



# Newbattle Abbey College

Colaiste Abaid a'Bhatail Nuaidh

## Outcome Agreement 2023-24



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## **1. Context**

Newbattle Abbey College has a proud track record of meeting the needs of adults and young people at points of transition, helping them change their lives for the better. The college operates under a Governing Deed of Trust, the Trustees of which have historically included the Principals and Vice Chancellors of Scotland's ancient universities. We receive core funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as a specialist college in recognition of our unique nature and contribution, which currently amounts to approximately 54% of our total income. The balance of our income is generated through a portfolio of funding and through commercial activities, the income from which is invested back into our curriculum and infrastructure to support our purpose.

In 2022-23, the College addressed the financial pressures created by rising costs and diminishing core grant funding. The action taken has placed the College in a stronger financial position going into Academic Year 2023-24. However, the financial challenges are set to continue, and the College is aiming to further secure its financial stability through maximising non-SFC income sources to ensure its educational provision continues to thrive and have impact.

## 2. Fair access and transitions

We will build on our success in attracting and supporting students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to our access programmes. Many of our students are referred to us from partner organisations, including social services.

Our entire curriculum (discussed in section 4) and our approach to supporting students is focused on providing and promoting fair access and supporting transitions. The demographic of our students, their high success and progression rates and our curriculum offer demonstrate our strong response to the fair access and transitions agenda.

The College is committed to contributing to the Commission on Widening Access target of 20% of entrants coming from the 20% most deprived postcodes by 2030. In accordance with the Commission's latest recommendations, the College will set its own measures, in discussion with SFC and consistent with its unique context, to ensure progress is made.

In 2022-23, nearly one-third of our students were from a care experienced background and 50% declared a disability, while 5% came from the 10% most deprived postcode areas. All students who successfully complete the College's HNC/Associate Degree programme progress to Queen Margaret University with advanced standing. We will ensure our work on fair access and transitions continues throughout 2023-24.

- Working with Who Cares Scotland and Women's Aid, we will provide whole-college training to upskill our staff on corporate parenting, domestic abuse and trauma-informed practice to further enhance our approaches to supporting students in transition.
- We will continue the active discussions with Midlothian Council on collaboration to support their *Pathways* programme and wider curriculum development plans. The Council are reviewing their school curriculum to improve opportunities for all young people, and have identified the College as an important partner in that aim.
- Our Forest College will provide further *Prescribe Nature* programmes, in partnership with Women's Aid, to support women who have suffered domestic abuse. Funding from the Midlothian Shared Prosperity Fund will support a further programme in 2023-24.
- We will review our curriculum offer against demand and need, to ensure it remains responsive, relevant and valued.

## 3. Quality learning and teaching

The college continues to provide a very high-quality, safe and supportive learning environment that enables our learners to succeed. During The Education Scotland Annual Engagement Visit (AEV) in May 2023, Inspectors found that rates of learner success for all modes of study are better than national performance levels. They also found that staff offer flexible timetabling and a family-friendly approach to planning learning, and that they respond well to the increase in demand for mental health support. These approaches help

our students to remain on, and be successful in, their programmes of study. This is further evidenced by the improved success rates for students on full-time further and higher education (FE and HE) programmes in 2022-23. The majority of the College's students study on full-time FE courses.

**Newbattle Abbey College - Successful completion rates over time:**

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Sector benchmark (2021-2022) <sup>1</sup>
Full-time FE	54.3%	66.0%	62.8%	77.8%	59.0%
Full-time HE	73.7%	80.8%	61.5%	77.8%	62.5%

We are also seeing increased progression within college programmes. In 2023-24, the majority of students enrolled on the Associate Degree programme have progressed from the SWAP programme: two of these started as students on the Rural Skills programme before progressing to SWAP.

Student engagement across all college activities is high, reflecting our commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive learning community. In 2023-24, 23% of our students hold positions on the Student Representative Council (SRC), actively contributing to decision-making processes within the institution. Our collaboration with sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) further bolsters student engagement by providing training and support to students, empowering them to shape their college experience. A unique aspect of our college culture is the daily lunchtime gatherings where students and staff come together over a meal of free soup, bread, and fruit. This initiative not only addresses the challenges posed by the cost of living crisis but also fosters an environment where staff-student relationships flourish. Furthermore, this close-knit community dynamic extends to our college-level committees, where students actively participate and influence tangible changes in college policies, procedures, and operational practices, ensuring that the student voice is integral to our continuous improvement efforts.

