



INTERIM OUTCOME AGREEMENT AY2020-21

INTRODUCTION

North East Scotland College (NESCol)

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

The College's main (College-owned) centres of delivery are in Aberdeen (three sites), Fraserburgh and Peterhead with a number of leased community based learning centres across the region.

NESCol serves an extensive geographical area (Aberdeen City: 186 sq km, Aberdeenshire: 6,313 sq km), with its two main centres of delivery, Aberdeen and Fraserburgh, located 41 miles apart. College services are also provided in a number of the region's main centres of population outwith Aberdeen City: Ellon, Inverurie and Peterhead.

Further detailed information on the College, its courses and services can be accessed at www.nescol.ac.uk

Interim Outcome Agreement

This Outcome Agreement is for Academic Year 2020-21. It should be noted that this document is an interim agreement required by the SFC to capture, at a high level, the College's contributions, impact and outcomes, and to provide assurance on use of allocated funding in AY2020-21. This document has been prepared in-year, submitted to the SFC at the end of February 2021.

RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

North East Scotland College has taken and continues to take proactive steps in response to the ongoing public health emergency and national measures to control the spread of Coronavirus. The College remains committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all NESCol staff and contractors, students and visitors as well as the communities it serves.

The advent of the pandemic has accelerated the development of a more cohesive set of working practices for the Leadership Team. Consistently, levels of creativity, motivation and confidence within the Leadership Team have increased, with members keen to ensure that similar approaches are developed further across all College teams.

At the time of writing, the College's Leadership Team continues to virtually meet weekly to review the latest regional and national guidance and to enable the College to act swiftly to changing local and national circumstances. The frequency of Leadership Team meetings however has evolved over the duration of the Pandemic, with daily meetings held for the first few months. The use of technology, especially Microsoft Teams, has been key to the effective working of the Leadership Team to support communication, consultation and decision-making processes.

Access to all NESCol facilities has been restricted for staff, students and visitors since March 2020. The majority of employees have worked from home since March 2020, with a limited staff presence on campuses to carry out key functions. Restricted class groups have returned to face-to-face on campus teaching when Scottish Government guidance allowed.

NESCol's response to date and its ongoing response to the COVID-19 emergency is informed by extensive contingency planning. This approach has been valuable in enabling the College to take an agile approach to the measures being implemented nationally and also in relation to local restrictions and lockdowns in the region. From the outset of the pandemic the College's Executive and Leadership Teams adopted a project-based approach to scenario planning, with immediate, medium and longer term risks and actions identified by a number

of workstreams – Campus Access, Curriculum Delivery, Staffing, Communications, and Student Information, Advice and Support. This work continues to ensure that the College remains reactive to developments and any updated Scottish Government or Health Protection Scotland guidance.

Throughout the pandemic the College has been mindful of how critical clear, consistent and easily accessible information is in its approach to the continuity of the provision of teaching and support services, and in effectively supporting its staff and students. Key communication channels that continue to be utilised include emails, staff intranet, student portal, social media channels, the College's website, media stories and press releases, and 'Notes from the Principal's Office' – a weekly staff newsletter. The Leadership Team also hold regular 'all staff' webinars to provide updates on key developments, followed by Q&A sessions.

The College is also aware of the need to provide comprehensive guidance to staff and students in support of compliance with public health guidance, and remote teaching and working. The creation of detailed reference documents, new frameworks and dedicated sections on COVID-19, working/learning from home, and health and wellbeing on the staff intranet and student portal continue to aid consistency of message and the management of expectations.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement to enable the College to benefit from effective partnership working and to ensure that NESCol is addressing the immediate and expected longer-term local and national impacts of the pandemic. This includes engagement with Health Protection Teams, Scottish Government, Local Authorities, local universities, local schools, SFC, Colleges Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, and employers. The College has also found participation in a number of collaborative sector networks, both existing and those created in response to the pandemic, beneficial for example in terms of the sharing of good practice and consistency of approaches across the sector, and national scenario planning.

The following provides information on key aspects of the College's response, including some longer-term commitments and considerations:

Online and Blended Delivery

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the overall approach to teaching at NESCol. Despite the challenges that all staff and students have faced with the switch to online delivery many staff have engaged well with training and support that has been offered to them and embraced the use of new and innovative pedagogies. Detailed guidance has also been created that outlines a new, collaborative approach to curriculum design and online delivery, with all teams were supported to roll out this approach across all curriculum areas.

The use of digital tools and technologies such as Microsoft Teams, Collaborate, Wakelet and Turnitin has skyrocketed across the curriculum and many students are now benefiting from being able to access a rich blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning & teaching activities and resources online via the College's VLE, Blackboard.

There are, however, many staff who still need to develop their confidence and skills further to truly thrive in the blended and online world. The College also acknowledges that work is required to ensure all qualifications and teaching materials are sufficiently modern and high quality, and designed to be as accessible and inclusive as possible. To address this and the previous staff skills issue, the College will ensure that its refreshed Learning and Teaching Strategy, being prepared at the time of writing, addresses both the issues of pedagogy development, and co-design and instructional design/universal design for learning.

Throughout the pandemic, the focus of the College's Learning & Development Team has been to deliver online training in support of online and blended delivery. A new online training programme was created to mirror sector good practice, improve staff knowledge and understanding of effective online teaching, and provide opportunities to broaden skills and

confidence in using a range of tools and technologies. A large part of the programme was designed to raise staff awareness of the importance of creating inclusive programmes and materials.

