

NCG Single Safeguarding Policy Annex



Policy Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Updated 28th Jan 2021

A.1 Response to COVID-19

There have been significant changes within our college settings in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The vast majority of both young and adults learners are participating in home study, and staffing impacted through illness, self-isolation and caring for family members.

Despite the changes, the NCG Single Safeguarding Policy remains current and our learners must come first and staff should respond robustly to safeguarding concerns and contact our relevant designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) in line with our established safeguarding procedure.

This annex sets out some of the adjustments we continue to make in line with the changed arrangements in the colleges, and following [advice from government](#) and local agencies. Please note this link was the latest guidance at time of writing but is subject to change by gov.uk. This NCG policy will be kept under regular review to ensure it takes account of any changes in government thinking.

A.2 Current Status of NCG Colleges

NCG's colleges are currently closed for face to face delivery, other than to vulnerable learners, children of key workers and a small number of learners to visit for wellbeing appointments. NCG will continue to inform DfE of the status, and the situation is reviewed daily by completing attendance reports.

Most learners and apprentices, are now being supported remotely by their teachers, tutors, lectures and skills trainers/assessors. Usual management hierarchies, structures and practices are being maintained in full. The Executive Team of NCG meet twice per week via virtual meetings to monitor this. An updated quality improvement cycle has been put in place.

Additional arrangements are in place for learners deemed vulnerable and/or are children of key workers (see A.4).

A.3 Reporting arrangements

The arrangements for reporting in the interim period continue to align with the principles of the NCG Single Safeguarding Policy. All contact details are available on the NCG and college websites.

<https://www.ncgrp.co.uk/guide-to-information/our-policies-and-procedures/safeguarding/>

The NCG approach ensures the DSLs are always contactable via dedicated phone numbers and/or emails while the college is open. In practice, many of our staff work outside of these hours to safeguard our learners and several trained colleagues are able to access these communication channels for cover.

All staff will continue to follow the NCG policy and college procedures, and advise the DSLs immediately about concerns they have about any learner, whether in college or not. COVID-19 means a need for increased vigilance due to the pressures on services, families and young people, rather than a reduction in our standards.

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NCG understand that local authority services for children and adults at risk may be affected by the impact of the virus on staff and an increased demand for services. We understand that where a child or adult at risk is at risk of significant harm there may be a need to be persistent in referring concerns to the local authority. We will continue to monitor these referrals and respond to any changes in trend.

Should a child or adult at risk be at risk of significant harm and local agencies are not able to respond, all NCG college DSLs will immediately follow the local safeguarding partnership escalation procedure. The Group DSL will support this process where required.

A.4 Identifying vulnerability

College leaders have identified the most vulnerable learners using government guidance/instructions (see below). These learners have been evaluated as to their needs and have been allocated a personal key worker, responsible for monitoring welfare, wellbeing and learner progress during this time of disruption. This is typically a suitable and trained member of the learning support team, or pastoral team. Adjustments have been made where required, in terms of access to materials and IT. College contact must be frequent, not less than twice per week, and preferably daily.

- Looked After Children.
- Previously Looked After Children.
- Children subject to a child protection plan.
- Children who have, or have previously had, an assigned social worker. There is an expectation that children with an assigned social worker must attend college (or another college by arrangement), unless in consultation with the child's social worker and family it is agreed this is not in the best interests of the child.
- Children with an EHCP.
- Children on the edge of social care involvement or pending allocation of a social worker.
- Children who are at risk of becoming NEET
- Children who may not have access to appropriate equipment and connectivity, and space to learn

In addition, the following groups are aware through college bulletins, letters, direct contact and social media that they have specific arrangements around contact and support from the college. It is not possible to accurately determine which learners are in this category due to the broad description and scope of key workers, instead the learners will be monitored through engagement reports with their peers. A child of a key worker, who has a vulnerability will be identified and supported in the cohort above.

- Children of key workers who may attend college.

A.5 Holiday arrangements

NCG's colleges will typically follow the usual college timetable which will close to learners during planned school/college holiday periods. Some learning (such as apprenticeships) would usually continue, hence this provision will continue remotely.

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College principals will continue to scope the need and requirement to support vulnerable learners and those children of key workers, and learners visiting for appointments and assessment making adjustments to opening times if required during holidays. The NCG Executive will monitor national guidance/policy for any adjustments to funding/entitlement to the provision of free meals during holidays and respond accordingly.

Learners should not visit college without an appointment.

A.6 Attendance

NCG will follow the [attendance guidance issued by government](#) in instances where a learner is still required to attend college for the reasons set out in A.4. Where a learner is expected to attend, and does not arrive, the college will follow the NCG Attendance Management Policy and make contact with the learner/family. Attendance for these learners is not compulsory and many learners in this category, or their families/carers may choose to study at home, where it is safe to do so. Circumstances will be evaluated on an individual basis.

Learners with a vulnerability identified above, will benefit from additional monitoring by designated staff using a caseload allocation. These staff will ideally be known to the learner through their routine studies and engagement with the college. Local records will be maintained, in addition to dedicated monitoring reports via NCG's MIS. The Principal will ensure that support and welfare strategies are in place, extending to opening of the college if required.

