



**THE EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING AND OUTCOMES  
OF NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this Report is to detail the progress North East Scotland College (NESCol) is making towards meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and how the College is mainstreaming this duty to ensure that everyone who learns or works at NESCol receives the best possible experience.

The Report gives information on how key areas of the College are mainstreaming equality into everyday life and work and how NESCol is meeting the three needs for which the PSED requires public bodies to have due regard.

Using examples, the Report demonstrates the progress the College has made since last reporting in April 2019 on how it is advancing equality through the PSED.

The Report covers progress against the College's Equality Outcomes for 2017-21, and evidences improvements in data collection and reporting in relation to equality and diversity. These improvements have enabled us to set evidence based Equality Outcomes for 2021-25 and to report meaningfully on staff equalities, the gender pay gap and occupational segregation.

The Report also demonstrates the positive way the College engages with its partners to provide innovative learning opportunities for students, which break down barriers and support learners from all backgrounds and protected characteristics into positive destinations.

The College's new Equality Outcomes for 2021-25 and reports providing detailed information on the College's Equal Pay Statement & Policy, Gender Pay Gap and Occupational Segregation analyses have been included as Appendices to this Report.



## 1. Introduction

### Legal Context and Scope

Under the Equality Act 2010, all Scottish universities and the majority of colleges are required to demonstrate how they are advancing equality through the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

In terms of the PSED's general duty, North East Scotland College (NESCol) has a responsibility to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different protected characteristics groups, considering the need to:
  - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.*
  - Meet the needs of people with protected characteristics.*
  - Encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.*
- Foster good relations between people from different protected characteristic groups, tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups.

For the PSED the relevant protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- sex
- sexual orientation.

The PSED also applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only with respect to the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct in employment.

NESCol published its first Equality Mainstreaming Report in April 2017. In line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012, the College is required to, by the end of April 2021:

- Report on progress on mainstreaming the general duty into all functions
- Publish a set of equality outcomes that cover all protected characteristics (or explain why not all protected characteristics are covered)
- Publish a report on the progress made to achieve the equality outcomes
- Gather information on the protected characteristics of employees as part of mainstreaming reports if not published elsewhere and include progress made in gathering and using that information to better perform the equality duty
- Publish the number of men and women board members as part of mainstreaming reports and how this information has/will be used to improve diversity amongst members
- Publish gender pay gap information
- Publish statements on equal pay and occupational segregation for gender, race and disability
- Publish the above information in a manner that is accessible

Mainstreaming sets out to integrate consideration of equality into a college functions so that it is a routine part of its day-to-day workings. It means ensuring that equality sits at the heart of a college mission, strategy and operational delivery in order to create both a structure and a culture that embraces and advances equality and diversity.

The purpose of this report is to detail the progress the College is making towards meeting its general and specific duties under the PSED, and to explain how it is mainstreaming equality across its campuses to provide a learning and working environment which advances equality, diversity and inclusion and where everyone is respected, valued and supported.

### 3. ABOUT NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE

North East Scotland College is the only further education college located within the North East of Scotland, and provides a wide range of education and training opportunities to meet the needs of individuals, communities and employers across the region in a flexible, engaging and accessible way.

NESCol serves an extensive geographical area (Aberdeen City: 186 sq km, Aberdeenshire: 6,313 sq km). The College's main (College-owned) centres of delivery are in Aberdeen (three sites), Fraserburgh and Peterhead with a number of leased community based learning centres across the region.

Each year, the College enrols approximately 26,500 students (6,500 full-time and 17,000 part-time).

The College delivers an effective and dynamic curriculum which develops essential skills for learning, life and work, while providing a learning and teaching environment that attracts and retains learners and helps them to achieve. The College curriculum for the region is fully integrated, with clear progression and articulation pathways within and beyond the College.

NESCol is committed to working with schools, universities and employers to secure seam less transition from school to College and on to university or employment. The College has formal Articulation Agreements in place with eight universities, and Memorandums of Understanding with the two local authorities to provide vocational education and skills development for school pupils.

Engagement with key stakeholders ensures that the economic development needs of the region are identified, that training meets the requirements of local and regional employers and that learner demand is delivered. A wide range of training, upskilling and retraining opportunities are provided across a range of different subject areas, including Business, Care, Computing, Construction, Creative Industries, Engineering, Leisure and Lifestyle, Maritime, Science, and Service Industries.

#### 3.1 Vision, Values and Strategic Goals

North East Scotland College will, through the delivery of high quality education and training:

- **drive and support innovation and economic prosperity,**
- **raise aspiration,**
- **create success, and**
- **promote diversity, fairness and opportunity for all**

providing individuals, businesses and communities in the North East of Scotland with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

This ethos is supported by our values; specifically the values of Respect and Diversity, which apply to everyone who comes to the College to learn or work:

#### 3.2 Respect and Diversity

- **Valuing the experience and talent of all**
- **Treating others with dignity and respect**
- **Creating an accessible, inclusive learning and working environment**
- **Being fair, open and transparent to ensure a culture of mutual trust and integrity**



Our values and commitment to equality and inclusion are also demonstrated in the College's Strategic Plan for 2018-2021. During the lifetime of our Strategic Plan we will deliver our Strategic Goals aligned to our five Strategic Themes:

<b>1. Being Responsive</b>	Deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive learning and training opportunities, which transform lives and which support the economic and social development of our region.
<b>2. Developing People</b>	Develop the skills, talents and potential of all of the people who come to college either to learn or to work.
<b>3. Working in Partnership</b>	Work with our partners to deliver positive and sustainable change for the individuals, communities and businesses in our region.
<b>4. Delivering Quality</b>	Deliver an excellent learning environment and experience leading to successful outcomes for all learners.
<b>5. Building Sustainability</b>	Optimise the use of our available resources to deliver financial and environmental sustainability.

In order to achieve its Strategic Goals the College has identified a number of Strategic Objectives. The following highlight a number of commitments made in relation to equality and diversity:

#### **Strategic Objective 1.1**

Build a portfolio of courses which:

- provides efficient and effective pathways for learners which lead to positive destinations in further study, higher education and employment
- is accessible, inclusive and appropriate for individual need providing learners with the best chance of success
- offers innovative and flexible modes of study
- tackles gender imbalance and challenges stereotypes
- is designed to provide a digitally capable, skilled and qualified regional workforce meeting the needs of existing and emerging businesses
- supports inclusive growth, builds community capacity and reduces inequality
- widens access to learning for under-represented groups, particularly those from areas of deprivation and those who are care experienced or disabled.

#### **Strategic Objective 2.4**

Create a positive and supportive culture based on respect, trust, engagement and clarity of shared purpose.

#### **Strategic Objective 2.9**

Provide the highest standards of governance for the College through the high quality operation of a skilled and diverse Regional Board.

#### **Strategic Objective 4.10**

Create an approach to equality and diversity which ensures success for all learners regardless of background or experience and maintains a culture of respect and opportunity for all.

## 4. GOVERNANCE AND EQUALITY

### 4.1 Leadership

NESCol's Regional Board is committed to fostering a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion by providing leadership to the College whilst also ensuring that its own policies and practices reflect good practice and support diversity in its membership.

To demonstrate its commitment to equality and diversity the Board appointed its first Equality and Diversity Champion in June 2016. The key objectives of the role are to:

- **To help ensure that the Board observes good practice in regard to equality and diversity**
- **To further embed equality and diversity in the Board's strategic and decision-making processes**
- **To help ensure that the Board complies with its legal obligations in regard to equality and diversity and meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.**

In undertaking this role, the Champion participates in reviews of key College documentation relating to equality and diversity, such as the College's Equality Outcomes and Equality & Diversity Policy. The Champion also attends equality and diversity training and briefings, in addition to those provided to the Board as a whole, to disseminate knowledge gained to other Board Members and to advise if changes to Board practices should be considered. In December 2020 the Board appointed a successor to its first Equality and Diversity Champion and as part of the transition arrangements for the new postholder student focus groups to discuss equality and diversity issues were held. As of January 2021, the Board's Equality & Diversity Champion is in attendance as an observer at meetings of the College's Equalities Committee.

All Board Members are aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty through both internal and external CPD opportunities. Board Members have undertaken training provided by Advance HE (formerly the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)) in relation to diversity in governance, and unconscious bias.

### 4.2 Programmes of Business

The annual Programmes of Business for the Regional Board and its Committee include the consideration of a number of equality related issues. The Board is consulted in relation to the College's Equality Outcomes and is responsible for approving the College's Equality Mainstreaming Reports. Through the Board's role in the Outcome Agreement process, it is responsible for setting strategy and targets in relation to a number of protected characteristics and specific student cohorts e.g. those from areas of multiple deprivation. Key Performance Indicator data, both internal and sector benchmarking, related to protected characteristics and specific student cohorts is also considered by the Board and its Curriculum & Quality Committee. The Board's Human Resources Committee considers the College's Equal Pay Statement, Gender Pay Gap Report, Occupational Segregation Reports and employee data in relation to protected characteristics.

### 4.3 Gender Balance and Diversity

In October 2017, the Regional Board signed up to the Scottish Government's **Partnership for Change**. The Pledge asks public, private and third sector organisations to set a voluntary commitment for gender balance on their boards of 50/50 by 2020. In support of the Pledge, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to take positive action in recruitment. The most recent review of the Board's Recruitment & Selection Policy for Board Members saw the inclusion of the following:

*"In line with the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018, the Board will seek to improve the representation of women in non-executive positions on public boards, noting the 'gender representation objective' - a target that women should make up 50% of non-executive board membership. The Board will take positive action in relation to Board Member recruitment to encourage applications from a diverse cross-section of the region's population, striving for a 50/50 gender balance in terms of its membership but also taking cognisance of all other protected characteristics as part of its recruitment and appointment process. The Board will however always, above all other considerations, appoint the person who has the skills required at that time.*

In addition, the Board established a Succession Planning Policy for Board Members in October 2018 which includes the following:

*"Strong, accountable governance requires Board Members who reflect Scotland's diverse population with the right skills, knowledge, experience and attributes to make a valuable contribution to an effective Board. It is therefore essential that the Regional Board takes a planned and considered approach to the appointment/re-appointment of Members."*

The Board's gender balance in April 2017 when the College's first Equality Mainstreaming Report was published was as follows:

Non-Executive Board Members (including Regional Chair)		Staff Board Members (including Principal)		Student Board Members	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
8	4	1	1	1	1

*Please note that at this time the Board had one Non-executive Board Member vacancy and Staff Board Member vacancy.*

The Board's gender balance in January 2021 is as follows:

Non-Executive Board Members (including Regional Chair)		Staff Board Members (including Principal)		Student Board Members	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
6	5	2	1	1	1

*Please note that at the time of writing the Board has two Non-executive Board Member vacancies.*

It should be highlighted in relation to the tables above that the recruitment and selection of the Regional Chair, Principal, Staff and Student Board Members is undertaken by other formal processes which are out with the control of the Regional Board. The figures above are therefore encouraging as the non-executive membership of the Board is currently 50/50 in terms of gender. In addition, through its recruitment processes, the Board continues to increase its diversity in terms of other protected characteristics.

