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## Sandra Whyte

# Priorities for Healthy Colleges

A long career in further education has made me very aware of all the elements that together affect the ability of our students to achieve, and many of these elements relate to student health.

Many who come to our colleges have specific health issues that affect their studies and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has worked closely with the sector to ensure that the entitlement to appropriate learning opportunities extends to all. Funding is available to ensure physical access and suitable equipment; Additional Learning Support; specialist provision in residential colleges where that best meets a learner's needs; and work to ensure that the curriculum and quality of provision meets the needs of each learner.

### Promoting health

As well as responding to specific identified needs we are aware of the range of positive action and activities colleges undertake to promote health in their student bodies. Ensuring a healthy environment through new buildings is one important aspect. A range of support services, for example those relating to sexual health, have developed well in recent years and colleges often work closely and in partnership with many public and third sector organisations to create a caring environment. In addition college activities like sport, services like counselling and facilities such as salad bars, help to create a healthy student body.

Participation has been a key priority for the LSC since its inception, and this has led to increasing numbers of young people staying in learning post 16. As providers

increasingly achieve this through recruiting from the NEET group, (Not in Education Employment or Training) young people with different needs and issues have come into our colleges.

### Reducing worklessness

A more recent LSC priority, that is bringing non-traditional learners into colleges, is our determination to reduce worklessness. Together with a number of partners, including Jobcentre Plus and local authorities, we have been working on a programme called Integrating Employment and Skills to support people who have been out of the workforce. Partnership is key to this in creating a progression pathway for people from initial engagement to the achievement of qualifications and employment, and bringing together appropriate opportunities from a range of providers and a number of funding strands is essential for success. Many colleges have excellent records of working with and in their communities and with workless people so the sector has a valuable contribution to make. The positive relationship between prosperity and health is well established and fits well with the healthy college agenda.

Many workless people do have significant health problems, as well as low self esteem, financial difficulties etc.. The priority placed on a positive and proactive approach, creating a healthy environment and providing support with specific health issues will be key to the success of this initiative. Creating healthy colleges is in the interest of the learners and welcomed by the LSC.