

NORTH EAST  
SCOTLAND  
COLLEGE



# THE EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING AND OUTCOMES OF NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE

2025-2029

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Principal's Foreword</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1 Who We Are   | 2         |
| 1.2 Why Equalities Are Important to Us   | 2         |
| 1.3 Legal Context  | 3         |
| 1.4 The Role of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) | 3         |
| <b>2. Governance and Equality</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| 2.1 Leadership   | 4         |
| 2.2 Programmes of Business   | 4         |
| 2.3 Gender Balance and Diversity   | 4         |
| 2.4 Equalities and Wellbeing Committee   | 5         |
| 2.5 Integration of Committee Structures to Embed Equality  | 6         |
| 2.6 Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)  | 6         |
| 2.7 Student Engagement Action Group (SEAG)   | 6         |
| 2.8 Curriculum Quality and Student Support (CQASS)   | 6         |
| <b>3.0 Mainstreaming Equality for Our Colleagues</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| 3.1 Staff Equality   | 7         |
| 3.2 Staff Learning and Development   | 8         |
| 3.3 Procurement  | 8         |
| <b>4. Mainstreaming Equality for Our Students</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| 4.1 Mainstreaming equality in the curriculum   | 9         |
| 4.2 Monitoring representation, experience and outcomes   | 10        |
| 4.3 Quality Processes  | 10        |
| 4.4 Student Satisfaction Data  | 11        |
| 4.5 Safeguarding   | 11        |
| 4.6 Student Advice Centres   | 11        |
| 4.7 Student Wellbeing  | 12        |
| 4.7 Student Voice and the Role of the Students' Association  | 12        |
| <b>5. Projects and initiatives to support mainstreaming equality at NESCol</b>                         | <b>14</b> |
| 5.1 The Student Advice and Support Team (SAST) Initiatives   | 14        |
| 5.2 Care Day   | 14        |
| 5.3 16 Days of Activism  | 14        |
| 5.4 Movember   | 14        |
| 5.5 Sparkle  | 14        |
| 5.6 Neurodiversity Celebration Week  | 14        |
| 5.7 International Day of Sign Languages/Deaf Awareness Week  | 15        |
| 5.8 ADHD Awareness Month   | 15        |
| 5.9 The Learning Lounge  | 15        |
| 5.10 Active Campus   | 15        |
| 5.11 Wellbeing Events and Initiatives  | 15        |
| 5.12 Fostering inclusion and RESPECT across our campuses   | 16        |
| <b>6. Equality Outcomes 2025-9</b>   | <b>17</b> |
| 6.1 Sex  | 17        |
| 6.2 Disability   | 18        |
| 6.3 Race   | 20        |
| 6.4 Disadvantaged Group  | 21        |
| <b>7. Conclusion</b>   | <b>22</b> |

## PRINCIPAL'S FOREWORD

At North East Scotland College we take pride in our role in giving every student who falls under our wing the best chance to succeed in education, in work and in life. We strive every day to provide opportunities for all.

Equality and inclusivity is at the very heart of that ethos. NESCol is a vibrant, welcoming and nurturing environment and our students tell us the support and encouragement they receive, from staff and from peers, is one of the most important parts of their experience at College.

Great strides have been taken over many years to embrace the diversity of our College community and to promote those values that are so important to us. What we must never do is believe that work is complete – we must continue to be progressive, to adapt and to address the issues which exist in our society.

We have a central part to play as an educator, employer and anchor institution in our region. In my role as Principal and Chief Executive I am committed to working with colleagues, with students and with our partners to keep equality at the top of the agenda in every part of our operations.

Actions, of course, speak louder than words.

It is vital we hold ourselves to the highest standards and we assess and measure progress. This report is the foundation of our work in this area, demonstrating our success but also highlighting areas for enhancement. It provides a roadmap for the journey ahead, as well as a reflection of the path that has taken us to this point.

**Neil Cowie**  
Principal and Chief Executive  
North East Scotland College



## 1.1 Who We Are

NESCol is one of the largest providers of vocational education and training in Scotland, delivering to more than 20,000 full-time, part-time and distance learning students each year. The College operates from its main Aberdeen Altens, Aberdeen City and Fraserburgh campuses as well as the Scottish Maritime Academy in Peterhead. The College employs more than 800 people, serving an area of 2,500 square miles, and directly supports 1,200 businesses.

NESCol is proud of its role in the evolution of traditional industries as well driving growth in new and emerging sectors. The College works closely with industry partners to ensure the skills required in the regional employment market are reflected in the courses offered and the qualifications students gain.

The College is led by our Strategic Leadership Team and governed by the Regional Board, which provides strategic oversight and ensures the college delivers high-quality education that meets the needs of all its communities.

## 1.2 Why Equalities Are Important to Us

At NESCol, we are committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment where all students and staff can thrive, feel valued, and reach their full potential. We recognise that education is a powerful tool for social mobility and are dedicated to removing barriers to success for individuals from all backgrounds.

Our commitment to equality extends beyond compliance with legal obligations; it is embedded in our core values and reflected in our teaching, support services, recruitment practices, and strategic planning. By embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion into all aspects of college life, we aim to:

- Enhance student attainment and experience by ensuring that all learners, regardless of background, have the support they need to succeed.
- Reduce disparities in educational outcomes by addressing systemic barriers faced by under-represented groups.
- Foster a diverse and representative workforce that is equipped to support the needs of our students.
- Strengthen community engagement by working with local and national partners to promote social justice and inclusion.

Our approach aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1, (No Poverty), Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). By embedding these global commitments into our policies and practices, we contribute to a more equitable society, ensuring everyone's experience at NESCol is accessible, inclusive, and transformative for all.



### 1.3 Legal Context

NESCol operates within the framework of equalities legislation and regulatory requirements that guide the sector's approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion. The key legal and policy drivers include:

#### **The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**

The Equality Act 2010 provides the legislative framework for promoting fairness and preventing discrimination in the UK. It protects individuals from unfair treatment based on nine protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

As a public sector organisation, NESCol must also comply with the PSED, which requires us to:

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
3. Foster good relations between different groups.