At the time of writing, the Regional Board is due to commence a recruitment process to fill the two non-executive Board Member vacancies, with a key consideration being how to maintain its gender balance. As with past recruitment processes the Board will ensure that the shortlisting of applicants is undertaken with anonymised applications i.e. names and dates of birth will be removed, to help avoid any unconscious biases. The consideration of Board Member protected characteristics ahead of and during the recruitment and selection process will also be of key importance. Good practice to encourage a diverse range of applications will continue to be followed in terms of the language adopted for the advertising of the vacancies, alongside consideration of where the vacancies are published.

## 5. EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING

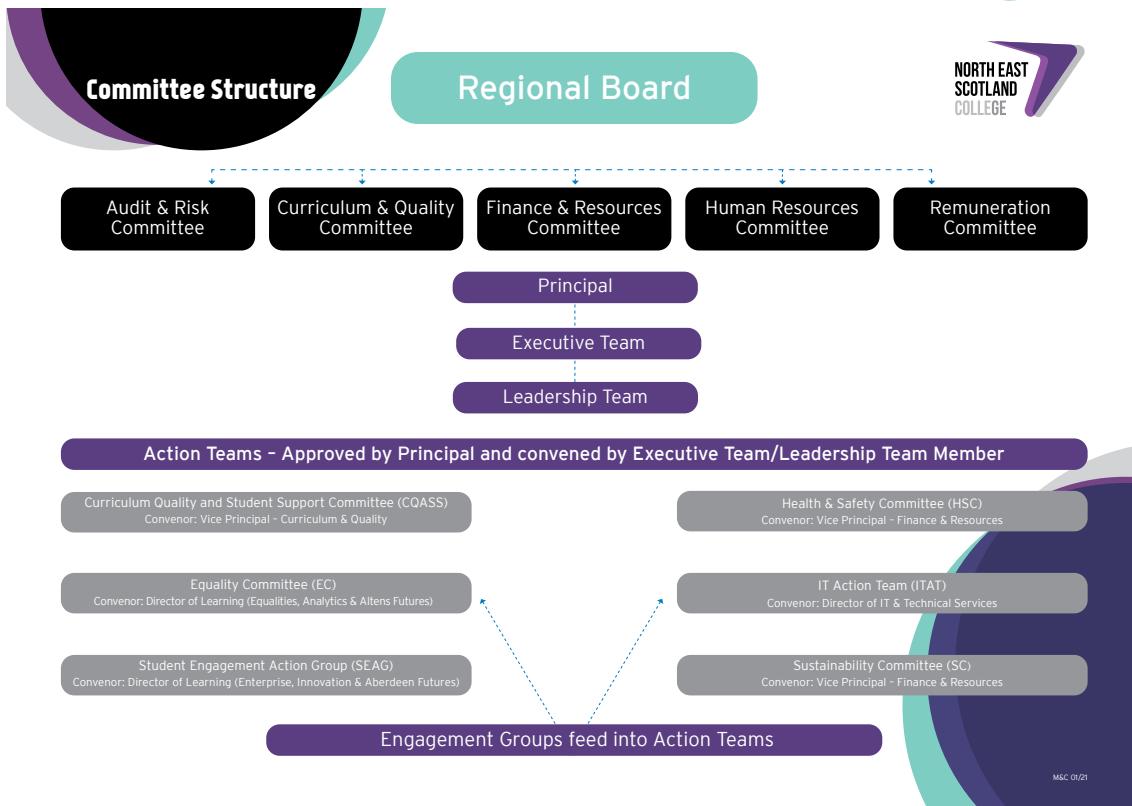
### 5.1 Leadership

The Leadership Team at the College is committed to having inclusive committee structures and compositions so all views are represented. The Leadership Team, which comprises the heads of all departments - and so is linked to all College Teams - considers equalities in relation to all key functions, as well as discussing them in their own right. All team members contributed to the mainstreaming and equality outcome progress reporting.

This helps to emphasise the combined responsibility for implementing responsibilities relating to the PSED. Key messages can be mainstreamed to all staff using this leadership forum and are followed up appropriately within departmental structures.

The College's Committee Structure (represented below) reflects the emphasis on equalities, with an Equalities Committee charged with leading on key equalities activities. Key findings from the Equalities Committee are fed into the Leadership Team and to the Curriculum, Quality and Student Support Committee (CQASS) for decision-making on key practices and to ensure effective communication throughout the organisation.





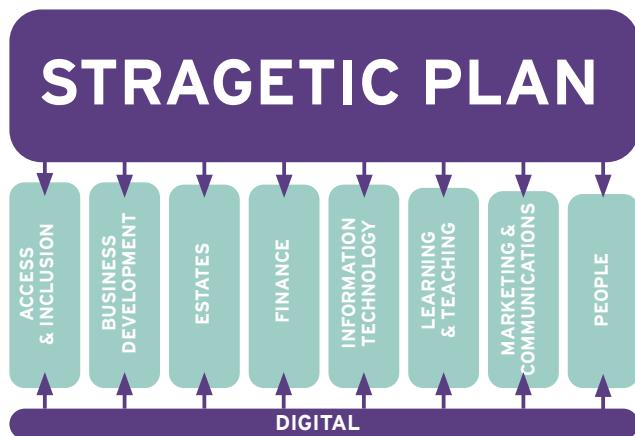
The purpose of the Equalities Committee is to ensure that, in line with its ambitions, priorities and policies, the College advances equality and diversity through meaningful, inclusive student-, staff- and stakeholder-centred services and approaches. The Committee meets no less than 5 times per academic year with key aspects of its remit being to:

- Oversee College adherence to its equality obligations as identified within related legislation, national guidance and recognised best practice;
- Oversee and monitor the promotion and mainstreaming of equality across the College;
- Oversee and monitor progress towards the achievement of the College's equality-related outcomes, targets, action plans and priorities identified in its:
- Equality Outcomes Report;
- Access and Inclusion Strategy;
- Equal Pay, Gender Pay Gap & Occupational Segregation Reports;
- Regional Outcome Agreement.
- Inform and advise, on a regular basis, the College's Leadership Team of progress on the above;
- Consult with other stakeholders, internal and external to the College in order to more fully inform and support its equality work and equality ambitions;
- Ensure, and by liaising with other Action Teams, that its maximises opportunities to achieve all College Annual Priorities;
- Work in partnership with the Students' Association in order to support enhanced services and inclusive approaches aimed at the wider student body;
- Lead on the development and implementation of the College "Respect" priority;
- Support, in conjunction with the College's Student Support Action Team, the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the College's Access and Inclusion Strategy.

Membership of both the Equalities Committee is comprised of support staff, teaching staff and student representatives. In addition, the Regional Board's Equality & Diversity Champion is a member of the Equalities Committee.

## 5.2 Policy and Procedure

As highlighted in this Report's Introduction, the College's Strategic Plan clearly reflects the organisational commitment to equalities and the PSED. The overall Strategic Goals established in the Plan are reflected in the College's Supporting Strategies, ensuring that the theme of equality is built into all key organisational plans across the whole organisation. In particular, the theme is carried into the Learning & Teaching Strategy, where the first key theme is "the promotion of inclusion, equality and diversity."



College policies, strategies and significant decisions are all subject to Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and are monitored in audits for impact. In 2020, a review was undertaken of a sample of the EIAs for key college policies. It was noted that, whilst these had been completed, the quality and relevance was variable and use of evidence to support decisions was rare. In response, further guidance is being prepared to assist managers in being more consistent and thorough in undertaking the reviews and that evidence is used to inform and evaluate progress (Action 1).

Staff are also guided not only by internal policies and procedures, but by external programme rules. For instance, mandatory "equality of access" forms are completed with all modern apprentices in accordance with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) requirements. This has the effect of reinforcing the equalities message and helps to propagate the information through employers and their apprentices. Within our Flexible Workforce Development Fund offering, we are required to determine how employers will ensure equal opportunities are achieved for courses being taken forward for employees with emphasis on priority groups such as women, disabled and BAME employees.

In 2020-21, a set of challenge questions was developed to assist teams evaluate their own contribution to equality mainstreaming. These were used by all members of the leadership team with their teams and provided a framework for teams across the whole organisation to discuss equality issues. This exercise is to be evaluated by the Equalities Committee and future value/use determined (Action 2)

## 5.3 Quality and Equality

The College takes steps to ensure that it actively advances equality, diversity and inclusion for students as part of curriculum delivery, through learning and teaching approaches as well as guidance and support. Two key drivers for this are the collection and analysis of student feedback and student data.

### 5.3.1 Student Feedback

Student feedback is collected in a number of ways throughout each academic year. One approach, which include a focus on equality and diversity, are student surveys. The College's First Impressions Survey in recent years has included the question 'I believe I am treated fairly'. The positive response rates are shown below.

Overall College			
Results for Full Time Students	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of Responses	4195	5185	4349
Student Response Rate	64%	78%	66%
Positive response to question: "I believe I am treated fairly"	98%	98%	98%

The College's Student Satisfaction & Engagement Survey in recent years has included the questions:

- '**I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff'**
- '**I feel safe and secure on college premises',**
- '**The College does enough to promote equality and diversity issues',**

The College did not complete a Student Satisfaction & Engagement survey in 2019-20 due to the Covid-19 situation. At the time of writing the Satisfaction Survey for 2020-21 had not been undertaken.

The positive response rates are shown below.

Overall College						
Results for Full Time Students	2016-17		2017-18		2018-19	
Survey Response rate	61%		50%		55%	
Survey Questions	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff	3461	81%	2924	84%	3168	85%
I feel safe and secure on college premises	3337	95%	2779	96%	3162	96%
The College does enough to promote equality and diversity issues e.g. College events, literature	3317	90%	2775	90%	3048	92%

Overall College						
Results for Part Time Students	2016-17		2017-18		2018-19	
Survey Response Rate	11%		11%		13%	
Survey Questions	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff	284	84%	121	84%	192	91%
I feel safe and secure on college premises	262	94%	117	91%	191	97%
The College does enough to promote equality and diversity issues e.g. College events, literature	260	93%	117	86%	184	94%

The three year trend data demonstrates consistently high levels of student confidence in the College's ability to promote and implement equality and diversity within its student body.

During each academic year, the College facilitates a number of student focus groups based on agreed themes. During 2019-20, one theme was Respect, corresponding with the priority activity implemented by the College. These focus groups enabled the College to ascertain awareness and find out what respect meant to students. A total of seven of the planned nineteen focus groups were completed (the remainder were not completed as a result of COVID-19 restrictions).

