the course, and the increased presence of young people's voices:

The only real improvement would be to have an opportunity to shadow people/officers that are working with young people and those in a gang environment. Also to maybe have a placement as part of the course within a youth club or within a street team in order to get first-hand experience of the work and also the opportunity to test the new skills we have learnt.

Having the 'utterings' of gang members in jail addressing future students via a recording may offer some students a different perspective on the subject matter.

Time

Several students felt the course was too compact and concentrated. They suggested more time for the course and fewer assignments.

The only improvement that I would like to see would be a reduction in the volume of work required and more time to complete each piece of work.

In practice, students completed the majority of the assignments in the final two months of the course, despite attempts to build into sessions activities which meant students were drafting text they could insert and adapt in assignment work:

Resources

Student feedback on the resources provided, were generally positive:

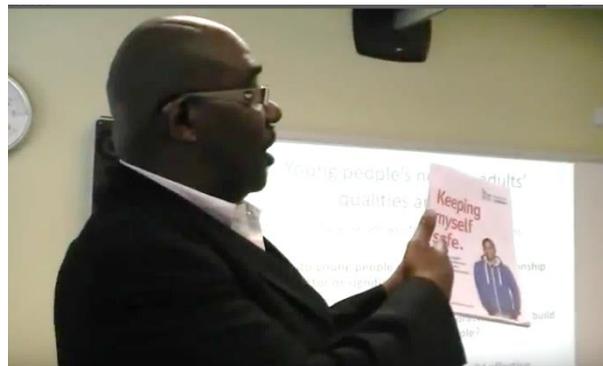
I think that the resources have been very useful, the articles, videos, diagrams and policies in particular.

Notwithstanding certain frustrations with the VLE, mentioned above, students on the whole found it a useful point of reference and repository of resources and outputs from the face-to-face sessions:

Everything on GOAL was well put together and very useful.

Goal was a good summary of what we had learnt.

One student suggested that in addition, they would have appreciated a reading list for the course, a point reinforced by the comment of a second student, who felt there could have been more links to external resources.



Two students suggested the course needed more in terms of case studies, and illustrations, for example, of how policies are enacted in real-world contexts, and approaches to safe working.

Recommendations

The EACEA funded EUGANGS pilot course was an ideal opportunity to trial new resources, new content and new approaches to teaching and learning. Expertise was provided by a range of partners and stakeholders to inform the course, and every effort was made to support students once they had embarked on it. The lessons learned from the pilot provide strong guidance on how to reshape the approach for future programmes, and these are set out below.

Acknowledgement of achievement

Completing assignments was a challenge for the majority of students, and for many completing and passing one assignment on the course will have marked progress on previous academic achievements. Course designers should explore ways of acknowledging and celebrating success internally, such as certificates of achievement, but also discuss with the awarding organisation their flexibility around ensuring different levels of achievement are recognised.

Ensure some element of face-to-face participation for all students

While the VLE provided access to resources and lessons when students could not attend in person, it was no substitute to the experience of face-to-face sessions. On the other hand, regular attendance at weekly face-to-face sessions was not possible for the majority of students. Centres should consider models of face-to-face delivery which ensure attendance in person by all students, perhaps by identifying key sessions where attendance is obligatory, or holding whole day meetings, so that sessions can be more comprehensive and fewer in number.

Provide some practical experience for all students

The majority of students on the pilot course were engaged in some kind of youth work or in dealing with gang crime. This, however, was not the case for all students, and some students were at early stages in their career. The activities on the course were designed to ensure exchange of experience and knowledge, but more could have been done to facilitate this beyond the classroom. In feedback on the course, one student suggested practical work experience should be a part of the course. This should be possible for a mixed cohort, where some students may be able to offer job shadowing opportunities, for example, to a fellow student. Even for students experienced in youth work, exchange visits to work places/localities would significantly broaden perspectives and may facilitate critical evaluation of practices and circumstances.

Interpersonal communication

Students commented favourably on the skills they had gained in interpersonal communication. Particular approaches such as motivational interviewing provide clear guidance on how to conduct productive conversations, and this was cited as a benefit of the programme. This could be extended and further embedded by applying particular approaches to IC to within-session conversations. This would also have the benefit of facilitating the critical thinking aspects of the course.

Resources

While a lot of effort was put into identifying resources appropriate to the programme, students still felt that more could have been made available, in terms of case studies, more information on local gangs, and access to reports and relevant laws and policies. Future courses should make clearer reference to the EUGANGS report and handbook, which address much of this. When the course is

run for the first time, this also generates case studies as students complete assignments. Permission should be sought from individual students to use these for future learning.

Building in enquiry as a means of learning

The final recommendation is for the role that a practitioner enquiry can play in supporting learning and addressing several of the issues raised in this evaluation. An enquiry cycle was originally a part of the pilot design, whereby participants were invited to identify an issue pertinent to their experience, formulate a question for enquiry based on this, research the issue and identify potential solutions or interventions. A second cycle would see students apply and evaluate the solution, and thereby answer the question.

