NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE

THE PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY:

SPECIFIC DUTIES FOR SCOTLAND 2023 INTERIM REPORTING

CONTENTS

GDPR

Contained within this report are case studies based on students whose identity is revealed. Full permission has been provided by the individuals for their data to be shared in this context.

1/ INTRODUCTION

1.1. 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 updated Equality Mainstreaming Report in April 2021. In line with the requirements of the PSED, the College is required to report, by the end of April 2023, on how it is meeting the general duties; its progress in developing the equality outcomes identified in the 2021 report and its progress with specific duties relating to employee information.

In addition, following the publication of the Scottish funding Council's National Equality Outcomes, the College is required to consider how they may be adopted into our future outcome setting and reporting.

1.2. About North East Scotland College

North East Scotland College (NESCol) is the only college located within the North East of Scotland. It serves an extensive geographical area, with three main campuses, two in Aberdeen and one in Fraserburgh. It also has two regional outreach centres in Ellon and Inverurie, as well as the Scottish Maritime Academy in Peterhead.

The College provides a wide range of high quality education and training opportunities to meet the needs of individuals, communities, employers and partners across the region. From each of its modern and well-equipped centres NESCol delivers a wide range of courses which provide the skills required for entry into the careers within established regional industries. The range of courses include Art, Design and Photography; Business & Management; Care; Computing; Construction; Automotive and Engineering; Hair, Beauty and Complimentary Therapies; Maritime; Creative Industries; Professional Cookery, Hospitality and Events Management; Science; Social Sciences; Sport; Supported programmes and Travel and Tourism. Each year, the College enrols approximately 19,200 students (6,200 full-time and 13,000 part-time).

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 seamless transition from school to College and to contribute to widening access 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. NESCol is currently heavily invested in the SFC Pathfinder projects for the region, further developing its links with schools, universities and other regional partners.

NESCol is clearly committed to meeting the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and application of inclusive practice throughout the organisation. Its governance, policy and practice is designed to incorporate equality, not only for those with protected characteristics but also to include those from other groups such as those from care-experienced backgrounds or experiencing social deprivation. These values are reflected in its Vision and Values, Strategic Plan and other Supporting Strategies.

1.3. Vision and Values

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**
- **Promote diversity, fairness and opportunity for all, providing individuals, businesses and communities in the North East of Scotland with 21st century skills.**

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

- **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.**

1.4. Strategic Themes, Goals and Objectives

Our values and commitment to equality and inclusion are also demonstrated in the College's Strategic Plan for 2021-23. During the lifetime of our Strategic Plan we will deliver our Strategic Goals aligned to our five Strategic Themes:

Examples of reference to equalities in each of our themes are provided below.

1. Being Agile and Responsive	Deliver a curriculum and support services that respond to the needs of students and the region, including supporting inclusive growth...and reducing inequality.
2. Empowering People	Deliver supporting strategies to support mental, physical and social well-being of staff and students, including creating a culture based on respect, trust, engagement and shared goals.
3. Advancing Partnership Working	Work with our partners to deliver on key priorities, with a focus on reducing inequality and removing barriers to educational entertainment
4. Delivering Excellence and Innovation	Continue to advance equality of opportunity across the College to ensure success for all students regardless of protected characteristics, background or experience.
5. Leading Sustainability	Implement an Environmental and Social Sustainability Strategy aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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.

To demonstrate its commitment to equality and diversity the Board appointed its first Equality and Diversity Champion in June 2016. 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. As of January 2021, the Board's Equality & Diversity Champion is in attendance as an observer at meetings of the College's Equalities Committee. The Board's Equality & Diversity Champion was appointed Regional Chair in November 2022, and has expressed a wish to continue in her dual role.

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.

2.2. 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.

2.3. Gender Balance

The Board's gender balance in January 2023 is as follows:

Non-Executive Board Members (including Regional Chair)		Staff Board Members (including Principal)		Student Board Members	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
7	3	2	1	0	2

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 show the current gender balance in relation to non-executive membership of the Board.

At the time of writing, the Regional Board is due to commence a recruitment process to fill two non-executive Board Member vacancies, with a key consideration being how to improve gender balance as well as encourage applicants with protected characteristics. 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.

CASE STUDY

CEZARY KOLACZYNSKI - HND CYBER SECURITY

CEZARY KOLACZYNSKI HAS MADE A HOME IN ABERDEEN SINCE MOVING FROM POLAND 10 YEARS AGO WITH HIS WIFE. CEZARY HAS SPENT HIS WHOLE LIFE ENJOYING HIS PASSION FOR WORKING WITH AND REPAIRING COMPUTERS.

He recognised that formal qualifications to match his knowledge and skills were required to improve his position in the job market and chose to attend NESCol.

Cezary joined the HND Cyber Security course, a programme which has been developed in recognition of the growing demand for specialists skills in the Scottish technology sector.

As well as being a full-time student, Cezary was recruited to join the NESCol IT HelpZone in April 2022. The service is run by students for students, with Cezary employed two days per week to use his expertise to respond to a wide range of IT issues.

Cezary has spent most of his life in a wheelchair, but has managed well in college with adaptions put in place. These adjustments include ensuring suitable study areas in the computer labs and improving the student IT HelpZone layout to make it more suitable both for staff and students with wheelchairs accessing the services.

CEZARY HAS EMPHASISED HOW ENJOYABLE HE HAS FOUND THE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT AND EXPRESSED HOW SUPPORTIVE AND FRIENDLY HE HAS FOUND STAFF AND STUDENTS TO BE.

Cezary plans to move into employment after College and feels he will have the qualifications, new knowledge and skills to have a successful career in IT.

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. 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 (EC) charged with leading on key equalities activities. Key findings from the EC 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.
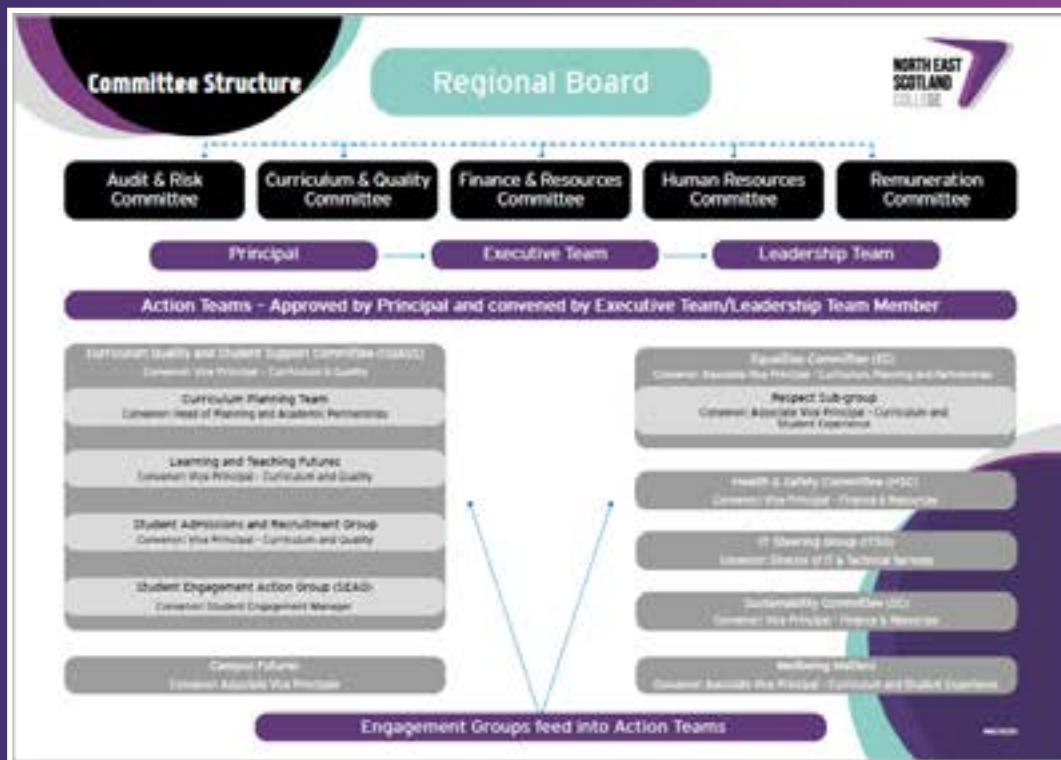
The purpose of the EC is to ensure that, in line with its ambitions, priorities and policies, the College advances equality and diversity through meaningful, inclusive student-, staff- and stakeholder-centred services and approaches. The EC meets no less than 5 times per academic year with key aspects 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**
- **Inform and advise the College 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**
- **Work in partnership with the Students' Association in order to support enhanced services and inclusive approaches aimed at the wider student body**
- **Lead on development and implementation of the College 'Respect' priority**
- **Support the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the College's Access and Inclusion Plan.**

