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# The Editor talks to Angela Balding and Tamsin Pascoe

## 6th Form and FE Healthy Colleges

SHEU sponsor colleges to use an online survey to provide baseline data for programme planning.

In October 2006, the Students Health Education Unit (SHEU) offered to sponsor, at no cost, their online questionnaire for use in 6th Form and Further Education colleges.

The sponsorship offer ran from the beginning of October until the end of November 2006. Colleges were initially contacted through the SHEU 'Healthy Student News' monthly email.

Further contacts were made using the Kirklees Healthy College network ([www.khcs.org.uk](http://www.khcs.org.uk)), the SHEU network of people who work in related education and health settings and the PSHE email network maintained by the National Children's Bureau PSHE and Citizenship Information Service -

### Use of results

As part of the sponsorship offer, colleges were asked how they planned to use the information resulting from the survey. The following points summarise the responses from many colleges:

- Useful to examine how our self-assessment compares to an external one
- Help to move our Healthy College project forward
- The data would help to formulate our action plan and help develop and implement our Every Child Matters (ECM) strategy
- Use the findings of the survey for further evidence for the ECM section of the Strategic Area Review and to further support our contribution to the Joint Area Review
- Use the data to take into account the students as key stakeholders in the college's ECM framework and action plan
- Cross reference results to our plans and make refinements as required
- Beneficial to be able to benchmark with other organisations and the potential to share good practice

### Healthy Colleges

Unlike the National Healthy Schools Scheme there is currently no national equivalent programme for the Further

Education and Higher Education sectors.

Angela Balding, SHEU Survey Manager, comments, "For a number of years we have been collecting data from FE colleges and became part of the Kirklees Healthy College network. The development of the work by Kate Birch has led to the Kirklees Healthy College Standard which is being taken up by many colleges. Prior to this, SHEU had been involved with some FE and HE surveys which began in 1995 when we collaborated in a healthy lifestyle study of University students aged 18 and over."

"Since the late 1990s, SHEU started developing healthy lifestyle survey services for FE & 6th Form colleges. A student survey instrument, 'The Further Education Student Health and Lifestyle Survey', had been successfully piloted with colleges and student groups."

"The principal purpose of the survey is to promote debate and change in the colleges receiving reports about the behaviour and beliefs of the students they work with. The information gained also informs and to some extent provides feedback on local health campaigns. For example, with respect to sexual health, all colleges have participated in campaigns for raising awareness of emergency oral contraception and of sexually transmitted infections."

### Comparative data

Angela Balding continues, "In our survey work, with primary and secondary schools, we have slowly built an impressive databank that we think is unique. Similarly, in our work with students aged 16 years plus, we are slowly building a databank that informs college health promotion and healthy college programmes."

### 'Pyramid' data collection

One of the key features of both data sources is the capacity to provide comparative results and to combine this with 'pyramid' data. Angela has used the 'pyramid' data collection model with secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. She has found that, "surveying the health related behaviour of pupils in their

final years of primary school can be very informative when used with data taken from pupils in the first years of secondary schools. Using a similar approach with young people who are in the final years of secondary school and the first years of 6th Form and FE college, we are finding a number of important health behaviour indicators that provide colleges with vital information to inform programme planning."

### Online developments

The desire to make the survey instruments more accessible to colleges came with the development of SHEU's online survey services.

In 1999 the 'Fit to Succeed' project involved SHEU with collecting healthy lifestyle and activity data from school pupils. There was a need to provide both paper-based and online survey facilities. Angela says, "We have documented and published the development of this ongoing project."

([www.sheu.org.uk/whoweworkwith/fittosucceed.htm](http://www.sheu.org.uk/whoweworkwith/fittosucceed.htm))

"One of the outcomes was an opportunity to put some of our questionnaires online and develop our knowledge of how to offer and run a successful online service".

Similarly the parallel development of SHEU's survey services to the FE sector led to colleges being offered an online and paper-based questionnaire.

### Every Child Matters

Angela sees SHEU's service developments as crucial to the survey sponsorship offer. A need for more data collection arose from the emerging 'Every Child Matters' agenda and opportunities created by colleges as they became more interested in issues that led to the Healthy College movement. Angela continues, "We had worked with some FE colleges when we carried out pyramid data collection methods in primary and secondary schools and FE colleges."

"We also noticed a growing interest in collecting data from young people aged 16 plus. This interest came from the wide range

of partnership organisations we are usually involved with in local surveys. These organisations often include Teenage Pregnancy Units, Drug Action Teams, Health Promotion Teams and of course members of local National Healthy School and PSHE teams."

### Gauging the mood

It was at this point that SHEU decided to make a sponsorship offer to some 6th Form Colleges. Angela thinks that it was the right time to gauge the mood of colleges and 'Healthy College'. "We had contacted a number of 6th Form and FE Colleges over the years since 2000 and, although gaining some interest in healthy lifestyle data collection, there was little evidence to suggest many colleges had sufficient resources to act on issues arising from the data. There were a small number of active colleges who used survey information to inform their health promotion programmes. From around 2003/4 a few colleges appointed a 'Healthy College Co-ordinator' or someone whose duties included healthy lifestyle issues. We would then see a fresh interest in data collection and further development of the Healthy College movement."