The majority of feedback highlighted that respect is promoted effectively across the College and students are treated with dignity and respect by college staff. Discussions at the focus groups have also helped to increase student awareness of the importance of respecting themselves, others and their environment. There were sixteen actions identified from the respect focus groups, these were actioned by curriculum teams as necessary. These include wider promotion of raising awareness of respect and to increase the number of posters in classrooms promoting respect.

### 5.3.2 College Evaluative Report and Equalities

The College's Evaluative Report for 2018-19 included evaluation of how good we are at ensuring best outcomes for all our learners (How Good is our College? - Outcomes and Impacts - Wellbeing, equality and inclusion). A number of actions were identified and included in the College's Enhancement Plan, these are detailed in Appendix 1.

The College's annual self-evaluation process also requires each Faculty and Support team to outline what activities each team has undertaken to address the actions described in the College's Equality Enhancement Plan. Faculty Heads are also required to report specifically on Equality KPIs, learning and teaching and support for students and to identify any specific equality-related actions. Areas for improvement are built into the actions contained within each enhancement plan, and reviewed on a continuous basis.

### 5.3.3 Quality Processes

The following describes a number of other quality processes which involve the consideration of equality and diversity issues.

Lesson observations include consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion in the teaching environment. A revised approach to observation has allowed a further opportunity to mainstream by noting good practice in equalities-related activity and/or naturally-occurring missed opportunities to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations. Student questionnaires following lesson observations have been customised for our Learning Opportunity and ESOL students, using appropriate language and graphic options to enable ease of completion.

Qualifications approval through the College's internal curriculum approval process requires sampling of teaching materials and supporting documentation. During this process materials are checked for accessibility; unconscious bias within materials (particularly around stereotypical assumptions) and the promotion of equality and diversity.

Additionally, through the process of prior verification, curricular teams submit materials through quality thus ensuring they are checked for accessibility and clarity before submission to the awarding body. This ensures that assessment instruments are checked for accessibility.

The Quality Team has a number of Senior Lecturers, each having responsibility for supporting allocated curricular areas. Regular meetings are held with curriculum teams, including discussion on resources such as teaching master packs (accessibility and inclusiveness); awareness of protected characteristics; evaluation of student feedback and outcomes of lesson observation.

## 5.4 People Services

### 5.4.1 Staff Equality

The People Services Team is committed to equality and diversity: to eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between staff who have a protected characteristics and those who do not.

In order to advance equality of opportunity, in 2019 the College carried out training for the People Services team regarding gendered vocabulary in recruitment, as it has been shown that job adverts and job descriptions carry unconscious gender bias and that this deters people of the opposite gender from applying for those posts. Since then, People Services has taken further steps and action and now uses a gender bias decoder before posting any job adverts to ensure gender neutrality.

To better support staff, particularly around mental-health related issues, People Services has recently introduced an Employee Assistance Programme, which gives employees free access to counselling on a 24/7 basis. This is in addition to support from Occupational Health, which includes reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

As identified in its last Mainstreaming Report, the College had planned to carry out a staff equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) survey, to:

- establish a baseline and determine what staff understand by ED&I
- identify how the College should advance staff equality-related matters
- identify the activities that staff need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations

The results of this survey were intended to further mainstream and embed ED&I into all aspects affecting staff. There were also plans to carry out focus groups to understand why there is a predominance of female staff in part-time posts and, in particular, lower paid support staff posts.

Because of COVID-19, these are actions that still need to be carried out and will be taken forward and monitored via a People Services Equalities Action Plan.

Further detail on actions that will be taken by People Services to further equality of opportunity are outlined in the following reports:

- Staff Equality Profile (Appendix 2)
- Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report (Appendix 3)
- Occupational Segregation: Gender (Appendix 4)
- Occupational Segregation: Disability (Appendix 5)
- Occupational Segregation: Race/Ethnicity (Appendix 6)

There is also an Equal Pay Statement and Policy demonstrating the College's commitment to equal pay.

#### 5.4.2 Staff Learning and Development

The College requires all new staff to undertake basic training in relation to equality and diversity. These messages are then contextualised within specific training courses, such as the Inspire programme undertaken by new teaching staff, which looks at meeting the diverse needs of learners.

Cross College Professional Development Days take place in January and June. In January 2019, one of the key themes for the day was Respect and Diversity and workshops took place on a range of equality topics including: A Leaders Role in Managing Inclusive Cultures; Managing the Diverse Classroom; Dignity and Respect; Equally Safe; Unconscious Bias and Avoiding Gender Based Language. In January 2020 the focus of the development day was on Digital Skills which included workshops on Blackboard Ally - a tool which is designed to help improve the accessibility of teaching materials. Work is ongoing to raise awareness, through training and development, of the need to ensure online materials are accessible and inclusive. Historically, our June development day has been devoted to wellbeing which, we believe, has a positive impact upon staff mental health. Care is always taken to offer a diverse range of options, including physical activities such as hillwalking and cycling alongside pursuits such as photography and music.

Training in Mental Health remains high priority. Student Support Advisors are trained in Mental Health First Aid. In addition, Safeguarding Staff also undertake training in Suicide Prevention. The majority of College staff have now attended a Mental Health Workshop the content of which is now incorporated into the Induction Programme.

The coronavirus pandemic led to a number of challenges across the College. The Learning and Development Team introduced various initiatives to support staff including training for the move to online learning, which has included sections on inclusiveness, as well as a wide range of wellbeing initiatives particularly aimed at improving staff mental and social wellbeing. Surveys have been carried out to establish the impact of homeworking and the results of these have been used to guide further action. Training opportunities have been provided for managers on mental health and resilience and a number of key staff have undertaken training in Gender Based Violence in order to support both staff and students who may be experiencing this outside of College.

We continue to monitor engagement in Learning and Development activities. Trends for 2018/19 and 2019/20 are available in the Learning and Development Equalities Report (Appendix 7).

### 3.5 Mainstreaming Equality in the Curriculum

#### 3.5.1 Reasonable Adjustments and Inclusive Practice

The College has well developed processes for ensuring all staff are aware of the need to provide reasonable adjustments for students and staff following disclosure of information relating to protected characteristics. For example, arrangements are made to release students from timetables/work for attendance at religious events; to amend assessment practices to accommodate disabilities or encourage minority group participation in subject areas e.g. Girls into Energy.

The College has a British Sign Language (BSL) plan. The BSL Plan sets out to establish clear guidance, objectives and actions relating to the support of BSL users setting out on their College journey; through their studies and transition to higher education or employment. The plan was developed in consultation with the local authorities, the local BSL community, the two local universities, North East Sensory Services (NESS), Sign Language Interpreters (SLIs), students and staff.

The College is also proactive in the evaluation of need for, and provision of, assistive technologies to assist students access learning materials. The additional legislative requirement to ensure publicly available digital materials are published in accessible formats placed on Colleges under the Public Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018 has also promoted a review of their available materials and evaluation of areas of weakness which are in need of improvement. This work has been supported by the purchase of additional software - Blackboard Ally - to complement the existing tools for the accessibility evaluation of published documentation and teaching materials. Ally has allowed the College to review and report on progress with digital accessibility and is being actively used to develop progress.

#### 3.5.2 Learning, Teaching and Supporting Students

College staff are well equipped and trained to deliver a wide range of learning activities that help to cater for diverse student groups. This means that a range of approaches can be taken to differentiate learning to meet the needs of individuals and specific groups. All lecturers complete the Teaching Qualification for Further Education (TQFE) and assessment/verification training which means all are well trained in the delivery of inclusive learning experiences and assessment practice.

The impact of COVID-19 in forcing an overnight transformation from face to face to online learning in March 2020 presented a challenge for teaching staff but the existing infrastructure, available hardware and digital skills of the staff enabled this dramatic change to be achieved with the minimum of disruption. It was recognised that the change had a differential impact on students but the existing College resilience and risk management activity enabled the provision

of equipment to be made quickly and effectively to meet need. College KPI data reflects the success in enabling course completion for 2019-20 compared to previous years. Overall complete success rates did not differ significantly from previous years and the breakdowns by protected characteristic did not differential impact on any protected characteristic group with the exception of those with a declared disability. The attainment gap for these students grew, in particular for those with mental health issues.

A student survey on working at home was conducted in May/June 2020 (appendix 8) and provided some feedback on how well students were coping and how the College could improve support. It did not provide specific information on those with disabilities but offered the opportunity for direct callback if additional help was needed. Overall responses were very positive, suggesting the College had responded very well to student support and learning needs at this time. However, attainment data suggests that there was an impact on students with a disability although it is not possible to clearly identify how much of this difference was due to the change to online learning. Further work is ongoing with respect to impact on students with a disability.

The College offers open and inclusive access to education including all those belonging to groups with protected characteristics; ESOL learners; care experienced young people and those coming from socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Application priority is given to MD10 and care experienced applicants. All programmes are designed to be inclusive, delivered with respect and without bias, intolerance or prejudice. All teams are required to produce a set of Programme Delivery Guidelines which provides a framework for expectations around behaviours and consistent application of College values.

Some curriculum areas offer specific opportunity to deliver a curriculum in which equality and diversity is an integral part - in particular: social sciences; care and learning opportunities. Social inequalities, discrimination based on protected characteristics and socio economic class are explicitly dealt throughout the curriculum. The relationship between individuals and society, human behaviour and social change is at the heart of the social sciences and so factors around inclusion, exclusion, discrimination, barriers and inequalities, prejudice, identity, stereotyping and social interaction are covered extensively at all programme levels.

In other curriculum areas there are specific units which present opportunity - such as: Travel & Tourism units with content including assistance for passengers with restricted mobility or visual impairment and the issue of assistance animals on board transport. The hospitality curriculum includes consideration of dietary adaptations for medical, pregnancy, cultural, religious or moral reasons.

In those curriculum areas where equality and diversity is less integral to learning and teaching, the College encourages curriculum teams to design learning so that students are given opportunities to research areas of equality and resultant projects reflect the diversity of backgrounds, interests and experiences. For example, in music learners have been looking at the importance of Freddy Mercury and the impact that he had on the perception of homosexuality in the 80's. The influence on society as a whole but specifically within music at a time this was not viewed positively in mainstream media was considered. Learners also looked at the artist Yung Blud and his representation of transgender/non-binary persons in mainstream music.

In 2020-21, the College also introduced an Academic and Personal Skills Development unit to all its FE programmes. This was designed to develop transferable skills, including specific reference to equality and diversity and to support the integration of these skills across the whole curriculum. Academic tutors have been provided with structured materials, time and opportunity to work with groups on a range of topics including LGBT respect, good citizenship and diversity tolerance. However, during implementation, it has also been noted that some staff lack confidence in presenting and discussing some of the topics. For example, staff have expressed concern over how to manage discussion in relation to discussions on Gender Based Violence and so further support for staff is required to improve confidence (Action 3).