The Equality Committee acts as an engagement group and consultative body on matters relating to equality, access and inclusion. Membership of the Equality Committee is comprised of support staff, teaching staff and student representatives.

4.1. 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 is also proactive in the evaluation of need for, and provision of, assistive technologies to support students with specific learning needs. Work has progressed with respect to implementation of the requirements of the Public Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018. All teams are now using the software tool – Blackboard Ally – which allows them to directly measure the accessibility of their materials, and the College to monitor this work. Work is also ongoing with respect to ensuring that subtitling is used as required for presentations. As a result, overall accessibility of materials is well monitored and implemented.

The College has a British Sign Language (BSL) plan. In session 2021-22, we issued the BSL Survey for staff and students which has given us an insight into staff and student wants/needs to inform next steps. Plans are in place to deliver a CPD accredited "Signs for Life" training course for front facing staff in the pipeline and the Student Advice and Support Team have undertaken training sessions with NESS and CALL Scotland in the past year to ensure we effectively support BSL Users. A significant amount of work ensuring compliance with the captioning and accessibility of learning materials on our VLE has also been completed. The plan will be reviewed and updated in 2024.

4.2. 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. However, the impact of COVID-19 over the period 2020-22 has been significant. The established approaches to access, inclusion and relationship building were compromised by lack of campus access and it was noted that student engagement online was challenging. Some students were, for example, unwilling to switch on cameras during online classes due to reluctance to share views of their remote working environment. This probably impacted disproportionately on students from less privileged backgrounds and resulted in limited relationship building with those individuals. However, even within protected characteristic groups, the impact of lockdown was variable. For example, some students with a declared disability benefitted from remote learning whilst others struggled. The KPI data for this period showed decline in attainment for all students.

Where there remain gender imbalances in curriculum areas, work continues to attract applications from minority groups. For example, the "Girls into Energy" course is offered to school pupils with an aim of attracting more females into energy related jobs. This programme was offered in an additional 4 schools in 2022-23 and continues to expand.

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 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, the 3D Animation students have created materials to support mental health awareness. In sport, college students have been involved in supporting the Grampian Para festival and individuals have been participating in para sport – Scottish record holder in para swimming and team involvement in para basketball. In Hair and Beauty, staff have made videos of practical techniques which are available as a general reference for all students but were particularly aimed at those who were unable to attend classes for a period due to health or other personal circumstances.

The College is delivering 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. Materials to support promotion of good relations and mutual understanding are provided to tutors to share with students. This is linked to the College's "Respect" campaign events such as International Women's Day and Black history month. This year the "Respect" campaign has focussed on neurodiversity and has run events to support understanding and awareness of neurodiversity so that staff and students can better create an inclusive environment. Training on this theme has been very well received by staff.

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. Existing evidence (from complaints and reporting) does not suggest there are major issues with harassment or discrimination with respect to racism in the College but work is ongoing to promote good relations by making available materials for use by tutors in their tutor time and opportunities to engage in competitions.

4.3. 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. The college is involved in 4 SFC "Pathways" projects which include the intensification of the relationship with Robert Gordon University and development of the senior phase in regional schools. Both of these projects include elements of widening access to college and to university courses. For example, a revised approach to school winter leavers has been developed to offer them more meaningful courses which can be completed before their leaving date and offer improved employability skills. This will impact on the most disadvantaged groups of school pupils.

The regional STEM Partnership is chaired by an Associate Vice Principal 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.

The College is working with regional partners Aberdeen Foyer and Aberdeen City Council on the "Reboot" project (formerly Early Action Systems Change) which sets out to coproduce solutions with and for young people and their families, collaborating across sectors and services to shift focus from crisis to prevention. Through Reboot, NESCOL has collaborated with different organisations to understand young people's experiences around disability, youth homelessness and mental health & wellbeing. This has involved 'deep listening' engagement workshops with staff and students, 'journey mapping' and some aspects of service redesign. The College has also piloted the Upstream Project which is a collaborative early intervention approach that enables the college and supporting services to work with young people who are at risk of homelessness and/or disengagement from college before they reach crisis point.

5/ 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.

5.1. 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	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of Responses	4349	4673	5120
Student Response Rate	68%	79%	86%
Positive response to question: "I believe I am treated fairly"	99%	99%	99%

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 2022-23 had not been undertaken.

The positive response rates are shown below. 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.

OVERALL COLLEGE							
Results for Full-time Students	2018-19		2020-21		2021-22		
Survey Response rate – Further Education	58%		65%		65%		
Survey Response rate – Higher Education	51%		59%		57%		
Survey Questions	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff	3168	85%	3491	94%	3113	92%	
I feel safe and secure on college premises	3162	96%	2848	97%	2906	97%	
The College does enough to promote equality and diversity issues e.g. College events, literature	3048	92%	3448	95%	3100	95%	

OVERALL COLLEGE							
Results for Part-time Students	2018-19		2020-21		2021-22		
Survey Questions	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
I believe all students at the college are treated equally and fairly by staff	192	91%	282	95%	232	92%	
I feel safe and secure on college premises	191	97%	203	97%	216	96%	
The College does enough to promote equality and diversity issues e.g. College events, literature	184	94%	275	93%	227	95%	

During each academic year, the College facilitates a number of student focus groups based on agreed themes. During 2021-22 and 2022-23, 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. Thirteen were completed in 2021-22 and, of the12 planned for the current year, 5 have taken place.

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 six actions identified from the respect focus groups completed in 2021-22, these were actioned by curriculum teams as necessary. Three actions to date have been identified in the current year mostly aligned to promoting all aspects of the "Respect" campaign on a wider scale.

