"Expanding work experience opportunities for Environmental Health students through assisting Local Authorities with housing surveys"

INTRODUCTION

Local Government has experienced significant cuts - few have the staff and budgets to undertake proactive work and build an evidence base. This impacts training as Environmental Health students have less opportunities to gain work experience. This project provides a solution to both problems with University Centre Weston (UCW)/University of the West of England (UWE) organising housing surveys with Local Authorities using students to collect data. In 2017 two surveys were undertaken over 3 days for Mendip and BANES respectfully involving up to 25 students resulting in an Additional Licencing scheme, one research conference poster and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education of 92.3% for UCW EH students in 2017.

According to the Public Policy Institute for Wales "Local government funding in England is estimated to have been reduced by 25% between 2010-11 and 2015-16. Statutory services have been relatively protected but spending on some non-statutory services has been cut by half". June 2017 The Guardian reported "Health inspectors used to be proactive" and "cuts have limited our prevention work". This project uses students and staff from UCW/UWE to temporarily boost local authority staffing by undertaking proactive survey work. This generates evidence that could be used for funding/staffing bids and also offers an important networking opportunity for students.

In 2012 Weston College (now UCW) were asked by North Somerset Council to assist in the application for Additional Licencing scheme. Door knocking survey was undertaken to consult with residents and identify potential HMOs. From this, further surveys were undertaken for Mendip, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. The two most recent surveys took place with Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES) and Mendip Council. Bath has a significant number of student houses and additional licensing was introduced in three wards in 2014.

By 2017 BANES EHPs suspected that significant numbers of students were moving into other areas of the city but did not have the resources to test this theory. UCW/UWE in conjunction with CIEH SW provided 20 students, two housing lecturers and one mini bus. In one day this team spoke to residents of 160 dwellings and externally surveying over 80 HMOs resulting in an application to extend additional licencing to all the wards in Bath. Shepton Mallet has

high levels deprivation, migrant workers and privately rented accommodation but relatively few housing complaints.

In January 2017 a survey of over 750 dwellings was taken over 2 days with up to 25 students each day door knocking in the town centre. This time the survey was looking at housing conditions and health of the occupants, identifying potentially vulnerable tenants and raising awareness of private sector housing team in Mendip.

Evaluation

In evaluating, the universities costs were absorbed into an enhancement budget. It provided valuable work experience for students, a research poster at a teaching conference and was highlighted as good practice in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. UCW achieved 92.3% DLHE survey 2017 (a key indicator of graduate employability) For a local authority, it's like have the equivalent of a free member of staff for a month. Jeremy Manners, Senior EHO at BANES said that "BANES Housing Services have discovered a real benefit from working with Environmental Health Students from UWE and UCW.

This partnership approach has made it possible to gain the views of occupants of HMOs and local residents using face to face interviews, and reach residents who are often hard to engage" Public Policy Institute for Wales in 'Coping with the Cuts' includes strategies to cope through Transforming approaches to service delivery and introducing new ways to meet the needs and aspirations of citizens and service users ('doing different things'). This is what we're doing with the partnership and it works.