### 1.4 The Role of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The SFC is the national body responsible for funding, monitoring, and supporting further and higher education institutions in Scotland. It sets strategic priorities for the sector, including those related to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The EHRC is the statutory body that promotes and enforces equality and human rights laws across the UK. It provides guidance, monitoring, and enforcement to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the PSED.

## 2. GOVERNANCE AND EQUALITY

### 2.1 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. All Board Members are aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the PSED through both internal and external CPD opportunities.

To continue to demonstrate its commitment to Equality and Diversity (E&D) the Board appointed a new E&D Champion in March 2024. The previous E&D Champion remains the Regional Chair. 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.

The Champion is in attendance as an observer at meetings of the College's Equalities and Wellbeing Committee and sits on the Governance and Nominations Committee.

### 2.2 Programmes of Business

The annual Programmes of Business for the Regional Board and its Committees include the consideration of a number of equality related issues and through its role in the new [SFC Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model](#) is responsible for setting strategy and targets in relation to a number of protected characteristics and specific student cohorts. The Board is consulted in relation to the College's Equality Outcomes and is responsible for approving the College's Equality Mainstreaming Reports. 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.

### 2.3 Gender Balance and Diversity

With continuing commitment to take positive action in recruitment, the Board's Recruitment & Selection Policy for Board Members includes a statement on 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.

In addition, the Board's Succession Planning Policy for Board Members highlights a planned and considered approach to the appointment/re-appointment of members, so as to reflect Scotland's diverse population.

The Board's gender balance in 2025 is as follows, which represents a positive trend towards an exceptionally well-balanced gender split within the Regional Board:

| Non Exec Board Members<br>(including Regional Chair) |      |        | Staff Board Members (including<br>Principal & TU Members) |        | Student Board Members |      |        |
|--|------|--------|---|--------|-----------------------|------|--------|
| Vacancy  | Male | Female | Male  | Female | Vacancy               | Male | Female |
| 1  | 6    | 6      | 2   | 2      | 1                     | 0    | 2      |

## 2.4 Equalities and Wellbeing Committee

The Equalities and Wellbeing Committee was restructured and rebranded in AY24/25, merging the former Equalities Committee and Wellbeing Matters Committee. This reconfiguration ensures a more integrated approach to equalities and wellbeing, reinforcing the College's commitment to both legislative compliance and the promotion of an inclusive and supportive environment for all students, staff, and stakeholders.

The committee leads the RESPECT Campaign, a key promotional initiative aimed at embedding messages of equality across all campuses and curriculum delivery. Targeted at staff, students, and stakeholders, the campaign ensures that equality, diversity, and inclusion remain visible and actively promoted within the College community awareness of the campaign.

Through clear and consistent messaging, the campaign reinforces NESCol's commitment to fairness, respect, and belonging for all. Students' awareness of the RESPECT brand is high as evidenced within the Student Satisfaction Survey (AY23/24) with 86% citing awareness of the campaign.

Respectful behaviours are strongly role-modelled within our community with 95% of students highlighting that they believe that college staff, students and contractors behave respectfully towards each other.

The committee operates through three dedicated subgroups, each with a distinct focus:

- **The Events and Promotion Subgroup** meets monthly and is responsible for raising awareness of key dates in the equalities calendar. It plays a crucial role in embedding equalities and wellbeing as a core consideration across all aspects of college life, aligning with the goals of the RESPECT Campaign.
- **The Advisory Panel** convenes twice per year, concentrating on the development and oversight of high-quality Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to ensure that College policies, procedures, and initiatives meet equality standards.
- **The Lived Experience Groups** are convened on an ad-hoc basis to gather direct feedback from service users. These groups provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of equality-related provisions and contribute to the review of policies, procedures, and strategies.

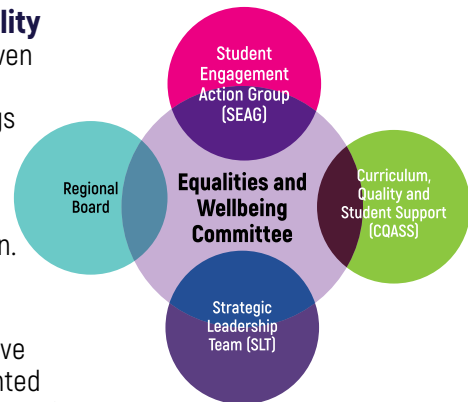
All three subgroups report regularly to the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee, ensuring a cohesive and informed approach to equality and wellbeing across the College. The committee is also responsible for overseeing the implementation of action plans linked to key policies and strategies such as the [British Sign Language \(BSL\) Plan](#), [Corporate Parenting Plan](#) and [Wellbeing Strategy](#), ensuring that progress remains on track and that intended outcomes are successfully achieved.





## 2.5 Integration of Committee Structures to Embed Equality

The College's committee structure reflects the priority given to equality, with the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee and sub-groups leading on key equality initiatives. Findings and recommendations from this committee are reported and shared to ensure that equality considerations inform decision-making processes and that effective communication is maintained throughout the organisation.



## 2.6 Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)

SLT is committed to fostering an inclusive and collaborative approach that ensures diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making. Comprising the Principal and Chief Executive, Vice Principals, and Assistant Principals, the SLT maintains strong links with all college teams and departments, ensuring that equality considerations are embedded across all key functions. In addition to integrating equality within broader discussions, the SLT also addresses equality matters as distinct agenda items. All members contribute to the mainstreaming of equality and the progress reporting of equality outcomes.