Innovation in the Curriculum

The following provides some examples of innovation adopted since March 2020:

- The Hair and Beauty Team created a series of short demonstration films on a range of vocationally relevant techniques. These can be referred to by students at any time, but they are also used as a basis for teaching staff to refer to during live teaching sessions with discussion based on the recorded skills demonstrated. The Team has also arranged guest speaker sessions which have been recorded.
- Virtual workshops, involving industry specialists connected to the world of music, sound and performance, continue to be very popular with students. The College's Silvernote initiative has brought students together across a variety of disciplines to hear from professionals, and provides a platform for students to develop their own ideas about future collaborations.
- Business students across all levels have formed working groups to develop ideas for virtual enterprise projects. Many of these projects have linked with community groups who are fund raising for good causes.
- Curriculum Managers within Care Professions have become involved in established local and national networks relevant to their discipline. This has helped to raise the profile of the Team and the College and has opened doors for new opportunities. For example, in healthcare, conversations have centered around the need to develop new courses at SCQF level 5 and above relevant to Allied Health Professions. In childcare, the issue of a lack of placements has brought a number of practitioners together to petition providers and seek solutions. In social care, the College has been involved in discussions relating to new awards, registration with regulatory bodies and practices relating to adult protection.
- The Professional Cookery Team has been undertaking live demonstrations of practical cookery techniques. Staff working in isolation on Campus have been filming practical demonstrations supported by a second member of staff remotely managing live Q&A. This has allowed students to observe practical demonstrations as part of their learning experience and to receive instant feedback on questions during the session.
- Staff from the Scottish Maritime Academy worked with NESCol Multimedia colleagues to manufacture specialist equipment allowing large maps to be viewed online during virtual classes, contributing to the successful delivery of Class 1 Fishermen's training.
- Having initially postponed the College's leisure programme to create campus space for employability/economic recovery support programmes, online versions of courses have gradually been developed to help re-engage learners and created opportunities for social interaction.
- The Quality Team have created a channel in all Curriculum Team Microsoft Team Spaces providing an instantaneous messaging approach for staff to raise queries relating to awarding bodies, assessment, internal verification or any quality queries. This channel is monitored regularly to ensure queries are responded to timeously, or queries signposted to external stakeholders.

Curriculum Business Priorities

Once AY2019-20 was completed, focus shifted to modifying the curriculum portfolio in light of the changes to course/training/skills demand that have occurred within the region because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A large-scale curriculum business priority review is now underway to create a three-year curriculum roadmap that will ensure that NESCol's full-time and part-time course portfolio is employer-informed, co-designed with key HE and third sector partners, and meets the evolving needs of regional stakeholders.

In addition to prioritising the development of a portfolio that is skills-focused, the curriculum business priority review will also ensure the creation of a portfolio of qualifications and courses that address the other key priorities including, student co-creation, gender balance, equalities issues and widening access.

This work is also key in enabling the College to continue to respond to those recently becoming unemployed, young people entering the workplace as first time workers, those who have previously been furthest from the job market, upskilling, reskilling, and retraining.

Close working partnership established with both local authorities and partner schools has stood the College in good stead for the continuing challenges of the pandemic. There is, however a need to review and refresh the School Link offer in response to the impacts of the pandemic – many School Links qualifications have been vulnerable to COVID restrictions, with feedback indicating that there may have been reputational damage. At the time of writing, the College is also aware that a significant number of pupils who had been expected to leave school in Summer 2021 will now not be leaving which may have significant implications for the enrolments and future progression pipelines.

A project is also underway with Aberdeen City Council to review and innovate the senior phase. It is widely acknowledged (e.g. via the Phase 1 of the SFC Review) that there is too much duplication and not enough flexibility within the senior phase – the creation of an integrated school-college senior phase offer will be a priority for NESCol working closely with both local authorities.

Amendments to Course Provision

Linked to the above Curriculum Business Priorities project, the College is aware of the critical importance of continuing to engage with stakeholders to ensure that the course provision remains responsive to shifting needs of employers and industries.

The College's Business & Community Development Team continues to engage with employers in a number of ways.

- Throughout the pandemic the Team has continued to contact employers to offer upskilling and reskilling opportunities for existing or newly recruited staff, and this has been supported through an increase social media presence.
- The number of programmes the Team is now able to offer online has increased in response to the pandemic, an example being the Class 1 fishing training which was offered online for the first time, despite the reservations of a number of industry experts, with all candidates successfully passing all exams.
- Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF) programmes have also been moved to online delivery for a number of employers, including Mental Health Training, Conflict Management and Report Writing. In addition, a number of NESCol online CPD courses have continued to be offered to employers for their furloughed staff to participate in.
- The College continues to heavily promote the Apprentice Employer Grant to local employers.
- NESCol is engaged in a number of ongoing energy transition discussions with employers related to the Moray East Offshore Wind Project, carbon capture initiatives, and the region's future hydrogen strategy.
- Employers also continued to be engagement with through the College's support of PACE events in response to potential redundancy situations, and through an Offshore

Project Management Controls Group related to identifying opportunities for upskilling where there are recognised skills shortages.

