

Safeguarding Children and Child Protection - COVID-19 addendum

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Introduction

The manner in which Gateshead College operated during the first nationwide Coronavirus lockdown period was fundamentally different to business as usual, however, a number of important safeguarding principles remained the same:

- with regard to safeguarding, the best interests of children must always continue to come first
- if any member of college staff has a safeguarding concern about any child they should continue to act and act immediately
- a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) will be available
- it is essential that unsuitable people are not allowed to enter the child workforce and/or gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online

During this third nationwide lockdown, College staff will continue to be vigilant about new and additional safeguarding concerns, they will remain aware of what they should do if they have any concerns about a learner. They will act immediately on any safeguarding concerns.

Gateshead College has an effective Child Protection policy, and procedure in place reflecting our normal practice:

[**STM-POL-001 - Safeguarding Children – Child Protection Policy**](#)

[**STM-PRO-002 - Child Protection Dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse**](#)

In addition, the following addendum clearly identifies arrangements that have been put in place in response to COVID-19. This addendum summarises the key COVID-19 related changes.

National lockdown

The Government recently advised that FE Colleges will be closed to all but a few learners (SEND/vulnerable learners and the children of key or critical workers) from 5th January 2021 and at least until the February half term. We have updated this safeguarding addendum to detail the arrangements for learners who study at college or from home. Our absolute priority is the health, safety and wellbeing of our learners and staff.

The College has continued its strict approach to identifying and supporting individual learners and staff who may be at increased risk because of Coronavirus, this includes requesting details of any underlying health conditions that are known to be at moderate or high risk (clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable) of contracting Coronavirus. In addition, the college will ask if the learner or staff has had a diagnosis of Coronavirus or has recently come into contact with a person who has the known symptoms of Coronavirus. Coronavirus (Covid-19) asymptomatic testing is in place to enable weekly testing for staff

and learners who continue to attend college. This programme will allow the college to test learners and staff on their return to face-to-face education.

Vulnerable learners

The College has produced a list of learners who are identified as 'vulnerable' for the following reasons:

- high need learners – SEND (special educational needs and disability),
- learners who have a social worker
- learners who have an EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan),
- previous or on-going safeguarding issue,
- medical, and mental health concerns.
- LAC (Looked After Child),
- receive a Higher Rate Bursary,
- receives free college meals.

The list is refreshed regularly throughout the new academic year. College staff will continue to make contact with these learners to ensure their continued engagement with their learning and care.

If staff have concerns relating to a learner who has not been identified as vulnerable, they must contact the DSLO (Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer) or deputy to share details of their concern. Support arrangements will be considered in the best interest of the learner.

Should a learner become unwell at College, the parent or carer will be advised and arrangements made for the learner to return to their care. Please note that staff must check if the learner has given permission for an emergency contact person to be contacted. Likewise, should a learner become unwell at home they must not access College. Parents or carers will be required to inform the College to ensure both staff and other learners who have been in close proximity can take advice from medical professionals.

The College will continue to notify social workers where children (with a social worker) do not attend. Where appropriate, a follow up will be made with a parent or carer. To support the above, College staff will take the opportunity when communicating with parents and carers to confirm emergency contact numbers are correct and ask for any additional emergency contact numbers where they are available.

Keeping children safe in schools and colleges

[Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (KCSIE) is statutory safeguarding guidance that Gateshead College continues to have regard to as required by legislation and funding agreements. Please note that the KCSIE document was updated on 1st September 2020. This guidance supports the governing body, the Executive, and Senior Leadership teams, and designated safeguarding officers (DSOs) so they can continue to have appropriate regard to KCSIE and keep children safe

The way the College is operating in response to Coronavirus may change depending on Government guidance. However, a number of important safeguarding principles remain the same:

- the best interests of children must always continue to come first
- if anyone in College has a safeguarding concern about any child they should continue to act and act immediately

- a DSO will be available to speak to about a concern
- it is essential that unsuitable people are not allowed to enter the children's workforce and/or gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online

Gateshead College will, as far as is reasonably possible, take a whole institution approach to safeguarding. This will allow the College to satisfy itself that any new policies and processes in response to coronavirus are not weakening the approach to safeguarding or undermining the child protection policy. It will be especially important that Covid-19 risk assessments and related Health and Safety risk assessments are appropriately linked to the College approach to the Safeguarding Children and Child Protection policy.

