

## **Safeguarding Children and Child Protection - COVID-19 addendum**

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### **Introduction**

The way Gateshead College is currently operating in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) is fundamentally different to business as usual, however, a number of important safeguarding principles remain 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

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*

However, this policy will not accurately reflect any new arrangements in response to COVID-19. This addendum summarises the key COVID-19 related changes.

### **Phased return**

The Government has recently advised that FE Colleges will begin to welcome back certain groups of learners from June 2020. We have updated this safeguarding addendum to support the college's plan for this phased return. Arrangements are currently being made to identify and advise those learners who will be asked to resume studies at College campuses. Our objective is still to minimise the number of people in our campuses - our absolute priority being the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and students.

- From 1<sup>st</sup> June a very small number of high needs students, and staff to support them, will return to College for 2 days a week. Arrangements for this are in place.
- From 15<sup>th</sup> June we will reopen some of our buildings for a very limited number of students and apprentices and the staff needed to support them.

This will be kept to an absolute minimum and these students/apprentices will be strictly prioritised based on where it is felt face to face contact is essential for them to successfully complete their qualification or be ready to progress; they will attend college on a restricted timetable.

Actual physical attendance will be determined by taking into consideration the needs of the learner and the availability of both curriculum and where necessary support staff. These learners will be contacted and a discussion will be held with the learner and where appropriate their parents, carers or support workers to consider if they will be able to return to College. The College will adopt a strict approach to identifying individual learners who may be at risk of Coronavirus, this is likely to include 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 has had a diagnosis of Coronavirus or has recently come into contact with a person who has the known symptoms of Coronavirus.

### **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.

College staff are undertaking regular check-ins with these learners to ensure their continued engagement with online learning and care. SEND staff are providing regular feedback to Local Authorities on the engagement and wellbeing of our high needs' learners.

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

High needs learners have been identified as a priority group by the DfE to return to College so that they can gain the educational and wellbeing benefits of attending. A risk assessment will be undertaken so that their needs can be as safely or more safely met in the educational environment. The College will work closely with Local Authorities to manage the phased return of high needs learners.

The College will determine whether a learner is safe to return or not at any particular time. Should the 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 College staff 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 a child who has been expected to attend and doesn't, a follow up will be made with 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.

The DfE has advised that (at this time) parents and carers will not be penalised if their child does not attend college provision.

The Colleges will resume taking an attendance register from 1 June and continue to complete the online Educational Setting Status form which gives the Department for Education daily updates on how many learners and staff are attending.

### **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. Whilst acknowledging the pressure that the College is under at this time, it remains essential that we continue to be a safe place for children. As more children are welcomed back to college, 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 continues to be different to business as usual. However, as more children return, 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
- 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 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 wider opening risk assessments and related Health and Safety risk assessments are appropriately linked to the College approach to safeguarding 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**

As learners return, the College will have a trained DSO (Designated Safeguarding Officer) on site. Where the DSO has to visit other campuses (to attend to safeguarding concerns). The DSLO will be available via telephone or video call or by email to ensure that advice and guidance is always available.

Where a trained DSO is not on site, 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.

Whatever the scenario, it is important that all college staff, third parties and volunteers have access to a trained DSO and know on any given day who that person is and how to speak to them. A rota will be available to identify which DSO will be on site at any given time.

Managers, teachers and support staff will ensure that contact is maintained with children (and their families) who have not returned to college. Where possible staff should try and speak directly to children to help identify any concerns. Where staff use personal phones to make calls, they should withhold their personal number. If a learner or their family raise a concern this should be reported to the DSO on duty or the DSLO to ensure that necessary actions can take place.

It is acknowledged that Designated Safeguarding Lead training is unlikely to take place during this period. Currently all Designated Safeguarding staff have up to date training. For the period coronavirus measures are in place, these staff will continue to be classed as a trained DSLO (or deputy) even if they miss their refresher training.

Designated Safeguarding staff 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, including as they welcome back more children. Where reasonably possible and where relevant, the Designated Safeguarding staff 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 very different circumstances the College is operating in, a revised process is necessary to report any concerns about child abuse and supporting the victim.

Whilst the ages and number of children returning will vary, the safeguarding principles to protect those children from harm and abuse will remain broadly the same.

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 phased return of children from 1 June 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 see them in person following College closure
- what staff, third party and volunteers should do if they have any concerns about a child, including new concerns where children are returning
- the continued importance of all staff, third party and volunteers acting immediately on any safeguarding concerns, including new concerns where children are returning
- a DSO will be available on College premises and via telephone or email contact to support staff and children regarding new concerns (and referrals as appropriate) as more children return
- reflecting the importance of ensuring relevant safeguarding and welfare information held on all children (including returning 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.
- arrangements are in place to keep children not physically attending college safe, especially online and how concerns about these children should be progressed (see below for further details about online safety)
- any updated advice received from the local safeguarding partners. The DSLO will lead the College's input into the local arrangements
- any updated advice received from local authorities regarding children with education, health and care plans (EHCP), the local authority designated officer and children's social care, reporting mechanisms, referral thresholds and children in need
- the continued importance for College staff to work with and support children's social workers, and local authorities

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 guidance publication '[Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019](#)' 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 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 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 Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer. If there are circumstances where the member of staff believes that the DSLO is not addressing these concerns correctly the Director of People and Organisational Development will respond to these concerns.

### **Disclosure**

Given the very 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.

Some learners are not physically attending college at this time and therefore disclosure could arise when staff are 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.

### **Learners who continue to study from home**

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 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 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 - 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 being asked to work 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 be in regular 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**

Negative experiences and distressing life events, such as the current circumstances, can affect the mental health of learners and their parents. College staff will be aware of this in setting expectations of learners’ work where they are at home or attending College. Support for learners in the current circumstances can include existing provision in college (although this may be delivered in different ways, for example over the phone for those children still not attending provision) or from accessing the Health and Wellbeing Service. Should a member of staff be concerned about a learners’ mental health, please contact our Student Health and Well-being Coordinator or a member of the safeguarding team - see contact details below.

## **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 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 will have undertaken safeguarding training at induction, and then on an annual basis, and have read part 1 of ‘Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019’. 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.

## **Contact details:**

### **Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer**

John Gray - Email: [john.gray@gateshead.ac.uk](mailto:john.gray@gateshead.ac.uk) College mobile:07718155443

### **Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead Officers**

Darren Heathcote - Email: [darren.heathcote@gateshead.ac.uk](mailto:darren.heathcote@gateshead.ac.uk) College mobile: 07736364425

Sharon Todd - Email: [sharon.todd@gateshead.ac.uk](mailto:sharon.todd@gateshead.ac.uk) College mobile: 07792362061

### **Student Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator**

Helen Keene – Email: [helen.keene@gateshead.ac.uk](mailto:helen.keene@gateshead.ac.uk) College mobile: 07851388527

**Safeguarding Team** - Email: [safeguarding.team@gateshead.ac.uk](mailto:safeguarding.team@gateshead.ac.uk)