

# Staying Safe Consultation Response

## General Questions

### 1a) How safe do you think children are?

AoC welcomes the consultation on Staying Safe recognising the fundamental importance to children and young people of being safe, and that this is the foundation on which the other objectives of Every Child Matters, is based.

AoC notes that whilst making some reference to Further Education colleges the document is very schools focused, although the Staying Safe remit covers children and young people up to the age of 19 years of age. Many of these young people will be attending college on either a full time basis, or as part of collaborative arrangements with local schools, and this is a situation that is likely to become more common given the emphasis on partnership working in the 14-19 education reforms. In this response AoC will therefore emphasis the particular issues of relevance to 14-19 year olds.

Similarly, AoC NILTA has general concerns that much of the information on e-safety is focused on schools, with little recognition of the differing requirements of college students and staff. A tighter focus on the FE sector has to be made in order to ensure that the appropriate messages reach the relevant audience. It is important, for example, to provide strategic guidance on what is expected of colleges in terms of the technical provision relevant to e-safety, what constitutes an Acceptable Use Agreement (which should, for example, address cyberbullying) and sources of information appropriate to the age group.

### 1b) How good are we at giving children and young people the opportunity to explore, understand risks for themselves and to learn the skills vital for their development?

In Further Education there is much evidence of good practice in the provision of extra curricula activities which encourage young people to explore and learn new skills. College enrichment and tutorial programmes play an important role in helping to develop young people's understanding of, and attitudes towards, risk taking behaviour.

### 2. If you are a parent, what concerns do you have about your children's safety and how do you address these?

Not applicable

**3. If you are a child or young person yourself, are the views of children and young people included here the same as yours and those of your friends?**

Not applicable

**4a) As a member of the public, do you feel a sense of responsibility for protecting children?**

Not applicable

**4b) How can we build this sense of responsibility in local communities?**

Colleges are at the heart of their local community providing opportunities not just for young people but for adults, both employed and those not working, as well as for employers and local businesses. Many colleges, working with local community groups, offer courses such as parenting classes aimed at raising awareness of the needs of children and young people. However, the reduction of funding for 19+ may adversely affect this provision.

**5. If you work with children and young people, do you know what your role is in keeping children safe?**

There is much evidence of good practice in Further Education colleges with regards to policies, practice and staff development, in relation to health and safety issues. Examples include policies and practice covering bullying; child protection; safety in college, during off-site activities, trips and work experience.

College enrichment and tutorial programmes play an important part in helping to develop young people's understanding of, and attitudes towards, risk taking behaviours. In addition, college's curricula present opportunities to explore safety issues in relation to the students themselves, and also in relation to the duty of care that students have to others.

**6. Have we got the right balance between keeping children safe and also allowing them the freedom to develop?**

The transition from school to college can be a time when young people are particularly vulnerable and when this balance can be hardest to achieve. The move from school to college often involves travelling to a new location, making new friends and being exposed to new and sometimes potentially risky experiences. It is important that colleges are able to provide adequate advice and support to support young people at this time. In relation to this, AoC would wish to lobby for much closer working between

agencies, in particular the sharing of relevant information between schools, colleges, social services and other agencies when young people transfer to college.

**7a) Are the roles and responsibilities set out in Chapter 2 correct?**

In general terms yes, but there is a need to consider the particular needs of 14-19 year olds.

**7b) What should the role of central Government be, and what is the responsibility of local organisations and communities?**

It is the role of central Government to formulate policy and lead on the strategy to keep children and young people safe. Central Government should develop the legislative framework, and allocate resources to support implementation at local level.

Further Education colleges are part of a range of local services which have an important role to play in keeping children and young people safe. It is vital that information is shared across these different agencies, although it is currently the case that information is very often not disclosed when young people transfer to college. It is important too, that resources are made available to colleges to support initiatives aimed at keeping young people healthy and safe.

**8. How can local and central Government do more to protect all children by reaching out to minority communities and those speaking minority languages?**

Further Education colleges already do significant work with minority communities, and with those speaking minority languages through ESOL and other outreach programmes. Much of this work has been adversely affected by funding cuts to ESOL programmes, and to programmes for adults, in recent years.

Colleges have extensive experience in working with vulnerable young people including those in care, those with disabilities, those with personal and family difficulties and those from other countries. Existing models of good practice could be used in other settings.

**9. Are the areas we have identified for new action right? What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?**

The three broad areas of firstly, helping all children to stay safe; secondly, protecting vulnerable children; and thirdly, responding when children and young people have been harmed; provides a useful model for exploring what has been done and what further action is needed. However, AoC would maintain that the document is very

schools focused. It does not reflect the existing positive work that is done in colleges in relation to all three areas, nor does it address the specific issues and needs of 14-19 year olds. In particular, the needs of those over 16 are not addressed. In addition, the document presents a somewhat narrow view of safety and fails to mention issues related to health and welfare, many of which are particularly relevant to the cohort of young people attending colleges.