Engagement activities also continue in relation to curriculum areas. Links have been maintained with employers through managing agents such as CITB, SNIPEF, SMTA and SECTT. This has been useful in keeping industry, employers and apprentices informed and updated with respect to delivery models, skills testing, deferrals and plans to catch up.

Given the likely delay in apprentice recruitment, early discussion has also taken place about late starts for MA-based courses and amendments to apprenticeship frameworks to allow training to commence prior to industry recruitment e.g. in construction.

Discussions have also taken place regarding use of digital technologies for submission and evaluation of work-based assessment where this is approved by awarding bodies and regulators.

Regular dialogue and meetings are taking place with awarding bodies to ensure required adaptations and mitigation to qualifications are communicated to curriculum teams to allow them to implement changes to meet the needs of stakeholder feedback.

Continuing engagement also enables the College to address specific needs identified by employers/industry, both short-term and longer-term, including adapting or shifting provision. Examples include:

- OPITO has been interested in using what the College has learned from lockdown to help redesign the apprentice programme to include a more blended approach for the delivery of theory elements.
- Some mandatory courses (such as personal licence holder refreshers) continue to be requested by employers to support the maintenance of licences. The College has adapted by offering online training, however assessments cannot always be accommodated online.
- Foundation Apprenticeship placements have continued to suffer as employers prioritise access to their premises. Customised units have therefore been provided where possible as a much-needed alternative for candidates (although this has not been possible for all frameworks).

Ongoing management of the work-based learning and practical aspects of course provision to ensure that students are prepared for the workplace is challenging given ongoing constraints due to the pandemic.

During the period early in AY2020-21 when campus access was possible, practical classes were run to enable skills training, with strict social distancing and other safety protocols in place. Some MA students are still able to continue in work, enabling their work-based elements to continue according to their employers' ability to keep activity going. Associated assessment continued under Tier 2 and 3 restrictions and where possible continues under Tier 4 where this can be undertaken online. Other access to placement and work-based learning has been halted under Tier 4 restrictions.

The SQA has reviewed the VQ aspect of Foundation Apprenticeship programmes and provided alternative approaches, where possible, to allow students to complete their programmes. The SQA has also provided alternative methods of assessments for some of the Care qualifications to mitigate the mandatory placement requirements.

Quality of the Student Learning Experience

The College developed a Framework for Curriculum Planning and Delivery in AY2020-21 at the start of AY2020-21, a one-stop-shop for teaching staff providing guidance and live updates from Awarding Bodies. The Framework covers: Online training framework; SQA updates and information; Curriculum management documents; Quality essentials; Academic tutoring and

student support; Review and redesign of courses and assessment; Programme delivery guidelines countdown teaching calendar, and Classroom tips & advice. The Framework resource is instrumental in achieving a standardised approach to delivery, assessment and student support. The implementation of the Framework and use of the College's Quality Enhancement Handbook are currently being reviewed in order to inform approaches for AY2021-22, taking into account lessons learned and best practice.

Academic Tutoring is a vitally important function within the College as it plays a crucial role in helping to deliver a positive student experience, encouraging positive attendance and ensuring that all students are enabled to achieve their full potential as successful learners, ready for transition to future learning, life and work. AY2020-21 saw the introduction of a new Academic and Personal Skills Development Unit which was created to further enhance the scope of the Academic Tutoring function introduced as part of an enhanced whole-College approach to student support (further information on this Unit is provided on the next page).

NESCol's Student Information Portal (SIP) provides a student dashboard allowing curriculum and support teams to share information and work in partnership to support students, including monitoring attendance and engagement. At the time of writing, work is ongoing to improve functionality to ensure students can access all required support.

Student engagement is key to ensuring that NESCol continues to provide a high quality student learning experience, especially during the ongoing period of a blended/online learning model. Engagement has been monitored directly by interaction in classes and in individual tutorials, but also via reports showing log-ins to the College's VLE. Tutors are also recording interactions on our Student Support Information System so that progress can be monitored and any necessary referral for specialist support can be made.

The AY2020-21 First Impressions Survey sourced valuable qualitative and quantitative feedback. Results were shared with curriculum and support teams, with additional action plans created to resolve issues identified for areas that received 85% satisfaction or lower. These plans include the sourcing of further student feedback to help identify improvements to their learning experience.

At the time of writing, 19 Student Focus Groups have taken place covering a range of themes: Student Induction; Learning and Teaching; Student Support; Students' Association, and the College's Respect Campaign. Improvement actions and good practice are shared with curriculum and support teams, followed up by the Quality Team to ensure actions identified have been addressed. Students are updated on actions implemented from the outcomes of the focus groups.

Student Support

As a result of COVID-19 and the requirement for remote service delivery, the Student Advice and Support Team has developed a new model of delivery to allow a responsive approach to curriculum and student demand, as well as a more creative and proactive approach to student engagement and support provision through initiatives and events. The Student Advice Centre Teams have also developed a more collaborative approach, with the consolidation of existing frameworks into one Framework for Supporting Successful Students. This framework covers Academic Tutoring, Student Support, Safeguarding and Mental Health, Student Funding and Attendance and Engagement Monitoring.