Prevent is a vital part of our work to safeguard children from radicalising influences, and it remains in operation during this challenging time.

Designated Safeguarding Officers

All staff should be particularly vigilant to new and additional safeguarding concerns. It is important that staff act immediately on any safeguarding concerns and make contact with a member of the safeguarding team – see contact details below. The College will have a trained DSO (Designated Safeguarding Officer) available to respond to any concerns. Contact can be made via telephone, video call or by email to ensure that advice and guidance is always available.

In the unlikely event that a trained DSO is not available, in addition to the above option, a member of the Executive Team or Senior Management Team will liaise with the DSLO (Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer) and will be asked to take responsibility for coordinating immediate safeguarding actions on site. This might include updating and managing access to safeguarding files, liaising with the offsite DSLO or deputy, and as required liaising with children's social workers where they require access to children in need and/or to carry out statutory assessments at the College.

Where a safeguarding or welfare concern is raised, staff should check that the information held by the College is accurate. When making a new referral staff will be required to provide information pertinent to the individual and the concern or incident.

DSOs Officers may require more time to support staff and learners with new safeguarding and welfare concerns. These staff will continue to work with and support:

- young people's social workers
- the local authority
- personal advisors for care leavers
- any other relevant safeguarding and welfare partners

The College has a statutory duty with regards to 16 and 17-year olds to provide information to local authority services to enable them to track and maintain contact with these young people. This will help local authorities to identify those not participating so that they can provide those learners with the support they need to reach their potential.

It is acknowledged that face to face Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer training is unlikely to take place during this period. However, DSO staff access online refresher training when necessary and if available.

DSOs will continue to do what they reasonably can to keep up to date with safeguarding developments, such as via safeguarding partners, newsletters and professional advice groups.

Every college will face unique challenges at this time, particularly as they welcome children to study. Where reasonably possible and where relevant, the DSOs will consider these challenges in a child protection context and reflect them in the Child Protection addendum as appropriate.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

Given the different circumstances the College is operating in, it is important to remind ourselves that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play. In order to fulfil this responsibility effectively, all practitioners should make sure their approach is child-centred. This means that they should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.

No single member of staff can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action. **Children includes everyone under the age of 18.**

This Child Protection addendum has been updated to reflect the response to Coronavirus. The addendum identifies changes made to reflect the national lockdown and arrangements for learners accessing face to face or online learning, and this includes, but is not limited to:

- reflecting that staff, third party and volunteers may identify new safeguarding concerns about individual children as they engage with the learner
- the continued importance of all staff, third party and volunteers acting immediately on any safeguarding concerns, including new concerns where children are accessing learning
- make immediate contact with a designated safeguarding officer to share details of an incident or concern
- the importance of ensuring relevant safeguarding and welfare information held on all children remains accurate. Appropriate College staff will be doing all they reasonably can to ask parents and carers to advise them of any changes regarding welfare, health and wellbeing
- if staff, third party and volunteers have concerns about a staff member, third party or volunteer who may pose a safeguarding risk to children they must act immediately and inform the DSLO who will address these concerns. Staff must not wait to see if things improve. The protection of children is paramount at all times.
- the continued importance for College staff to work with and support children's social workers, other local authority or health care services.

All staff will be advised of updates to this Child Protection addendum, it will be available to all staff via the document management system and will be published on the College website.