## 2.7 Student Engagement Action Group (SEAG)

SEAG plays a crucial role in mainstreaming equality by ensuring student voices are central to decision-making and institutional improvements. Through its partnership with the Students' Association and alignment with key frameworks, SEAG actively promotes inclusive engagement, wellbeing, and participation. The group ensures that equality considerations are embedded in student-led initiatives, quality enhancement, and representation structures, such as the Class Rep system. SEAG's reporting strengthens the integration of equality-focused strategies across all levels of NESCol, reinforcing a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement in student experience and outcomes.

## 2.8 Curriculum Quality and Student Support (CQASS)

CQASS plays a vital role in embedding equality considerations into institutional decision-making. As a key governance body, CQASS ensures that equality, diversity, and inclusion are integrated into quality assurance, curriculum development, and student support strategies. By reviewing reports and recommendations from the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee, SEAG, and SLT, CQASS helps to drive continuous improvement and accountability. This structured approach ensures that equality is not treated in isolation but is embedded across teaching, learning, and student support, reinforcing NESCol's commitment to fostering an inclusive educational environment.





## 3.0 MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY FOR OUR COLLEAGUES

### 3.1 Staff Equality

The People Services Team is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion; to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good staff relations. Details of the College's People Services mainstreaming activity can be found within the attached appendices:

- [Staff Equality Profile \(Appendix 3\)](#)
- [Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report \(Appendix 4\)](#)
- [Occupational Segregation: Gender \(Appendix 5\)](#)
- [Occupational Segregation: Disability \(Appendix 6\)](#)
- [Occupational Segregation: Race/Ethnicity \(Appendix 7\)](#)

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

Overall, the appendices identify the activity and progress that the College has made within the area of mainstreaming equalities since the previous report. Data is shared and compared with previous publications to identify where there have been changes.

Generally, the information gathered within the College confirms that the staff profile is comparable to the wider College sector. The College employs more females than males and this is expected when considering sector wide information. There have been no huge changes in the data and information contained within the appendices when comparing them to previous information shared however there will be specific actions taken to address these findings.

There has been an increase in the number of staff not declaring their protected characteristics. The College plans to address this by inviting all staff to update or input their information.

The area of recruitment needs to be investigated to understand why the diversity of those that are appointed does not reflect the diversity that can be seen within those that apply. There may be further actions that come out of the findings but those have not yet been established although recruitment training has been identified as required for managers.

Information around flexible working and specifically the flexible working policy will be shared and highlighted to all staff. It is known within the College that flexible working is more commonly practiced by females so it has been identified that males should be encouraged to utilise the opportunity too.

Within the area of championing equality for women there will be consideration as to how the College supports females into senior roles. This will probably take the form of market research to understand what other comparable institutions are doing and what is available with the further education sector specifically within this area. Once these findings are collated, consideration will be given to the suitability of these to NESCol.



### 3.2 Staff Learning and Development

The College has resource dedicated specifically to the area of Staff Learning and Development. There has been a number of activities carried out within the area of staff development to mainstream equalities. Some of these are highlighted below:

- **Refugee training** – specific training delivered to a number of staff in order to support people from a refugee background
- **Neurodiversity training** – topics such as ADHD, autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia have all been covered in various formats and regular continuous professional development within these areas is encouraged of all staff
- **Mental health** continues to remain a priority area. A number of staff have been trained in First Aid for Mental Health to support staff, students and other stakeholders if required
- **Suicide prevention** – workshops have taken place on this subject to raise awareness and develop staff in being able to support others
- **Gender Based Violence** – the College has worked with Emily Test to upskill and train internal facilitators to deliver a live workshop of every member of College staff and this will be continued moving forward to ensure this is refreshed as necessary
- **Trauma informed practice** – training will be provided to all staff in this area
- **Dementia awareness** – sessions on this topic have been available to staff in order for them to be able to support colleagues, students and others
- **Menopause** – a new policy has been implemented along with the introduction of Menopause champions. Training sessions have been delivered to managers and others to encourage supporting all those going through menopause.

### 3.3 Procurement

NESCol is committed to ensuring that public procurement processes align with our ethical, legal, and social responsibilities. When awarding contracts and setting procurement conditions, we take active steps to uphold principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability.

The College requires all suppliers to comply with key policies on modern slavery and human trafficking, anti-bribery and corruption, and diversity and equal opportunities. We ensure that procurement decisions reflect our commitment to eradicating forced labour, maintaining ethical business practices, and promoting inclusivity. Suppliers must adhere to all relevant legislation, including the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the Bribery Act 2010, and demonstrate a commitment to non-discriminatory practices. Additionally, they are expected to extend these obligations to any subcontractors.

Through these measures, NESCol ensures that procurement processes support our wider equalities objectives, reinforcing ethical business conduct and fostering an inclusive and fair working environment.

## 4. MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY FOR OUR STUDENTS

### 4.1 Mainstreaming equality in the curriculum

Student success is at the centre of everything we do at NESCol and we strive to make the student experience as accessible, inclusive, safe, welcoming and positive as possible. The College takes steps to ensure that it actively advances equality, diversity and inclusion for students as part of curriculum delivery, through high-quality educational provision and a whole-college approach to student support.

The College seeks as far as possible to meet the needs of the learner within its inclusive learning environment. Particular emphasis is placed on the promotion of inclusive teaching practices which reduce/remove the requirement for interventions/adjustments for individual learners.

The Learning and Teaching Futures group, a sub-group of CQASS, provides leadership, guidance and insight on key issues relating to the science of effective learning and teaching, high impact learning, teaching and assessment strategies and inclusive learning and curriculum design. The group is made up of staff and students from across the College who are enthusiastic and passionate about learning and teaching. The group works to identify and develop new and innovative learning and teaching strategies, including pedagogies that support effective digital and online delivery, improve attainment and enhance the student experience.

Additionally, NESCol are mainstreaming the use of the YuJa Panorama accessibility tool by integrating it into our standard teaching practices. This means that all course materials can be routinely checked and converted into accessible formats. Staff receive regular training on how to use YuJa Panorama effectively, ensuring that they are well-equipped to support diverse learning needs. By embedding accessibility into our everyday workflows, we are fostering an inclusive learning environment where all students have equal access to educational resources.