The wider engagement with home study will be monitored in line with an amendment to the NCG Attendance Management Policy. Tutors are required to use the student record system to identify if the student has engaged in weekly tuition, learning and/or assessment. Bespoke reports will be utilised to monitor engagement in main aims, tutorial, English and Maths, sectors, departments, college with associated action-response where rates are found to be low. The NCG Executive will receive weekly updates from the Principals/Group DSL for action/response.

Curriculum managers will continue to follow up non-engagement with the learner following the principles laid down in the NCG Attendance Management policy – the primary focus will be welfare and wellbeing, and the individual learner's ability to successfully continue their learning from home.

A.7 Staff will be aware of increased risk

The pressures on children and their families at this time are significant. There may be heightened awareness of family pressures through being contained in a restricted space, poverty, stress, financial or health anxieties. The circumstances for safe and productive learning will vary considerably within even small tutor groups and staff are asked to be mindful and considerate to the setting of any work for learners to undertake at home (including recognising the impact of online learning – see below). Staff will be aware of the mental health of both children, adults at risk and their parents and carers, informing the DSL about any concerns.

College leaders will ensure that staff are inquisitive about wellbeing during routine course communications and we will implement monthly 'keep in touch' surveys. Advice on positive mental health will be regularly disseminated on college VLEs, social media and websites. Pastoral and counselling staff will continue to operate remotely offering personalised advice and guidance.

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NCG managers will occasionally visit the virtual classroom to undertake learning walks – these ‘temperature checks’ seek to ensure that the quality of education is appropriate, that teachers receive developmental feedback to help improve their practice, and to check on the learner engagement and wellbeing. The process for undertaking these visits are set out in a policy amendment to the NCG TLA Policy.

A.7.1 Supporting Mental Well-being/Mental Fitness

All colleges have resources and dedicated staff ready to support issues related to mental well-being. This extends to informal discussion, through to college counselling/support and referral to specialist external services where required.

All staff and students are encouraged to download an innovative app called FIKA which was developed especially for the education sector. <https://www.fika.community/>. It is free for NCG’s staff and students and registration takes seconds by selecting the college/NCG. The app has some excellent resources, dedicated videos, tips, advice and guidance for managing a range of circumstances.

A.8 Peer on peer abuse

Under normal circumstances, we recognise the potential for abuse to go on between young people, especially in the context of a college closure or partial closure due to the lack of scheduled routines and the additional time for recreation/socialising. In the current climate this is likely to involve additional time online, or not adhering to government instructions to stay indoors. Our staff will remain vigilant to the signs of bullying, online radicalisation, gang recruitment and organised violence and dealing (such as ongoing County Lines activity likely to be fuelled by increasing frustration and boredom if the situation persists for a longer period of time).

A.9 Risk online

We understand that learners will be using the internet more during this period. Staff will be aware of the signs and signals of cyberbullying and other risks online and apply the same child-centred safeguarding practices as when learning at the college. We will publish specific guidance for dealing with remote and distance learning, drawing on existing guidance and best practice available from organisations like NCSC, DfE, AoC and JISC.

- NCG will continue to ensure appropriate filters and monitors are in place, and these are tested frequently.
- NCG continues to take on board guidance from the UK Safer Internet Centre on safe remote learning and guidance for safer working practice from the Safer Recruitment Consortium. We have reviewed the code of conduct and issued guidance to colleagues. This includes the risk that professional boundaries could slip during this exceptional period and colleagues have been reminded of NCG expectations, code of conduct and the importance of using college systems to communicate with children and their families. We have included guidance for live streaming in the guidance.
- We have published links to information for learners accessing remote learning on keeping safe online and know how to raise concerns with the college, links to [Childline](#), the [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) and [CEOP](#) are available here.
- Parents and carers have received basic information about keeping learners safe online with peers, the college, other education offers they may access and the wider internet community.

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A.10 Allegations or concerns from or about staff

With such different arrangements, young people and adults at risk could be at greater risk of abuse.

We remind all staff to maintain the highest professional standards with the view that 'it could happen here' and to immediately report any concern, no matter how small, to the safeguarding team.

Normal procedures will be followed should a concern be raised about a staff member. All learners can access the DSLs via details published on the NCG and college websites.

A.11 New staff or volunteers

NCG will occasionally need to recruit new staff during periods of lockdown to maintain business continuity and learning.

All new starters will follow existing procedures for safer recruitment and selection. In addition new members of staff should meet remotely with a member of the leadership team and DSL to understand the current risks and arrangements are understood. Leaders must ensure that new staff are closely monitored and supervised. Teaching caseloads for new or inexperienced staff should preferably be deferred where at all possible.

A.12 New Learners at NCG

NCG is enrolling learners throughout the academic year through procedures outlined on the college websites. The process will be reviewed regularly, taking into account advice from the DfE and ESFA.

A.13 Testing

NCG participated with a DfE college testing pilot at Newcastle Sixth Form College. This insight has been harnessed by the Group and student/staff testing is discussed at the weekly NCG COVID meetings. The Group will continue to follow national guidance and best practice to ensure our staff and students are as safe as possible, within our means to do so.

A.14 Acknowledgement

The format of this document was originally shared as good practice, by <https://safeguarding.network> which is based on DfE KCSIE statutory guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>

This policy annex was remotely approved by the Corporation Board on 9 April 2020, and is available on the NCG website.