

# Danos – three years on



**DANOS – the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards – are three years old this month. Trevor Boutall, the consultant who has led the development of DANOS on behalf of Skills for Health, reports on progress to date and highlights the issues still to be addressed.**

On the third anniversary of the publication of the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards, it is useful to reflect on how far we have travelled and consider the obstacles that lie in the road ahead.

The time-line in the figure below shows the major events since work started, in January 2001, on developing standards for all those working in the substance misuse field.

Early in 2001, Healthwork UK, the predecessor of Skills for Health, published the occupational and functional map of the drugs and alcohol sector, entitled *A Competent Workforce to Tackle Substance Misuse*. This called for the development of a set of National Occupational Standards – a combination of both existing standards from health, social care, justice housing etc, and new standards covering functions unique to the substance misuse field – which would define the quality of performance expected of all those working to improve the quality of life for individuals, their families and communities by minimising harm associated with substance misuse.

Work began on the development of what

eventually became known as the DANOS standards in September 2001. This work was completed in May 2002 and the standards were accredited by the UK education regulatory authorities in October of that year.

Since then, the DANOS Project Board, with funding from the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA), the Home Office Drug Strategy Directorate and the Welsh Office, has supervised the implementation of DANOS. This has involved launch events for commissioners and services throughout England and Wales during the summer of 2003, workshops to assist trainers and educationalists to align their courses with DANOS in November 2003, and the launch of the DANOS website, funded by Skills for Health, in January 2004. The NTA encouraged all adult substance misuse treatment services to align job descriptions to DANOS by December 2004, and the first qualification specifically based on DANOS standards, the Health and Social Care National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), became available in January this year. This was closely followed by the launch of the Federation of Drug and Alcohol Professionals' certification scheme, again based on DANOS.

## Uses of DANOS

A recent survey\* of 250 commissioners, service managers, human resource managers, trainers, people delivering front line services, service users and ex-users shows that the DANOS standards are being used by over three-quarters of those in the substance misuse field.

Many DANOS non-users in the survey are new to the field and have not yet got to grips with DANOS. Amongst the non-users, however, there is a small but articulate group who have dismissed DANOS as being bureaucratic, complicated, simplistic and a total waste of time and money.

Once they are familiar with them, most users find DANOS clear, straightforward and easy to use. However, not all DANOS users have found the standards simple to implement with limited time and financial resources. A number of respondents to the survey reported initial difficulties in understanding DANOS themselves and in encouraging others to use them. One commissioner summarises this difficulty and how he was able to overcome it: 'The problem was mainly getting people to understand the purpose of DANOS and how they work. Initial reactions are often one of feeling threatened in some way, or perceiving DANOS as an extra layer of work and a bit of a "pain". Most people respond well when they see how DANOS can help – especially around things like job descriptions, setting work targets, and knowing what areas of competency staff have. Problems were mainly overcome by encouraging managers to "try it out" – starting with job descriptions/competencies, where managers appreciate some help. We have sent

managers on Alcohol Concern's DANOS training as well, which has demystified the process a lot. I would say the best way we have overcome problems is by discussing how DANOS can help, rather than seeing it as some kind of imposition – using it to serve us rather than allowing an impression that it is there to "police" us.'

Encouragingly, respondents to the survey say they are using DANOS for a wide range of human resource (HR) development and service development purposes, although many admit that they are still in the early stages of using DANOS for these reasons.

By far the most popular uses of DANOS are for training and development, and job design, job descriptions and role profiles. Around 40 per cent of respondents say they are also using DANOS for other HR purposes such as continuing professional development (CPD), qualifications, recruitment and selection, career development, induction and performance management. A smaller percentage (between 17 per cent and 34 per cent) are using DANOS more strategically for workforce planning, organisational development, service design, succession planning and partnership development.

Ten per cent of respondents are using DANOS for other purposes, such as:

- keeping up-to-date with policy developments
- an audit tool
- developing service specifications
- developing and updating organisational policies and procedures
- curriculum development
- commissioning
- Federation of Drug and Alcohol Professionals (FDAP) professional certification.

## Benefits of DANOS

Most respondents took some care to identify the benefits to different groups of using DANOS. However, for many, these are anticipated benefits rather than benefits confirmed through experience.

Benefits for workers include:

- clear guidelines for practice
- better understanding of their role and the standards they should be working to
- clarity about the knowledge and skills they require
- tool to measure their own performance, be clear about the knowledge and skills they need to develop and be able to negotiate the training they require
- structured training and professional development in line with national standards
- ability to evidence their training and experience
- professional qualification and status
- greater confidence, pride and self-esteem
- recognition, transferable skills, employability and career progression
- fairer system – everyone working to the same standards.