All full-time students are allocated an Academic Tutor, which provides the opportunity for effective relationships and trust to be built between staff and students, and signposting to relevant resources and support services available. Core to the whole-college support model, Academic Tutors promote retention and achievement via the delivery of effective monitoring and support interventions, and liaise with wider college teams regarding student support, advice, funding, transitions and progress.

Mainstreaming equality in the curriculum and the effectiveness of approaches is regularly discussed with curriculum management teams through Head of Sector, Curriculum Manager and Academic Improvement Lead forums which provide leadership, advice, guidance and support through a series of sessions and workshops.



## 4.2 Monitoring representation, experience and outcomes

NESCol continues to enhance its data management systems, providing staff with access to both historic and live data on applications, enrolments, and outcomes, disaggregated by protected characteristic. This data enables the College to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and trends related to under-representation, unconscious bias, and attainment gaps.

As part of the annual self-evaluation process, all curriculum and support teams formally assess their effectiveness in meeting the PSED. This structured reflection ensures that equality considerations are embedded across all areas of College operations. Each team also produces an Annual Enhancement Plan, focusing on targeted improvements and further mainstreaming equalities within their work.

Curriculum teams undertake three "Stop and Review" activities/reports per year. Based on the [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework \(TQEF\)](#) and sparqs [Student Learning Experience \(SLE\)](#) Model. In addition, curriculum and student support management teams review and evaluate representation, experience and outcomes biannually at meetings with a panel of Assistant Principals. These meetings offer an opportunity to review interventions, share best practices and ensure a strategic approach to addressing identified challenges, reinforcing the College's commitment to continuous improvement in equality, diversity and inclusion.

To support evaluation and action planning, work is underway to develop a robust Equalities Dashboard in Power BI which will support evaluation of data across protected characteristics. This tool will provide live and trend data, enhancing the College's ability to monitor progress against its equality outcomes.

## 4.3 Quality Processes

A range of quality assurance processes at NESCol incorporate the consideration of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Lesson observations assess how EDI is embedded within the teaching environment by identifying both examples of good practice and any missed opportunities to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

To ensure accessibility and inclusivity, student questionnaires following lesson observations have been adapted for Learning Opportunities and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. These customised versions use appropriate language and visual elements to support ease of completion.

As part of the College's internal curriculum approval and validation process, qualification approvals include sampling of teaching materials and supporting documentation. This ensures materials are accessible, free from unconscious bias (particularly in relation to stereotypes), and actively promote equality and diversity. In addition, the prior verification process requires curricular teams to submit materials for quality review before being sent to awarding bodies, ensuring clarity and accessibility of assessment instruments.

The Quality team includes Senior Lecturers of Enhancement, each assigned to support specific curriculum areas. Regular meetings with curriculum teams provide opportunities to review resources such as teaching master packs (focusing on accessibility and inclusiveness), enhance awareness of protected characteristics, and reflect on student feedback and lesson observation outcomes.

#### 4.4 Student Satisfaction Data

Findings from the First Impressions Survey AY24/25 further reflect the positive student experience at NESCol with 98% stating they are satisfied with the College. Regarding NESCol's commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment, 98% of respondents felt they were treated fairly, a satisfaction level comparable with the previous academic session.

Additionally, the results from the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey for AY23/24 confirms that students feel that the College does enough to promote equality and diversity issues with a 94% satisfaction rate.

Student satisfaction data is continually reviewed through the annual self-evaluation process and used to influence positive change.

#### 4.5 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a key priority at NESCol, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all. The College uses the **Report and Support** platform, allowing students and staff to seek guidance on equality matters or report safeguarding concerns. Dedicated Safeguarding Teams provide confidential support and work closely with external partners to manage disclosures effectively.

NESCol collaborates with Police Scotland and third-sector organisations in the City and Shire through the Third-Party Reporting Network, addressing regional concerns related to hate crime. As a Third-Party Reporting Centre, the College offers a safe space for students, staff, and contractors to report incidents.

Additionally, NESCol's partnership with Emily Test has enabled three staff members to become trainers in the **L.I.S.T.E.N.** programme. Training roll out for all staff is underway equipping them with the skills to recognise and respond to Gender-Based Violence.



#### 4.6 Student Advice Centres



The Student Advice Centre (SAC) teams provide essential support to students throughout their journey at NESCol, from recruitment, funding, and enrolment to on-course guidance and pre-exit support. Care-experienced learners' funding applications are prioritised to ensure timely financial support. Additionally, the SAC teams actively participate in Through Care After Care Forums alongside regional social work teams, collaborating to address any challenges care-experienced learners may face and supporting their success at college.

The Student Advice & Support Team (SAST) plays a key role in ensuring an inclusive student experience. They conduct Needs Assessment Reports to identify additional support requirements, allowing curriculum teams to implement appropriate interventions. At the application stage, particular attention is given to students with additional support needs, care-experienced applicants, and other vulnerable learners, ensuring a well-planned and inclusive transition into college life.

SAST also facilitates Alternative Assessment Arrangements (AAA) for students requiring adjustments due to disabilities, medical conditions, or additional support needs. These measures, such as extra time, assistive technology, or alternative formats ensuring fair access to assessments.

The upcoming implementation of a new Student Records System in summer 2025 will further strengthen NESCol's whole-college support model by enhancing the secure and efficient sharing of key information. This will reinforce the College's commitment to widening access, promoting equality of opportunity, and improving student outcomes.



#### 4.7 Student Wellbeing

NESCol provides a comprehensive range of wellbeing support to ensure students have access to the resources they need to maintain good mental health. In-house counselling is delivered by Mental Health Aberdeen (MHA), with consistently high demand highlighting the necessity of this service. Alongside counselling, NESCol's Student Advice and Support Team (SAST) includes dedicated Student Wellbeing Advisers who offer 1:1 appointments, in-class sessions, and support at mental health and wellbeing events. Wellbeing referrals are the largest referral type received by SAST; however, many students book appointments directly without a referral, ensuring a trauma-informed approach that minimises barriers to accessing support.