5.2. College Evaluative Report and Equalities

The College's Evaluative Report for 2021-22 included evaluation of Fair Access and Transitions and Equalities and Inclusion. A number of actions were identified across both themes and included in the College's Enhancement Plan; relevant extracts from the plan are summarised below:

OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS - FAIR ACCESS AND TRANSITIONS					
No.	Area for Development (Developmental Driver)	Impact (intended difference to be made)	Planned Actions for Improvement	Deadline	Developmental Driver Code
1.	Improve data sharing by SDS, local authorities and college.	Match curriculum offer to needs of school leavers.	1. Continue to contribute to community groups.	November 2022	NF2, NF4 SO 3.4
Progress to date – interim evaluation **February 2023** (Director of Student Access & Information)		Data relating to school leavers' planned destinations shared by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and local authorities used to contribute to formulating February course offer. Application target for February courses exceeded; enrolment in progress. The College now holds a data sharing agreement relating to children and young people signed by a wide range of organisations including local universities, Policy Scotland and local authorities that will allow the sharing of appropriate information. The College is working with SDS to ensure winter leavers remain in a positive destination. More regular intervention between the students and SDS takes place to improve the retention of winter leavers on their college course and support them to a successful outcome.			
Area for Development (Developmental Driver)		Impact (intended difference to be made)	Planned Actions for Improvement	Deadline	Developmental Driver Code
2.	Improve collection of data relating to specific groups – care-experienced, estranged students.	Identify students so that needs can be met.	Review wording of questions on application and enrolment forms, reporting tools.	December 2022	EO4 NF2, NF4
Progress to date – interim evaluation **February 2023** (Director of Student Access & Information)		Application and enrolment forms were reviewed to include additional questions relating to care-experienced and estranged students. The questions relating to care-experienced students have been reworded to remove confusion and reduce the likelihood of students misunderstanding the question. In the past, many students who worked in the care industry mistakenly declared that they were care-experienced. Questions on our online forms are now dynamic to reduce the mismatch of answers, which skewed data previously.			

LAUREN FARMER
TRAINEE DECKHAND (SCOTTISH MARITIME ACADEMY)

LAUREN FARMER ENROLLED ON THE 12-WEEK TRAINEE DECKHAND COURSE AT THE SCOTTISH MARITIME ACADEMY IN PETERHEAD, NESCOL'S NAUTICAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE.

Since leaving school at 16 she has had the ambition of pursuing a career in the maritime sector and she is now realising those dreams at the SMA.

Lauren said: "Life and work commitments always seemed to get in the way of achieving my dream of working at sea, but after browsing on the NESCol website I finally found something suitable that will get me into the Merchant Navy with my level of qualifications."

The decision means leaving behind a steady shore based career in hospitality and retail, which recently saw Lauren progress to the position of manager at a large supermarket chain, but she is determined to follow her chosen path.

Lauren said: "Working at sea is commonly perceived as a male dominated environment. Using my experiences working in bars, restaurants and supermarkets I'm confident that as long as my voice can be heard then there are definitely ways I can progress, like I successfully managed to do on the shore side."

Lauren is confident that her drive to succeed will enable her to quickly climb the ranks and added: "I aim to get as much sea experience as a Deckhand as possible before eventually studying for my Officer of the Watch qualifications and ideally working my way up within the offshore renewables sector."

SHE IS NOT FAZED BY THE LACK OF GENDER DIVERSITY AT SEA AND HOPES TO SERVE AS A ROLE MODELS FOR OTHERS WHO ARE KEEN TO FOLLOW HER LEAD.

Lauren said: "More advertising and promotion is definitely needed to make the sector an attractive and aspirational career for women. I can see already that there are many more female seafarers around today, but a lot more work needs to be done. Hopefully my experience at the SMA gives encouragement for others."

OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS - EQUALITIES AND INCLUSION

Area for Development (Developmental Driver)		Impact (intended difference to be made)	Planned Actions for Improvement	Deadline	Developmental Driver Code
10.	Support need for increased numbers of trauma-experienced students.	Staff better equipped to support trauma-experienced students.	1. Work with partners to provide training for staff members most frequently working with trauma-experienced students.	June 2023	EO4 HGIOC 3.1, 3.2 NF3 SO3.1

Progress to date – interim evaluation February 2023 (Associate Vice Principal: Curriculum & Student Experience)	As part of the Respect campaign theme for AY 2022-23, Celebrating Neurodiversity, one of the projects identified is Trauma Informed Practice and the Student Advice and Support Team are leading on this project. The team completed a workshop in January 2023 to work through a series of exercises and training information to review how trauma informed the team's approach, including a review of general spaces at City Campus as a pilot. The outcomes of the workshop are still being finalised, with a view to supporting other teams in completing the same exercise. Initially this will be with other student-facing support teams before rolling out further to the rest of the organisation to ensure NESCol takes a trauma-informed approach.

Area for Development (Developmental Driver)		Impact (intended difference to be made)	Planned Actions for Improvement	Deadline	Developmental Driver Code
11.	Need to further improve understanding and promotion of equality of opportunity and promotion of good relations in the curric-ulum	Better support the main-streaming of equalities in the curriculum by promotion of RESPECT/ equality initiatives and to support colleagues improve their understanding and practice	1. Appoint Equalities Champions	January 2023	EO5 HGIOC 1.3, 3.1,3.2 NF4 SO 4.9

Progress to date – interim evaluation February 2023 (Associate Vice Principal: Planning & Academic Partnerships)	The Respect subgroup of the Equalities Committee has led on promotion of the theme of neuro-diversity this year and the Committee has also considered the incorporation of the new National Equality Objectives into College outcomes. Activity has included discussion on supplementing current activity on equality mainstreaming. Feedback is being sought from groups of people with protected characteristics to help improve understanding and identify actions e.g. student LGBTQ+ group. A representative from People Services has also completed a piece of work involving mentoring in association with a disability charity. Curation of resources identified through this exercise is now underway so that these can be made more widely available. However, the appointment of Equalities Champions has been postponed whilst alternative approaches are being considered.

The College's annual self-evaluation process also requires Heads of Sector and Support Heads of Department to outline how they are meeting the general duty to eliminate unfair discrimination; promote equality and foster good relations between different groups. 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 area. Areas for improvement are built into the actions contained within each enhancement plan which is reviewed informally on a continuous basis and on a formal basis twice annually.

5.3. 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 and validation 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 department 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.

The Quality department has a designated Quality Hub, which provides guidance to staff across a range of quality activities. The Quality Hub has a range of video guidance available for staff, which also has captions/subtitles in place to cover diversity, equality and accessibility.

STUDENT CASE STUDY

SOCIAL CARE STUDENT - LEVEL 6 SOCIAL CARE

A SERIOUS VISUAL IMPAIRMENT THAT DEVELOPED DURING HER SCHOOL STUDIES FORCED A BUDDING ARTIST TO RECONSIDER HER FUTURE PLANS.

The supportive and nurturing environment at NESCol has enabled the student to pursue new opportunities and she has embraced the College experience.

The student explained: "I was a good student and enjoyed my time at school – until I started seeing changes in my eyesight at the age of 16. It started decreasing rapidly and doctors were unable to pinpoint what was happening for months.

"It affected my performance at school as I could no longer make sense of what the teacher were saying because I could no longer see what was on the board or even read my own notes. The school was unable to put in place suitable adaptations. My attendance significantly dropped as I did not feel supported through the biggest change in my life."

Social workers supported the young school pupil, who had dreamt of becoming a graphic designer, and encouraged her to pursue College qualifications.

She said: "The lovely social workers I was working with helped my transition from school to college. I studied art for a year. After taking time to consider my life path, I knew that I wanted to become a social worker. Because of all the people I had the pleasure of working with, I saw a real opportunity to make a difference."

THE STUDENT BEGAN HER SOCIAL CARE STUDIES AT LEVEL 4 AND HAS PROGRESSED TO LEVEL 6 AS SHE CONTINUES ON HER ROUTE TO HER CHOSEN CAREER.