In the end, this was not possible within the timescale of the pilot, given the demands of completing assignments. If, however, the products of such an enquiry can be made part of the assessment process, this would provide a way forward. The other benefits of an enquiry as an integral part of the course are that it:

- provides an opportunity to personalise learning, and create starting points appropriate for each student
- enables students to explore in depth an issue relevant to them
- is likely to be related to the day job, and so provide efficient use of time
- provides opportunities for collecting data from young people, enabling a conduit for young people's voices into the programme, as highlighted in the feedback
- supports students in the development of skills in research, analysis and writing
- provides evidence of the impact of the course on students and those they work with, including young people.



Next steps

The EUGANGS project has provided Walsall College with an excellent opportunity to forge links with organisations and communities around the Black Country, to develop knowledge and skills around the issue of gangs and youth crime, and consider best ways of working to address these. As the funding for the project ends, the College will take forward the model developed and adapt it in line with the learning set out in this evaluation. We will explore with the many partners who have worked with us on EUGANGS, opportunities to make the course accessible to the workforce and communities of the Black Country and beyond. One such development is already underway in the form of *Activate Walsall*. This is project developed by a partnership between local Police, Walsall Council, Walsall Voluntary Action, and Walsall College. The project will support local communities deal with crime in their area, taking an ABCD approach. The new Open College Network West Midlands Level 3 Certificate⁴, also a product of the EUGANGS project, will form the core of *Activate Walsall's* projects, providing a framework for learning and support, based on the enquiry model described in the recommendations.

If you would like further information or updates on this, please contact Colin Isham at: cisham@walsallcollege.ac.uk.

'I have recommended this course to many people who now recognise that this training is important. If and when run again I also believe that there will be an over subscription if people wanting to do the course.'

'I thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt a great deal. I am so glad that I stayed for the whole course and completed it. It's given me a taste for this area of work and it is something that I am now looking to get a job role in, as well as looking at more courses to help improve my knowledge, experience and expertise.'

⁴ <http://www.opencollnet.org.uk/qualifications/all-qualifications/working-with-gangs-and-youth-violence>

Appendix – 90 hour VET programme course outline

module / content
Induction
Interpersonal Communication (IC) - principles of emotional intelligence (EI) / use of EI in situations related to gang environments
IC - key concepts of transaction analysis / use of TA insights to improve communication and to build positive relationships / analyse conversations using TA / define situational literacy / reflect on situational literacy in a gang related environment
IC - methods of relationship building / trust and respect in negotiating and changing boundaries / appropriateness of using different methods of relationship building
Safe Working (SW) - Identify key components for safe working /precautions that should be taken to ensure personal safety when working in a gang related environment / lone working in a gang related environment
SW - different approaches conflict management and resolution when working with young people / in a gang related environment / strengths and weaknesses of different methods of conflict management and resolution
SW - key aspects of the law as it pertains to safeguarding / risk assessment and health and safety when working in a gang related environment / key factors to consider in risk assessment and health and safety / the importance of boundaries in working safely with gangs and gang members
Policy (Pol) - key legislation relevant to gangs / / statutory and voluntary provisions for working in a gang related environment and their relationship to own role / how current national policy on gang related activities has come about / key components and drivers of national policy on gang related activities / national policy framework on gang related activities
Pol - roles of national and local agencies operating in a gang related environment - links between policy and implementation as they apply to different agencies working along and in multi-agency relationships

module / content
Pol - how national policy on gang related activity is applied locally / how the local policy framework impacts on gangs and gang related environments / extent of own role in relation to relevant services and to national policy on gang related activity
IC - key aspects of language, body language and visible signs in a gang related environment / implications of language, body language, and visible signs in a gang related environment
SW - safeguarding and protection of vulnerable adults in the context of client relationships in a gang related environment / signs and symptoms of mental health issues in a gang-related environment / implications of mental health issues and the appropriate agencies to address them
Pol - differing impact of various statutes / range of practice in relation to interventions in gang related activity / justice and agency responses and best practice interventions in gang related activity
Psychology (Psy) - principle theories of working with groups / different roles that individuals play in groups / relations and processes in groups / how power operates in groups
Psy - different theories of motivation applicable to individuals in groups and gangs / drivers of human behaviour in groups including in gangs
Psy - social psychology's focus on the individual and the individual within groups / significance of social psychology insights in relation to human groups and the development of gangs / relevance of different social psychological theories for working with gangs
Psy - compare and contrast different models of learning / experiential learning models / different theories of reflection / how combining theory and practice results in relevant learning
Psy - list the formal and informal group types to which people may belong / explain the possible reasons that may affect people's affiliation to and alienation from groups
Social Factors (SF) - social forces that can shape behaviour and form a context in which gangs can emerge

SF - the representation of gangs in the mass/multi media / the impact of mass/multi media messages on the public's opinion of gangs and gang related activity / impact of major social media, on gangs and gang related activities, including bullying

SF - range of youth and gang cultures within the UK and internationally / identify youth and gang cultures influenced by geographical location, music, fashion and film

SF - attachment theory and family functions in relation to the family and socialisation of young people / the impact of family background on the socialisation and shaping of young people

SF - the different causes of crime in a gang related environment / describe Bronfenbrenner's theory of outside influences on individual behaviour

IC - effective approaches to mentoring

Pol - multi-agency working and next steps for participants