

PILOT EXERCISE

HEALTH & SAFETY VERIFICATION VISIT FOR SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES



HEALTH AND SAFETY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK GROUP

Rationale

In December 2004 Roger McClure, then Chief Executive of SHEFC/SFEFC, circulated to all Principals in the HE and FE sectors information on the launch of a 3 year project to support Health and Safety in Further and Higher education. The project was called, Co-ordinating Health and Safety in Tertiary Education (CHASTE).

The main purpose of the project was to promote, support and enhance health and safety compliance and development throughout tertiary education. The project ethos also included promotion of the business case for robust health, safety and risk management processes and reputation of management aspects which are integral to good health and safety management. The project was extended until April 2011.

In June 2010 CHASTE wrote to all College Principals and University Secretaries highlighting the main objectives for the final year of the Project which included continuing to help make a genuine contribution to enhancing practice in terms of health and safety management across the sector and to leave the SFC with a realistic picture of this aspect of the sector's activities.

CHASTE asked Colleges and Universities to provide an update on progress of the recommendations which were contained within in each participating College and Universities' confidential report from the first 3 years of the project.

The CHASTE final report to the Scottish Funding Council (April 2011) made reference, throughout the report, that some progress had been made but there was still room for improvement. Within the overall conclusions there were some important themes highlighted, one of which was *"the paramount importance of closing the loop by auditing health and safety performance against a set standard within an individual institution"*

Before the end of the CHASTE Project, the Health and Safety Community of Practice (CoP), now titled Development Network Group, was formed in June 2010. Over the last 5 years the group has supported the College sector and its Health and Safety Practitioners in numerous ways. For example, the group has stimulated the sharing of good practice, formulated examples of best practice and health and safety procedures, consulted and engaged with strategic partners, developed new initiatives and held numerous, well attended events on topical subjects.

During feedback from the Health and Safety Development Network event "Revitalising Health and Safety in the Sector" (3 June 2014) there was appetite from the attendees regarding the idea of Colleges assessing each other in terms of health and safety compliance. Peer assessment within Colleges is not new to the sector. Assessed College units or course components are checked through the SQA's verification process as a quality assurance method to ensure national standards are being applied and maintained across all qualifications at all levels. It is the procedure SQA use to ensure College department assessment decisions are valid and reliable and are in line with national standards.

In March 2011, the UK Government published 'Good Health and Safety, Good for Everyone' which set out how HSE would categorise and target its interventions at non-major hazard workplaces on the basis of risk. A key aim of this new emphasis was that HSE would target its resources on higher risk and poor performing workplaces. Further education establishments, along with most other parts of the public sector, are therefore unlikely to be inspected by HSE on a proactive basis, unless there is evidence of poor performance. However HSE does continue to investigate incidents and complaints that meet its selection criteria, so Colleges may find themselves the subject of HSE attention through this route.

The HSE business plan 2015-16 has a core aim to "*Lead others to improve health and safety in the workplace*" They mention that they will work closely with groups to assist in driving forward sector-led improvements to create behavioural change and ultimately improve health and safety in the workplace.

Many Colleges may already have existing means to assess their health and safety standards. But as mentioned earlier.

- The CHASTE final report (April 2011) mentions there continues to be room for improvement and auditing health and safety was seen as of paramount importance.
- The health and safety practitioners at the "Revitalising Health and Safety in the Sector" event (3 June 2014) were keen to explore health and safety verification by their peers.
- HSE support sector-led improvements.

This pilot illustrates the College Development Networks vision of Leading, Creating and Sharing and exemplifies the purpose of all networks to endeavour to participate in activities which are forward looking, ambitious and will benefit the sector as a whole. Having a form of health and safety external verification conducted by a Health and Safety Practitioner working within another College, would be sector leading. It would give an independent view of the health and safety standards of that College by a person who has a knowledge and understanding, not just of health and safety but on how further education Colleges operate. They would also be proactive by offering advice and support to the College and its Health and Safety Practitioner.

Introduction

Following discussions with the members of the Health and Safety Development Network group, an agreement was reached to pilot this initiative. The following Colleges agreed to participate:

- Dundee & Angus College
- Fife College
- Perth UHI

The pilot will take place during 2016 – 2017 academic year.

Format

A department will be selected for review from each participating College. The purpose of the visits will be to determine the level of compliance in controlling health and safety risks and in meeting relevant statutory provision of the Health and Safety at Work Act and associated regulations. The aim will be to complete the visit within one working day. A pre-defined set of questions will be used to ensure a standard is obtained for verification purposes. If available within the College, a union appointed health and safety representative will be invited to accompany the verifier.

Scope

The verifier will:

- Agree a date and timescale for the planned visit
- Agree, with the College's H & S practitioner or relevant staff member, which departments will be assessed and relevant documentation required prior to the visit
- Visit the College to carry out the verification with the agreed departments
- Discuss health and safety with relevant staff
- Observe tasks being conducted within the area
- Review H & S documentation
- Highlight good practice and any recommendations for improvement
- Provide advice and support
- Compile an evaluation report on the visit which, where applicable, gives clear advice on any improvements that would be required.
- Forward the report to the visited College within an agreed timescale

Next Steps

Once the review of each College is completed an evaluation of the pilot will be undertaken and thereafter a report produced. This will include feedback on the process by the Colleges and the verifiers. It will also include a summary of the verifier's findings but will not identify the department or College which was reviewed.

The report will be distributed to the participating Colleges. It will also be discussed at a Health & Safety Development Network group meeting to review the pilot and decide on next steps. If the pilot is deemed to have been successful the findings can be relayed to the network and to the College Principals Group with a view to extending the activities out to the entire sector.