Raising a safeguarding referral

In keeping with the current guidance publication ['Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020'](#) Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this addendum as:

- protecting children from maltreatment;
- preventing impairment of children's health or development;
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- taking-action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

In the event of a safeguarding concern about a learner (under the age of 18 years), all staff, third party or volunteers must immediately contact the DSLO or one of the deputies – see contact details below. These learners may be known to the college as 'vulnerable' or previously, have not been identified as 'vulnerable'.

The DSLO or deputy will consider the information that has been provided and may ask for more details or make an enquiry themselves. Should the DSLO conclude that there is enough evidence to warrant concern a referral will be made to the Local Authority Child Protection services or when in immediate danger the Police and arrangements for safeguarding/supporting the learner will be agreed.

Where staff have concerns that their safeguarding concerns are not being addressed correctly within the organisation or by other agencies these concerns can be raised with the Director of Student Experience who operates as DSLO. If there are circumstances where the member of staff believes that the DSLO is not addressing these concerns correctly the Head of People and Organisational Development will respond to these concerns.

Raising a safeguarding concern about another member of staff

In the event of a member of staff having concerns about another staff member or volunteer who may pose a safeguarding risk to a child, this information should immediately be shared with the DSLO. The DSLO will consider the information that has been provided and may ask for more details or make an enquiry themselves. Should the DSLO conclude that there is enough evidence to warrant concern a referral will be made to the local authority LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer for child protection) and arrangements for supporting the learner will be agreed.

Disclosure

Given the different circumstances that the College is operating in, arrangements for supporting learners who are the victim of abuse and the reporting of such abuse remains paramount.

It is essential that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously, that they will be supported and the College will take all necessary steps to support them. The learner should never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment. The learner should never be made to feel ashamed for making a report.

Disclosure may arise when staff are meeting learners face to face, communicating with a learner in a video conference, telephone, text or email.

It is important to remember that effective safeguarding practice includes:

- not promising confidentiality at this initial stage as it is very likely a concern will have to be shared further (for example, with the DSLO or children's social care) to discuss next steps. Staff should only share the report with those people who are necessary in order to progress. It is important that the victim understands what the next steps will be and who the report will be passed to;

- recognising the learner is likely to disclose to someone they trust: this could be anyone on the college staff. It is important that the person to whom the learner discloses recognises that the learner has placed them in a position of trust. They should be supportive and respectful of the learner;
- listening carefully to the learner, being non-judgmental, being clear about boundaries and how the report will be progressed, not asking leading questions and only prompting the learner where necessary with open questions – where, when, what, etc.;
- considering the best way to make a record of the report. The best practice is to wait until the end of the disclosure and immediately write up a thorough summary. This allows the staff member to devote their full attention to the learner and to listen to what they are saying. It may be appropriate to make notes during the disclosure (under normal circumstances, a second member of staff would be present, however, currently it may be unlikely). When making notes, staff should be conscious of the need to remain engaged with the learner and not appear distracted by the note taking. Either way, it is essential a written record is made;
- only recording the facts as the learner presents them. The notes should not reflect the personal opinion of the note taker. College staff should be aware that notes of such reports could become part of a statutory assessment by children’s social care and/or part of a criminal investigation;
- where the report includes an online element, being aware of [UKCCIS sexting advice](#) (for schools and colleges) will provide essential guidance. The key consideration is for staff not to view or forward illegal images of a child. The UKCCS advice provides more details on what to do when viewing an image is unavoidable.

If the learner discloses abuse within the home for example; sexual violence, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, peer on peer or domestic abuse/violence, it is important to remember that (if the disclosure is made via telephone or video link) the learner may be at risk of being overheard or watched by another person in the home and have to stop the disclosure. The member of staff should not wait and hope for the learner to make contact again. The member of staff should not try and make contact immediately using the same means of communication as this could place the learner in danger. Instead the member of staff should contact the DSLO or deputy who will provide advice and guidance. Where a child had been harmed, is at risk of harm or is in immediate danger the DSLO will make an immediate referral to local children’s social care. In the unlikely event that the DSLO or deputy are not available, please seek support by contacting the Police using the emergency services telephone number - 999. At this stage parents and carers should not be informed as this could place the child in immediate danger. A decision to inform the parents/carers will be taken in-conjunction with children’s social care.