The College has also signed up to the "Declaration on Anti-Racism" campaign initiated by Advance HE. Activities to support this campaign are being developed alongside the existing "Respect" campaign within the College. A sub-group of the Equalities Committee has been set up to plan and implement activities to support these campaigns and to supplement the materials available to curriculum teams in mainstreaming equality and diversity in the curriculum.

Through representation on the Equalities Committee, the specific skills and experience of staff members with experience of, or specifically in teaching, social and care-based subjects; disabilities; race discrimination; mental health and religious discrimination have been recognised and consideration is now being given as to how those skills and experiences can be most effectively harnessed so that they can support colleagues in other curriculum teams to develop confidence in tackling discussions with tutor groups. Colleagues are also supportive of Student Association events/campaigns e.g. social science student work was provided to support the Association with their Black History month.

### 3.5.3 Monitoring Representation, Experience and Outcomes

The College has continued to develop its data management system and now curriculum teams have access to a range of historic and live data on applications, enrolments and outcomes which can be evaluated by protected characteristic. This allows them the opportunity to identify areas of concern such as under-representation, unconscious bias or attainment gaps in their own specific areas. This data is also required to be reviewed as part of self-evaluation processes. A screen shot of the opening data page is shown below, indicating the available reports and breakdowns by protected characteristic.



The screenshot shows a web-based reporting interface for 'Enrolment / Outcomes Reports'. On the left, there is a sidebar with links: Enrolment Status, Enrolment Trends, Enrolment - 2 year monthly comparison, Withdrawal Reasons, Results, Pre Enrolments, Schools, and Conversion from School Links to Full-Time. The main area is titled 'Enrolment / Outcomes Reports' and contains two columns of reports: 'Outcomes' (Outcome Trends, 4 Year Trend Data, Outcome Comparisons) and 'Enrolments with Outcomes by Protected Characteristics / Social Interest groups' (Gender, Age Group, Gender Identity, Ethnic Group, Sexual Orientation, Religious Beliefs, Disability, SIMD 10, Care Experienced, Careless). The entire interface is framed by a purple border.

In addition, as part of the annual self-evaluation process all curriculum and support teams are required to formally reflect on and evaluate how effective they are in meeting the general duties. This provides a formal mechanism for all teams to consider their impact on the respective elements of the equality duty, and to feed into both local and overall College enhancement plans.

An Equality KPI report (appendix 9) is also being produced annually which summarises the KPI data by protected characteristic and provides evidence to inform actions, improvement plans and outcomes at local and whole college level.

As a Modern Apprentice training provider the College is contractually bound to actively monitor equality of opportunity and diversity procedures and take positive action where necessary to ensure equal access and treatment of all across the protected characteristics. Each year, the College's Modern Apprenticeship Team prepare a Provider Equality Action Plan (PEAP) which is approved and then monitored across the academic year.

### 3.5.4 Inclusion and Widening Access

The College curriculum is under constant revision, taking into account demand, performance and local factors as well as, importantly, considering the government "Widening Access" agenda. Course development with partners such as the University of Aberdeen (Gateway to Medicine and SWAP programmes in Care and Education) are already in place. An initiative is underway to further develop our close relationship with Robert Gordon University. One of the key deliverables in this plan is to develop "A more effective and efficient approach to widening access and participation in further and higher education" and specifically "More impactful targeting and support of under-represented groups including, but not limited to, MD20, Care Experienced, and the disabled."

The regional STEM Partnership is chaired by a College Director and is also engaged with partners to address equality in STEM education and widen access to events and opportunities across the region. This has, to date, included activity such as providing science events to primary school children and teachers.

Work is also ongoing with partners in the Local Authority and third sector in targeting groups such as young people who disengage with education early in their school careers and young parents.

## 5.6 Student Support Services

Student Advice Centre teams play a critical role in supporting the curriculum with recruitment, pre-application and pre-entry, enrolment, funding, on-programme support and at the pre-exit stage. The Student Advice & Support Team (SAST) undertake initial needs assessments with applicants to ensure their correct course placement and to allow for any additional transition support to be considered. Further, the needs assessment can identify where reasonable adjustments and/or the commissioning of external support might be appropriate for an applicant. With the applicant very much at the centre, this process involves the creation of a Personal Learning and Support Plan (PLSP) and a Needs Assessment Report which passes on key information to the relevant curriculum team to ensure that necessary support

interventions and recommendations can be implemented. Our systems are currently being improved so that it is easier to share this key information efficiently and securely on our Student Information Portal. In order that it better supports the key aims of the College in terms of promoting wider access, equality of opportunity and improving standards and outcomes for the student.

Equality and diversity is embedded in all aspects of Student Services. All staff are fully aware of the importance of applying effective equality and diversity practices to ensure this is mainstreamed seamlessly in all operations and behaviours. The Student Advice & Support Team offer a student-centred service and by doing so, take on board the views of all students regarding the range of services we provide. Evaluation of student feedback is the basis for quality improvement and this is analysed by the managers throughout the year. In furtherance of quality improvement, a series of student focus groups have been planned to inform both our strategic and operational direction. Feedback will be considered and action taken in accordance with the team Enhancement Plan.

Managers and staff review and evaluate policies, procedures and practices which are under the Student Services remit, to ensure that equalities issues are central to - and fully embedded in - everything we do. For example, the policy Promoting & Supporting Learning for Looked after Young People and Care Leavers was created to support transition into College and ensure success in reaching educational goals. Equality Impact Assessments have also been applied to all policies and procedures. In addition, work has been undertaken to consult with students and the Students' Association with the aim of drafting student friendly, more accessible versions of key documentation such as the Corporate Parenting Plan and the Access and Inclusion Plan.

#### **Examples of Mainstreaming in Student Services:**

##### **5.6.1 Changes to service delivery**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was essential to plan for on-campus, blended and fully remote service delivery. The Student Advice & Support Team responded quickly and innovatively to this challenge, producing and repurposing materials and moving resources online.

Key to this was the introduction of the new booking system for the team, successfully piloted during the initial period of remote working. Microsoft Bookings is a scheduling application available within the suite of Office 365 packages and as such, can be readily accessed by students (who have access to Office 365 when they enrol with NESCol), on a range of devices, making seeking support and booking appointments with the team possible at a time and in a way which best suits them. In addition, links/buttons to the system are available via social media platforms, so appealing to a significant proportion of our student demographic who engage with the College using this medium.

In facilitating remote appointments with students, the team recognised the importance of offering flexibility and so provide students with a range of available appointment formats including Teams/Collaborate/Skype video call, Teams/Collaborate/Skype audio call or phone appointment to choose from depending on what they feel most comfortable with. The benefits to offering remote appointments are numerous (greater flexibility, removes the need and cost of travelling to attend, minimal impact to caring responsibilities as well as removing any residual stigma which may remain for some in seeking support). As such, it has been widely acknowledged that this more inclusive format should continue to be available when on-campus working resumes.

Similarly, the reach of remote working and online delivery is vast. The team have delivered a number of remote events and initiatives online, including The Remote Revolution, the summer and January offerings of Ready, Steady, Study!, the Hack Your Studies Showcase, UCAS Week and a SAMH Healthy Minds session to date with further events planned. Previously such events would have been subject to both capacity and resource limitations which clearly do not factor when delivered online. Consequently, the team have successfully supported a far larger cohort of students than would have been feasible with traditional, face-to-face delivery.

##### **5.6.2 Partnerships**

It is crucial when engaging with the most vulnerable groups within our communities that we work with local partners to provide the most appropriate advice and guidance. The SAST are keen to grow their network of external contacts and currently liaise with external stakeholders such as, schools, social work departments, educational psychologists, care facilities, Skills Development Scotland, Who Cares? Scotland MCR Pathways, Local Learning Community Partnerships etc. to ensure that as wide an audience as possible are aware of the support provision available at College. This promotes early support interventions and enables transitions for students - both for those with a protected characteristic as well as for those who do not share a protected characteristic.

The work of the SAST, in conjunction with other teams such as Schools Liaison and Marketing & Communication, is crucial to the work of the College in supporting transitions. Representation on external groups such as the CDN Networks for Access and Inclusion, Guidance and Safeguarding, as well as local groups such as the Aberdeen Champions Board and Aberdeenshire Corporate Parenting Strategy Group provide opportunities to share good practice and encourage involvement in local and national campaigns and initiatives. Collaboration with these

groups and other partners provide significant input from a wide range of stakeholders to look strategically at the barriers, support provision and outcomes for children and young people across all protected characteristics.

Our partnership with Skills Development Scotland enables all NESCol students to have weekly access to book appointments with SDS to look at their transitions to employment or university.

In December 2020 NESCol became a referral partner of Trussell Trust Foodbanks in the City and Shire allowing students in need to be referred to a food bank and get faster access to food parcels. Students who are struggling to feed themselves or their families will be able to speak to a Student Support Tutor confidentially, who will then refer them to the Trussell Trust at their closest food bank. This demonstrates NESCol's commitment to supporting students by tackling poverty and inequality, by helping to ensure students have access to the food they need. This not only gives students peace of mind about where their next meal is coming from, but also allows them to receive the fuel they need to perform to the best of their ability.

### **5.6.3 Supporting Transitions to College**

Support Teams are heavily involved in Open Days and other promotional events, taking the opportunity to highlight the support services available to all applicants and prospective students.

#### **Virtual Open Days**

Throughout the COVID19 Pandemic, NESCol has actively sought out opportunities to engage with applicants. A piloted Virtual Open Night took place at Fraserburgh Campus and its success lent itself to further Regional Open Days being rolled out as part of the recruitment strategy in 20/21. Using a dedicated website, the College highlighted itself via virtual tours, curriculum, and support videos with various live chat options available to engage with applicants. A dedicated timeslot was assigned to School pupils to ensure that potential applicants currently at school could have their queries answered during school hours. The Student Advice Centre Teams were available throughout the events on Live Chat to answer queries that were presented by potential applicants. Queries through the Live Chat covered a wide range of topics which included Care Experienced Funding, Additional Support for Learning, and progression routes to University.

As part of the Recruitment and Admissions procedures for AY21/22, the SAST will be heavily involved in schedule of Keep Warm Activities which will be delivered in a similar style to the Virtual Open Days, with live Q&A sessions, How-to videos and Get to know the team videos which will allow applicants and potential applicants to engage with information and preparatory content in a format best suited to them and their needs.

#### **On-campus Open Days**

Campus Open Days are an important part of NESCol's Recruitment Strategy. Events are extremely popular within the community. The Fraserburgh Campus Open Days are pitched to both local secondary schools and the community.