Benefits for the organisation can be summarised as:

- reliable, competent staff
- quality assurance
- recognition and respectability – able to prove quality to service users and commissioners
- national benchmark against which to audit the organisation
- ready-made structure for human resource planning and development
- clear differentiation of roles
- recruitment of staff from a wider field with the prospect of a professional job
- retention of staff because they have opportunities to progress
- tool for training needs analysis and developing training plans
- culture of constant review
- tool to support change.

There is broad agreement amongst those using DANOS that the key benefit to service users would be a quality service delivered to a common standard across the country by well-trained, qualified workers. Service users who wished to volunteer or find work with a substance misuse agency would be helped by DANOS clarifying the knowledge and skills they need to develop, to work in the field.

### Issues for the future

The issue at the front of most respondents' minds is how workers should demonstrate their competence through qualifications, performance management and supervision processes. They are looking for a strong lead from the NTA to clarify what qualifications, or means of demonstrating compliance with the DANOS standards, is required of which worker groups (both unqualified and professionally-qualified) and the timeframe for achieving this.

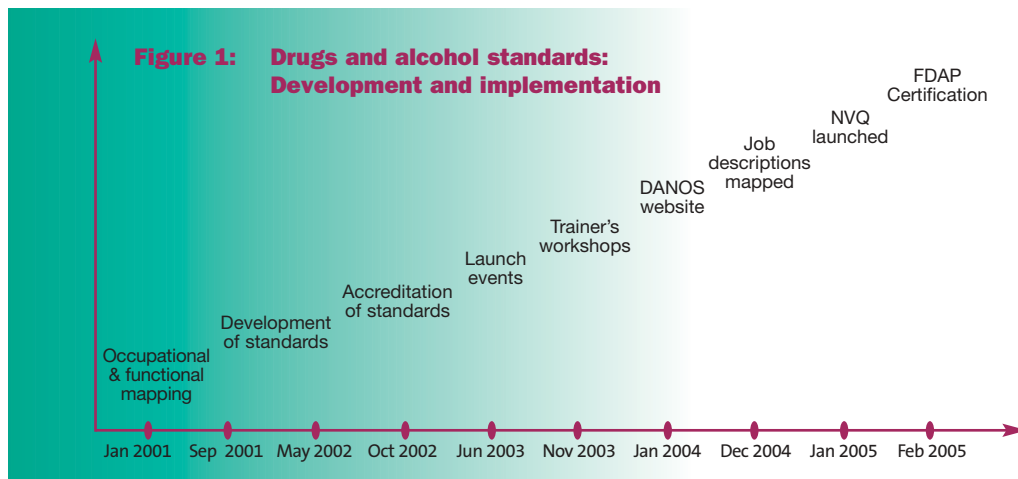
To support the qualifications and competence issue, there will also need to be a national strategy to develop external assessors and train managers to be able to use DANOS effectively to assess their own staff. Closely linked again to the question of qualifications, many respondents would like to see a system of accreditation of training to help them understand what areas of competence the training will support.

If the workforce is to be properly accredited, DANOS users will need additional resources over the next 12 months or so for the training and assessment of their staff in line with the standards, including the backfill costs. National agreements on funding, and guidance of how to access this funding, are required.

People have largely implemented DANOS under their own initiative. They would now like clearer, practical guidance in a number of areas, a fuller exchange of experiences with colleagues and a schedule of activities so that they are able to plan in advance. Those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland would like to see their national authorities supporting DANOS.

### Conclusion

In three years, much has been achieved with DANOS



at national, local, organisational and individual levels. There is a significant body of knowledge and understanding about DANOS in the substance misuse field and the standards are beginning to be widely used, not just for job descriptions and training, but across a range of HR and organisational development areas.

There is much goodwill and enthusiasm (tinged with healthy scepticism!), but this is in danger of being eroded if momentum is not maintained. There are a number of complex issues which must be resolved speedily if the benefits to workers, their organisations and ultimately service users are to be achieved.

In the past year or so, many individuals and organisations have travelled a steep learning curve and gone through the pain barrier of getting to grips with a new system. In the next 12 months, they will expect to see tangible results from their investment.

*\*DANOS – Three Years On: A Report of a Survey of Users of the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards can be found on [www.themsc.org](http://www.themsc.org).*

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