It is important to remember that the role of the College is to alert and not to investigate a safeguarding concern.

Online safety

The College will continue to provide a safe online environment. Appropriate filters and monitoring systems are in place to protect learners when they are online on the college’s networks or recommended resources. Online teaching adopts the same principles as set out in the college’s Behavioural Framework, Social Media Policy, Informational Technology Communications Policy, and Safeguarding procedures and must be followed. These policies include acceptable use of technologies, staff/learner relationships and communication including the use of social media.

It is important to recognise that the college has no control over what learners can access when they are not on the college network. Advice for learners to Stay Safe Online can be found by clicking this link <https://www.gateshead.ac.uk/student-services/safeguarding>

The College will continue to ensure any use of online learning tools and systems is in line with privacy and data protection requirements.

An essential part of the online planning process will be ensuring children who are working online have very clear reporting routes in place so they can raise any concerns whilst online. The College has provided learners age appropriate practical support from the likes of:

- [Childline](#) - for support
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) - to report and remove harmful online content
- [CEOP](#) - for advice on making a report about online abuse

College staff are likely to seek contact with parents and carers. Those communications should continue to be used to reinforce the importance of children being safe online. It will be especially important for parents and carers to be aware of what their children are being asked to do online, including the sites they will be asked to access and be clear who from the college their child is going to be interacting with online. Further information for parents and carers about online safety is available by accessing the safeguarding section of the Gateshead College website <https://www.gateshead.ac.uk/student-services/safeguarding>

Prevent

The College complies with the specific duties outlined in Section 26 (1) of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (“the Act”) imposes a duty on “specified authorities”, when exercising their functions, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Where concerns are raised regarding staff or learners who are at risk of radicalisation, contact will be made with both the local authority and the Police.

Mental health

Many learners will be feeling uncertain and anxious at this time. It is important to support positive mental health and wellbeing, which is necessary to support young people to engage in learning. College staff will be required to identify young people that may need additional support and with the permission of the learner make a referral to the Student Health and Wellbeing Coordinator who is a trained mental health nurse. The College will continue to engage with local authorities and voluntary sector mental health organisations to ensure specialist support is in place

Safer recruitment

It remains essential that people who are unsuitable are not allowed to enter the children’s workforce or gain access to children. The College will continue to follow the relevant safer recruitment processes including, as appropriate, relevant sections in part 3 of [KCSIE](#).

In response to coronavirus, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has made temporary changes to its [guidance on standard and enhanced DBS ID checking](#) to minimise the need for face-to-face contact. The Home Office and Immigration Enforcement have also temporarily adjusted the [right to work checks](#) due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Safeguarding training

All existing College staff are required to have undertaken safeguarding training at induction, and then on an annual basis, and have read part 1 of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020'. It is important that College staff remain up to date with their safeguarding knowledge and access refresher training on an annual basis. Staff will receive an alert when training is due to be refreshed via the alert section of the college digital dashboard home page.

External speakers

We will continue to encourage external speakers to speak with our learners. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, all visits will remain virtual. Staff will continue to use the guest speaker system to seek approval for their virtual guest speaker visit. It is important that staff are always in attendance during the time the external speaker works with our learners.

Contact details:

Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer

John Gray - Email: john.gray@gateshead.ac.uk College mobile:07718155443

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead Officers

Darren Heathcote - Email: darren.heathcote@gateshead.ac.uk College mobile: 07736364425

Student Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator

Helen Keene – Email: helen.keene@gateshead.ac.uk College mobile: 07851388527

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