### **Chapter 3 – Helping all children and young people to stay safe**

#### **10. Would parents welcome a communications campaign and information on play and positive activities in their local area?**

Colleges are well placed to contribute to a communications campaign to parents on play and other activities in a number of ways. Staff teaching in the curriculum areas for those preparing to enter Early Years or the Health and Care professions will have expertise in this field and can, and do provide courses for adults on these topics. It is to be hoped that the QCF will provide a framework in which such provision can be located, and that such courses will be adequately funded. Many colleges provide child care facilities for the children of staff and students, and these could provide another opportunity for such messages to be disseminated.

The particular the health, safety and welfare needs of 14-19 year olds should not be forgotten in a communications campaign aimed at parents. Many colleges have embraced the ethos of the Healthy Schools initiative and are providing health and welfare advice and facilities for their students. It should be noted however, that the Healthy Colleges Network has grown up in an informal way, and AoC would argue that this should be formalised in the same way as the Health Schools initiative.

#### **11. What more could be done to enable children and young people to play safely and explore the outside world?**

College enrichment and tutorial programmes do much to promote, support and monitor the safety of young people, and to help to develop their understanding of, and attitudes towards, risk taking behaviours. However, health promotion activities in colleges specifically aimed at the health and safety needs of this age group are variable and are not part of a strategic approach to health promotion in the further education sector. The cohort of young people attending colleges forms the target group for a range of government health initiatives, the Government's teenage pregnancy campaign and the campaign to reduce the number of sexually transmitted infections, being two examples. In addition, much can be done to promote healthy lifestyles, including drug and alcohol awareness and other health and safety issues. AoC would urge the Department to extend the Healthy Schools initiative to the further education sector.

**12. Are children and young people taught enough in school about how to manage risks and stay safe?**

College enrichment and tutorial programmes play an important part in the promotion, support and monitoring of the safety of young people. They play an important part in helping to develop young people' understanding of, and attitudes towards, risk taking behaviour. In addition, the curricula of many college programmes offer the opportunity to explore safety issues both in relation to the safety of students themselves, and also in relation to their duty of care to others.

**13. Is teaching safety education in Personal, Social and Health Education a good way to increase children and young people's resilience to harm? Are there other ways we could do this?**

Colleges do not offer PHSE in the same way as schools. College enrichment and tutorial programmes play an important part in the promotion of health and safety in colleges, but the content of these programmes can vary across curriculum areas within a college and there is a need for a strategic approach to health promotion activities in colleges, as there is in schools. The curriculum in most curriculum areas of colleges gives students the opportunity to explore the particular health and safety issues associated with their particular occupational sector. However, the promotion of the general health, safety and welfare of students is not part of a strategic approach to these issues.

**14. How can e-safety be promoted to all professionals who are responsible for children's safety?**

AoC NILTA wishes to stress that access to technology among young people, which allows for the dissemination of information and the creation of content, is now so pervasive that any attempt to fully control how, when and where it is used is neither possible nor enforceable. It is therefore better to support young people in their use of technology for learning and in finding their way around the Internet with guidance and positive examples rather than attempting to control and regulate the use of technology and online resources, other than responsible screening and fire-walling as part of good college practice.

However, AoC NILTA stresses that any attempt to implement purely technical solutions to e-safety issues, for example the use of content filters and prescriptive firewalls, will not fully address the issue of e-safety. AoC NILTA instead recommends that the responsible use of technology and online resources should form part of the general curriculum within Further Education colleges (rather than in simply IT subject specific areas) as part of the drive towards increasing digital literacy and the development of e-maturity at the institutional level.

**15. What information would parents welcome about risks of harm faced by their children and how to manage them? What areas mentioned here would parents like more specific information about?**

In general, colleges provide many opportunities to involve parents in their children's progress and activities whilst at college, and encourage students to involve their parents in their college life. However, colleges are responsible for young people at a time in their lives when they are making the transition from childhood to adulthood, and encourage young people to develop a sense of personal responsibility, involving parents with the full knowledge of the young person. Colleges can be in a difficult situation when a young person does not wish to involve their parents, and they have to balance the needs of the parents alongside the needs of the young person. It should be noted that many students in colleges are over 18 years of age, and can request that colleges do not contact their parents.

**16. What more could be done to help Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) to make a difference?**

Colleges have extensive experience of working with vulnerable young people. It is vital however, that there is much closer working between agencies, in particular the sharing of information when a vulnerable young person transfers to college. Senior college representation on Local Safeguarding Children's Boards is therefore essential.

**Chapter 4 – Protecting vulnerable children and young people**

**17. How could training for social workers be improved?**

Colleges report variable practice with regards to the help offered by Social Services to vulnerable young people who are 16 or over. It is vital that social workers have a good understanding of the particular issues affecting 14-19 year olds, and of the ways in which they are vulnerable – forced marriage, unsuitable consensual physical relationships, homelessness and teenage pregnancy, and the concept of imminent risk of danger to name but a few. Looked-after children are particularly vulnerable, as are those with moderate learning difficulties. Colleges with experience of these types of student report significant difficulties in obtaining help from Social Service departments.

