



STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
A College of Queen's University Belfast

POLICY ON CHILD PROTECTION

1. INTRODUCTION

We, in Stranmillis University College, have a primary responsibility for the care, welfare and safety of the students in our charge. We will carry out this duty through, amongst other policies, our child protection policy, which aims to provide a caring, supportive and safe environment and values individuals for their unique talents and abilities - an environment in which all our students can learn and develop to their full potential. One way in which we seek to protect our students is by helping them learn about the risks of possible abuse, helping them to recognise unwelcome behaviour in others and to acquire the confidence and skills they need to help keep children safe in their placements/school based settings.

This policy also provides advice to tutors and teaching staff on their responsibilities in relation to child protection, including the action to be taken to enable cases of suspected abuse to be properly considered and pursued. It includes guidance on the role of the College Child Protection Co-ordinator (CPC); procedures that staff should follow when a student discloses abuse; and procedures that students should follow if faced with a child protection issue during placement/school based work. Its contents do not constitute, or purport to be, an authoritative interpretation of the law: that is exclusively a matter for the courts.

The central thrust of the Children (N.I) Order 1995, which came into effect on 4 November 1996, is that *the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration*, and it is this essential principle which underpins the policy that follows. This policy applies to all of the College's full-time and part-time programmes.

2. CHILD PROTECTION CO-ORDINATOR

The CPC's primary role is to ensure that College procedures are followed, and particularly to inform Social Services about the relevant concerns raised by any student or member of staff about individual children. Investigations of cases will be left to Social Services or other appropriate agencies. The role of the CPC within the College is:

- (a) To produce, maintain and develop relevant Child Protection Policies and Procedures for staff and students within the College
- (b) To ensure that all teaching staff, whether full-time, part-time or temporary, are aware of the College Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- (c) To co-ordinate action by staff when a report is made about suspected child abuse in a school/educational or other setting, and to report to the appropriate Social Service officer where necessary
- (d) To co-ordinate the raising of awareness of child protection issues during initial teacher education (ITE) and during the preparation of students to work in the childcare, community arts and leisure sectors
- (e) To facilitate staff development in terms of child protection issues for students
- (f) To be available to provide advice, guidance and information relating to child protection issues to all students and teaching staff.

The designation of a member of staff for this purpose should not, however, be seen as diminishing the role of all members of staff in being alert to the signs of abuse of a student, in recognising their responsibilities in reporting a concern that a student has made during placement/school based work and understanding the procedures to be followed.

3. PROCEDURES FOR STAFF

As the Children (N.I) Order 1995 defines a 'child' as a person under the age of 18 years, FE Colleges and Universities have a responsibility to assist Social Services in child protection issues, since a small number of students will be in this age category. Older children in FE Colleges and Universities sometimes disclose abuse and need help in determining how to handle the situation. Teaching staff should therefore be familiar with the University College's procedures for dealing with any suspicions, allegations or instances of abuse which arise, in order that they may make the first 'judgement call' and provide access to counselling where necessary and appropriate.

In order for this to happen, course co-ordinators and programme leaders will work closely with the CPC, who will provide a copy of the regulations and will be available for advice and guidance. The relationship which teaching staff have with students is based on trust, and often on confidentiality: such relationships are an integral feature of a secure, caring environment which fosters learning and personal development. Staff have, however, a professional responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of students with other professionals where appropriate, and where physical, sexual or emotional abuse is suspected, a moral duty to report it. When a student discloses abuse to a member of teaching staff, the following procedures should be followed:

- (a) Advise the student of the College Student Support Services
- (b) Inform the student that details may have to be reported to the CPC
- (c) A referral to external agencies may have to be made
- (d) Monitor the students' progress in terms of academic achievement and welfare.

N.B If the concern raised is about the CPC, the tutor should report the information directly to the College Principal.

4. PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT

Student placement providers will be furnished at the outset with a partnership agreement which outlines the University College's responsibility to report any incidents of inappropriate practice or child protection issues.

Procedures for students on placement/school based work are as follows:

- (a) Student will report the concern to their placement/school based setting line manager (teacher, supervisor, leader)
- (b) Line manager/teacher will notify the designated teacher for child protection in schools or appointed person for educational groups
- (c) The designated teacher/appointed person must notify the Principal/Manager/Owner, and together they will decide, taking advice where necessary, if the information is such that the matter should be referred immediately to the Social Services
- (d) Student will inform their College tutor or CPC that a child protection concern has been reported within their placement/schools based setting
- (e) CPC or tutor will provide the student with advice and College student support services will be offered where appropriate/necessary.