The demand for Student Wellbeing Adviser support remains high, with 375 referrals recorded in AY23/24. While female students consistently account for the majority of referrals (59.73% in AY23/24), the proportion of male students seeking support has gradually increased, rising from 34.53% in AY22/23 to 37.87% in AY23/24. Despite this, stigma and barriers to disclosure continue to impact engagement, reinforcing the need for targeted initiatives that encourage help-seeking behaviour among male students.

To further enhance student wellbeing, NESCol has partnered with Spectrum Life, providing a holistic suite of support that includes 24/7 multilingual counselling, a digital gym with online fitness classes, a wellbeing series featuring weekly themed webinars, and a learning suite covering key topics such as anxiety, exam stress, and menopause. Additionally, Spectrum Life offers nutritional guidance through healthy budget-friendly recipes and calorie tracking tools.

Beyond in-house provision, NESCol works closely with external partners such as Aberdeen Foyer, Cyrenians, Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and Penumbra, ensuring students can access specialised support tailored to their individual needs. These partnerships reinforce NESCol's commitment to student wellbeing, offering a multi-layered approach that supports mental health, resilience, and overall wellbeing.



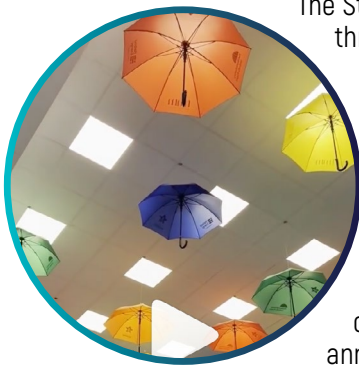
#### 4.7 Student Voice and the Role of the Students' Association

Student voice is a key priority at NESCol, with the Students' Association playing a vital role in shaping policy and driving meaningful change. Steven Seagull, the Students' Association mascot, can regularly be seen around our campuses during key events, encouraging student participation and engagement.

In response to the cost-of-living crisis and student poverty, the Association has successfully introduced several key initiatives, including Student Breakfasts (providing free breakfast for all students), the Student Pantry, and Student Kitchens, allowing students to prepare or heat their own food. These initiatives have been widely utilised and are likely to have contributed to improved outcomes for learners from SIMD backgrounds.



The **Gender Affirming Fund**, established by the Students' Association, has been recognised as sector-leading practice, providing financial support to students undergoing or considering transition. Since its launch in 2023, 82 students have benefited from this fund. NESCol is also an active member of the **TransEdu Network**, attending regular meetings to ensure best practices and the latest developments are shared within the College community.



The Students' Association supports the mainstreaming of equality through various initiatives in collaboration with the Learning and Development Team. Language Cafés provide an inclusive space for students to develop language skills and cultural awareness, while in 2024, the Association partnered on the **Umbrella Project**, part of the Aberdeen Inspired initiative, to celebrate neurodiversity. In response to feedback from the Annual Staff and Student BSL Survey, they also co-led activities during Deaf Awareness Week, addressing the demand for basic BSL learning. This included jointly purchasing 50 places on a CPD-accredited course from British-Sign.co.uk for staff and students, with plans to offer this opportunity annually.

NESCol and the Students' Association are co-sponsors of **Grampian Pride**, organised by Four Pillars, which also regularly supports campus events such as Freshers' and WellFEST.

The Students' Association ensures that student perspectives inform College decision-making by holding seats on the Regional Board and key College committees, ensuring that student voices are represented at all levels of governance.

#### 4.8 The Student Advice and Support Team (SAST) Initiatives

As a Trussell Trust Referral Partner and Naloxone distributor, NESCol mainstreams equality by providing essential support to those in need. Access to food banks helps alleviate financial hardship, while Naloxone distribution promotes harm reduction and community safety. These initiatives ensure dignity, wellbeing, and practical assistance for staff and students.

## 5. PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY AT NESCOL

NESCol actively embeds equality, diversity, and inclusion through initiatives that promote awareness, wellbeing, and support for students and staff. These projects create an inclusive environment, ensuring meaningful engagement and access to essential resources.

### 5.1 Care Day

NESCol participates in the annual Care Day event organised by EPIC, with the Students Advice and Support Team hosting activities and prizes to encourage engagement with support services while showing solidarity, celebrating and supporting our Care Experienced learners and staff.

### 5.2 16 Days of Activism

Each year we actively participate in 16 Days of Activism by collaborating with Police Scotland, Rape Crisis Grampian, and other stakeholders to raise awareness and offer support on campus. A Gender-Based Violence Course has been created by Rape Crisis and shared with all staff and students via our virtual learning environment, MYNESCol, to raise awareness. There are plans to further enhance and embed messaging by working on a national campaign through the College Development Network (CDN) Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Network.



### 5.3 Movember

NESCol's commitment to men's physical and mental health is gaining momentum, reflected in its 9th-place national ranking for [Movember](#) fundraising, raising over £7,000. This growing engagement highlights an increasing willingness among male students and staff to discuss their health and wellbeing. Additionally, in partnership with NHS Grampian, NESCol hosted campus stalls offering activities and information on preventative health measures, including testicular cancer awareness and mental health support.



#### 5.4 Sparkle

The Sparkle Winter Festival is an annual celebration in the lead-up to the winter break, featuring a diverse programme of inclusive activities and events for staff and students. Designed to foster a sense of community and enjoyment, Sparkle also serves as a fundraising initiative, with all proceeds over the past three years, totalling over £9,500 supporting the Student Pantry. This vital resource helps alleviate financial pressures for vulnerable and disadvantaged students amid the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.