Dedicated Schools Sessions are available to be booked by Schools through Marketing and Communications for their cohorts, which include a dedicated tour of the Campus, 2 chosen taster sessions to meet the applicant's interest and a session in our Atrium which allowed pupils to further engage in activities provided by all areas the Curriculum. Student Advice and Support play a pivotal role in the event by supporting curriculum colleagues with their taster sessions, carrying out Campus Tours, escorting pupils around the campus and providing a challenge for them in the Atrium. The Student Advice and Support Team's Selfie Station Challenge encouraged pupils, with their friends and classmates to dress up in PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), use our selfie props and take their photo. The Pupils and School could then choose if they wanted to upload their photo to their Social Media and tag in NESCol. The SAST also supported the feedback station, giving pupils post-its and pens and encouraging them to build the "feedback wall". Feedback was incredibly positive, with pupils reporting "better than school", "staff were nice", "I really enjoyed these sessions." and "very cool". These types of activities are designed to promote a safe and inclusive environment and foster good relations between people from different protected characteristic groups.

#### **Secondary School Open Days and Parent's Evenings**

Secondary Schools across the City and the Shire reach out to NESCol to support their transition events. These events form part of our recruitment strategy and are an essential communication channel with our future students and their parents. The events are attended by a mixture of Marketing and Communications, Curriculum and Support Staff. This ensures that all queries are answered promptly, allowing relationships to be formed and connections made in advance of the academic year commencing and transitions to be seamless.

#### **Ready, Steady, Study**

Currently, SAST Transition Events include Ready, Steady, Study which runs for both the August and February intakes. These events are designed to offer enhanced transition support to students who have additional support needs, are Care Experienced, are Young Carers or generally those who are anxious about taking their next steps into the College environment. The sessions provide tours either virtually or physically and provide students a detailed insight into life

at college including the IT systems, how to access financial and study support and how to follow their timetable. These sessions have been well received and are advertised to local schools and social work departments. The feedback from participants is always positive and it is found to settle nerves and enthuse applicants taking their first steps at NESCol.

#### Next Steps

NESCol actively seeks to promote courses, support and facilities to Secondary Schools to encourage pupils to view NE-SCol as their first-choice post-school destination. The Next Steps Program has been piloted at Fraserburgh Campus with plans in place to replicate its success at our other main campuses in the future.

#### Next Steps School Activities Program

A bespoke suite of bookable activities is offered to Fraserburgh Campus Feeder Secondary Schools that can take place either in the school or campus setting. These sessions are designed to offer taster sessions to school pupils across multiple curriculum areas to give insight and inspire students to apply for full time courses.

#### Next Steps Tours

Next Steps Tours are available to all Secondary Schools and organisations such as FraserDeen and PeterDeen who work with Secondary School age pupils who have disengaged with learning to provide them with an insight into life at NESCol. The tours allow pupils to view the campus, speak to support services and curriculum areas of interest. These sessions are facilitated by the Student Advice and Support Team and are advertised to take place twice per month. Pupils can directly book a place, or can do so via their Guidance Teacher, Support Worker or Social Worker. Attendance is mixed with increased numbers participating in November before or after the main Open Night and in Block 2. Participants have reported it "useful to see the College in Action" and to "help me make my course decision". These sessions have been piloted in Fraserburgh in 19/20 and their success will be replicated in the Altens and City Campuses when on-campus learning resumes.

We are looking to introduce a more structured approach to engagement with CE applicants and this is detailed in the SAST Enhancement Plan for AY20/21 that include focus groups to discuss with students their experience from application to their exit. The views and opinions will be used to shape and enhance future service provision. In addition to this, we currently have transition support in place for Care Experienced students where they are guaranteed an interview, will receive priority funding assessment, and will receive regular contact from the Student Advice and Support Team.

#### 5.6.4 Regional Partnership with Local Universities - Transitions

The College has established a regional partnership with Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen to support care experienced applicants and students in Further and Higher Education. All three partners work together to jointly provide relevant information for Care Experienced Young People by contributing resources, developing good practice and contributing to a holistic model of support. Much of this work is facilitated through the previously mentioned Aberdeen Champions Board and Aberdeenshire Corporate Parenting Strategy Group. Both groups recently created websites/forums to collate information from a variety of partners and NESCol has a profile signposting relevant support.

Regular meetings with both Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen to discuss and agree approaches have recently re-commenced.

#### 5.6.5 Mental Health and Wellbeing

The College recognises that mental health and wellbeing is a significant area of concern and as such have implemented a variety of resources to support this.

##### Mental Health First Aiders

The College continues to operate with a designated team of Mental Health First Aiders to provide support in the event of a mental health emergency or crisis situation. The function of the Mental Health First Aiders is to provide support when students are experiencing serious symptoms which require immediate support. These are situations in which the student needs to be removed from their classroom or where the student is seriously distressed and where the member of staff who is their first point of contact is unable to support them.

Following a review of this service it was recognised that a more robust process was required to support students, but also to support the staff involved in these incidents. A fully collaborative approach has now been established with Mental Health First Aiders working in partnership with the College's Security First Aiders to jointly attend all mental health first aid emergencies. Reporting and de-briefing is also done in partnership and all guidelines and related policies and procedures have been updated in AY20/21 to reflect this.

Despite COVID-19 and limited campus access this service continued to operate with one Mental Health First Aider available at each main campus. To further support Curriculum Staff and provide clarity on the service, the SAST created

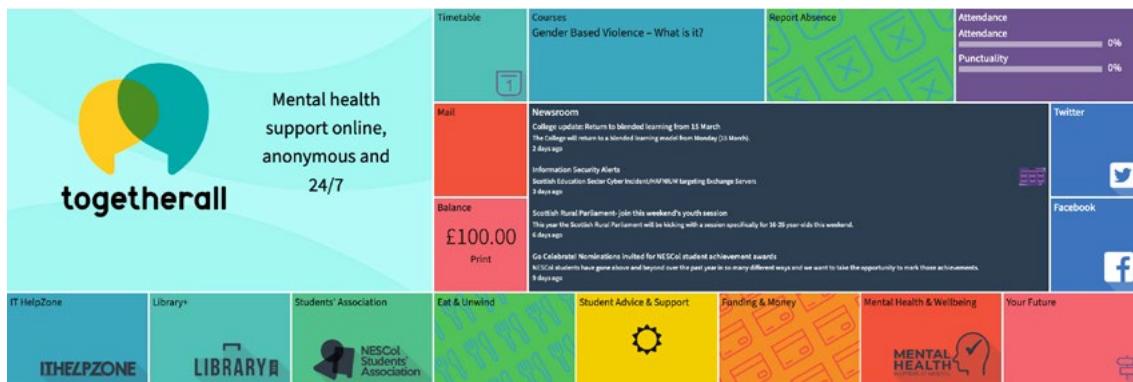
a video setting out the purpose, related documents and linked support available relating to Mental Health First Aid. Due to the most recent lockdown which has resulted in no students on campus this has not been shared yet, however once staff and students are able to return to campus the update will be rolled out.

#### Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit

The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit was updated at the start of AY20/21 and moved to a much more suitable format in articulate rise, creating a course for students to work through. This was also incorporated into the Academic Tutoring materials available for both FE and HE students. The toolkit includes advice and guidance but also signposts events and a range of useful links to support for mental health and wellbeing.

#### Togetherall

Although the SAST provide a variety of support to students during College opening hours, there was recognition of a lack of out-of-hours support. In March 2020 the College launched the Togetherall platform. Togetherall is a digital mental health support service which is available online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is completely anonymous so students are able to express themselves freely and openly under the supervision of professionally trained Wall Guides. The guides are there to monitor the community to ensure the safety and anonymity of all users. The service is also available to all staff at NESCol.



#### Counselling service

A very welcome addition to the College's student support offer was the introduction in March 2020 of the ACIS Student counselling service to complement and enhance the established well-being and support provision of the College. ACIS Student, a Mental Health Aberdeen service, are committed to developing a relational approach in their partnerships to ensure an effective response to the therapeutic needs of children, young people and adults in the community.

Counselling can be an effective source of support for students who may be experiencing emotional difficulties due to a range of experiences, including: family breakdown, bereavement, loss, gender-based violence, difficult family or peer relationships, anxiety, depression or bullying. Counselling enables these students to gain an understanding of themselves and their situations and can help them develop strategies to cope with these difficulties.

During the period of remote working appointments have predominantly been offered via Microsoft Teams with minimal issues. ACIS Student have been proactive in offering alternative formats for appointments, for example where students have issues with internet connections or access, or where clients have a preference to carry out session via telephone.

Presently there are 15 student clients in session with ACIS Student, with the next students on the waiting list, currently 20, being offered start dates with 3 student clients having completed their therapy in January 2021.

Attendance rates overall since the introduction of the service are 78% attended, 11% cancellation rate and 11% no show.

In response to demand a third counsellor has been recruited, to commence post in March 2021, so allowing ACIS Student to increase their capacity for student client sessions lowering the waiting time from initial appointment to starting sessions. In addition, the third counsellor will see coverage for the full week with the service running from Monday to Friday.

#### Report and Support

NESCol's Report and Support platform launched in February 2021 and this will provide a practical mechanism to raise awareness and educate staff, students and visitors about discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010. Reports can be made anonymously, or by contacting an advisor and the process will be managed by the Safeguarding team.

## 5.7 Students' Association

The promotion of equality and celebration of diversity is embedded in NESCol Students' Association (NESCol SA) core values. Equality and diversity is reflected in:

- **The Constitution;**
- **The Strategic & Enhancement Plans;**
- **The Executive's Roles and Responsibilities;**
- **The Calendar of Events.**

NESCol SA works to the key principles outlined in the "Framework for Strong and Effective College Students' Associations in Scotland" and is affiliated to the NUS. Both ensure that the NESCol SA functions as a democratic and representative body working on behalf of all students. A priority is to help create a safe environment for all students to express their views on the College experience and offer appropriate guidance and a referral service to students who may have experienced prejudice and discrimination.

There are five Officer posts all with a duty to promote equality and celebrate diversity. These are:

- **Communications Officer;**
- **Activities and Events Officer;**
- **Environment Officer;**
- **Health and Wellbeing Officer;**
- **Equality and Diversity Officer.**



These Executive Officers are given the opportunity to attend the annual NUS Liberation Conferences which promote equality and diversity. NESCol SA Election Policy allows all students to apply for posts unless the post requires that the student self-defines and the applicants are determined on that basis. The class representative election process ensures that candidates are democratically elected from the whole student population and potentially includes representatives with a variety of protected characteristics. NESCol SA ensures that the election literature it uses promotes equality and diversity.

In delivering training, bespoke materials designed by sparsq are adapted as necessary to make them accessible to all. NESCol SA continues to work as part of the College's Mentally Healthy College Initiative Group, which undertakes a key role in relation to the College's "Respect" campaign, the NUS Think Positive campaign, and the identification and implementation of actions for the College to achieve Healthy Body, Healthy Mind Awards. The SA holds three key annual events in the Calendar - Fresher's Fairs, Health and Well Being Fairs and Together: NES (College branded Equality and Diversity events). Invitations are extended to organisations who represent protected characteristics groups and promote gender equality. In addition, other calendar events are promoted such as LGBT History Month, International Women's Day, International Men's Day, Black History Month and Disability Awareness Month. Representatives also participate in community events such as the Torch Parade, PRIDE and Celebrate the Difference, working with a variety of key regional stakeholders and organisations.

