Appendix: The consultation process

As part of the consultation process to inform the development of the course material, course team members met with groups of workers and service users across Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This Appendix briefly outlines the consultation process and gives context to some of the quotations from managers, practitioners and service users presented throughout this book and its companion volume, Managing Care in Practice.

Adult service user consultations

The user consultation strategy for adult services involved (among other less structured meetings) four workshops with groups of people with experience of using mental health, disability, learning disability and older people’s services. A facilitator with direct experience of services was identified for each workshop and participants were contacted by facilitators through informal networks. Some people already knew each other and others met for the first time at the workshops. Everyone had experience of several services, including health, voluntary sector, community-based and residential settings.

Some people had experienced compulsory services, and several people in the mental health group had been ‘sectioned’ under the Mental Health Act. The names of some participants and all projects, centres, wards and professionals have been changed. Some participants were happy for their names to be used. It was clear that, although services are split along similar lines to those chosen for the consultations, people do not fit into neat service delivery boxes. For example, Lou, a woman in the learning disability group, also had a visual impairment. Judith, from the older people group, had a physical disability and had cared for her elderly mother. Because people have diverse experience of services we have chosen to identify them by name alone alongside quotations in the chapters. For example, to have identified Judith as belonging to a ‘physical disability’ service user group would deny the range of her experience and contribution. By using names only we hope to highlight the commonalities of experience and emphasise people rather than service categories.

The groups had the following remit:

To consider a set range of questions from their specialist viewpoint as users of services for a specific group of people. Views on their experiences of involvement (or lack of it) in consultation and planning services will be particularly useful.
For adult groups, Jeanette Henderson (a member of the course team) met with facilitators to talk through the consultation process with the aim of ensuring that participants as well as the course team would find the experience useful and relevant. Group members were sent the course outline and information about the materials likely to be developed for the course. Each member was paid a fee for taking part as well as travel expenses. Following the workshops a representative or facilitator from each of the groups was invited to a meeting at The Open University to discuss the content and process of the consultations. A report was produced for each of the groups outlining the themes discussed and containing a selection of quotations illustrating the views of the group, and an overall report summarising the sessions was circulated.

Young people, children and families consultations

The parent and young people user views are drawn from several consultations co-ordinated by Janet Seden (a member of the course team). In one, a Home-Start staff member interviewed six families with children under five years who were receiving services from Home-Start (a voluntary befriending agency, accessed by referral from commissioning agencies). These families had all experienced a crisis in their family life that had led them to ask for help. The agencies they experienced included social services, health, education, housing and the benefits agency. The families’ experiences of the statutory agencies were mixed, ranging from the helpful (sensitive responses) to the incompetent (initial telephone calls not returned). They were unanimous in valuing responsive, respectful encounters with professionals and valued highly the peer support of the befriending agency.

In another consultation, Maya Joshi and Rukshana Owen (with Janice Whyne at the Family Service Unit) interviewed five young women who had attended a group for teenagers who had experienced sexual abuse. The therapeutic group had now ended and been evaluated. It was thought that these young women, who besides attending the group had also experienced a range of other interventions in their lives, would be able to tell the researchers what they thought about the services and professionals they knew about. The researchers prepared questions relating to the areas of:

- benefits received from services
- the positives and negatives of the experience
- the young women’s feelings about the services they received and improvements they might like to suggest.
The researchers found they needed to adjust the language of the questionnaire and make space for the respondents’ own areas of concern as the research progressed, and that making space for free narrative was a useful way to work. These consultations were undertaken as face-to-face interviews which were then transcribed.

In both adult and children’s consultations the respondents had a rich experience of very current meetings with a range of professionals from several agencies. This makes their valuable views and insights both genuinely felt and grounded in direct personal experience. Material from these consultations is referred to in this book as ‘service user consultations’ and ‘children’s consultations’.

**Regional and individual manager consultations**

Regional consultations were held in Leeds, Edinburgh and Belfast. The regional sessions were held with groups of people working in or using care services. Participants were identified and contacted by regional academics in the School of Health and Social Welfare.

Two workshops were held with groups of managers and practitioners in the north-east of England. The first consisted of managers and practitioners from a local authority that had moved to integrated health and social care adult teams. The second workshop was made up of groups of senior managers, frontline managers and practitioners from adult and children’s services in one local authority.

Workshops with managers discussed a set of questions that focused on expectations – what senior managers and staff expect of frontline managers, and what managers think is expected of them – and experiences – what senior managers and staff consider they get from frontline managers.

Twenty-six semi-structured interviews were held with individual managers in the Midlands and north-east of England. Additional material from managers was gathered with the help of the BBC in preparing audio and video cassettes for use by students of the course. Material from these interviews and workshops is used throughout this book and is referred to as ‘manager consultations’.

Finally, three managers were asked to keep written diaries of their work for several weeks, and one manager kept an audio diary over a period of several months. These are all drawn on in both course books.

Some managers and service users continued their involvement with the development of the course by becoming critical readers of course materials.