Academic and Personal Skills Development

For AY2020-21, the College introduced a new 3 credit unit to all full-time FE students at SCQF level 4, 5 and 6 - Academic and Personal Skills Development Unit (SCQF Level 5). The unit focuses on the development of transferrable skills which include core skills, meta-skills such as self-management, social intelligence and innovation, and the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence. It has been designed to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and skills development, focusing on their own personal, educational and

career goals, which is especially important in current circumstances and online/blended learning. The unit is delivered by Academic Tutors who tailor delivery to suit the target group, contextualising content to the relevant industry/sector. Feedback to date indicates the unit is having a positive impact upon the confidence of new and progressing learners in light of negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The unit is also expected to contribute to improvements in retention and attainment in AY2020-21.

Student Health & Wellbeing

The College's Student Advice and Support Team is critical in providing a number of services and mechanisms in support of student health and wellbeing. Due to the continuing requirement to work remotely an increased use of technology has enabled the Team to remain accessible to all students. The Team does however also continue to facilitate face-to-face appointments and on campus in-class support where necessary.

Key to remaining accessible was the introduction of a new online booking system - Microsoft Bookings is a scheduling application available within the suite of Office 365 packages and as such, can be readily accessed by students on a range of devices, making seeking support and booking appointments at a time and in a way that best suits them. In addition, links to the system are available via social media platforms, so appealing to a significant proportion of our student demographic who engage with the College using this medium.

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

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

The College's Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit was updated at the start of AY2020-21 and moved to a much more suitable format in Articulate Rise, creating a course for students to work through. This was also incorporated into the Academic Tutoring materials available for both FE and HE students. The Toolkit includes advice and guidance but also signposts events and a range of useful links to support for mental health and wellbeing.

Togetherall is a digital mental health support service which is available online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is completely anonymous so students are able to express themselves freely and openly under the supervision of professionally trained Wall Guides. The Guides are there to monitor the community to ensure the safety and anonymity of all users. The service is also available to all staff at NESCol.

A Student Counselling Service is provided by ACIS Student, with appointments predominantly offered via Microsoft Teams with minimal issues, but with alternative formats offered where required. In response to demand a third counsellor has been recruited, to commence post in March 2021, allowing ACIS Student to increase their capacity for student client sessions lowering the waiting time from Initial appointment to starting sessions. In addition, the third counsellor will increase service coverage to Monday-Friday.

In January 2021, SFC announced additional funding dedicate to Student Mental Health and Wellbeing, and NESCol was awarded £46,000. NESCol intends to use the funding in the following ways:

- To recruit a Mental Health Support Officer (or equivalent) to provide additional resource to support and further develop current student support mechanisms. This will include identifying emerging mental health issues, implementing initiatives (in conjunction with current Student Advice & Support Team and the Students' Association) to support student wellbeing and to develop materials for incorporating into the recently introduced Academic and Personal Skills Development unit delivery by Academic Tutors. This would be a fixed term post.
- To further develop engagement with vulnerable groups (incl. Care Experienced, young carers and estranged students) through proactive initiatives to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. There will be a particular focus on social activities to reduce feelings of isolation, and will be done in collaboration with the Students' Association who have also received additional funding to support students.

In February 2021, the College launched its new Report and Support platform to provide a practical mechanism to raise awareness and educate staff, students and visitors about discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010. Reports can be made anonymously, or by contacting an advisor and the process will be managed by the College's Safeguarding Team. An e-learning module has also been available to all staff and students on Gender Based Violence. This module was created by Rape Crisis Scotland to give a brief introduction and raise awareness of this very important issue – something which has been magnified due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Although this module is not mandatory for students in AY2020-21, the plan is to incorporate it into the Academic Tutoring resources for AY2021-22.

Staff Health & Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of its staff has always been a key priority for NESCol. The ongoing public health emergency has led to introduction of a number of new approaches and initiatives which have further strengthened the College's commitment.

NESCol achieved the Investors in People (IIP) Health and Wellbeing Standard in Spring 2019. Prior to the College moving to remote teaching and working in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, work had already begun on improving the College's approach to wellbeing in response to improvement actions identified from the College's first year audit by IIP in Winter 2019.

With the onset of the pandemic, the delivery of the actions and introduction of further initiatives increased in terms of priority. Since March 2020, the following developments have occurred:

- Appointment of a new Occupational Health Provider
- Appointment of a new staff Benefits Provider
- Establishment and launch of an Employee Assistance Programme.
- Expansion of the Health and Wellbeing section on the staff intranet - access to support, guidance, health and wellbeing training resources
- Staff Wellbeing Surveys (analysis identified further improvement actions)
- Online discussion forums and staff information sessions
- Peer support programme with mentors provided with coaching skills training
- Programme of social and wellbeing activities
- Virtual Wellbeing Day
- Health and wellbeing challenges
- Health and Wellbeing Staff Bulletins
- Virtual Time to Talk Day
- Training, including Mentally Healthy Workplace Training for Managers, Resilience Training for Managers, Gender Based Violence Training, and Safeguarding Training.

At the time of writing, further initiatives under development include the creation of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the creation of a Health and Wellbeing Group, and a longer-term programme of events and challenges.

The College's overall approach to staff health and wellbeing will continue to be reviewed in terms of uptake and positive impact to both support staff during the pandemic but also to continue to further strengthen longer-term provision of support. In January 2021, the College underwent its second year IIP review with feedback received that NESCol has "significantly stepped up the promotion of its wellbeing agenda."

