

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: York St John University		
Unit of Assessment: 33. Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Converge: Releasing the potential of university arts education to benefit adults with mental health problems.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 - 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Nick Rowe	Associate Professor in Theatre and Health, Director of Converge	1992 - present
Dr Mandy Asghar	Director of the Academic Development Directorate	2010 - 2018
Professor Liz Mellor	Professor in Applied Music	2000 - 2016
Andy Pendle	Senior Lecturer in Counselling, Coaching and Mentoring	2000 - present
David Britten	Senior Lecturer in Counselling, Coaching and Mentoring	2007 - present
Dr Catherine Heinemeyer	Postgraduate Research Fellow in Theatre / Lecturer in Theatre	2017 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Converge is an extended practice research project in arts and mental health in a university context, offering a range of educational opportunities to local people who have mental health problems. Since 2014 the project's impact has included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Influencing NHS practice (via 3 NHS Trusts) through modelling ways in which HEIs can work directly with people with mental health problems through an educational approach. 2) Supporting other HEIs in UK (2 institutions) and USA (1 institution) to adopt the 'Converge model' within their own contexts. 3) Providing arts educational and employment opportunities and experiences to people (over 150 each year) with mental health problems that support personal recovery and self-actualisation. 		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Converge is a practice-based action research project, which began in 2008, with the objective of designing, implementing and evaluating the potential benefit of running University based arts courses for adults with experience of mental ill health. People are referred through mental health service providers; they stay with the project as long as they judge it benefits their mental health. The focus is on arts education, not on therapy.</p> <p>Its four main research questions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What conditions foster a successful relationship between university and health services? 		

A fundamental insight of the Converge research project is that offering creative opportunities within a university context, as distinct from mental health services, enables inclusion of people with severe and enduring mental health problems in the wider community. Participants in Converge are identified as students, not patients, with the research exploring the multiple ways the university environment impacts upon their habitus; particularly the impact of being regarded as a student within a university environment.

Investigating the institutional cooperation between university and health services, Rowe [3.1] finds the following key criteria for success: convergence of interests; trust, mutual understanding and sustained interpersonal relationships; clear common purpose; interdisciplinarity; and, taking risks to test the boundaries of ingrained practices.

2. What is the impact on university students involved?

Asghar and Rowe's [3.2] phenomenological research into a cohort of YSJU students with Converge found that in-depth learning has resulted from encountering 'those who are different and unfamiliar', enabling students 'to engage with the messiness of the real world'. Asghar and Rowe also find that university students' prejudices in relation to mentally unwell people were substantially reduced by engagement in Converge, while Pendle, Rowe and Britten [3.4] document how coaching Converge students led trainee coaches to redefine their professional roles.

3. What is the impact on mental health service users?

A key focus of the research was how Converge could capture the impact of arts-based processes on mental health, while avoiding reinforcing negative stigmatising identities. Rowe [3.1] provides narrative and case study evidence that taking on the role of student is one route to overcoming the 'spoiled' identity of the 'mentally ill person'. Heinemeyer and Rowe's [3.5] participatory research with members of Converge's theatre company established that the long-term nature of involvement was crucial to members' professional and personal 'branching out' and thus to their recovery.

4. What is the potential for peer research in the Mental Health context?

Through its research, Converge has developed innovative (often arts-based) approaches to co-production of socially-engaged research with mental health service users. In 2018-19, Converge theatre company, Out of Character, presented two performances based on participatory drama-led enquiry into local stakeholders' desires for future mental health services [3.6]. In 2017, the Converge Evaluation and Research Team (CERT) was established as a group with lived experience of mental health difficulties who, following research training, have been commissioned to undertake bespoke evaluation for six services.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Rowe, N. (2015). 'Creating a Healing Campus: A Partnership between a University and a Provider of Mental Health Services.' *University Partnerships for Community and School System Development*. (Vol. 5, pp. 119-134). Online: Emerald Insight. DOI: 10.1108/S2055-364120150000005007

Included in the multi-volume 'University Partnerships' series, an output of the International Higher Education and Learning Association (HETL)

[3.2] Asghar, M, & Rowe, N. (2017). 'Reciprocity and critical reflection as the key to social justice in service learning: A case study.' *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. DOI: 10.1080/14703297.2016.1273788

[3.3] Bates, C. and Mellor, L. (2017) 'Exploring the perceived benefits of shared musical experience'. In Reason, M. and Rowe, N. (eds.) *Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact in Theatre, Music and Arts*. London: Bloomsbury. [Can be Supplied by the HEI upon Request]

[3.4] Pendle, A, Rowe, N, & Britten, D. (2017). 'Coaching in a non-clinical setting with coachees who access mental health services.' *International Journal of Evidence Based coaching and Mentoring*, 15(1) [Microsoft Word - 15-1-6 Pendle Rowe and Britten -Coaching in a non-clinical setting.docx \(yorks.ac.uk\)](#)

[3.5] Heinemeyer, C. and Rowe, N. (2019) 'Being known, branching out: troupes, teams and recovery'. *Mental Health Review Journal*, 24(3), 212-227. DOI: 10.1108/MHRJ-12-2018-0039

[3.6] *In/Hospitable and In/Significant*. (2018) Pair of plays by Paul Birch and Out of Character Theatre Company. Performed York Festival of Ideas, University of Huddersfield, Queen Mary's University, London.