#### 5.5 Neurodiversity Celebration Week

Students and staff can engage with the new Celebrating Neurodiversity course on MYNESCol, promoting awareness and acceptance. Additionally, messaging encourages participation in the national Neurodiversity Celebration Week programme.

#### 5.6 International Day of Sign Languages/ Deaf Awareness Week

For International Day of Sign Languages and Deaf Awareness Week, the Students' Association has introduced free CPD-accredited British Sign Language (BSL) training, enhancing communication accessibility across the College. These initiatives, along with encouragement for staff and students to participate in the BSL Survey, are actively promoted during these awareness events.



#### 5.7 ADHD Awareness Month

NESCol, in collaboration with the Students' Association and Learning and Development Team, joined the [Umbrella Project](#) with Aberdeen Inspired for ADHD Awareness Month, displaying umbrellas to support neurodiversity in our community.

#### 5.8 The Learning Lounge

This group fosters student engagement through themed drop-in sessions, curated content on MYNESCol, and bespoke support sessions. Recent Learning Lounge topics have included Celebrating Neurodiversity, British Sign Language, and Mental Health and Wellbeing.



#### 5.9 Active Campus

**activecampus**  
NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE

[2024–27] is in place, with the Active Campus Steering Group overseeing progress and the Active Campus Working Group driving collaboration among staff. Growing in popularity, particularly at Fraserburgh Campus, joint staff and student sessions like badminton and football provide a safe, inclusive space for participation. Weekly activities at our campuses include curling, boccia, [Frisbee Golf](#), table tennis, basketball, health walks, gym sessions and Scottish Country Dancing, promoting teamwork, wellbeing, and a sense of belonging.

The introduction of the Active Campus Coordinator in September 2023, funded by Scottish Student Sport and Sport Scotland, has expanded free physical activity opportunities for students and staff. A three-year Active Campus Plan

## 5.10 Wellbeing Events and Initiatives

NESCol prioritises student wellbeing through events such as WellFEST, Time to Talk Day, and World Suicide Prevention Day, which promote mental health awareness and connect students and staff with support services. These events also provide opportunities for engagement and feedback, shaping initiatives like the Student Mental Health Agreement.

## 5.11 Fostering inclusion and RESPECT across our campuses

A range of inclusive initiatives, developed in collaboration with the Student Engagement Action Group and Employee Voice, enhance support across campuses. Wellbeing Hubs within library spaces offer a relaxed environment, particularly benefiting Learning Opportunities students. Contemplation/Prayer Rooms provide suitable spaces for reflection and prayer at the point of need. The Learning Tools Library allows students and staff to borrow assistive equipment, such as noise-cancelling headphones, coloured overlays, and reader pens, ensuring accessibility and support for diverse learning needs.

The Respect Campaign, overseen by the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee, promotes a safe and inclusive environment where all staff and students feel valued. Past campaigns have included #RESPECTME, highlighting neurodivergent staff experiences, and an Anti-Racism Campaign supporting NESCol's commitment to eradicating racism. In AY24/25, the Hate Crime Awareness Campaign was introduced to educate staff and students on new legislation and encourage the reporting of hateful behaviour.





## 6. EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2025-29

NESCol has carefully considered the National Equality Outcomes (NEOs) and, through collaboration and consultation with staff, students, and regional partners, has identified four priority outcomes to focus on over the next four years. These priorities reflect our commitment to advancing equality, fostering inclusion, and ensuring positive outcomes for our students.

The following outlines our rationale for choosing each of these four priority Equality Outcomes, detailing the steps we will take to drive meaningful progress. Oversight of these actions and their impact will be led by the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee.

Information on the remaining NEOs that won't be progressed at this time can be found in Appendix 1), providing insight into our current position and rationale. Data on these remaining NEOs will be regularly reviewed throughout the reporting period by the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee to ensure NESCol continues to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) while delivering an excellent experience for our community.

### 6.1 Sex

Increase awareness, accessibility, and engagement with mental health support for men (students and staff) at NESCol by addressing stigma, promoting inclusive services, and ensuring intersectional approaches to wellbeing.

The decision to prioritise increasing awareness, accessibility, and engagement with mental health support for male students and staff at NESCol is informed by a combination of data analysis, feedback, and ongoing discussions. Events and initiatives such as Upstream, Movember, and the Man Cave sessions have highlighted the need for long-term strategies that encourage male students and staff to seek mental health support. The success of the pilot Man Cave sessions, which provided peer support while reducing stigma and normalising conversations, demonstrates the value of creating safe spaces for men to discuss their wellbeing openly.

Mental health referral data further highlights the need for targeted interventions. Although male students consistently account for approximately 35–38% of all wellbeing referrals at NESCol, they remain significantly underrepresented compared to their female peers. This suggests that men may be less likely to seek support despite experiencing mental health challenges. Additionally, while there has been an increase in the number of males accessing Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) support in AY24/25 (rising from 4 to 11), the overall engagement remains low, reinforcing the need for greater awareness and accessibility to preventative support.

These insights have prompted discussions with men's mental health charities to explore partnerships and establish a regular on-campus presence, further encouraging engagement and support for male staff and students. While data does not yet show a substantial increase in demand for mental health and wellbeing services from male students, feedback from curriculum colleagues during Key Performance Indicator (KPI) meetings strongly suggests that stigma remains a major barrier to disclosure and help-seeking. Staff have identified anxiety and resilience as key areas requiring further exploration and support.

In AY23/24, ACIS Counselling delivered by Mental Health Aberdeen (MHA), NESCol's in-house student counselling service, recorded 21 referrals from male students seeking counselling. The Safeguarding Platform also recorded three reports in AY24/25 citing mental health and wellbeing as the reason for referral. Despite these figures, feedback from external surveys suggests that the actual prevalence of mental health concerns among male students is likely much higher.

Our awareness of these concerns was first raised through our participation in the UpStream Survey (2021–23) with Aberdeen Foyer. Although primarily focused on eradicating youth homelessness, the survey also gathered health and wellbeing insights using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). It revealed that, despite not seeking support through College channels, poor mental health was notably high among male students at our Altens Campus.