IT

The College's ITTS service has responded well to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic with swift transition to a virtual or hybrid model supporting home working, and an online/blended learning approach. The pandemic has in fact proved a very effective catalyst in materials development and, in particular, online assessment. Since August 2020 and the adoption of a blended learning model, this has developed further and curriculum staff have been supported in delivering courses in accordance with the provided blended learning framework.

Infrastructure changes and addition hardware has also been required to enable all staff and students to access digital learning. These developments and ongoing learning associated with evolving delivery models are identifying good practice and the continued review of lessons learned will ensure learning and teaching at NESCol will be significantly enhanced in subsequent years.

Regional and Sector Engagement and Collaboration

The College's participation in a number of regional and sector networks and discussions has contributed to the College's overall response to the pandemic, providing opportunities to share good practice and to work in partnership to address ongoing challenges and potential future risks. These networks and forums include existing pre-pandemic ones and some that have been convened to address pandemic related issues. Some examples are noted below:

- College Principals Group
- Vice Principals (Curriculum) Group
- CDN Finance Directors Network
- CDN Business Development Directors Network
- CDN Communications Group
- CDN HR Development Network
- CDN MIS Network
- CDN Quality Network
- College Health & Safety Community of Practice
- Higher Education Communications Group
- North East Scotland branch of the Institute of Occupational Safety & Health (IOSH)
- Scottish Colleges Information Leaders (SCIL) group
- HEFESTIS CISO Share Service

In addition, the College is also involved in various Scottish Government and Colleges Scotland briefings and ongoing sector scenario planning. Engagement also continues with key external partners regarding the national response to the pandemic, for example, the SFC and SQA, and the local response, for example, local authorities education teams.

In addition to operationally responding to the COVID-19 emergency, NESCol has sought to contribute to addressing the external economic impacts of the pandemic. Some examples are provided below:

Aberdeen City Council Socio Economic Rescue Plan

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

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

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

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

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

The four actions are longer-term than the lifetime of the Socio Economic Rescue Plan which was concluded at the end of March 2021. In support of this, the College requested funding from Aberdeen City Council to extend the reach and impact of the joint promotional campaign to highlight to the regional workforce options to increase employability in response to changing circumstances. Funding was also requested to recruit a Regional Economic Recovery Project Coordinator to work with external and internal stakeholders to ensure the College maintains a comprehensive understanding of regional need and College capability for upskilling/reskilling. This role will coordinate related NESCol project activity and leverage funding opportunities.

New Year, New Skills, New You

Partners from across North East Scotland are working together to enhance access to learning, training and business start-up support in 2021. The initiative is linked to action 4 in the above table.

The campaign brings NESCol, Robert Gordon University (RGU) and the University of Aberdeen together with national agencies, business organisations and community groups.

The partnership includes Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, Aberdeenshire Council, Business Gateway, Aberdeen City and Shire, Elevator, Opportunity North East (ONE), Skills Development Scotland and the Aberdeen Employability Training Providers Forum.

The initiative is raising awareness of advice and support is available to all – school leavers taking first steps towards employment or an adult considering a return to education and training with a view to upskilling for career progression or retraining to enter a new sector.

As part of 'New Year, New Skills, New You' NESCol launched a fully funded selection of online courses available to anyone who can commit to two hours of study a week as part of the College's 2021 part-time and distance learning programme. The programme has been developed to provide skills for employment, including personal and professional development, to enhance career prospects through working towards and gaining accredited qualifications and skills.

Leading the initiative has also enabled the College to expand its reach for the promotion of full-time courses for AY2021-22 and opportunities to access Flexible Workforce Development funding.

Future Skills Partnership

The Future Skills Partnership is a collaborative initiative between ONE, CodeClan, NESCol, RGU, SDS, The Data Lab and University of Aberdeen. The purpose of the Future Skills Partnership is to up-skill the thousands of people across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire who we know will benefit from expanding their already-significant talents with digital capability.

The Future Skills Portal is a single source platform to capture all educational information, news and events directly accessible within one place to help the regional workforce better understand what is on offer and where to access it. The design of the portal is such that it draws its data directly from the institutions' websites ensuring that the information is always up-to-date.

This initiative arose from ONE Board discussions where the desire to develop a digital based economy for the North East was agreed, with a key aspect of this linked to the promotion of the range of Digital skills being developed at NESCol and the two local universities.

NESCol is now also involved in additional project with ONE and the two local universities, Digital Launch Pad with a company called Udrafter. The project aims to link up new business with digital students, providing opportunities for internships/paid work experience or 'real-life' commercial project work. It is hoped that this will contribute to building digital capacity and a digital reputation for the North East of Scotland, retaining digital talent in the region and attracting new business.

Partnership Working with Robert Gordon University (RGU)

The College and RGU have committed to an intensification of partnership arrangements between the two institutions to ensure the establishment of an industry, and student-led sustainable skills infrastructure within the North East that is agile and responsive to the challenges currently facing the region, and opportunities of the future.

This intensification - which builds on 20 years of joint working - will see RGU and NESCol remain fully independent but work in close partnership, removing competition to deliver demand-led, skills aligned and sustainable learner pathways. Intensifying this partnership now will enable NESCol and RGU to engage ambitiously to support Scotland's education-led economic recovery, bringing expertise in advanced partnering with employers, substantial experience of work-based learning and commitment to learners of all ages. The partnership will focus on both ends of the learner journey and will address themes such as curriculum portfolio design and delivery, enhanced articulation and widening access.