She said: "I owe it all to the support I got from my lecturers and classmates. It is a caring and uplifting environment where everyone is given a chance to reach their highest potential. As a guide dog and white cane user, College has been the place where I could learn to build my resilience and grow as a person.

"I had my ups and downs as a student. Nevertheless, the help was always there. The Social Care course has shaped me into the confident, self-aware and positive person I am today. I would like to thank all of the students and staff members for making College a fantastic experience I will learn from and look back on for the rest of my life."

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. The exchange and sharing of information is now done securely via our Student Information Portal (SIP).

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, as set out in the Access and Inclusion Plan. This plan is currently being reviewed, ready to update and set out the approach for the next three years from 2024. 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.

Working in partnership with the Students' Association, all key documents including the Access and Inclusion Plan are also available in student versions which are more accessible to the wider student body.

EXAMPLES OF MAINSTREAMING IN STUDENT SERVICES:

6.1. Service Accessibility

All appointments with SAST are now bookable via the online booking system, promoted in marketing materials and on the student portal, MyNESCol. This makes seeking support and booking appointments with the team possible at a time and in a way which best suits the student. Appointments are available both in-person and online, and students are able to select the tutors which reflects a trauma-informed approach. Options for bookings also include SDS and other partners such as the local universities, to support transitions.

As part of NESCol's "Respect" campaign for AY22/23, Celebrating Neurodiversity, the team are leading on the project: A Trauma Informed Approach. A pilot workshop took place in January 2023 which has resulted in a series of actions and elements for further discussion. By the end of this academic session, the team will have a template and approach which can then be shared with other teams across NESCol to ensure as an organisation, we take a trauma informed approach.

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 continue 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 team also represent NESCol on various external groups such as CDN Networks for Access and Inclusion, Guidance and Safeguarding, and local groups such as the Aberdeen Champions Board and Aberdeenshire Corporate Parenting Strategy Group. These 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.

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. Current transition events are being reviewed as part of the Recruitment and Conversion Workstream to ensure the offer is fit for purpose and meets the needs of current and prospective students. Bespoke activities are arranged for more vulnerable groups. For example, in February 2023 Care Experienced Young People were invited to Fraserburgh Campus to attend taster sessions, get to know the campus and some of the staff. The event was very well received with 12 young people in attendance. Feedback was excellent with requests to offer more sessions like this, so this is currently being reviewed.

The promotion of support for Student Carers and Estranged Students has been enhanced over the past year to align better with that already offered to Care Experienced Students. NESCol has been successful in achieving the Going Further for Student Carers Award from Carers Trust Scotland and continues with the Stand Alone Pledge. All promotional material has been updated to reflect equal focus on all of these groups.

6.4. Mental Health and Wellbeing

The College recognises that mental health and wellbeing is a significant area of concern. This has been amplified following the pandemic and this is illustrated by Wellbeing referrals forming the largest category of student support referrals at 33%. In addition to the Mental Health First Aiders who provide support in the event of a mental health emergency or crisis situation, Student Wellbeing Advisers were also introduced to support the demand of student wellbeing need.

6.5. Digital Wellbeing Support

Although the SAST provide a variety of support to students during College opening hours, additional support, available to students out of hours and in a format that can be accessed online is crucial to the whole-college support model. NESCol moved to a new online mental health support provider, SpectrumLife in 2022. This digital wellbeing platform provides information, advice and support in areas such as physical wellbeing with online gym classes and nutrition and financial wellbeing with money management advice. Online support is available 24/7 via the Student Assistance Programme which can be access via a direct phone number, whatsapp or live chat.

spectrum .life

6.6. Counselling Service

The counselling service introduced in March 2020 has been a very welcome addition to the student support offer. Unfortunately this is the final year of funding for counsellors and as such we are required to transition to an affordable and sustainable embedded approach to mental health at NESCol. Student Wellbeing Advisers and Student Support Tutors will continue to utilise Spectrum Life and NESCol's Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit to signpost relevant support. There is currently a review of NESCol's Wellbeing Strategy including consultation with students, staff and stakeholder to inform and shape the future approach. Further developing partnerships with local organisations will be key to ensuring students are able to access the support they need, which will no longer be accessible directly at College.

6.7. Report and Support

NESCol's Report and Support platform continues to offer 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 is managed by the Safeguarding team.

7/ STUDENT 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 Office
- Activities and Events Office
- Environment Office
- 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 involves democratic elections form the whole class population and the Association ensures that the election literature it uses promotes equality and diversity.

In delivering training, bespoke materials designed by sparqs are adapted as necessary to make them accessible to all. The Association continues to work as part of the College's Wellbeing Matters Group as well as the "Respect" sub-group, which undertakes a key role in 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 Torcher Parade, PRIDE and Celebrate the Difference, working with a variety of key regional stakeholders and organisations.

The Student Partnership Agreement sets out the priority projects for the year and for AY22/23 there is a big focus on responding to the cost of living crisis. **www.nescol.ac.uk/college-services/students-association**

8/ STAFF EQUALITY

PEOPLE SERVICES

8.1. People Services

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 2021, the College carried out a Staff Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) Survey, in order 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**

Actions from this survey are being used to further mainstream and embed ED&I into all aspects affecting staff.

For example, the survey identified that further training and awareness on ED&I matters/protected characteristics were required, including those relating to: transgender; LGBTQ+; racism; disability (including hidden impairments); faith; mental health; unconscious bias

- **The results and comments from the survey were passed on to the Learning & Development team and were used to inform the Staff Development Day in February 2022, which focussed on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**
- **This Staff Development day was used to address any identified lack of recent ED&I training**

Further actions are being taken forward via the College's Equalities Committee. For example:

- **There is a need to create a more inclusive environment within the College, so that all staff feel welcomed & valued, irrespective of their protected characteristics and feel able to disclose their whole identity across all their protected characteristics**

In addition, in 2022, People Services participated in a Disability Connect Reverse Mentoring Scheme. The scheme assigns executives, managers, HR professionals (the mentee) with a mentor who has a disability. The mentor and mentee meet every month for six month and during this period, the mentor shares their unique insights and personal experiences of disability and the challenges of obtaining and maintaining employment. People Services has used this scheme to address disability-related actions identified in the ED&I survey as well as recruitment actions that were identified in its Staff Equality Profiles.

Further detail on actions that will be taken by People Services to further equality of opportunity are outlined in the Staff Equality Profile and in the Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Report. These reports will be published separately.

It should be noted that any actions for the People Services team are incorporated into a People Services Equalities Action Plan, and progress on the actions is monitored by the Human Resources Committee of the Board.

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

8.2. Staff Learning and Development

8.2.1. Induction

The College requires all new staff, teaching and support, to undertake an online course called "Equality & Diversity Essentials" as part of their Induction which takes place in the first few months' employment at NESCol. These messages are then contextualised within specific training courses, such as the "Prepare to Teach" programme undertaken by new teaching staff, which looks at meeting the diverse needs of learners.

8.2.2. Whole Staff Training

Our Winter Cross College Professional Development Day takes place in January. With 2021 being in the middle of the pandemic, an online selection of courses was offered to managers to book for their teams. Topics such as Mentally Healthy Workplace for Managers, Office 365 Accessibility and Wellbeing brought colleagues together to learn.

In 2022, a more themed approach was taken, albeit still online. The key theme for the day was Respect and Diversity. On the day there were 23 workshops, all based around equalities. Topics included awareness around neurodiversity, age, disability, gender, the Equality Act, men's health and mental health, race and religion, unconscious bias and managing inclusive cultures. In 2023 the theme was "neurodiversity" and staff benefitted from access to a range of online workshops on understanding neurodiversity as well as specific conditions, their manifestations and approaches to adjustments.