During 2023-24:

- We will strengthen our formal processes for collecting, monitoring, and responding to student feedback, aligning them with sector best practices to drive continuous improvement in learning and teaching quality.
- We will invest in the ongoing professional development of our teaching team, introducing targeted training and resources to enhance teaching methodologies and support diverse learning needs.

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<sup>1</sup> College Performance Indicators 2021-22 (SFC, 2023)

- We will introduce a peer observation scheme, building a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.
- Using data from our new Management Information System, we will identify learners at risk of low attainment or withdrawal and ensure that they receive appropriate support to succeed.
- We will work with our Student Representative Council and the wider student community to co-develop a programme of student wellbeing and student support sessions. By nurturing the well-being of our students, we will create a solid foundation for learning.

#### 4. Coherent learning provision

Our current curriculum reflects and responds to the demand for further and higher education from adults and young people at points of transition in their lives. We are seeing increasing demand from people who are dealing with multiple challenges, including learners from a care-experienced background.

##### **Proportion of credits delivered to care-experienced learners at Newbattle over time:**

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
0.0%	7.1%	1.4%	15.3%	15.7%	22.1%	30.0%

Many of our learners tell us that they would not have applied for a course at another college, or that they have previously been unsuccessful in a larger college environment.

Our curriculum currently comprises the Preparation for Further Education course, enabling people returning to learning or leaving school to find their feet before choosing their next steps; the Rural Skills programme, for which there is an increasing demand; our Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) that provides a route into higher education for adult returners; the National Certificate (NC) in Social Science which runs alongside our SWAP programme; and the Associate Degree programme delivered via our long-standing partnership with Queen Margaret University (QMU), providing direct entry into second year of a number of the University's degrees.

Our Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards (FOLA) provide skills and leadership qualifications across SCQF levels 2 to 8, and our Adult Achievement Awards (AAA) enable adults to gain accreditation for their learning and achievements in a range of contexts. Both FOLA and AAA are delivered across Scotland by accredited centres, including other colleges, universities, local authorities and third-sector organisations. Six schools are now accredited FOLA delivery centres, including three of the six secondary schools in Midlothian. Our Forest College runs *Prescribe Nature* and other transition-focused programmes, often in partnership with other organisations. We have invested in a new post to refresh the Adult Achievement Awards and drive growth in the number of organisations adopting it.

Our commitment to providing a seamless educational journey extends beyond our college walls, as we actively collaborate with partner institutions to facilitate a smooth transition for our students from our college access programs to university studies. To ensure the success of these transitions, we maintain close ties with widening participation teams at our partner universities, including those dedicated to care-experienced students, student-parents, and disabled students. At each progression institution, we proactively seek a designated point of contact, fostering a network of support to ensure that our students experience a seamless transition into higher education. Additionally, we extend invitations to our partner universities, encouraging them to visit our college and actively engage with our students during university open days, thereby providing valuable insights and support to further enhance the educational journey of our learners.

During 2023-24:

- We will review our curriculum offer against demand, and within the challenging operating environment, to ensure that it stays responsive to need, relevant and valued. The review will involve partnership and stakeholder engagement and reference to relevant data and intelligence.
- We will revise our Semester 2 'Preparation for FE' programme, reflecting on outcomes and feedback from previous years, to ensure the offer in 2023-24 responds better to the demand and provides an effective preparation for further study or employment.
- Taking account of the rising demand for, and success of, our Rural Skills programme together with the constraints of available funding, we will review how best to ensure the demand is met and progression from the programme supported.
- We will take forward the next phase of the Forest College and FOLA development: a key focus of this will be to use the success of the YPG-funded activity of the last two years to encourage more schools to adopt FOLA as part of their curriculum. We will continue discussion with Midlothian Council with a view to establishing a model of how FOLA can be embedded in the school curriculum at a local authority level, and the benefits to young people.
- We will explore with our partner QMU how the Associate Degree programme might evolve in light of the implementation on Next Generation HN awards to ensure it provides an effective progression to a sufficiently wide range of QMU degree programmes.
- We will explore with a number of our university partners the potential for further Associate Degree provision.
- We will refresh our AAA and increase the number of accredited centres and award registrations.