The progression of this initiative is a key priority for both institutions with tangible targets regarding progress to be agreed and monitored. Various initiatives are to be established which will deliver better progression pathways; responses to emerging and future skills needs of the region; more efficient, targeted and shared curriculum planning, design and delivery and better student and stakeholder experiences. It is hope that in the near future the partnership will be able to access, from SFC, transformation funds that will further accelerate its activities.

In addition to the specific examples above, the College will continue to contribute to regional economic and social renewal through its continued participation in a number of forums:

Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs)

The College's work within the region's CPPs continues to evolve positively and far stronger relationships have been established, by NESCol representatives, within the two CPPs. The College is represented on the following:

- Community Planning Aberdeen Board and Management Group
- Community Planning Aberdeen - Integrated Children Services Board
- Community Planning Aberdeen - Aberdeen Prospers
- Aberdeenshire Community Planning Board
- Aberdeenshire Community Planning - Tackling Poverty & Inequalities
- Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership – Connected & Cohesive Communities
- Aberdeenshire Employability Partnership
- Aberdeen City Care Experienced Champions Board
- Aberdeenshire Corporate Parenting Steering Group
- PREVENT and CONTEST Multi-agency Groups
- Aberdeen City Attainment & Progression to Adulthood Group.

Economic Forums

NESCol also plays a significant role within the Regional Economic Strategy Group and is the only local tertiary sector provider at its meetings. In addition, the College has been involved centrally in the delivery of both the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Action Plan and associated Regional Skills Strategy Action Plan.

The College continues to influence the work of the RESG and has been involved in developing a 'refresh' strategic position for the RES in order to address the immediate and longer-term economic challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Principal also represents the College on the Opportunity North East (ONE) Energy Board and Aberdeen City Council's Transformation Management Group. Consequently, the College is positioned well to ensure that it plays a significant part in the evolution of the region's skills agenda as partners seek to address the nation's NET Zero 2045 ambitions as well as the region's commitments to transition the economy from oil and gas to energy.

The College also co-chairs with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP). This entity was established with the approval of the Regional Economic Strategy Group and is charged with the delivery and implementation of the Regional Skills Strategy.

The work of the RLSP was suspended during 2020 in order that partner organisations, mainly the region's education providers, were able to focus on the emerging difficulties created by the global pandemic. At the time of writing, discussions are due to take place between the College and SDS which aim to ensure that the RLSP remit, terms of reference, membership and the skills strategy itself adequately reflect what is needed to shape both the region's economic recovery and reform.

COMMITMENTS TO KEY SECTOR PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

The following aims to demonstrate NESCol's contribution to the key sector priorities as identified by the SFC:

Fair access and transitions

The College is committed to delivering accessible pathways to younger people. The College will, in relation to the wider Learning and Skills Journey, continue to ensure that school pupil pathways across the educational landscape are well-aligned, accessible, flexible and easily navigated. In turn, leading to greater cost-efficiencies, lack of duplication and learner journeys that move at a pace consistent with learner capacity.

Whilst the College has always been sector-leading in its range and success with articulation links, the next phase of this development is now underway. In partnership with Robert Gordon University, it is now sharing its plans to further integrate tertiary education in the region, including development of new regionally developed provision, closer collaboration with schools and joint marketing to ensure a coherent message to young people.

The College's Access and Inclusion Plan and Corporate Parenting Plan highlight the College's commitment to support improved outcomes and progression to positive destinations for care-experienced students and to ensure that their College journey is a positive and successful one. This includes working with a number of external agencies, including the two local authorities and two local universities, to support transitions and signpost students to the support services available to them. NESCol supports a nationwide project, MCR Pathways, by allowing staff to be involved as mentors for Care Experience school pupils across the region and facilitate College taster sessions across a range of curriculum areas.

The College will continue to provide a safe and Inclusive environment for all learners and while campaigning on behalf of all learners will seek to ensure that on-going awareness raising is conducted in respect of those within the protected characteristics groups, and including those from deprived areas, and the care experienced.

At the time of writing, the College has committed to, as part of its approach to equality mainstreaming, to strengthen the equality impact assessment process to ensure reviews are more consistent and thorough and that evidence is used to inform and evaluate progress.

Quality learning and teaching

The College provides a wide range of high-quality education and training opportunities to meet the needs of individuals, communities and employers across the region in a flexible, engaging and accessible way.

Through use of the HGIOC (How Good Is Your College) framework and the annual self-evaluation and enhancement planning process, staff from curriculum and support teams are encouraged to engage in meaningful evaluation of their impact on the learning and teaching experience and to identify required improvements.

Maintaining the quality of learning and teaching has been a priority of the College's response to the pandemic. As such, feedback from students and stakeholders enables continuous quality improvements to be implemented. The College is also committed to ensuring that lessons learned, especially from online and blended learning models adopted, are utilised to enhance the learner experience and to increase the number of students who successfully achieve their chosen qualification in AY2020-21 and beyond.

Learning with impact – students are equipped and ready to take up appropriate employment in the future

NESCol's curriculum is shaped by its vision to drive and support innovation and economic recovery and prosperity, raise aspiration, create success, promote diversity, fairness and opportunity for all, whilst ensuring the development of 21st century skills across the region.

