



Protection of children and vulnerable adults in FE Colleges

Staff in further education colleges have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under the Children Act 2004 in the same way that school staff do. This includes all students aged between 14 and 18. FE colleges also have a duty to protect vulnerable adults who may study on their premises and who have similar legislative protection. This factsheet explains what NEU reps should expect colleges to have in place by way of guidance for staff and support for students.

Child protection policies

All colleges should have a written policy on child protection. In the unlikely event that a college does not have a written policy, it is imperative that reps raise this issue as soon as possible.

It is important that policies on child protection are implemented in conjunction with staff and are accompanied by full training. This should include sessions on each section of the policy and how it should be implemented, giving examples of scenarios and how staff should deal with them. This should clear up any grey areas, where staff feel unsure what to do if they suspect child abuse in a particular situation.

Colleges should also be mindful that any training should be updated and reviewed regularly to ensure that any changes to policies are fully understood.

Specific training should also be considered for those working with particularly vulnerable groups, including students with learning difficulties or disabilities. New staff should receive full copies of guidelines/policies at induction, as well as full training on their use.

Designated responsibility

All colleges should have a senior member of staff who has designated responsibility for child protection and who must have received the appropriate training in dealing with child protection concerns. That designated person should be fully conversant with the multi-agency approach to child protection, which incorporates the local social services department and the police. It also includes the local child safeguarding board, which brings together all relevant parties in relation to child protection.

It is likely that the local safeguarding board will have a place for a representative from a local FE college; that person should cascade information to other colleges

and their designated child protection persons. Relationships with all other agencies should be clear and focused so that advice and assistance is available when needed, and a decision on whether to refer to one or more of the agencies can be made quickly and efficiently.

Staff that receive any information regarding a child protection issue, or suspect that a student might have a problem, should pass the information on to the designated person only. It is not the responsibility of general staff to investigate suspected cases of abuse. The designated person is responsible for making the judgement on a child protection issue, and whether to pass that information on to the appropriate authorities for investigation.

Staff responsibilities

All employees have a responsibility to be familiar with, and to understand, the college's child protection procedures and to report any disclosures or concerns they have to the relevant person. Abuse can occur in all cultures, racial and religious groups. Staff must be sensitive and respectful of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, these factors must not be used as a reason for non-intervention.

Confidentiality

Students should be advised that staff cannot guarantee confidentiality and may need to share information with others. If a student confides in a member of staff and requests that the information is kept secret, it is important the member of staff tells the student that he or she has a responsibility to refer cases of alleged abuse to the designated person for the student's own safety. However, the student should be assured that the matter will be disclosed only to people who need to know about it, and will be kept confidential as far as is possible.

Suggested action plan for NEU reps

- Ask for a copy of your college's child protection policy if you haven't already got one.
- Check whether the college hosts other vulnerable groups to which the policy should apply.
- Discuss with NEU members how effective the policy is in practice.
- Ask members whether they feel they have been appropriately trained on the use of the policy.
- Ask members if they think there are things which aren't included in the policy that should be.
- After obtaining feedback from members, raise issues with the college either via a specific meeting or, where NEU is recognised, through the joint consultative structures.