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Colleges broadly in-support of a national healthy colleges programme

With 96% of schools now working with the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP) and 57% at Status, this joint DH and DCSF initiative, has proven to be one of the most popular non-statutory initiatives in schools today.

But does our responsibility to a young person's physical health, social development and emotional wellbeing stop once they move into FE? When DH's 'Choosing Health' (2004) introduced the NHSP as a universal provision for schools, it also stated that we should 'extend the principles of the NHSP to institutions providing education to an older age group'. In summer 2007, I began a national consultation and scoping exercise to find out what is happening in our colleges and whether there is a demand for a National Healthy Colleges programme. The consultation used a sample size of 10% base on current DCSF figures for total number of colleges (378).

Without exception, colleges welcomed - often enthusiastically - the idea of a national 'Healthy Colleges' programme. The proposed 'healthy colleges' model would - like NHSP - recognize the links between positive physical, emotional and social health; raising achievement and engaging students and staff; and could respond to the Government's call to raise standards, increase the skills base, and increase the numbers of confident, healthy and emotionally resilient young adults in our society.

The idea of a national 'healthy colleges' model that uses a central driving system - the whole college approach - with key aims and national criteria predicated on the

OFSTED Inspection Framework and ECM, had wide support from senior college managers and principals. Designed well, this new model could also address the broader elements of the Quality Improvement agenda; and directly contribute to the LSC's 'Framework for Excellence'. Crucially, any proposed national 'healthy college' model would need to support the business and marketing strategy of the college by contributing to key inspection, assessment and performance management frameworks.

The college's physical and social environment should reflect the culture and values of the college, and provide those with complex needs and those in mainstream with a safe, supportive and enjoyable learning experience. No current single policy or strategy brings together all these elements.

A National Healthy Colleges programme would involve partnership at national, regional and local levels and would include DH, DCSF and DIUS, LSC, OFSTED and NUS, NIACE, AOC, NAMSS, and the current local Healthy Schools network.

Our scoping exercise has highlighted a demand for a consistent, quality based minimum standard that would provide them with a sound base upon which to build both their current and future practice.

What happens next?

The consultation report is with colleagues in DIUS/DCSF before going to Ministers later in March. Ministers' response to the report and proposals will shape further discussions with colleges and their senior management/Boards.