Course design and review is central to the provision of the right learning in the right place. With the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic this is a shifting scene and so flexible and responsive planning is essential. To that end, the College is undertaking an extensive Business Priority review to ensure resources are directed towards the most relevant and successful subject areas to ensure that students are provided with relevant skills and knowledge for careers in the changing world. Work with partners in local authorities and regional universities also ensures that flexible entry and exit points are available, providing a selection of learner journeys which enable wider access and equality of opportunity.

Meeting future skills needs, including upskilling and reskilling

The College has developed strong, collaborative relationships with partners and employers through ongoing activities within Community Planning Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire Community Planning and the Regional Economic Strategy Group, supporting the College to be responsive to the needs of the region.

NESCol is aware of the importance of using labour market intelligence to align its provision to areas of growth in the region and in support of pipelines of skilled people for key industries where skills gaps have been identified. This is even more crucial for helping the College to evolve to meet the needs of a changing job market in the North East of Scotland, which has not only been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic but has also been affected by Brexit and further downturn in the oil and gas industry. The College's current Curriculum Business Priorities project will be evidence based and informed through engagement with key regional stakeholders to ensure the College continues to play its part in upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce in support of regional economic recovery.

Student participation and engagement in their educational experience

The College is committed to providing students with a range of meaningful involvement and enhancement opportunities that can be recognised as impacting upon, influencing and enriching their overall College experience.

The College has in place an established Framework and Toolkit to Advance Student Engagement which aims to ensure that students have their voice heard and valued, and influence their educational experience. The Framework is overseen by the College's Student Engagement Action Group.

A number of quality related mechanisms also provide effective opportunities for students to contribute to quality improvement and enhancement activities – these include focus groups, surveys, course committee meetings and peer-led reviews.

Since 2018, the College has had an agreed Partnership Agreement in place with the Students' Association (SA). The Agreement documents the commitment to work in partnership to achieve shared priorities to promoting student engagement in shaping quality improvement initiatives; developing the SA to engage effectively in the life and work of the College; and reviewing and reshaping resources to collect student feedback. At the time of writing, to reflect upon the challenges COVID-19 presents for a partnership approach to safeguarding the student experience, the College and SA are creating a tailored, short-life Partnership Agreement (June to November 2021).

Equalities and inclusion

NESCol strives to support people from a wide range of backgrounds to access a high-quality educational provision and ultimately improve their positive destinations in life.

The College continues to seek to ensure that as an organisation it creates - year-on-year - a more equal, diverse and inclusive learning and working environment for students and staff alike where everyone is respected, valued and supported.

NESCol is committed to offering a curriculum that provides opportunities for those who can benefit from education and progress onto further education and/or employment. The College seeks to provide opportunities that are accessible to people irrespective of socio-economic status and the various protected characteristics. Providing access includes the provision of dedicated courses where appropriate (e.g. learners with additional needs) and/or providing additional tailored guidance and other support (e.g. care experienced). Consideration is given to meeting the needs of specific groups of learners (e.g. hard to reach, additional needs, care experience) when planning the curriculum offer.

At the time of writing, the College is preparing its Equality Mainstreaming Report for publication in April 2021 and has also identified four Equality Outcomes to be addressed over the period 2021-26. These Outcomes relate to the disability attainment gap, biological sex representation and success, digital poverty and literacy, and community partnership working.

Also at the time of writing, work has commenced on improving the College's approach to equality impact assessment to ensure that the needs of the diverse student body are considered in every aspect of the student experience. This work includes awareness raising, additional training and guidance and the review of equality impact assessment documentation.

High quality research and innovation

A college culture in which innovation can flourish and economic growth is supported continues to be developed and embedded at NESCol.

The College believes that research is essential in solving grand social and economic challenges, and given the contribution that colleges make to the national economy, and their role as civic-anchors within their region; NESCol is supportive of a direction of travel to encourage more high level research and analysis focused on the college sector, enabling the creation of richer and more sector-specific guidance to support the delivery of evidence based practice.

With so much innovation within colleges in relation to pedagogy due to the ongoing pandemic, student support and the delivery of blended vocational training it seems an opportune moment to establish mechanisms that enable sector level research to be commissioned and managed internally by the sector.

NESCol expects to be at the heart of the economic recovery in North East Scotland, offering innovative practice and ideas to help new and existing businesses succeed. This will include working closely with agency partners, and specifically Elevator UK, to support business growth locally

Responding to the climate emergency

NESCol is committed to environmental sustainability, where the needs of the present do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The College is committed to continuous improvement and through implementing an Environmental Management System the general management of environmental performance in the College has been greatly improved benefiting both staff and students. All NESCol campuses are fully accredited with the Environmental Management System (EMS) bsi ISO14001.

The College is very aware of its educational, organisational and social responsibilities; therefore in promoting environmental sustainability through ISO14001 the College promotes knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable all staff and students to make decisions relating to the impact of their actions on the environment. All staff and students are encouraged to act in ways that promote a sustainable environment through reducing, reusing and recycling and implementing safe and ethical disposal procedures.

By implementing its Environmental & Social Sustainability Strategy, the College aims to be a leader in sustainability. As NESCol is a signatory to the Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland (UCCCCfS) and the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges' (EAUC) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Accord it recognises the importance and relevance of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Through the EAUC the College has also agreed to complete the Sustainability Leadership Scorecard (SLS).