8.2.3. Training and Policy Developments

Training in Mental Health remains high priority. Student Support Tutors and other members of staff are trained in "Mental Health First Aid". "Suicide Prevention" training and "Mental Health: supporting others" were offered to all staff with many sessions throughout the year. Training for managers around recruitment, which covered discrimination in the recruitment process was offered in 2022. Work is ongoing to develop training on Menopause for managers, awareness sessions for all staff plus the development of a Menopause Strategy for 2023. A pilot project on Trauma Informed Practice was delivered with the Student Advice and Support team and this will be rolled out to other teams in 2023.

8.2.4. Wellbeing

Wellbeing remains a priority with a dedicated HR Advisor - Wellbeing working to ensure there is a programme of training opportunities for all staff. A staff and student working group called "Wellbeing Matters" looks at opportunities for training and events for all. There is a Staff Wellbeing Framework and Wellbeing Champions have been trained to support and signpost any staff in need of wellbeing advice.

Our June development day is 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 walking, swimming, cycling alongside pursuits such as baking, crafts, photography and music. Staff can suggest, plan and run their own session or take part in the wide range of sessions offered, from whole day activities, to short 1 hour sessions. The flexible nature of the day empowers staff to choose what is right for them.

9/ MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

The Marketing and Communications team has a key role in 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 supporting the promotion of the Respect campaign and its focus on reinforcing key values. In 2022 the Respect campaign featured a range of awareness months and in 2023 neurodiversity has been chosen as the key theme, supported by visible marketing across all campuses.

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 and 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. A suite of new case studies and photography has been developed for 2023 and that work will continue.

Enhancing the accessibility of College materials, both in relation to print and display as well as digital channels, is central to the Marketing and Communications team's work. A website audit has identified areas for improvement and those will be actioned in the 2022-23 academic year.

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

STUDENT CASE STUDY

HND STUDENT

NEURODIVERSITY HAS BEEN THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE RESPECT CAMPAIGN AT THE COLLEGE IN THE 2022/23 ACADEMIC YEAR. THE CAMPAIGN HAS NOT ONLY RAISED AWARENESS OF NEURODIVERSITY, BUT WAS ALSO USED AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE STAFF TRAINING THROUGH THE NESCOL WINTER DEVELOPMENT DAY.

This training has helped staff to better understand the needs of individual students - including those who present as neuro diverse without diagnosis, who are entitled to, and should expect, the same levels of support as those who do.

Those circumstances are demonstrated by the experiences of a student new to NESCol, who has debilitating social anxiety. The student has associated selective mutism and clear indication of neurodiversity, but no official diagnosis.

Throughout the initial weeks of block one, the Academic Tutor tried to establish rapport to gain understanding of the nature of the communication problem.

The student communicated frequently and at length in writing via email, but could not respond to the register call, even by raising a hand. In the first one to one, the student would not speak at all and could not even respond using body language.

Over time and with careful encouragement, the student seemed more comfortable and would stay behind at the end of class to speak to Academic Tutor one to one. The student started to open up and share their experiences which afforded valuable insight.

In addition to building trust with their Academic Tutor, the student was encouraged to access College support mechanisms. They attended wellbeing support sessions with the Student Advice and Support Team and an extensive programme of support through the external provider ACIS.

THE TRANSFORMATION IN THE STUDENT IS REMARKABLE. THEY HAVE MADE SECURE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS IN THEIR CLASS GROUP, WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN COMMENDED FOR THEIR SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AND INCLUSIVITY.

The student, whilst still anxious with new people, is beginning to engage in conversations, successfully completed a group task.

Continued work in the areas of confidence, trust and self-esteem are vital - but the approach at NESCol, changing the individual's perception of education and increasing their confidence socially, is addressing the significant impact of adverse school experiences.

In parallel with the social achievement is an impressive academic success story. The student has recorded As and one B in their graded assessments to date and is considered a strong candidate for an overall A for first year.

UPDATE ON EQUALITY OUTCOMES 2021-23

10.1. Existing Equality Outcomes

10.1.1 Equality Outcome 1: Disability Attainment Gap

Inequality

Students declaring a disability are less likely to successfully complete their courses than those who do not declare a disability.
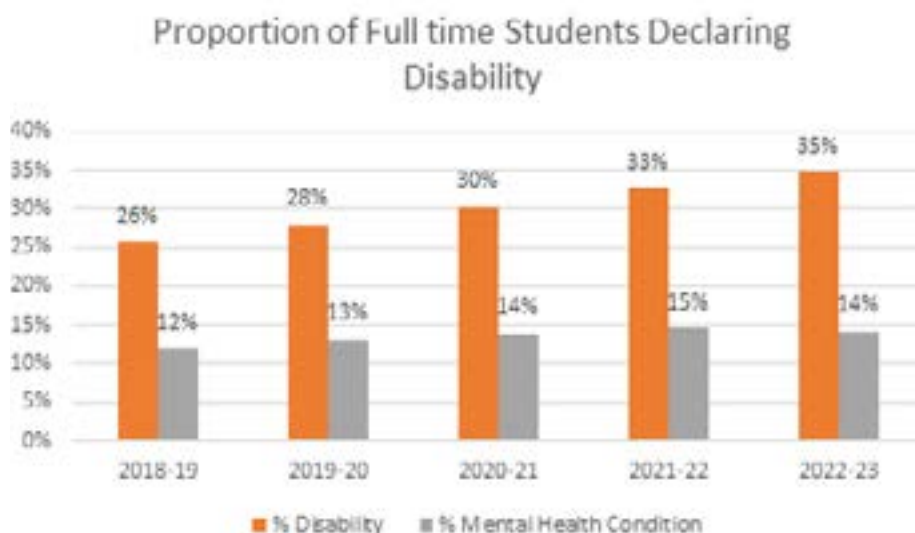
Outcome

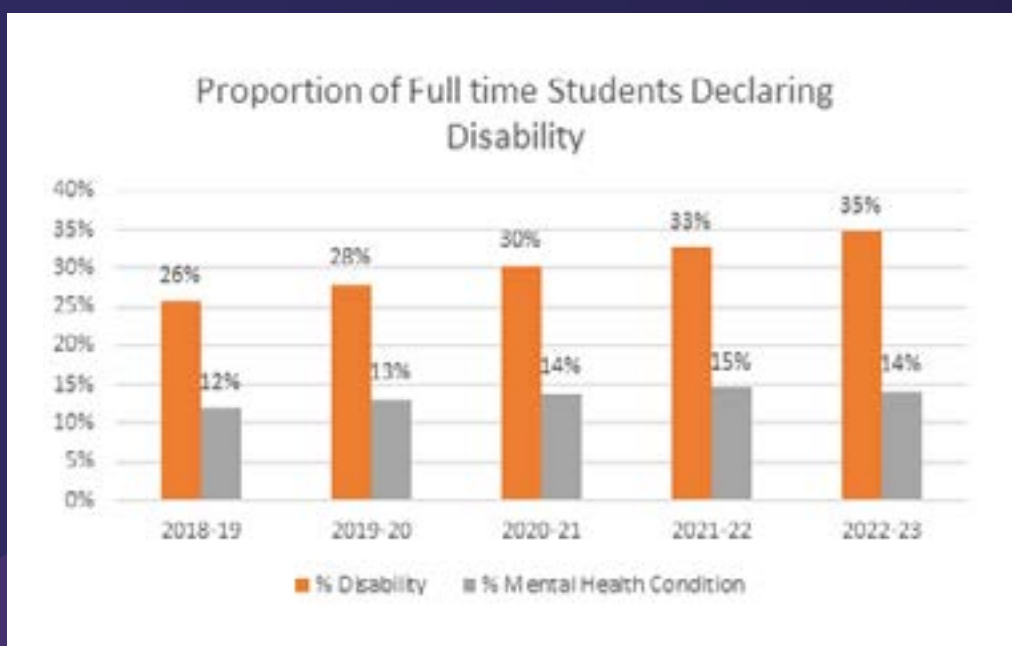Reduce the attainment gap for students who declare a disability

