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National 'Health Colleges' Conference Report: Executive Summary

This article is taken from the Executive Summary of the report on the first National Healthy College Conference. It was held, in February 2007, at Wigan and attended by 70 delegates.

Background

The concept of Healthy Colleges has developed from the Healthy Settings approach which itself derived from the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (World Health Organisation, 1986). The healthy settings approach has become a tool to address many health issues. Over the past five years, interest in the Healthy College Programme has led a number of College/PCT partnerships to work within colleges to improve the health and wellbeing of the whole college community. A partnership between Huddersfield New College and Huddersfield PCT led to the production of the Kirklees Healthy College Standard. Interest in these standards by other colleges became a Healthy College Network co-ordinated by Huddersfield New College. The growth of this network and the interest from all part of the country led to the National Healthy Colleges Conference.

The conference was designed to

- ♦ Give the background to healthy college work in England
- ♦ Explore how healthy colleges can be an effective vehicle for delivering national and local strategies, e.g. 'Every Child Matters' and 'Choosing Health'
- ♦ Share and develop learning from colleges and other partners

- ♦ Develop networking and partnerships across FE and its partners

Delegates

There were 70 delegates present. Of these 56 were from 43 colleges, and the other delegates were 6 PCT based Public Health or Health Promotion staff, 2 PCT employed School/College Nurses and 4 from Healthy Schools/PSHE Teams. One delegate was from NIACE and another from North West Public Health Teaching Network.

Conference Programme

The programme of the conference was a combination of formal presentations and workshops. The presentations covered the background to and offered an overview of Health Colleges, lifestyle of 16 to 19 year olds and the sexual health issues of young people. Geoff Dessent from the Department of Health outlined the department's view of the role of Healthy Colleges in broad health agenda. The final presentation by the vice Principal and students from Wigan and Leigh College showed ways of selling the Healthy College role to the whole college community. The presentations were well received and considered by the delegates to be helpful.

Workshops

There were seven workshops available, and participants selected three. The workshops were: Getting Started, replaced by 'RU Ready?' after lunch; using the SHEU survey; Working with 'Every Child Matters'; Healthy Food in College; Smoking issues;

and Mental Health and Well-being.

The delegates found that the workshops enabled them to:

- ◆ Identify issues relevant to post-16 education
- ◆ Discuss good practice and other ways of working
- ◆ Network with delegates from other colleges, PCT staff and those from other organisations

Did the conference achieve its objectives?

To give the background to healthy college work in England, understand the current situation and discuss future developments.

Many of the participants said that they had found the conference a useful source of information and identified a need for national standards to be developed.

Explore the role of Healthy Colleges in the delivery of national and local strategies.

Delegates found that the conference provided them with ideas to develop and ways forward. For some it gave the assurance that their college was moving in the right direction

Networking and sharing of ideas.

Many of those who completed the evaluation sheet found that the conference had provided them with useful opportunities for networking and for sharing ideas.

Future of the Healthy College Network

The Healthy College Network has developed without any funding. It has now reached the point at which it can no longer continue purely on the goodwill of one person. It would help with future planning if there were some indication of the level of support that a fee based membership network could support. A survey was completed by delegates to the Healthy College National Conference. Completion of the survey did not commit to payment of a

membership fee. A fee-supported network would aim to provide:

- ◆ Up to three network meetings per year
- ◆ Networking across colleges
- ◆ Sharing of good practice

There were 35 completed questionnaires returned. This represents a response from 44% of the delegates present.

Do you think that a network would be useful? There was a positive response to this question as 88.6% said yes.

Would you/your organisation be prepared to consider the payment of an annual membership fee of £100?

Most thought that their institution would be prepared to fund membership, however 43% were not sure that funding would be made available.

'Future of the Network' survey summary

- ◆ The evidence from this short consultation exercise suggest that there is an interest in a possible fee based network and that the network could be viable
- ◆ The network would be expected to link colleges and promote sharing of good practice
- ◆ A formal national network, which would oversee accreditation standards, was envisaged by some respondents
- ◆ A desire for support was underlying most comments. Some of the were keen to become involved in any network which would offer them support

Recommendations

The feedback from the conference supports the following recommendations: -

- ◆ There is a need for nationally recognised standards to be developed
- ◆ The Government should support a national and regional Healthy College Network
- ◆ PCTs should be encouraged to support local development of Healthy College programmes