Equality Outcome 1 will be addressed as a short- to medium-term priority, focusing on increasing awareness and engagement with mental health support for men (students and staff) at NESCol. These findings, combined with ongoing feedback, reinforce the urgent need to address mental health support for men. Moving forward, our approach will focus on reducing stigma, promoting inclusive services, and ensuring an intersectional approach to wellbeing.

#### **How we plan to achieve this**

(Full Action Plan to follow after consultation with the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee and produced in 2025-26)

- **Develop and deliver targeted awareness via RESPECT Campaigns**
- **Establish peer-led men's support networks**
- **Improve accessibility internal and external mental health services for men**
- **Provide staff training on men's mental health and stigma reduction**
- **Celebrate and participate in Men's Health Awareness Campaigns**

### **6.2 Disability**

NESCol will enhance support mechanisms, inclusive teaching practices, and targeted interventions to reduce the attainment gap of students who declare a mental health condition.

As part of our commitment to becoming a Trauma-Informed College, we will embed mental health awareness within curriculum design, expand access to specialist support, and foster a culture of early intervention. By creating a learning environment that is compassionate, understanding, and responsive to the needs of all students, we will ensure equitable opportunities for achievement.

NESCol has identified improving the success and retention rates of students who declare a mental health condition as a priority for 2025-29, based on clear evidence of an attainment gap between these students and their peers. While overall student success rates have steadily increased from 70.61% in AY20/21 to 83.90% in AY23/24, the success rates of students declaring a mental health condition remain significantly lower, rising from 55.53% to 66.48% over the same period. Although this represents an improvement, a persistent gap remains, highlighting the need for enhanced support and targeted interventions to ensure these students achieve success at the same rate as their peers.

The demand for wellbeing and mental health support at NESCol continues to grow, with wellbeing referrals increasing year on year. In Block 1 of AY23/24, there were 168 wellbeing referrals, rising to 225 in the same period for AY24/25. Additionally, students can book wellbeing appointments without requiring a referral, ensuring a trauma-informed approach that reduces barriers to accessing support. In Block 1 of AY24/25 alone, 632 wellbeing appointments have been booked to date: 266 at the City Campus, 153 at Fraserburgh, 26 at Altens, and 187 remotely. This increase in demand underscores the essential role of NESCol's Student Wellbeing Advisers in supporting students' mental health and wellbeing.

ACIS Counselling, has also experienced a significant increase in demand, leading to a temporary pause on new referrals as of 1 March 2025 to manage a backlog. This further demonstrates the scale of need for mental health support services and the importance of continued investment in accessible and timely interventions.

Through our direct engagement with students, we recognise the growing need to address anxiety and resilience, which have been consistently identified as barriers to success. These insights reinforce the necessity of a college-wide approach that embeds mental health awareness within curriculum design while fostering early intervention strategies.



As part of our commitment to becoming a Trauma-Informed College, NESCol participated in the College Development Network (CDN) Trauma-Informed College pilot, with three staff members receiving enhanced training. This commitment will be further strengthened by Trauma-Informed Practice training for all staff on 19 June 2025. Additionally, curriculum and support management teams have received training in AY23/24 and AY24/25 to ensure trauma-awareness is embedded across teaching and student support services.

We also recognise the impact of poverty on student mental health, as evidenced by findings from the [Pathways from Poverty series](#). NESCol has taken proactive steps to mitigate some of these challenges through initiatives led by the Students' Association, including the introduction of Student Kitchens, the Student Pantry, Free Breakfast, and our status as a Trussell Trust Referral Partner. While these initiatives provide critical support, further work is required to address the structural barriers affecting student mental health and academic success.

Equality Outcome 2 will be addressed as a medium- to long-term priority. By embedding mental health awareness within curriculum design, expanding access to specialist support, and fostering a culture of early intervention, NESCol will create a more inclusive and responsive learning environment. These efforts will ensure that students declaring a mental health condition receive the necessary support to succeed, closing the attainment gap and promoting equitable opportunities for achievement.

#### Enrolment and Success Data

|                               | Enrolments |       |       |       | Success |        |        |        |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
|                               | 20-21      | 21-22 | 22-23 | 23-24 | 20-21   | 21-22  | 22-23  | 23-24  |
| <b>Total Enrolments</b>       | 14302      | 20050 | 23449 | 18260 | 70.61%  | 79.91% | 81.20% | 83.90% |
| <b>Mental Health Declared</b> | 1203       | 1616  | 1647  | 1417  | 55.53%  | 63.30% | 62.84% | 66.48% |

These figures illustrate both the increasing number of students declaring a mental health condition and the persistent gap in success rates. NESCol is committed to closing this gap through strategic and targeted support, ensuring all students have the opportunity to thrive.

#### How we plan to achieve this

(Full Action Plan to follow after consultation with the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee and produced in 2025-26)

- Identify and address barriers, and monitor impact through data analysis, engagement, and outcomes tracking
- Expand early intervention, targeted support, and peer-led mental health networks
- Embed mental health resilience within curriculum design and teaching practice
- Increase awareness and accessibility of support, including digital and on-demand resources
- Create inclusive, student-led spaces that promote wellbeing and reduce stigma

### 6.3 Race

Ensure that attainment levels by ethnicity are monitored and addressed while embedding a diverse, anti-racist curriculum and workplace culture that reflects, supports, and values the experiences of all students and staff.

Ensuring that students from all ethnic backgrounds achieve equitable educational outcomes and feel represented, supported, and valued within NESCol's learning environment is a key priority. By closely monitoring attainment levels by ethnicity and embedding an anti-racist curriculum, the College aims to create an inclusive learning experience that actively supports all students and promotes equitable opportunities for success.