Action Taken:

- Provision of live data on enrolment, retention and attainment by protected characteristic, including disability
- Reporting on progress in year through "Stop and Review" and KPI meetings where equalities are referenced
- Additional staff development courses on neurodiversity to aid understanding and approaches to appropriate teaching strategies
- Provision of professional counselling services for students referred by curriculum staff
- Creation of additional support time on timetables for staff to spend on individual students

Progress made:

The proportion of students declaring a disability has continued to rise each year, with those declaring a mental health condition levelling off at 14-15% over the last 3 years.

Proportion of Full time Students Declaring Disability

The disability attainment gap was at a low of 6% in 2021-22, reduced from a high of 10% in 2019-20. However, retention and attainment for those with mental health conditions remains well below overall outcomes, at 11-14% over the same period.

Proportion of Full time Students Declaring Disability

A bar chart titled "Proportion of Full time Students Declaring Disability" showing % Disability (orange) and % Mental Health Condition (grey) across academic years:

Year	% Disability	% Mental Health Condition
2018-19	26%	12%
2019-20	28%	13%
2020-21	30%	14%
2021-22	33%	15%
2022-23	35%	14%

Further actions:

Although the attainment gap has reduced, further actions are planned in order to continue to tackle underlying contributors, in particular for those students declaring mental health conditions.

These actions include:

1. Gathering feedback from students declaring a disability on the application of reasonable adjustments
2. Correlating data on additional needs assessments and outcomes
3. Devising support interventions to deliver more widely on resilience and coping mechanisms

10.1.2 Equality Outcome 2: Biological Sex Representation and Success

Inequality

Representation and attainment rates of male and female students is unevenly distributed in some subject areas

Outcome

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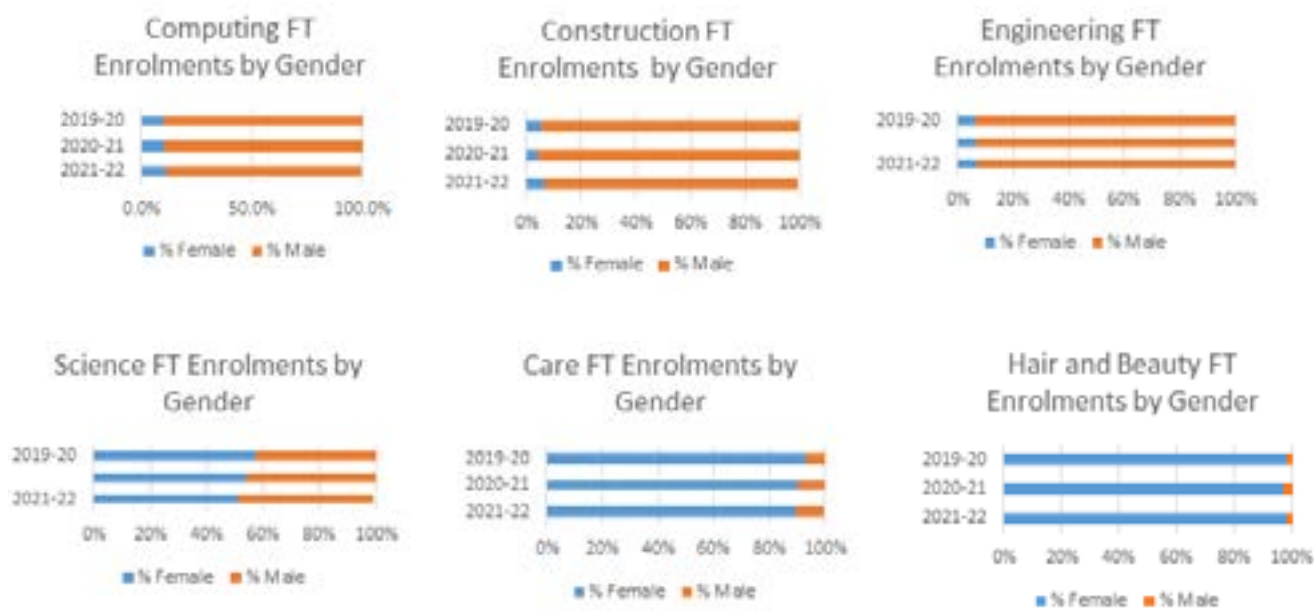
Action taken:

The societal influences on gender bias in subject areas have been well documented and multi-agency intervention is recognised to be necessary to tackle the persistent divide. Intervention through activity in schools and at events has been hampered since 2020 by pandemic restrictions. However, courses such as Girls into Energy have continued, as has the weekend Coding Club for school age children and marketing aimed at tackling gender bias. The College has also run Lego League events where restrictions have allowed and this is continuing in 2022-23. This international competition is inspirational and attracts people of all genders in STEM challenges. STEM partners are also involved in tackling inequality and the College has hosted promotional events with Techfest in 2022-23 with a view to inspiration across all genders.

Progress made:

Whilst there have been some minor improvements, gender representation in some subject areas remains stubbornly resistant to change.

Science overall shows good gender bias but there remains a gender divide between biological and physical sciences (females predominate in biological sciences and males in physical sciences)

Computing FT Enrolments by Gender

Construction FT Enrolments by Gender

Engineering FT Enrolments by Gender

Science FT Enrolments by Gender

Care FT Enrolments by Gender

Hair and Beauty FT Enrolments by Gender

However, where females are in the minority, they are performing better than their male counterparts in all areas except construction. 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 in these subject areas.

Cumulative FT Complete Success by Gender 2019-20 to 2021-22
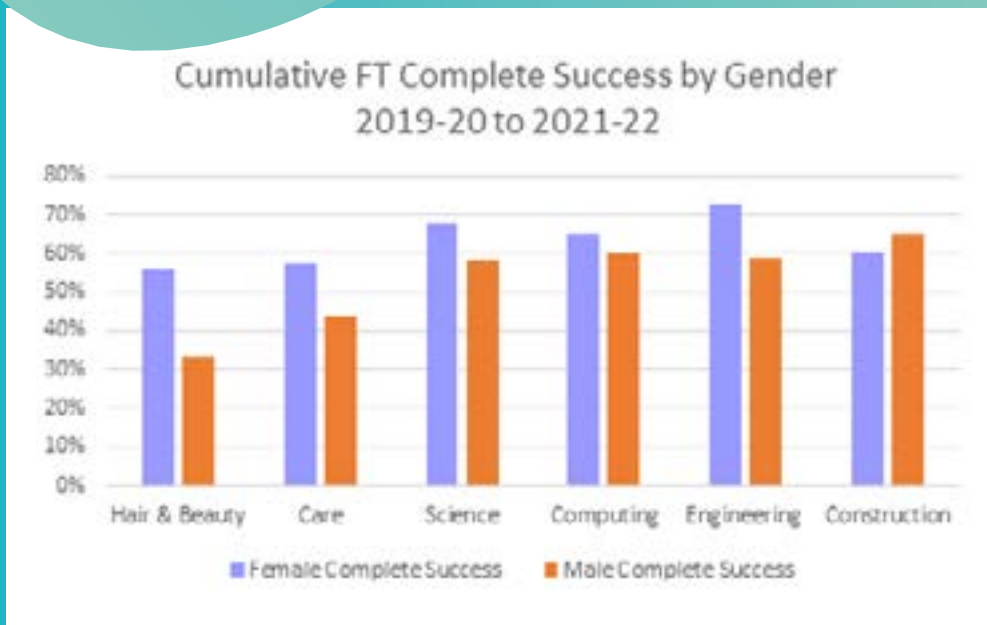
Further Actions:

Staff are now back to proactively working with primary and secondary schools and partners to promote opportunities, careers, skills in subject areas where there is a clear and sustained gender imbalance - for example, in Computing and Engineering. Work is also ongoing to re-engage with primary schools in science and computing.