The outcome of a drama-based research process, synthesising the views of mental health professionals, heads of service, service users and carers plays portraying alternative possible futures for the mental health system. [Can be Supplied by the HEI upon Request]

Research grants

[3.7] In March 2020 Converge was awarded £356,000 by Research England and The Office of Students to investigate the impact of Converge on university students and Converge participants at York St John University and Northumbria University. Since 2014, it has also been awarded total grants of £161,900 from the Igen Trust, £270,000 from Leeds and York Partnership NHS Trust and Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust, £15,000 from the Imagine Foundation and £20,334 from the People's Health Lottery.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Three areas of impact are detailed here: 1) on NHS practice; 2) on HE practice; 3) on participants. In each area the impacts include improved mental health service provision, with benefit to both institutional practice, communities and individual service users.

1. On NHS practice:

The Converge model of arts-based courses for mental health service users within a university context has been accepted and adopted by the NHS as an example of 'good practice' and 'excellent partnership' [5.1] and as 'transforming the lives of mental health difficulties locally' (Adult Mental Health Services Locality Manager [5.1]). Moreover, adult mental health professionals describe Converge as establishing a new paradigm of shared responsibility for mental health care, 'breaking new ground in terms of exploring the therapeutic potential of a partnership between the health and education sectors' [5.2]. The medical Director for York's mental health services [5.3], states that Converge's approach has 'been highly influential within the City of York and surrounding area'. He also confirms that the Converge model has influenced the NHS's approach within the region more broadly: 'The NHS and our partner organisations have taken on a community based approach [...] the Converge project has been an important element of this approach, and a key national exemplar' [5.3].

The impact of Converge within the health field is evidenced through the following:

1. The local NHS Trust provides over £200,000 of funding each year directly to Converge.
2. The local NHS Trust refers over 150 people to Converge each year.
3. Converge has been recognised by key bodies within the NHS as follows:
 - 2014 Winner of the Medipex Innovation in the NHS Award (Mental Health).
 - 2015 Shortlisted for Health Service Journal Award, 'Acute or Community Service Redesign'.
 - 2017 Non-Clinical Team of the Year Award from Tees Esk and Wear Valleys (TWEV) NHS Trust.

2. On Higher Education practice:

Converge's impact on practice at YSJU has been profound, offering a model for opening up the campus to the local community. Over 1000 people with mental health problems have completed Converge courses and over 400 university students have been involved in delivery of the courses and in support of the participants. The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's assessment is that Converge 'represents truly innovative practice in the Higher Education sector' (NCCPE Director [5.4]). The Adult Mental Health Locality Manager of TEWV NHS Trust [5.2] testifies that Converge has 'demonstrated that within the university, the very language of mental health can change attitudes, and to all intents and purposes eradicate mental health stigma on the campus.'

The wider reach of Converge is demonstrated through the adoption of the Converge model in three other locations - Leeds, Newcastle, and Portland (Oregon, USA) – and the close involvement of the Clinical Commissioning teams and NHS trusts in the pilot projects, committee meetings and evaluations of these.

Leeds. From January 2017 Converge-labelled courses operated at Leeds, Leeds Trinity, Leeds Beckett universities and Leeds College of Music. Four academic staff and 18 students have been involved in this delivery with 71 Converge students enrolled.

Newcastle. From February 2017 three academic staff and 28 students have worked with local mental health professionals to deliver courses in theatre and fashion to 58 Converge students.

Portland. Since 2016, 55 occupational therapy students from Pacific University have made extended visits to visit Converge in York, and a Converge Oregon Theatre course has been held in Portland. The Programme director [5.5] describes how the ongoing mentorship of Converge York has enabled Pacific University's School of Occupational Therapy to develop Converge Oregon, and to publish the model in texts used by US occupational therapists and OT students.

3. On participants:

The average completion rate of Converge students enrolled on Converge York's 37 courses is 81%, higher than rates for comparable mental health interventions. The local NHS Trust has 'found evidence to support that involvement in Converge reduces contact with mental health services' [5.2] enabling people to explore new identities and saving money to the NHS. The two case studies provided as testimonials [5.6; 5.7] exemplify the role of Converge in mentally unwell people's recovery journey, the progression of Converge students into employment, support and professional roles, and thus the knock-on beneficial effects of their own recovery on other students. To date, 14 Converge students have moved on to undergraduate or postgraduate study at YSJU, and 14 have moved into tutor/research assistant roles. A further 25 Converge students currently work as a semi-professional theatre company, and six of these are also working with the company's simulated patient service.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Report: Care Quality Commission. Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. 'Community-based mental health services for adults of working age: quality report'. January 2015.

[5.2] Testimonial: Adult Mental Health Locality Manager, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust

[5.3] Testimonial: Deputy medical director of York's mental health services, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust

[5.4] Testimonial: Director, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement

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[5.5] Testimonial: Interim Programme Director, School of Occupational Therapy, Pacific University

[5.6] Anonymous Converge Student Case Study 1

[5.7] Anonymous Converge Student Case Study 2