At the time of writing, the College is in the process of finalising a new 5-year Carbon Management Plan (CMP). The new Plan will allow the College to build on successes and ensure it continues to deliver the benefits of this programme over the years. The College will reduce CO₂ emissions from its activities by 50% from the 2018-19 baseline by 2025. The College is also extremely mindful of Carbon neutrality and will continue to work towards having a net zero carbon footprint, in line with Zero Waste Scotland's five key steps to identify the most effective ways to reduce our emissions by doing things differently.

The College continues to be a leader and innovator in environmental and sustainability issues, demonstrated by progress year-on-year towards its sustainability targets. NESCol also contributes well to national and international goals. For the future, the College will continue to identify areas where it can make significant positive impact in the area of environmental sustainability.

AY2021-22 AND BEYOND

The College's current Strategic Plan concludes at the end of July 2021. Given the current challenging circumstances and the number of unknowns the College will be preparing a 'lighter touch' Strategic document for the emergency years (AY2021-22 and AY2022-23). This document will however include reference to some longer-term ambitions, including the key ambition to be the best College in Scotland by 2025. A fuller 5-year Strategic Plan will then be developed, in part through service design workshops and a programme of consultations, for AY2023-24 onwards.

NESCol's new strategic documents will have cognisance and improved alignment to the SFC's new Outcome and Impact Framework.

APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO ASSESS IMPACT

The SFC Outcome and Impact Framework on the next page refers to the expectations and the national measures related to each priority outcome referred to in the previous section.

In line with SFC guidance, the College is committed to maintaining, wherever possible, the levels of performance as in its AY2018-19 baselines

College Outcome Agreement Impact Framework: Supporting Data

		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Measure								
A	Credits Delivered (Core)	132,327	137,897	135,312	135,125	130,069	131,296	129,770
	Credits Delivered (ESF)	0	3,898	2,881	1,140	2,154	2,433	2,235
	Credits Delivered (Core + ESF)	132,327	141,795	138,193	136,265	132,223	133,729	132,005
B	Volume of Credits Delivered to 10% most deprived postcode areas	6,257	6,587	7,130	2,928	2,813	2,597	
	Proportion of Credits delivered to 10% most deprived postcode areas	4.7%	4.6%	5.2%	2.1%	2.1%	1.9%	2.1%
C	Volume of credits delivered to care-experienced learners	16	982	1,314	1,210	1,296	5,332	
	Proportion of credits delivered to care-experienced learners	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	0.9%	1.0%	4.0%	1.0%
D	Number of senior phase age pupils studying vocational qualifications delivered by colleges	154	277	425	553	567	802	567
E1	Proportion of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Full time FE)	61.9%	67.4%	66.2%	66.6%	64.8%	61.8%	64.8%
	Number of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Full time FE)	2,459	2,800	2,649	2,704	2,663	2,564	
	Total number of FTFE students	3,973	4,152	4,001	4,058	4,112	4,151	
E2	Proportion of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Part time FE)	62.2%	71.1%	71.2%	69.0%	72.4%	73.4%	72.4%
	Number of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Part time FE)	5,481	4,142	4,156	3,018	4,118	4,223	
	Total number of PTFE students	8,809	5,827	5,837	4,371	5,687	5,753	
E3	Proportion of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Full time HE)	72.0%	77.1%	75.0%	74.1%	72.0%	70.4%	72.0%
	Number of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Full time HE)	1,884	2,101	2,135	1,953	1,772	1,703	
	Total number of FTHE students	2,616	2,724	2,847	2,634	2,460	2,402	
E4	Proportion of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Part time HE)	82.8%	80.1%	80.1%	79.5%	71.8%	66.9%	71.8%
	Number of enrolled students successfully obtaining a recognised qualification (Part time HE)	1,293	1,245	1,025	744	599	467	
	Total number of PTHE students	1,561	1,554	1,280	936	834	68	

Measure		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
F *	Number of students achieving an HNC/D qualification articulating to degree level courses		600	673	817	772		
	Number of students achieving an HNC/D qualification articulating to degree level courses with advanced standing		411	485	528	453		
	Proportion of students achieving an HNC/D qualification articulating to degree level courses with advanced standing		68.5%	72.1%	64.6%	58.7%		58.7%
G *	Total number of full-time FE college qualifiers (in confirmed destinations)	2,268	2,517	2,467	2,550	2,527		
	Number of full-time FE college qualifiers in work, training or further study 3-6 months after qualifying	2,042	2,322	2,220	2,415	2,377		
	Proportion of full-time FE college qualifiers in work, training or further study 3-6 months after qualifying	90.0%	92.3%	90.0%	94.7%	94.1%		94.1%
	Total number of full-time HE college qualifiers (in confirmed destinations)	1,030	1,177	1,269	1,171	1,065		
	Number of full-time HE college qualifiers in work, training or further study 3-6 months after qualifying	850	1,069	1,109	1,125	999		
	Proportion of full-time HE college qualifiers in work, training or further study 3-6 months after qualifying	82.5%	90.8%	87.4%	96.1%	93.8%		93.8%
H **	Percentage of students overall satisfied with their college experience (SSES survey)	-	90.6%	90.9%	N/A	93.3%	N/A	93.3%

*This information was not available at the time of writing

**Due to the pandemic, the sector did not undertake an SSES Survey in AY2019-20