The "Girls into Energy" programme which provides female S4 school pupils with opportunity to complete a Shell-sponsored Skills for Work Energy course is being expanded into schools in the Aberdeen City region. This, and the associated S2 engineering competition which is run for teams consisting of one male and one female, are intended to attract more females into engineering and other STEM disciplines.

Plans are underway to introduce a fulltime barbering course in 2023-24. This is expected to attract some more male students into hair and beauty, which is very heavily weighted towards females. The College is also active in partnership work through the SFC Pathways project in the region aimed at attracting more people into the health and social care. This will present some opportunity to attract some more males into this female dominated subject area.

10.1.3 Equality Outcome 3 : Digital Poverty and Literacy

Inequality

Digital poverty and/or literacy affects access to, and successful completion of, education and skills training for disadvantaged groups.

Outcome

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

Action taken

Digital poverty in the form of lack of skills and/or lack of access to digital resource is recognised as a significant barrier to education and employment for many groups of people. The College has worked individually and with partners to address digital poverty in a range of ways:

- Extension of its "bring your own device" scheme to additional groups of students. In 2022-23 this has increased the number of laptops issued to students to 1,224
- Provision of loan laptops to an additional 205 students who are not on "bring your own device" courses
- Provision of dongles to 29 students to support internet access
- Delivery of a "Digital Passport" programme, sponsored by Shell, to support digital literacy in order to remove a barrier to re-employment. The project funded participants who needed support with barriers such as childcare or transport to improve accessibility. Completing candidates were allowed to retain the laptop issued to them to take part in the course – ensuring a longer term solution for digital inclusiveness was provided.
- The Digital Poverty Fund has allowed provision of funding for students to access (if they require) print credit, WIFI or MIFI dongles or Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) tokens
- The Digital Poverty Fund has allowed the upgrade of PCs in classrooms and community based learning settings and acquisition of a larger fleet of loan laptops.
- Upgrading of the network, both WIFI and Ethernet (partially funded by the digital poverty fund) which has facilitated students to be able to connect and have a much better experience once connected enabling them to stay on campus for longer.
- Provision of SAD lights for the library for students to utilise

Progress made:

- 1,224 students have been supported by provision of 1,224 "bring your own device" laptops
- 205 students have been supported by the provision of a loan laptop
- 29 students have been supported by the provision of dongles
- 87 candidates have been supported by the Digital Passport scheme. The programme was well placed in terms of providing support for a paper mill closure which saw several hundred face redundancy. Digital literacy was highlighted as a major barrier to re-employment and being able to offer a programme within a couple of weeks of the closure, helped to reduce the impact.
- Financial support for students with respect to access to infrastructure and print facilities
- Access to therapeutic facility for those suffering from SAD (seasonal affected disorder)

Further Actions:

Significant progress has been made in accessing technical equipment and infrastructure for students but there is more which can be done to address digital literacy.

- The College will investigate opportunities to promote careers in digital technology to under-represented groups such as young women.

10.1.4 Equality Outcome 4: Community Partnership Working

Inequality

Access to, and attainment of, skills training and education is poorer for disadvantaged groups in the region, exacerbating poverty-related issues and limiting employment opportunities.

Outcome:

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.

Actions 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.

The College is represented on a range of community groups in the region with remits for tackling inequality. These include Community Planning Aberdeen Management Group and Board; four Outcome Improvement Groups – Aberdeen Prospers; Children's Services Board; Anti-Poverty Group; Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Group and a number of associated work streams (e.g. Attainment and Progression to Adulthood, Child Friendly Cities, Curriculum Alignment). It is also represented on Aberdeenshire Council Connected, Cohesive Communities Group. This enables to College to be informed and supportive, where relevant, of the regional plans.

The College currently works with Aberdeen City Council's Care Experienced Champions Board, and Aberdeenshire Council's Corporate Parenting Steering Board; Local Authority Social Care teams and Who Cares? Scotland to ensure that all care experienced and young carers are effectively supported to transition to the College so that their journey is a positive and successful one

The College is represented along with Aberdeen Foyer and Aberdeen City Council on the "Reboot" project (formerly Action Systems Change) to understand what needs to change in order to allow improved outcomes for young people who currently have unmet needs.

Partnership work is also ongoing with local authorities and third sector partners such as Grampian Region Equality Council (GREC) to provision ESOL courses and other potential educational support for refugee and asylum seeker groups in the region.

Progress Made:

- Success outcomes for the College's Full Time Care Experienced Learners has progressed as outlined below. The pandemic has impacted negatively on outcomes for all students but the attainment gap for care experienced students has grown during these years, reversing the progress made prior to COVID. The Care Experienced student population, in common with those in other colleges in the sector did not thrive during the COVID years. We did poll our Care Experienced Students early on in the pandemic to establish what type of support would be most beneficial to them. As a result we implemented: quarterly newsletters to keep them updated with supports and initiatives; promoted NESCol's "Named person" and implemented the peer support group, "Our NESCol SPACE". However, many students did not enjoy remote learning and found it difficult to engage. Some reported this was due to motivation and some reported that the longer the pandemic continued, the poorer their mental health and wellbeing became. Some reported they experienced reduced support more generally and they could not access their social worker or support workers in the same way as they normally would, which they found challenging. Despite the College's prompt implementation of access to IT and other general support they needed to be successful, the lack of the "familiar" structure and support was the main attributing factor to the increased attainment gap.

COMPLETED SUCCESSFULLY			
2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Care Experienced	59%	50%	47%	47%
Non care Experienced	68%	67%	61%	61%
Attainment Gap	-9%	-16%	-14%	-14%

All teams have all been offered "Corporate Parenting Refresher" Training at the beginning of session 22/23 with some teams requesting additional training to help them to understand and support their Care Experienced Students better. The Student Advice Centre Managers have supported the implementation of the "NESCol Forum" which includes the Student Support Manager; Student Funding Manger and Social Workers in Aberdeenshire. Every 6 weeks, we meet to facilitate Social Work bringing forward referrals from their caseload where they have concerns about attainment and engagement with College. This forum allows for swift action to be taken either by Social Work or by the College and is working very well in supporting our Care Experienced Students in the Shire. We have plans to request a similar approach be adopted in the City. It is hoped that this collaborative partnership with the Social Work Team, coupled with the enhanced training, awareness and return to normal service delivery, will see the attainment gap reduce again steadily over the next couple of years.

