

Pilot trial and process evaluation of a multilevel smoking prevention intervention in further education settings

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

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Smoking remains the leading cause of ill health and early death in the UK. Preventing young people from taking up smoking is vital to improve public health. More than 1.5 million 16- to 18-year-olds are now enrolled in further education (FE) courses in the UK, but there remains very little investment in smoking prevention activities in FE colleges or 'sixth form' colleges. However, this is the time when many people start to smoke, and the transition to FE itself increases the risk of starting smoking for some young people as they make new friends and are more independent of their parents.

This research evaluated a new smoking prevention project for 16- to 18-year-olds that was delivered in both general FE colleges and 'sixth form' colleges. The smoking prevention project is called 'The Filter FE'. We evaluated this project over 1 college-year to check if it was delivered as planned and how acceptable (or not) it was with staff and students in different colleges. Three colleges received the project and the other three continued with their normal practice and acted as a 'control group'.

At the three colleges where the project was delivered, a project manager, staff trainers, social media experts and trained youth workers were deployed to implement a range of new smoking prevention activities. However, prevention activities were not always implemented as intended, such as the planned smoke-free campus policies. Staff training reached a total of 28 staff and youth work activities were attended by 190 students, although many of them felt that the messages about the harms of smoking were already well known. It was challenging to integrate existing web-based information, social media campaigns and online services with the colleges' websites and social media. Further evaluation of the Filter FE project is not recommended because of the low levels of acceptability to students and staff.

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