## 5.8 Marketing and Communications

### Marketing and Communications

The Marketing and Communications team has a key role in mainstreaming and the promotion of equality of opportunity. The positive work being done within the College is used as the basis for building greater internal and external understanding and supporting the aim of widening representation within the College community.

The team has been integral to developing and implementing a number of initiatives to ensure an inclusive and supportive experience, including the RESPECT campaign and its focus on reinforcing key values. Most recently the roll-out of the Report + Support platform - a new tool to help staff and students report physical or sexual violence, harassment, racism or any other form of discrimination - has been supported.

The team also actively supports external awareness activities relating to mainstreaming and the promotion of equality of opportunity and is responsible for increasing understanding of key issues through a variety of channels, including digital display screens throughout all campuses as well as the MyNESCol student portal as well as the NESCol social media accounts.

Promoting all protected characteristics whenever possible through representative photography, imagery and accessible promotional material is another important facet of the Marketing and Communications team's work. The use of case studies allows diversity to be showcased, with an emphasis on ensuring those with protected characteristics are fully represented.

The team is also represented on a number of committees and working groups, including the Equalities Committee and digital accessibility group, to ensure influence on the College's wider work.

## 6. PROGRESS UPDATE ON EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2017-2021

### Equality Outcome 1

The College's gender pay gap will be reduced by addressing the causes of gender inequality to create a more equal and balanced workforce with men and women being more equally represented at all levels in the organisation.

Equality Outcome 1 was identified to address the difference in average pay for men and women in the College and this remains its intention.

#### Progress made:

In 2018, the College reduced its overall mean gender pay gap from 14% in 2016 to 6.8% and its overall median gender pay gap from 15% in 2016 to 7.5% in 2018. The reasons for this were detailed in the College's Gender Pay Gap Report 2018 and included the fact that the College had undergone restructuring and that it had a female Principal.

In 2020, there was an increase in the overall mean gender pay gap to 10.1% and the median gender pay gap to 9.7%. The reasons for this are examined in the College's Pay Gap Report: Gender: 2020 and relate to changes in the numbers and gender balance within the different grades in the College, but which have a cumulative effect on the mean and median figures which are used to calculate the gender pay gap.

These reasons include the fact that the College has a new, male Principal and a reduced Executive Team, which is now all male, as well as changes to the numbers and staff profile in most grades, but notably, there has been a small increase in the number of female staff in lower support staff grades 1-5 (from 89 in 2018 to 91 in 2020), but a decrease in the number of male staff (from 27 to 21). Full details are in the College's Pay Gap Report: Gender: 2020.

However, it should be noted that since the College's 2016 report was written and its outcomes set in 2017, that the College has reduced its mean gender pay gap from 14% in 2016 to 10.1% in 2020 and its median gender pay gap from 15% to 9.7%.

#### Further actions:

The College is committed to reducing the gender pay gap and had planned to set up focus groups to understand why there are such a number of women in lower graded support posts and in part-time posts, which are contributing to the gender pay gap. This was postponed due to COVID, but will be picked up as soon as it is safe to do so. The outcome from these will be used to determine if there are any actions the College should be taking and will include considering the impact of flexible working, particularly in light of the impact of COVID-19.

Going forward, these actions will no longer be included as an Equality Outcome, but will rather be picked up as part of the Gender Pay Gap actions.

### Equality Outcome 2

The attainment gap for students with disabilities will be reduced by ensuring an inclusive and accessible learning environment which will enable them to maximise their chances of attaining the skills, knowledge and qualifications needed to achieve their full potential and progress to further/higher education or employment.

Equality Outcome 2 was designed to enhance equality of opportunity by minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to a disability. Baseline data collected for AY2015-16 showed evidence of an attainment gap of almost 10% for those full-time students with declared disabilities. The data represent students with a range of disabilities and apply to those who self-declared at enrolment. Other students with disabilities are identified subsequent to enrolment but are not captured in the data. The data is shown for a very wide spectrum of disabilities, including learning difficulties, mental health problems and a broad range of physical impairments.

#### Action taken:

Curriculum teams, in conjunction with student support services, identified shortfalls in how well information about students with disabilities was shared in order for support needs to be evaluated, applied and monitored.

The new "Whole-College" support model, implemented in AY2018-19, was designed to involve all staff in identification of needs and application of interventions where appropriate. Academic tutors were appointed from within the teaching teams and charged with following up with individuals where a disability had been declared to evaluate any potential additional need and to monitor progress. To aid this process, the College began development of an online system, the Student Information Portal (SIP) to manage individual student information in order that relevant information could be shared between teaching and support colleagues effectively and that information would be stored securely and in accordance with data protection legislation. The first phases of this development have been in place since 2019-20 and

subsequent phases of the project are still in development.

The College, in common with other institutions across the country, has seen a significant rise in students declaring a mental health condition. In response to this, in 2020-21, the College received financial support to provide counselling services. This is now in place and will assist with providing support to those with specific needs. However, the resource is limited and will be available to a very small proportion of those who may benefit from the service.

**Difference and impact:**

The data below shows the trends for numbers of full time and part time students who declare a disability at enrolment and the attainment data for these groups.

The number and proportion of FT students declaring disability, including mental health conditions continues to rise year on year, with non-disclosure rates very low. In particular, the number of FT students declaring a mental health condition is increasing year on year. Disclosure is not subject to verification and so reflects the personal belief of the individual with respect to their disability/condition.

The part time data is more erratic, with distinct rises in number in 2018-19 and 2019-20, and although the proportion declaring a disability rises in common with the full time data, the proportion with mental health conditions is lower.

**Number and Proportion of Full time Students Declaring a Disability at Enrolment 2015-16 to 2019-20**

FULL TIME								
YEAR	NO DISABILITY		ALL DISABILITIES		PNTS		MENTAL HEALTH (subset of all disabilities)	
	Number of enrols	% of Enrols	Number of enrols	% of Enrols	Number of enrols	% of Enrols	Number of enrols	% of Enrols
2015-16	5722	83%	1163	17%	13	0%	423	6%
2016-17	5641	81%	1323	19%	12	0%	525	8%
2017-18	5277	79%	1430	21%	15	0%	570	8%
2018-19	5016	76%	1563	24%	31	0%	691	11%
2019-20	4490	73%	1681	27%	83	1%	787	13%

**Number and Proportion of Part time Students Declaring a Disability at Enrolment 2015-16 to 2019-20**

PART TIME								
YEAR	NO DISABILITY		ALL DISABILITIES		PNTS		MENTAL HEALTH (subset of all disabilities)	
	Number of enrols	% of Enrols	Number of enrols	% of Enrols	Number of enrols	% of Enrols	Number of enrols	% of Enrols
2015-16	13589	88%	1843	12%	28	0%	444	3%
2016-17	12690	84%	2345	16%	22	0%	550	4%
2017-18	13206	86%	2155	14%	27	0%	710	5%
2018-19	13378	60%	5950	26%	3746	16%	671	3%
2019-20	9957	63%	3842	24%	2085	13%	506	4%

The data shows the trends for attainment of full time and part time students who declare a disability at enrolment. When considering all disabilities, the attainment gap had been closing successfully until 2019-20, even though numbers disclosing were rising. However, it grew again in 2019-20. This may reflect the impact of the move to online learning having a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities. When considering those with mental health conditions, the attainment gap grew in 2018-19 and got worse again in 2019-20. This suggests that this is not likely to be attributable to the change to online learning. Reasons are likely to be complex but are probably influenced by a lack of capacity to deal with increasing numbers of students with declared issues.

For part time students, those with disabilities actually performed better in 2018-19 and 2019-20 but this coincides with a significant additional number of those declaring a disability and so may be an issue related to data collection or may reflect the changing demographic of the part time student population. This needs further investigation.

**Complete Success Rates of Full time Students Declaring a Disability at Enrolment 2015-16 to 2019-20**

FULL TIME COMPLETE SUCCESS RATES						
	NONE	ALL DISABILITIES	ALL DISABILITIES ATTAINMENT GAP	MENTAL HEALTH	MENTAL HEALTH ATTAINMENT GAP	PNTS
2015-16	73%	62%	11%	55%	18%	54%
2016-17	72%	64%	8%	59%	13%	79%
2017-18	71%	66%	6%	62%	9%	77%
2018-19	69%	64%	5%	58%	11%	76%
2019-20	70%	60%	10%	55%	15%	71%

**Complete Success Rates of Part time Students Declaring a Disability at Enrolment 2015-16 to 2019-20**

PART TIME COMPLETE SUCCESS RATES						
	NONE	ALL DISABILITIES	ALL DISABILITIES ATTAINMENT GAP	MENTAL HEALTH	MENTAL HEALTH ATTAINMENT GAP	PNTS
2015-16	83%	74%	9%	70%	13%	79%
2016-17	84%	75%	9%	74%	10%	89%
2017-18	74%	69%	5%	67%	7%	81%
2018-19	75%	83%	-8%	56%	19%	95%
2019-20	81%	83%	-2%	53%	28%	94%

The data suggests that progress had been made in closing the disability attainment gap but this progress has been impacted in 2019-20. The main difference in this year was the move to online learning for the final third of the year.

**Next steps:**

The College will continue to work on the original intentions on closing the attainment gap for disabled learners. Embedding of the new "Whole-College" support model and the introduction of a new data handling system for student support information appear to have made an impact, but this has been impacted by the change to learning delivery models imposed by COVID-19 and the shift from face to face learning. It is likely the lack of access to face to face support services may also have impacted on success, even though there was no demonstrable demand for additional services.

Work is underway to identify how students with disabilities have been disproportionately impacted to inform how learning and support can be better adapted under blended or fully online conditions. Further development of the Academic Tutor role, support activities and provision of specialist support is also planned.

This equality outcome will remain a priority for the College.

**Equality Outcome 3**

Opportunities will be created in targeted curriculum areas to address gender imbalance and stereotyping. The College will aim to eliminate the barriers to subject choice and thereby enable all students to maximise their education and employment opportunities.

Equality Outcome 3 was designed to enhance equality of opportunity by addressing the gender imbalance in selected courses so that minorities are encouraged to participate in subject areas where their participation is low and sections of the population are under-represented.

**Action taken:**

Gender imbalance is a complex, cultural issue and to truly make a difference it is important that gender stereotypes are addressed at as young an age as possible. Staff are actively working with primary and secondary schools and partners to promote opportunities, careers and skills in subject areas where there is a clear and sustained gender imbalance - for example in science. STEM and Coding Club groups for school age children have been set up to encourage more female participation in engineering and computing. Through the regional STEM partnership, the College has also worked with partners such as Techfest and the Oil and Gas Technology Centre to co-ordinate activity and widen the reach of STEM-based activities to younger age groups designed to inspire females into traditionally male-dominated subjects such as engineering. The college also hosted regional heats of the international Lego League competition in 2019-20 and had participation from 13 schools, including 5 primaries.

