

Michele Sutton is Principal of Bradford College and Chair of the Healthy Further Education (Healthy FE) Steering Group. For more information on Healthy FE, please visit the website <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/hfep> email: [healthyfurthereducation@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:healthyfurthereducation@dh.gsi.gov.uk) or call 020 7972 3993.

## Michele Sutton

# Providing healthy, safe learning environments should be on the agenda for all FE colleges

Healthy FE is a programme which was set up in 2008 to meet the health needs of those studying and working in the FE sector. This article describes the main health and wellbeing challenges facing FE colleges today, and how the sector can work with external partners to address them.

We know that Further Education learners are a complex group encompassing 14 -19 year olds, adult learners, people updating their vocational skills and in some cases, higher education students. In 2001, over half a million people were enrolled in an FE college in England (ONS, Census, 2001) and this number has since grown exponentially. As a result of this vast and varied population, I believe it is unrealistic to assume that all learners face the same health and wellbeing challenges and that there is a 'one size fits all' way of addressing them. As health issues are likely to vary from one FE college to the next, a self-review tool will be available as part of the Healthy FE Programme to assist colleges in identifying their own health and wellbeing priorities. I'm confident that this will enable colleges to overcome that first hurdle of where to start and where to focus efforts.

### Bradford College

For me, it's important that colleges take a holistic approach when tackling health and wellbeing. At [Bradford College](#) for example, we introduced a healthy meals option at the canteen as well as a number of different

sports clubs to ensure staff and students can participate in free physical activity. These initiatives are easy and are usually low or no-cost to implement, but can have a profound impact on the health of staff and students.

### Community partners

Relationships with community partners are equally important when implementing health and wellbeing programmes. PCTs, Local Authorities and health charities often have health targets that are specific to the 14-19 age group, so working in partnership with local colleges is almost always mutually beneficial.

So far, nine Regional Healthy FE Networks have been set up to support partnership working between FE colleges, PCTs and Local Authorities. These Networks provide a virtual and face-to-face forum where best practice and information can be shared, and will be the building blocks for many FE colleges to engage in partnership programmes with external providers.

I strongly believe that all FE colleges must provide a healthy and safe environment to work and learn in, where staff and students can make the most of the opportunities presented to them. Colleges are already doing a significant amount in this area and Healthy FE is about supporting the fantastic work that is already underway.