Addressing attainment gaps remains a key focus, as while overall success rates continue to improve, it is essential that attainment levels by ethnicity are closely monitored to ensure that no student group is disadvantaged. Embedding an anti-racist curriculum will create an inclusive learning experience that actively supports all students and promotes equitable opportunities for success.

Representation within the workforce is another important consideration. Although there has been a slight increase in the number of BAME staff at NESCol, overall representation remains below both regional and national levels. Ensuring that the College's workforce reflects the diversity of the student body and the wider community is essential in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for both students and staff.

Scotland's Census (2022) data highlights an increasing diversity across the country, with Aberdeen City having a significantly lower proportion of White Scottish residents (67.8%) compared to Aberdeenshire (79.8%). NESCol's student demographics, with 66.4% identifying as White, align more closely with Aberdeen City, but still indicate an opportunity to further engage and support students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Institutionally, NESCol has committed to fostering an equitable curriculum through its Learning and Teaching Futures Group, which feeds into CQASS and ensures that teaching practices are inclusive. Additionally, staff representation on the regional Anti-Racism Roundtable with partners including NHS, Local Authorities, RGU, Police Scotland, University of Aberdeen and GREC ensures that the College remains aligned with best practices and up-to-date research in tackling racial disparities in education and employment.

Equality Outcome 3, will be pursued as a long-term goal throughout the 2025-2029 reporting period, ensuring meaningful and lasting change. Taking a proactive approach to embedding a diverse curriculum and an inclusive workplace culture will not only address potential attainment disparities but also enhance the overall experience for both students and staff. This work is essential to ensuring that all individuals within the College feel valued, supported, and represented in every aspect of their learning and working environment.

#### How we plan to achieve this

(Full Action Plan to follow after consultation with the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee and produced in 2025-26)

- Engage the College community in shaping and championing anti-racist approaches
- Strengthen and use ethnicity data to address disparities in attainment and progression
- Embed anti-racism across the curriculum, staff development, and leadership practices
- Challenge racism in all forms and promote active bystander behaviour
- Increase representation and visibility of ethnic minority role models through internal action and external collaboration.
- Address attainment and career progression gaps through targeted academic and professional development support.

## 6.4 Disadvantaged Groups

NESCol will enhance support mechanisms, inclusive teaching practices, and targeted interventions to reduce the attainment gap of students who declare care-experience.

NESCol will prioritise the success and retention of care-experienced learners by taking a trauma-informed approach and strengthening partnerships with regional agencies to ensure informed transitions into, through, and beyond college. We will enhance the student experience by providing tailored support, fostering a sense of belonging, and addressing barriers to engagement. Through collaborative working and a commitment to continuous improvement, we will create an inclusive learning environment where care-experienced learners can achieve their full potential.

Addressing attainment and career progression gaps for care-experienced learners is vital for ensuring equitable opportunities for success. NESCol's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-26 underpins our commitment to supporting care-experienced students, aligning with our broader efforts to close attainment gaps. While overall student success rates at NESCol have improved, care-experienced learners still face attainment gaps. In AY20/21, the success rate for care-experienced students was 56.32%, compared to 72.78% for their peers. Though this improved to 67.22% in AY23-24, the gap persists, highlighting the need for continued, enhanced support.

NESCol has taken significant steps to support care-experienced learners, including collaboration with Through Care After Care in Aberdeenshire to provide consistent support from both the College and social work teams. Work is also underway to establish a similar forum in Aberdeen City. Care-experienced bursary applications are prioritised, and monthly meetings between Student Support Managers and Curriculum Managers ensure targeted interventions.

Despite the support available, many care-experienced students are reluctant to seek assistance. To address this, NESCol distributes a Care-Experienced Newsletter three times a year and maintains a Wakelet that hosts tailored support information from NESCol and regional partners, ensuring that it is easily accessible when students need it most.

Recognising the trauma many care-experienced learners have faced, NESCol is working to embed trauma informed practice across all our services embedding trauma-informed practices in its student support services. This aligns with the College's broader commitment to creating an inclusive environment and removing barriers to learning.

NESCol collaborates with Robert Gordon University and the University of Aberdeen to support care-experienced learners in transitioning to higher education. However, uptake remains low, and further development is needed. The re-introduction of the Care Experienced, Estranged, Carers (CEEC) North Forum, chaired by NESCol staff, will improve progression pathways. NESCol is also active in the National Key Policy Group, ensuring care-experienced students' challenges inform sector-wide discussions and policy development.

Additionally, NESCol engages with Virtual Head Teachers to provide early information on college transitions for care-experienced school pupils. The College is represented on the Corporate Parenting Leads Group in Aberdeenshire and the Champions Board in Aberdeen City, reinforcing its commitment to supporting care-experienced students through the Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-26.

Equality Outcome 4, will be delivered through a medium to long-term action plan, ensuring sustained support and measurable progress. By continuously monitoring progress, enhancing academic support, and working with external partners, NESCol aims to close the attainment gap and help care-experienced learners achieve their full potential.

### How we plan to achieve this

(Full Action Plan to follow after consultation with the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee and produced in 2025-26)

- Deliver Trauma-Informed Practice training and increase awareness of available financial support
- Co-host Lived Experience Focus Groups with the Students' Association to inform meaningful change
- Strengthen transition, academic, and wellbeing support tailored to learner needs
- Foster belonging and enhance the overall student experience across all campuses
- Monitor attainment and retention to identify gaps and drive continuous improvement

## 7. CONCLUSION

NESCol remains committed to mainstreaming equality across all aspects of college life. Whilst good progress has been made in embedding inclusive practices, we recognise that continuous improvement is essential to ensuring equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students and staff. The College will continue to prioritise the achievement of the Equality Outcomes 2025-29, working in partnership with internal and external stakeholders to drive meaningful change.

To ensure accountability and sustained progress, the Equalities and Wellbeing Committee will develop robust, data driven Action Plans and closely monitor development, evaluating the impact of initiatives and identifying areas for further action. Through ongoing collaboration, data-driven interventions, and a commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.