The College delivers a range of initiatives aimed at promoting gender balance with the traditionally male dominated field of engineering. The Shell "Girls in Energy" programme is a one-year course that is designed to open young women's eyes to the energy industry's wealth of career opportunities. Delivered in partnership with oil-giant Shell, the programme delivers weekly lessons, workshops and field visits to young women aged 14-16 in secondary education. The students get to meet over one hundred people from the oil and gas sector, where they can hear first-hand about the various roles and challenges in support of our exploration, development and production activities.

Computing is one of the areas with severe imbalance in gender. The teaching staff come from many different backgrounds and currently 50% of the Computing Technologies Team are female but issues remain in attracting female students. An initiative to introduce a "Girls into Computing/Technology" was kicked off with partners in Opportunity North East and Education Scotland in 2020 but has been put on hold as a result of COVID-19 meantime. It remains an ambition. Meantime the Coding Club run on Saturday mornings for a number of years has also been temporarily halted during lockdown. This too, will be re-activated when conditions allow.

The College is also working on promotional activities for renewable energies in which it has taken the opportunity to challenge stereotypes of people working in the energy industry and to highlight diversity and opportunities for all. However, it is recognised that this all work will take some time to mature and many external factors influence the choices of young people as they mature.

#### Difference and impact:

Baseline data collected for AY2015-16 showed evidence of significant gender imbalance for enrolments in particular subject areas: female predominance of over 80% in Care and Hair and Beauty whilst there was a male predominance of over 80% in Engineering, Construction, Automotive, and Computing. Trend data since then unfortunately shows no change in the gender balance in any of the subject areas. This shows the complexity and difficulty in addressing the attractiveness of these subject areas to the minority gender. Much of the work undertaken has been aimed at younger age-groups, to influence individuals before they have been influenced by social stereotypes. This will take some lead in time and so has not yielded results to date.

However, where females are in the minority, they are performing better than their male counterparts. This is not true of males where they are the minority. In fact they are, for the most part, doing significantly worse than the females, the attainment gap being wider than for the whole college, even though in these areas females are also attaining below whole College levels.

Full time Enrolments and Complete Success						
Faculty	FEMALE		MALE		O/IAW	
	No of Enrols	Success %	No of Enrols	Success %	No of Enrols	Success %
Engineering, Automotive and Construction (Aberdeen)	26	77%	421	63%	0	N/A
Creative and Service Industries (Fraserburgh)	500	63%	160	59%	1	N/A
Engineering, Automotive and Construction (Fraserburgh)	52	79%	411	72%	0	N/A
Business (Aberdeen)	637	80%	380	61%	1	100%
Care (Aberdeen)	478	66%	35	51%	0	N/A
Creative Industries (Aberdeen)	464	76%	457	69%	3	100%
Science, Computing & Technology (Aberdeen)	170	76%	511	62%	0	N/A
Social Science, Hospitality & Learning Ops (Aberdeen)	480	66%	309	60%	1	100%
Service Industries (Aberdeen)	396	66%	240	45%	0	N/A

Part time Enrolments and Complete Success						
Faculty	FEMALE		MALE		O/IAW	
	Enrolment Total	Success %	Enrolment Total	Success %	Enrolment Total	Success %
Engineering, Automotive and Construction (Aberdeen)	85	91%	841	85%	0	N/A
Business and Community Development	5684	74%	4007	84%	4	75%
Creative and Service Industries (Fraserburgh)	212	73%	64	78%	1	100%
Engineering, Automotive and Construction (Fraserburgh)	429	93%	822	90%	2	100%
Business (Aberdeen)	69	70%	66	74%	0	N/A
Care (Aberdeen)	171	71%	11	55%	0	N/A
Creative Industries (Aberdeen)	106	95%	75	99%	0	N/A
Science, Computing & Technology (Aberdeen)	266	79%	398	64%	0	N/A
Social Science, Hospitality & Learning Ops (Aberdeen)	124	65%	118	76%	1	100%
Service Industries (Aberdeen)	141	83%	48	79%	0	N/A
Professional Development	35	71%	42	74%	0	N/A

#### Next steps:

The College will continue to work on the original intentions on closing the gender gap for identified subject areas. Further partnership work is being implemented to address gender inequality with schools e.g. through continuing involvement with Lego League and by offering STEM and Coding Clubs for younger children. Through these, opportunities to break down stereotypes are being provided, although these are longer-term initiatives which may not yield short-term results.

This equality outcome will remain a priority for the College.

#### Equality Outcome 4

The College and its Regional partners will work together to reduce inequality and remove barriers to attainment and employment across all protected characteristics to meet the aspirations of community planning regionally.

#### Action taken:

In originally establishing this long-term Equality Outcome the College sought to ensure that it could enhance its role, its approaches and its activities in relation to community planning across the North East of Scotland. In particular, the College has aimed to play an increasingly central role in reducing disadvantage in both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire by building its role within community planning partnerships and building the capacity to reduce social, economic and educational disadvantage within the region. Fundamentally, this Equality Outcome, when written, sought to demonstrate our commitment to working regionally, and with our community planning partners, to deliver a curriculum offer and educational services which would make a positive difference and meet the needs of local people representing all protected characteristics.

To date the College's work within the region's Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) continues to evolve positively and far stronger relationships have been established, by NESCol representatives, within the two CPPs.

### Regional Economic Strategy Group

Currently, the College is the only tertiary sector education provider involved in the work of the Regional Economic Strategy Group (RESG). The Regional Economic Strategy provides a long-term plan for the economic development of the North East of Scotland to 2035. The Regional Economic Strategy is focused on four themes matching the priorities in the Scotland's economic strategy: Innovation, Internationalisation, Infrastructure and Inclusivity. The Strategy outlines key sectors for the region, including Oil and Gas; Food, Drink and primary industries; Tourism and Life Sciences.

Over the course of the previous year the strategy has been refreshed to incorporate the Group's emerging response to both the global pandemic and the oil price crash which together have led to significant impacts regionally on both the economy and employment trends within both City and Shire.

Within the Group, the College works particularly closely with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) on developing the Group's approaches to inclusive economic recovery and growth. At the time of writing SDS and College representatives are working on the refresh of the Regional Skills Strategy, a sub-strategy of the RES, which will assist the Group to meet its ambitions re. economic recovery, reform and prosperity.

### Developing the Young Workforce North East (DYWNE) Board

The College remains the only tertiary sector education provider on the DYWNE Board. The Board aims to ensure that the ambitions of the Scottish Government's Youth Employment strategy, a strategy to better prepare young people for the world of work, are fully realised. On the Board, North East Scotland College work closely with the Heads of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire's Education departments, as well as Skills Development Scotland and representatives of various regional employers.

Recently, The Board has overseen the establishment of 8 DYW School Coordinator posts established to work directly with schools in both City and Shire. The Coordinator posts will assist school pupils to develop stronger links with employers in order to develop further their links to regional employers and, in turn, to enhance the employability skills required for the local economy.

### RGU/NESCol Joint Delivery Board

Over the course of the 2020 both Robert Gordon University (RGU) and the College have progressed a joint approach to skills and provision planning and development between the institutions. Whilst work on this approach is in its infancy, the two partner institutions have now constituted a joint Planning and Delivery Board which will enable integrated academic planning, development, and delivery across the two organisations.

At the heart of this is an agreement to plan together, deliver coherently and, where appropriate, deliver jointly a programme of work aimed at:

- **Assessing changes in the labour market and skills demand from employers, incorporating analysis from Scotland's national skills development agency, local government, and other key stakeholders;**
- **Ensuring alignment of established provision against future skills requirements and streamlining delivery;**
- **Commissioning the development of new and innovative provision, working in dialogue with employer partners, which responds to changed need. Pilot areas will be identified in priority subject disciplines;**
- **Cohesive and co-ordinated engagement with regional and national stakeholders;**
- **Coordinating investment to support joint delivery and development of SFC/SDS funded and commercial provision.**

The primary focus of the Planning and Delivery Board is to deliver better aligned pathways that are employment focused, responsive to skills needs, efficient in delivery, inclusive in design, and provide

the highest quality student experience. This work sits alongside and fully complements other initiatives within the region, enabling NESCol and RGU to work more effectively and cohesively with partners to pursue and secure shared goals. The Board is supported by a small Enabling Group, comprising key senior personnel from both organisations with expertise in planning and academic development. This group will be responsible for:

- **Developing and curating a three-year strategic plan and associated development roadmap that increases graduate employment via short-, medium-, and long-term objectives across each of the strategic themes;**
- **Collating skill demand insights and information;**
- **Liaising with academic teams to coordinate the development of new provision;**
- **Undertaking annual review and self-evaluation of progress made against the roadmap.**

It is anticipated that the following outcomes will be delivered as a consequence of this new approach:

- A more explicit focus on employment, ensuring graduates possess the necessary meta and industry skills to flourish in the modern workplace;
- A shared approach to marketing and promotion offering seamless pathways from SCQF 6 to 10 and beyond;
- Fast tracked degree pathways from senior phase into priority subject areas;
- Alignment of the Apprenticeship 'family' from Foundation, Modern, and Graduate Apprenticeships ensuring more seamless apprenticeship pathways;
- The development of a more efficient, responsive, and relevant shared course portfolio including a redesigned College HE qualification portfolio, complementing SQA accredited Higher National qualifications with CerTHE (Graduate Certificate) and DipHE (Graduate Diploma) qualifications co-designed, validated, and awarded with RGU;
- The co-design and delivery of SCQF level 9 & 10 qualifications in key subject areas where no existing degree articulation route exists (for example, creative industries);
- A more effective and efficient approach to widening access and participation in further and higher education;
- A shared approach to marketing, insights, application trends, and behaviours analysis;
- A joint schools engagement team and approach to promotion and marketing of learner journey pathways to school pupils and their influencers;
- A more impactful targeting and support of under-represented groups including, but not limited to, MD20, Care Experienced, and the disabled.

#### **Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA)**

The College is represented on the Community Planning Aberdeen Management Group. The Group facilitates effective joint working across the CPA partners, to ensure delivery of the LOIP and Locality Plans remains on track and to advise the CPA Board of any additional action required to overcome barriers. This involves overseeing the progress delivery by the Outcome Improvement Groups, the Locality Empowerment Groups and Priority Neighbourhood Partnerships.

The Group is comprised of members from Aberdeen City Council; Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership; Active Aberdeen Partnership; ACVO; Civic Forum; North East Scotland College; Nestrans; NHS Grampian; Police Scotland; Scottish Enterprise; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; and Skills Development Scotland.

