

An update from the English education watchdog Ofsted shows that the fact that 96% of English secondary schools say they have a **drug education** policy is no guarantee of **quality**. The inspectors found drug education generally "adequate" but less than good in 60% of lessons.<sup>1</sup> Lack of interactivity was a major failing: the 'facts' are taught but pupils are usually not involved in constructive discussion of their views, attitudes and values and only rarely are they or their parents consulted about the overall programme,

Similarly, research on drug education in Scottish schools goes behind official statistics which optimistically record that 98% of Scottish schools provide drug education "in line with current national advice". Interviews with staff in nine secondary schools and a direct-observation case study in one revealed that they commonly fell short of best practice.<sup>2</sup> Very few had developed a comprehensive drug education policy with clear goals, reflected in widespread confusion over the "difficult" issue of harm reduction. When it came to planning the programme, most did not involve pupils and none involved parents. Though classroom discussions were common, their scope must have been limited by the active discouragement of pupil self-disclosure, wariness over harm reduction, and a strong if implicit message that the only right decision was not to take drugs. The author, now a drugs/alcohol health promotion officer with the Greater Glasgow NHS Board, argues that "fundamental changes to how drug education is approached ... would be required to resolve these issues." Recommendations include the formalisation of personal and social education as a topic for which schools receive recognition, a focus on quality in the monitoring of its implementation, and specific training and qualifications for teachers as specialists in the subject.

**1** Ofsted. *Drug education in schools: an update*. November 2002.

**2** Fitzgerald N. *School-based drug education in northeast Scotland – policy, planning and practice*. June 2003. Copies: apply author, niamhief@hotmail.com.