* The College has, in 2022-23, enrolled 32 asylum seekers and 141 displaced/refugee students on full time ESOL courses. In addition, 16 unaccompanied asylum seekers have been enrolled in a vocational/ESOL programme through a school link course. As well as the improvement of their language skills, the students have benefitted from additional support with learning and opportunities to integrate into the wider college community, raising awareness and promoting good relations.

• The college has, in 2022-23, enrolled 439 refugees and asylum seekers on part time ESOL courses. Some progress from these programmes FT ESOL and some want to learn general English to help secure employment or get a better job. Some students are also enrolled on Community learning courses in partnership with the local authority.

• The College continues to deliver significant activity through our partnership with Aberdeen Foyer. Prince's Trust programmes are delivered across the region for the 16-25 age category and the REACH programme is available for over 25 year olds. This is a personal development and employability programme for adults in recovery from various things such as addiction; mental health challenges; low confidence and long-term unemployment and helps them overcome the challenge that brings in terms of self-worth and confidence. These are individuals who would not have engaged with the college through the traditional route and so the partnership programmes help bridge the gap back to into education. Many students progress onto full time courses, some gain employment, some take up volunteering opportunities and others attend further study with the Foyer. We currently have 162 students enrolled on Foyer programmes in 2022-23, and a total of 214 were enrolled in 2021-22.

Further Actions:

• Working with local authority partners, the College will investigate how it may further support integration and education for more unaccompanied asylum seekers, including progression from language-based courses where this is applicable

• Working with local authority partners, the College will investigate how it may support opportunities for young people in disadvantaged areas with access to vocational learning during their school careers

10.2. Update on Other Actions

The College also identified 5 other actions in the 2021-25 report. Progress with these is outlined below.

1. Provide additional support to improve efficacy of EIA writing, evidence collection and evaluation.

2023 Progress: This has been delayed during the pandemic and with staffing changes in the relevant department but is ow being progressed.

2. Incorporate challenge questions for all teams to further develop understanding of mainstreaming equalities and diversity within their own teams.

2023 Progress: this has been developed and is being used by support 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.

2023 Progress: Staff development days have concentrated on equality themes in 2022 and 2023. These have included training on topics such as gender pronouns, neurodiversity and autism and have improved staff understanding and confidence in tackling equality themes and supporting students to succeed.

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.

2023 Progress: Some adjustments have been made, in line with SFC requirements, to collection of data on gender identity and ethnicity. Work has also been undertaken to clarify data on care-experienced students so that the type of care experience is noted. This will help student interpretation and understanding of the question and improve reliability of the data.

5. Introduce staff "Equality Champions" to help promote awareness and mainstreaming through all college teams and activities.

2023 Progress: a proposal for 2 champions was developed, along with associated role description. However, appointments have been postponed meantime whilst the college reconsiders how to best promote equalities efficiently and effectively.

10.3. Review of Outcomes and Incorporation of National Equality Outcomes

Following a review undertaken by the Equality Committee, it was considered that the College needed to retain all of the existing outcomes for 2021-25 and continue the good work in progress. However, the Committee also reviewed the National Equality Outcomes (NEO) - which were published in the SFC Report "Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together" in January 2023 - and how they applied to NESCol. The SFC report is attached as Appendix 1.

As a result, NESCol's equality outcomes have been revised to incorporate the relevant NEOs as shown in the table below. The table which shows the existing outcomes and those added as a result of the publication of the national outcomes. Full development and action planning for the new outcomes is in progress and will be monitored with oversight by members of the Equality Committee.

Outcome Reference	Draft Revised Outcomes	Protected Characteristic	National Equality Outcome
EO1	Revised: The attainment gap for students who declare a disability and, specifically who have declared a mental health condition, will reduce. Was formerly NESCol EO1: Reduce the attainment gap for students who declare a disability	Disability	The success and retention rates of college students who declare a mental health condition will improve.
EO2	Continue: The College will have regard to significant gender imbalances on selected courses and take action to address it. Was formerly NESCol EO2: Reduce the imbalance in biological sex representation and attainment rates in identified subject areas.	Sex	Institutions will have regard to significant imbalances on courses and take action to address it
EO3	Continue: Improve access to, and attainment of, education and skills training for those suffering from digital poverty and/or literacy. Was formerly NESCol EO3: Improve access to, and attainment of, education and skills training for those suffering from digital poverty and/or literacy.	Digital poverty and/or literacy	
EO4	Continue: 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. Was formerly NESCol EO4: 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	Disadvantaged groups	

Outcome Reference	Draft Revised Outcomes	Protected Characteristic	National Equality Outcome
EO5	New: Complete success rates for students aged under 19 will improve.	Age	The success rates for college students aged under 19 will improve.
EO6	New: Disabled students report feeling satisfied with the overall support and reasonable adjustments received, including from teaching staff, while on their course	Disability	Disabled students report feeling satisfied with the overall support and reasonable adjustments received, including from teaching staff, while on their course
EO7	New: Create an inclusive environment in the college so that all individuals feel safe and supported to be themselves	Disability	Disabled staff and students report feeling safe in the College
		Gender reassignment	Trans staff and students report feeling safe to be themselves in the tertiary system
		Sexual Orientation	Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual staff and students report that they feel safe being 'out' at university and college.
		Race	Staff and students feel supported and safe and are confident that complaints of harassment or bias on the grounds of race will be dealt with appropriately because complaints procedures are fit for purpose and offer effective redress.

Outcome Reference	Draft Revised Outcomes	Protected Characteristic	National Equality Outcome
EO8	New: Curriculum content and teaching resources are diverse and anti-racist	Race	Institutions should also have regard to attainment levels by racial group and ensure that their curriculum is diverse and anti-racist.
EO9	New: Students and staff report that they have confidence in institutional report and support mechanisms because they are fit for purpose.	Religion or Belief	Students and staff report that they have confidence in institutional report and support mechanisms because they are fit for purpose.
		Sex	Staff and students know how to access support about violence, harassment and abuse, report their experience and feel properly supported in doing so because the services are fit for purpose. Institutions can evidence approaches that prevent and respond to violence, harassment and abuse.
EO10	New: Men (staff and students) know how to access mental health support	Sex	Men (staff and students) know how to access mental health support (recognising intersectionality within that group)
EO11	New: Increase the diversity of the College Board so that disabled and racial representation is proportionate to the relevant population NB: Disabled staff representation and staff racial diversity is covered in the People Services Equality Action Plan	Disability	Where representation is not proportionate to the relevant population, increase the representation of disabled staff on College Boards
		Race	Where representation is not proportionate to the relevant population, address any racial diversity issues in college Boards

CONCLUSION

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 good progress with its 2021-25 Equality Outcomes, with measurable gains in outcomes 1, 3 and 4. Whilst there has been no measurable gain for Outcome 2 to date, this is a complex issue with long-term action in mind. The collaboration and in-person activity which this outcome needs has also been severely disrupted by pandemic restrictions but activity continues.

The College plans to maintain its 4 outcomes from the 2021-25 report but has also made plans to incorporate the National Equality Outcomes which were published in 2023. Planning is in the early stages but an initial outline is provided.

The College is also satisfied with its progress with mainstreaming equalities: the work of the Equality Committee; "Respect" campaigns; Student Advice and Support and of quality activities being integral to this strategy.

The College will continue to work towards mainstreaming equalities and the achievement of its Equality Outcomes. Evidence will be continuously monitored to identify areas for improvement which will enhance the achievement of its vision and values to provide an accessible, inclusive learning environment where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.