#### **Aberdeen City Council Multi-agency Transformation Management Group (MATMG)**

Over the course of the previous two years, the College has further progressed its working arrangements with Aberdeen City Council and other key regional partners. This work has been channelled through the creation of a Multi-agency Transformation Group whose membership comprises, in the main, of senior officials from various organisations including Aberdeen City Council, Police Scotland, Grampian Fire and Rescue; NHS Grampian, RGU; University of Aberdeen and NESCol.

Essentially the MATMG is a forum where public-sector partners in Aberdeen City work collectively on programmes of transformation designed to support the delivery of better outcomes as envisaged by the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP).

The Group leads on whole-system initiatives where the collaboration and integration of services and or/assets can lead to better outcomes and better value. The reforms focus on the design, development, delivery and adaption of public services around the life experiences of citizens and, where appropriate, it uses existing and emergent technologies to enhance the work the Group undertakes. The Group plays an important role in facilitating the physical regeneration of the city centre in line with the vision contained in the City centre masterplan, by collaborating on the estate strategies of all partners.

#### **Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership**

The College is represented on the Connected and Cohesive Communities Strategic Lead Partnership Group. The remit of this Group is:

To oversee locality planning arrangements for those communities experiencing poorer outcomes than other parts of Aberdeenshire or similar communities because of socio-economic inequality based on robust understanding of the needs of communities across Aberdeenshire.

The Group is focused on locality plans for the localities of Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Banff & Macduff, highlighted as areas of disadvantage in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. The Group supports the Planning Partnership in bringing together the key priorities and plans that are proposed for the next five years, developing partnership actions with local communities to help make a difference in these areas. The Group also supports the delivery of several initiatives around addressing inequalities, employability and health, as well as supporting community to become more resilient.

### Aberdeen City Council Socio Economic Rescue Plan

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic Aberdeen City Council developed a Socio Economic Rescue Plan to lead a coordinated city-wide response to the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis, and its wider implications on Aberdeen's economy, people, and businesses. The Plan was published at end of June 2020, and was been created within the frameworks of the Regional Economic Strategy priorities, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), the Net Zero Vision for the city and the Strategic Infrastructure Plan - Energy Transition.

The Plan was aligned to the LOIP strategies for Economy, People, and Place, with a focus on immediate actions whilst acknowledging that some longer-term actions would also feed into a scheduled refresh of the LOIP in 2021 and/or be mainstreamed in the Regional Economic Strategy.

The implementation of the Plan was addressed as part of the existing Community Planning Aberdeen framework. NESCol was identified as a Lead or Joint Lead against the following four actions in the Plan:

1. **Skills 4.0 - Review emphasis based on employability pipeline**  
**Outcome: Shared understanding of skills required for local economy**
2. **Develop and pilot an accredited course for young parents to aid them back into education or employment using Google classroom as an online means of supporting pupils**  
**Outcomes: Skills and training outcomes. Employability**
3. **Energy Transition Skills Academy**  
**Outcome: Ensuring local people gaining skills around new opportunities in delivery of Net Zero Vision**
4. **Joint promotional campaign about learning opportunities**  
**Outcomes: Joined-up approach to ensure agreed collective messaging about learning and training opportunities is promoted. Access to education. Skilled workforce.**

In addition, the College was also identified as a key stakeholder for a further nine actions in the Plan.

### Other Community Activities

In January 2019, Aberdeen Foyer received four years funding (£824,567) through the BIG Lottery's Early Action System Change Fund. This fund aims to enable stakeholders, including young people and their families, to work together to understand what needs to change in order to allow improved outcomes for young people who currently have unmet needs. In 2019 the project was named "Reboot" and from the initial work on learner journeys, 4 themes for further development emerged: Winter leavers; Targeted and Intensive Support; Young People's Wellbeing and Youth Homelessness. The College has been directly involved in leading one of the themes and in hosting events to investigate the experience of young people. In addition, a pilot bespoke programme for disengaged learners in a City school was introduced, designed to improve their employability and engagement with learning.

The College is also working with Aberdeen Foyer to help engage learners such as adults who have disengaged with education due to long-term addiction, social, behavioural or emotional challenges. Part-time options delivered in their local community provide a route back to education, in a familiar environment close to home. Other community-based projects include the Refugee & VPRS (Vulnerable Persons Re-settlement Scheme), the Supported Learning Programme and courses for adult returners.

For the VPRS scheme, the College works closely with both local authorities and another organisation (WEA) to ensure provision is available for individuals who have been re-settled in the region. We have a joint approach to ensure there is a pathway these individuals can follow in order to progress and improve their English to a level where they can continue their education or go into employment.

A number of programmes & courses exist within the supported learner programme. The College works with organisations who have clients with additional learning needs to provide local small group classes with tutor support. Accredited learning opportunities are available for those individuals who could not cope with a mainstream course at a college campus. This ensures our programmes are inclusive to all, irrespective of additional needs.

The part-time programme offers a route back to education for adults who are returning to learning, for example, after a period raising a family or other caring responsibilities. Courses are delivered in community settings and planned around the school day to increase accessibility, in particular for those with children or caring responsibilities.

### Difference and impact:

Whilst significant efforts have been made by the College and its partners to enhance community planning approaches the vast majority of work undertaken to date has centred on building the infrastructure for improvement. Consequently, it remains too early to truly measure the impacts of these relatively newly formed community planning arrangements.

The community based programmes have engaged the following numbers of students, providing access to education, personal development and progression opportunities:

- Aberdeen Foyer programmes: 355 in 18/19, 331 in 19/20
- Refugee and VPRS 404 in 18/19, 516 2019/20
- Supported learner 12 per year in Project Search

**Next steps:**

Whilst regional local outcome improvement planning and activity is still at an early stage, the College will continue to develop its role and involvement as a lead partner within the two Community Planning Partnerships. Further, the College remains committed to ensuring that its activities within these Community Planning Partnerships help to build collaboration and capacity to improve experiences and outcomes for those encountering disadvantage within Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

## 7. Equality Outcomes 2021-25

North East Scotland College remains committed to promote diversity, fairness and opportunity for all, and to meet its Public Sector Equality Duties.

The College has made progress with its 2017-21 Equality Outcomes, although progress has been impacted by external factors. In defining its equality outcomes for 2021-25, the College has retained its commitment to those significant and persistent inequalities in relation to disability and biological sex imbalance as evidenced by our data (EO2&3).

The outcome designed to tackle the gender pay gap (EO1) will be removed from the 2021-25 outcomes and work on this will be continued and monitored through other processes.

The College ambition to become better connected and to increase its influence and impact on community planning and addressing needs across all protected characteristics has been successful in developing regional partnerships and setting up of programmes to support vulnerable groups. This work is by its nature long-term but remains a priority and will be continued in the form of a revised equality outcome for 2021-25.

A new inequality has been highlighted by recent circumstances both nationally and regionally. This is in relation to digital poverty and literacy and the access to education, services and social connection that these bring. For that reason, a new outcome in relation to this has been introduced in 2021-25.

There are no discrete outcomes in relation to gender identity; sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religious belief or pregnancy, this is because our current evidence does not highlight any specific inequality. However, we will continue to develop our means of collecting qualitative evidence from these groups about their representation and experience and have developed actions to progress this work and to inform possible future outcomes (Action 4).

A list of the revised equality outcomes for 2021-25 is provided below, the full details are available in Appendix 10, North East Scotland College Equality Outcomes 2021-25.

### EO 1 Disability Attainment Gap

Reduce the attainment gap for students who declare a disability

### EO2 Biological Sex Representation and Success

Reduce the imbalance in biological sex representation and attainment rates in identified subject areas.

### EO3 Digital Poverty and Literacy

Improve access to, and attainment of, education and skills training for those suffering from digital poverty and/or literacy.

### EO4 Community Partnership Working

The College and its Regional partners will work together to improve access to education and training for identified disadvantaged groups in the region in order to increase the employability and aspirations of individuals within these communities.

Other Actions:

1. Provide additional support to improve efficacy of EIA writing, evidence collection and evaluation.
2. Incorporate challenge questions for all teams to further develop understanding of mainstreaming equalities and diversity within their own teams.
3. Develop staff skills in promotion of good relations and tackling prejudice so that stigma and fear of disclosure of personal characteristics is reduced and improvements to the inclusive environment are established.
4. Improve data and feedback collection for sexual orientation, gender identity; race; religious belief; pregnancy and maternity in order to inform the need for further action.
5. Introduce staff "Equality Champions" to help promote awareness and mainstreaming through all college teams and activities.

## 6. Conclusion

The College is satisfied with its progress with mainstreaming equalities, and the commitment to develop this to the next level is reflected in the College's Strategic Plan 2018-2021; enhancement activities with respect to mainstreaming; availability and use of evidence; development of its "Respect" Campaign and commitment to tackling racism.

The College will continue to work towards mainstreaming equalities and the achievement of its Equality Outcomes. Evidence will be continuously monitored to identify persistent and significant inequalities in order to inform improvement actions which will progress the College's ambitions and duties with respect to equality.

## EQUALITY AND MAINSTREAMING – STUDENT CASE STUDIES

### **Prabhjot Kaur, HND Textiles**

Diversity and inclusion are at the heart of NESCol life and the influence of international students is hugely positive.

Prabhjot Kaur made the move to Aberdeen from India to embrace her passion for textiles, choosing the College because of its reputation for excellent pathways to university studies.

The application process was smooth, with a very strong digital folio submitted and an interview conducted online prior to a formal offer being made.

Prabhjot, who has family in the North East, settled quickly and has demonstrated her passion, commitment and creativity.

Prevented from returning to India during the summer of 2020 due to Coronavirus travel restrictions, she instead used that time to research the impact of Indian culture on textiles in Scotland - with a focus on how traditional Indian pattern motifs have been incorporated, including notably in The Paisley Pattern. The chance to attend a small family wedding also presented the opportunity to create a stunning bridal henna painting.

Prabhjot and her classmates have been incredibly supportive of each other during very challenging times, as learning moved online and then to a blended model in 2020, and together they are looking forward to a bright future in the industry.



### **ES, Introduction to Hair and Beauty**

Providing every student with the opportunity to fulfil their potential is one of NESCol's key aims and giving talented students a platform to shine is important.

The success of ES on the regional and national stage is a source of great pride for the College, after her ability shone through when she took the beauty route as an Introduction to Hair and Beauty student.

ES was crowned winner in the North of Scotland heat of the Association of Hairdressers and Therapists competition and went on to claim third place in the national final in Blackpool, a fantastic reward for her efforts.

The College journey began as a Learning Opportunities student at NESCol, providing an introduction to the hair and beauty department and building understanding of her individual needs. This helped ES to build confidence and self-esteem as she progressed to the mainstream course.

She has been an excellent ambassador for NESCol, playing an active role in an autism group in the area.