## 5. Work-based learning and skills

The college's distinct offer, environment and approach prioritises personal development to enable people to fulfill their potential, in work, life and further study. Career and progression opportunities are highlighted throughout our curriculum, and wellbeing and is promoted and developed through guidance and learning support. Progression to further study or employment for learners completing our programmes remains very high, and universities receiving our students speak highly of the readiness of our graduates for academic study and progression. The Rural Skills programme develops a range of vocational and employability skills. Our estate provides rich and varied opportunities for learners to develop rural skills and gain an insight to estate management.

While our access courses and Higher National Certificate (HNC) programs primarily focus on preparing students for progression into further study, we support the development of skills that are not only relevant to academic pursuits but also to the world of work. Our curriculum is designed to equip students with valuable skills that are applicable in both educational and professional contexts, ensuring they are well-rounded individuals prepared for various challenges. As an anchor institution in Midlothian, we take an active role in community planning and collaborate closely with the local employability partnership. Through these partnerships, we effectively guide our students toward employment opportunities, reinforcing our dedication to their holistic development and successful integration into the workforce.

- The curriculum review, referred to in section 4 of this report, will explore further opportunities to enhance and/or include work-based learning and skills as part of the student experience.
- We will look to extend our partnership with the University of Edinburgh's estates department to provide work-placement/experience to our Rural Skills students, including the potential for our students to progress to Modern Apprenticeships with the University.
- Archeology Scotland's headquarters are now hosted within the college and we will work with the organisation to identify collaborative projects that deliver work-based skills.
- We will develop a memorandum of understanding with Skills Development Scotland, and work in partnership to ensure that our students know how to access appropriate support and opportunities.
- We will work with third sector organisations, such as Volunteer Midlothian, to signpost students to appropriate opportunities and to provide voluntary and work experience opportunities within the college
- We will collaborate with our community partners to facilitate meaningful work experience opportunities within a college team, enriching our students' practical learning experiences.



## 6. Net zero and environmental sustainability response (1 page)

The shift to net-zero remains challenging due to the nature of the college's historic estate and its classification; i.e., outwith the public sector for the purposes of net-zero grant funding. Continued capital and maintenance grant funding from SFC enabled the college to effect changes and improvements that contributed to improving energy efficiency. Previous works include upgrading the boiler heating and hot water systems, installation of thermostatic valves, and installation of LED lighting, replaced insulation in main Building and Residences.

The carbon dioxide emissions of the main house are 339kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

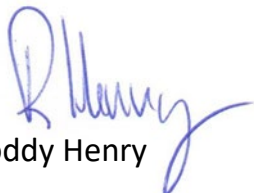
In 2023-24:

- We will continue to explore funding sources to install double-glazing in the Main Building and Residences and explore other ways to increase fuel efficiency. We will seek support, for example through Business Energy Scotland, to scope out potential developments/improvements to move towards net-zero.
- Supported by SFC, we will engage with EAUC to further support our strategy on sustainability and a whole-college response to the climate emergency.
- We will continue to embed sustainability in learning and teaching, through the curriculum review, and in particular through our Rural Skills programme and Forest College activities. We will embed sustainability and a response to the climate emergency in our Student Partnership Agreement and the work of our Student Representative Council.
- We will continue to support the work of partners, such as the local voluntary environmental group *River Fly on the Esk*, and host Edinburgh Council's Forest Kindergarten.
- We will continue to source and procure resources locally as much as possible; our suppliers regularly come from the local and immediate area, including the college-managed Business Park on our estate.
- Net-zero and environmental sustainability will continue to be prominent in Board and Board Committee discussions, and feature on the college's Strategic Risk register.

**Outcome Agreement between Newbattle Abbey College and the Scottish Funding Council for AY 2023-24**

**On behalf of Newbattle Abbey College**

Signed:

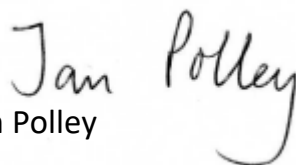


Print name: Roddy Henry

Position: Principal and CEO

Date: 30 October 2023

Signed:



Print name: Jan Polley

Position: Chair

Date: 30 October 2023

**On behalf of the Scottish Funding Council:**

Signed:



Print name: Karen Watt

Position: Chief Executive

Date: 15 January 2024