**18. Would a national safeguarding children awards scheme help to raise the profile of work to improve children's safety?**

The AoC Charitable Trust runs an annual awards scheme called the AoC Beacon Awards which aim to recognise and reward outstanding teaching and learning in further education colleges in the UK. If funding were to be made available, the AoC

Charitable Trust would be happy to administer an award for best practice in improving children's safety. This could either be done by devising an Award for the college that is providing the best teaching programme to improve children's safety, or it could be for the college that can demonstrate that by improving its environment to be safe for children, it has had a directly beneficial impact on their learning within the college.

**19. Will the beacon council scheme help to promote learning from good local practice?**

n/a

**20. How can we tackle inequalities in prevention of accidents? What role could national or local organisations play?**

College enrichment and tutorial programmes play a part in helping to develop young people's understanding of, and attitudes towards, risk taking behaviours. The curriculum in many courses will present opportunities for young people to explore safety issues in relation to themselves, and also in relation to the duty of care they have to others.

Review and implement safety measure around colleges (as in schools)

**21. What problems do professionals face in trying to address the needs of both the parents and children in the family?**

College staff can find themselves in the situation where a student does not wish their family to know details about them. It is important therefore for staff to know what to do in these circumstances, for there to be clearly understood policies and procedures, and for staff to understand that the needs of the child are paramount.

College staff should be represented at case conferences, because the impact that the decisions taken will have on a child's education, must be taken into account.

**22. Do some parents need help to access support available to them?**

Colleges recognise the benefits of involving parents in college life, and need to have clearly understood policies and procedures in relation to the sharing of information with parents.

**23. How can local areas ensure that children's and adult's services work collaboratively to safeguard and promote the well-being of children and young people affected by substance misuse, domestic violence or mental illness problems within their families?**

AoC would seek to lobby for much closer working between agencies, in particular the sharing of relevant information between schools, colleges, social services, youth centres and other agencies, and is critical of some local authorities who currently refuse to disclose relevant information when young people transfer to college.

There needs to be recognition that education cuts across the work of other agencies, including the work of both children's and adults' services.

**24. What is the best way to reach parents who might need help with problems that are affecting their children's welfare? Would national or local communications help?**

A national campaign supported by the provision of local services would serve to raise awareness of the issues, and provide support where it is needed.

In colleges, where most courses are one or two years in duration, it is not possible to build the same kind of relationship with parents that exist in schools. However, it is important that college staff know how to contact parents to discuss issues which may be affecting their children, and what action to take if there are concerns. College child protection policies and policies for protecting vulnerable adults need to be clearly understood by staff. Colleges need to be confident that action will be taken by the relevant agencies with regards to the problems affecting young people post 16.

**25. Whose responsibility should it be to address bullying that happens outside school? How could local agencies work together to address this problem?**

Local Safeguarding Children's Boards, on which senior college personnel must sit, could provide opportunities for the sharing of good practice in relation to bullying. Anti-bullying policies and procedures could be shared between schools and colleges, and a zero tolerance policy be implemented across a partnership. Information sharing between schools and colleges is vital so that children and young people can be protected when they move from one setting to another.

**26. What role could LSCBs play in tackling gun and knife crime? Are there examples of good local or international practice which could be considered in more detail?**

Feedback from colleges where knife crime has occurred suggests that there needs to be a consistent national message of zero tolerance to the carrying of knives, regardless of religious beliefs.

These colleges also report that local initiatives are not co-ordinated and that the problem therefore moves around from one area to another.

**Chapter 5 – Responding when children and young people have been harmed**

**27. How can we make sure children have somewhere to turn to if they are being harmed?**

In colleges, students need to have a clear understanding of what to do if they are in trouble, and of what support they can expect. Staff should have a clear understanding of the college's child protection policy and procedures, and of their role in ensuring that the needs of the child are paramount. The agencies contacted must take the needs of those over 16 years of age seriously. Colleges report significant dissatisfaction with the level of support given to vulnerable young people over the age of 16.

**28a) Does the Government need to communicate with the public to improve people's ability to identify and know how to act on concerns about children's safety?**

Yes, a national campaign would serve to raise awareness. It is essential however, that this is coordinated with the agencies that will be providing the support on the ground. Colleges can raise awareness of child safety issues via the curriculum.

**28b) What effect would this have on local services, such as children's social care and the police?**

It may well increase the pressure, but may also result in earlier intervention and more children being protected, which has to be a good thing.

**29. How can we protect children crossing our borders from harm? How can immigration officers work best with others in their local area?**

Immigration officers should check and keep records of where such children are going. This information should be shared between agencies, and at LSCBs.

Many young people from other countries come into the further education system. Many of these on ESOL courses and it is vital that funding is maintained in order to keep them in the system.

The requirement by the LSC for colleges to notify connexions as soon as a student withdraws from a course may help in the tracking of these young people when they leave the education system.

**30. Would professionals working with children and young people welcome clear information about cross-border issues to help with potential concerns?**

Yes.