### Collect baseline data

Angela was keen to encourage colleges to collect baseline data. She has seen, in primary and secondary education, how powerful the data have been and how they can empower education and health staff to change school practices and encourage healthy lifestyles with pupils.

The decision to make a time-limited sponsorship offer to a number of colleges was due to the logistics of carrying out online surveys and the unknown reaction of the colleges. Should the offer fall flat then SHEU had not wasted too much time and money and could hopefully establish reasons for failure. If the offer was successful than it provided an opportunity to develop the survey services to reflect the needs of the colleges. Angela felt that the offer was a success if around five colleges become involved, collected data and used the results to inform or establish their programmes.

### Lots of interest

Tamsin Pascoe, Project Co-ordinator, has found a lot of interest from colleges. "At the beginning we contacted 6th Form and FE colleges via email using our own and other networks. We were never certain if we were contacting the 'right' person and in some cases we depended on the initial email being passed to the 'right' person."

The offer started on 1st October and SHEU initially emailed colleges in September. Tamsin continues, "We spent around two to three weeks sending and re-sending emails before the sponsorship offer started. The first colleges to respond were usually already involved with the Healthy College network and were at various stages of developing their healthy college strategy."

"Although we were unsure about the

'right' college contact we found the most common 'title' held, by those who contacted us, was the same or something similar to 'Student Services Manager'. Also, many potential college contacts in various college health departments were found to be part-time and/or did not respond to email on a regular basis."

### Reasons for not being involved

Tamsin explains some of the reasons colleges gave for not doing the survey. "Naturally, not everyone we contacted would be interested and a pattern emerged that showed the main reasons for not being involved. Time was clearly a problem. We talked to a number of colleges about the 'best' time for carrying out a healthy lifestyle survey. Unsurprisingly, colleges said there wasn't a good time of year as it was always busy."

"Some colleges, who were unable to take on the survey, had already allocated activities to any potential 'free' curriculum time in the sponsorship period. However, they did say that given sufficient notice the online survey would be of interest."

### 'Dummy run'

Tamsin describes the 'dummy run'. "We sent out a series of emails that briefly explained the sponsorship offer and how the online survey worked. A 'dummy run' was also provided. This gave each college an opportunity to see all the questions in the survey and also fill in a 'dummy' survey. Like most online surveys, some questions opened up further questions depending on the initial 'yes/no' response. Being able to see all the questions also meant that college staff would know exactly the sorts of issues that would be covered in the health survey."

### Too much information

"One contact, who came from a school with a sixth form, decided not to continue with the sponsorship having seen the questions. The reason given was that the questions would have provided more information than the school needed."

"Another college was undecided about carrying out the survey having seen the questions and the 'dummy run'. A very fruitful period of constructive feedback resulted and we were able to make a number of changes to the survey and adapt the process. However the college still felt unable to carry out the survey as they were concerned about the completion of the survey 'online'. They felt the students would have problems answering the questions as other students would be in the computer room at the same time. However, confidentiality issues were not expressed by any other college and we offered a paper-based survey to the college concerned about privacy."

### Time to complete

As more colleges took up the offer of the 'dummy run' one other issue was raised. Tamsin continues, "The survey had been developed over a number of years with

inputs from different colleges and students. The hardest things to achieve were agreement over the right number, content and length of each question. After the trials and developments we used the paper-based FE survey for a number of years."

"The online survey was essentially the same. It was of no surprise that when colleges saw the 'dummy run' the issue of the time to complete was raised. Most colleges have tutorial curriculum time of around 40-50 minutes. Our experience was that students took on average about 30 minutes to complete the online survey. Should a student need more time they could go re-enter the survey, and continue from where they left, at a later date from any computer with an Internet access."

"With the sponsorship survey we found only one college had an issue with the time needed to complete. We offered to provide a shorter version of the survey although some comparative data would be lost."

One of the reasons why SHEU surveys have proved popular over the years is the ability to compare your school/college results with others. This also proved to be important to colleges when talking to them about the sponsorship.

Tamsin explains, "We initially asked the colleges to complete their online surveys by the end of December. This was later extended to the end of January 2007. When each college finished their survey they see their results on screen and can print out the tables and charts."

"The reason we set a completion date was to have aggregated results from all colleges available online by February 2007. We then provide each college with a comparative, anonymous dataset. This is an invaluable tool and allows colleges to see the similarities and differences between their student results and those from other colleges."

### Success

Some colleges finished collecting their data in December 2006. Comments about the survey web site included: "...very easy and straightforward to use," and the ease of the exercise: "went very well. We originally planned to undertake 700 questionnaires online, but I had to increase the number due to the volume of willing participants".

SHEU will continue to be involved with healthy colleges. Angela explains, "We will be briefly presenting some of the results from the sponsored survey at the first national Healthy Colleges conference in February 2007."

The future funding of the Healthy College movement could depend on support given by central government. It is difficult to imagine that the enthusiasm and energy that many individuals and colleges have already devoted to this issue will die away. SHEU have been fortunate to play a part in this process. Once individuals become involved in the promotion and development of students' healthy lifestyles and their healthy college setting, changes do happen."