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# Why educating learners in health and wellbeing is so important

Further education colleges should improve health and wellbeing provisions to help learners achieve success.

It is vital that we provide our young people with the skills, opportunities and services they need to lead healthier, happier lives. Traditionally, Ofsted has been concerned with students' abilities to achieve success in their education and this remains important. However, we recognise that learners' physical and emotional wellbeing is crucial in helping them to enjoy their education and training, and to enable their progression to work or further learning.

### What is the Healthy Further Education (FE) programme?

The Healthy FE programme aims to improve the health of those who study or work in the FE sector. It isn't about creating something new: it's about working with FE providers to make the health and wellbeing of staff and students an integral part of all aspects of life in FE.

This sector-led programme seeks to support FE colleges' community leadership role and the wider FE sector in responding to the needs of the environment around them. It will enhance a provider's ability to cater for the health and wellbeing of its staff and students through the self-review tool, support through partnership with local health services and established regional networks.

This initiative is supported by the Department of Health, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and delivered through the Learning

and Skills Council (LSIS).

### What are the advantages of building health and wellbeing into the Ofsted inspection framework?

The main focus for many learners at a college is to achieve a qualification; therefore our inspections place considerable emphasis on attainment of qualifications - an important component of measuring success. A key question in our last inspection framework - 'How well do learners achieve?' - focused closely on achieving qualifications and the progress made by learners. Whilst the Every Child Matters themes - Be Healthy; Stay Safe; Enjoy and Achieve; Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Wellbeing - were also considered, they are now more prominent in the new framework, which came into operation in September 2009.

The new framework focuses on educating the whole person - not just in an academic sense. Arguably if, for example, you feel safe, healthy and enjoy your learning experience, your capacity to study and achieve is greatly increased. We believe that by placing the Every Child Matters themes at the centre of our inspection judgements, this will encourage all providers to consider and recognise the progress, development and achievement of the whole person.

### What does the new framework mean for colleges in real terms?

Whilst we previously looked at the list of health and wellbeing activities on offer at

colleges, we will be looking for such developments to be taken further. We would hope to see a more systematic approach to planning and evaluating health related activities: using learner health and wellbeing data, to ensure the activities and services offered by colleges meet learners' needs and are informed by local health priorities.

There is also a greater focus on the learner voice: have learners been involved in developing the health awareness programme, and ultimately does their involvement ensure high levels of participation?

In addition we would like to see examples of partnership working with local health agencies and any evidence of changes in attitudes through evaluation.

### **Why are colleges so important when it comes to tackling the health and wellbeing priorities across the country?**

The college sector is significant and caters for around 3.5 million learners. The majority of these learners are adults and many have their own families. Therefore the influence of the sector is amplified in terms of changing attitudes and lifestyles of many more people.

On 19 January, I spoke at the Healthy Further Education (FE) 2010 conference to an audience of colleges, health professionals and local authorities. I was able to reinforce the place of health education in the inspection framework.

The Healthy FE programme encourages mutually beneficial partnerships through tools, guidance and regional networks. Colleges can play an important role in promoting a local health strategy and health partners can support colleges in meeting their own health and wellbeing objectives. For example, colleges might consider ways to work at a strategic level with health organisations, especially their local hospital

trust, GPs and specialist health clinics.

Once these relationships are established, they can learn from each other, fund joint projects and share resources. It is not expected, nor is it realistic, that colleges can tackle the health and wellbeing problems of staff and learners without the support of other organisations in their local community.

This type of work should be recognised in colleges' self assessments and may be considered in inspections. The Ofsted Handbook for FE and skills sets out in more detail what inspectors might consider in judging health and well being.

### **Is there a role for Ofsted through the inspection framework to encourage colleges' engagement in learner health and wellbeing?**

We are not here to tell colleges what to do, and I would not want them to feel that they have to engage with the Healthy FE programme because Ofsted requires it. Ofsted's role is to inspect to raise standards and improve lives for children, young people and adults of all ages. We are one partner in the process of improving health and wellbeing provision for learners, and our rationale is that by incorporating the 'Be Healthy' agenda into the inspection framework, we are recognising the importance of this theme in developing the 'whole person'.

We hope that with the Healthy FE programme, and the revised Ofsted assessment criteria, learners will have the opportunity to make informed choices about their own health and wellbeing.

Ofsted acknowledges that the 'Be Healthy' agenda is part of a whole college experience. Improved health and wellbeing services should support improved student attendance and attainment, assist learning and teaching, and empower people to look after themselves and make better life choices.