When a student is concerned that the above procedures for placement/school based setting staff have not been carried out appropriately or adequately, the following should apply:

- (f) Student reports concern to College tutor, who informs CPC
- (g) CPC will initially discuss the concern with the student where necessary and maintain a written record of the details (cf. Appendix One)
- (h) CPC will discuss concern with the tutor, and together they will decide, taking advice where necessary and maintaining a written record where appropriate if the information is such that the matter should be referred immediately to the Social Services (cf. Appendix Two)
- (i) If agreement cannot be reached, the decision should be made by the CPC; but where there is doubt, a referral may be made by the tutor
- (j) Communication between link staff of schools/educational settings should be maintained
- (k) Whatever the decision, the student should be informed of actions taken.

Any member of teaching staff who follows the procedures in this guidance in making a report of suspected child abuse by any person (whether or not connected with the educational or other setting), is acting within the course of his/her employment, and in such circumstances, where he/she has acted in good faith, will receive the full support of the College and will not be legally or financially liable should any consequential action be brought against him/her. This assurance is given added strength under the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which came into effect in 1999.

Under this Order, employees will be protected from suffering detrimental treatment by their employers for disclosing information (in good faith, and in the reasonable belief that it is substantially true) about the conduct of private or public bodies or individual employers ('protected disclosure'). Specifically, protected disclosure includes any disclosure of information which, in the belief of the employee making the disclosure, tends to show that a criminal offence has been, is being or is likely to be, committed, or that the health or safety of an individual has been, is being or is likely to be, endangered; or that information about such matters has been, is being or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.

The Data Protection Act 1998 deals with the right of individuals to obtain copies of personal data, held on computer and manually-held data (i.e. paper records), of which they themselves are the subject. Section 28 of the Act, however, sets out some exemptions to the general subject access right. In particular, it specifies that subject access need not be given in any case where to do so *would be to prejudice the prevention and detection of crime, or the prosecution or apprehension of offenders*. Moreover, under the Education (Pupil Records) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998, any information held (manually) in school on a child, whether or

not directly related to possible child abuse, need not be disclosed where, in the opinion of the Designated Teacher, disclosure may cause serious physical or emotional harm to the child or any other person.

5. UNDERGRADUATE AND PGCE PROGRAMMES

The criteria governing all courses of initial teacher education (ITE) require newly qualified teachers to have acquired the necessary foundation to develop a working knowledge of their contractual, legal, administrative and pastoral responsibilities as teachers. Within that framework, it is a matter for individual institutions to determine the appropriate coverage, in ITE courses, of awareness and recognition of child abuse, reporting arrangements, roles and responsibilities within education and the need for the education service to work together with the other statutory, and where necessary, voluntary, agencies. All students on entry to ITE, Early Childhood Studies and Health and Leisure Studies at Stranmillis are subject to a criminal record check, through the PSNI, to ensure that they themselves are appropriate persons to work with children.

Restricted Information (1)

**Notification of Suspected/Admitted/Known Abuse of Child(ren) to Child
Protection Co-ordinator**

This form should be completed on the basis of information that a student gives about a concern of a child in their placement/school based setting

Student's surname

Student's forename

Contact details

Current programme of study

Link tutor

Reason for report including child(ren)'s details where known:

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Action to be taken:

Referred by CPC in writing/by telephone to

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Date of referral

Parents of child advised of referral? Yes/No

Child/young person advised of referral? Yes/No

Signature of person referring

Position Date

Contact details

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Appendix Two

Restricted Information (2)

Notification of Suspected/Admitted/Known Abuse of Child(ren) to Social Services

This form should be completed on the basis of information readily available and should not be delayed on the basis of incomplete information.

Child's surname

Child's forenameDOB

Present location

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Reason for report:

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Action already taken:

Referred in writing/by telephone to Date

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Parents of child advised of referral? Yes/No

Child/young person advised of referral? Yes/No

Signature of person referring

Position Date

Contact details

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Acknowledgment

Child(ren)'s name(s) and date(s) of birth

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Present location

I acknowledge receipt of your notification in respect of the child(ren) named above.

Signature Name in print

Designation Date

Address of Social Services Office

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..... Tel: