

# OUTCOME AGREEMENT SELF-EVALUATION REPORT 2019-20



## INTRODUCTION

The 2019-20 academic year was a year of two very different parts, before and during lockdown. It started positively with 400 students taking part in our *Interrupt19* digital conference to learn about new technology developments from leading industry experts – the first large-scale digital conference of its kind in Scotland aimed specifically at college computing students. It was a festival for students run by students, with HNC Events students organising the event to the standard of commercial industry conferences, and HNC Media and Communications students capturing the proceedings on digital and social media.

Our events students helped run The Gathering 2020, the biggest annual event for the third sector in Scotland hosted by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. Three professional cookery students were awarded Hospitality Industry Trust Scotland scholarships and forty competed in UK cooking competitions, winning multiple awards.

Marie Todd MSP, Minister for Children and Young People, visited our new forest classroom (the first in a Scottish college) in September 2019 to learn how we are integrating outdoor learning into our childhood practice curriculum, and about our initiatives to encourage males into early years. Through the forest classroom and applying their learning with children from local nurseries and primary schools, hundreds of our students gained vital skills that make them extremely employable.

The excellence of our students and staff was acknowledged through being invited to represent the sector at national events and write features in the Times Education Supplement. SVQ Social Services graduate, and co-founder of Aid and Abet, Kevin Neary spoke about adverse childhood experiences at the Colleges Scotland parliamentary reception. One of our hospitality lecturers and two Level 5 professional cookery students spoke at the College Development Network national conference, *Enhancing the Student Experience: Enabling Attainment*, about how international work placements help improve student attainment. And, our childhood practice curriculum team co-presented a workshop with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) at the *UK Men in Early Years* conference and at a sector event in Stirling.

In response to West Lothian Community Planning Partnership's call to action to partners to tackle the global climate emergency we held a whole-college sustainability summit in March 2020. On that day all staff and students set aside normal activities and focused on generating ideas on how we could reduce our carbon footprint. It included a mini-conference featuring TedX environmental speakers, a marketplace where sustainable businesses showcased their products, and activities to help staff and students to identify ways to make the college more sustainable. At the summit, we announced that the college was now single-use plastic free and that we had secured five electric bikes for use by students and staff.

The college continued to develop and enhance strategic partnerships with employers, for example with the Winchburgh development project, Morrison Construction and life sciences company, Catalent. Many large-scale STEM events (some aimed at addressing gender imbalance) with primary and secondary school pupils took place over the year in partnership with the Developing the Young Workforce regional group, local companies and charities such as SmartSTEMs.

External recognition of excellent practice over the year included one of our Project Search graduates receiving the Young Achiever Award at the NHS Scottish Health Awards, winning the College Development Network's Marketing and Communication Award for our first virtual open day held during lockdown and receiving the Innovation in STEM award at the 2019 PIONEER Awards for our STEM Olympics initiative with West Lothian schools. The college also received commendation awards at Education Buildings Scotland 2019 for our forest classroom, and the 2019 Scottish Digital Business Awards in recognition of new digital learning courses for children's hearings panel members.

Education Scotland reviewed the college's performance against our *2018-21 Enhancement Plan* in a progress visit in November 2019 and concluded that positive progress is being made on all actions.

Student feedback from the previous year heavily influenced the allocation of college resources in 2019-20, for example we invested in a second high-specification cyber security lab. Three further priorities were identified in 2019. First, although students recognised and welcomed the major investment made by the college in 2018-19 in digital infrastructure, there were still some computers that needed to be upgraded, the WiFi connection was poor in some parts of the campus, and there was a lack of computers available for loan. In response, we upgraded our WiFi network, updated classroom computers and audiovisual equipment, and made significant investment in laptops for staff and students.

Second, engineering students were concerned that they needed to travel off site as the required facilities were not available on campus to support their courses. Responding to these concerns, we put in place plans to double workshop space and install welding booths. Unfortunately, lockdown halted this project in March 2020. It has resumed in the current academic year and, pandemic permitting, these facilities should be in place by April 2021.

Third, students told us that our library was not big enough, that there are no flexible learning spaces for individual or group work, and no quiet spaces to study. There is increasing evidence on the impact that physical spaces have on students' learning experience and attainment. Flexible learning and collaborative spaces that make the most of educational technology enable the physical environment to accommodate different learning styles. Our twenty-year old campus was never designed for the volume of full time students we now have. Neither was it designed to support adaptable in-between learning spaces in our buildings.

Refurbishment of the ground floor of our main building is planned for summer 2021 to create a modern learning resource centre and flexible, technology-enabled learning spaces. The small budget we have identified for this work, consisting mainly of the £158,000 available due to the loan break agreed with SFC, will support refurbishment but not the expansion of learning spaces our students require. This budget is at risk due to the costs of the expansion of the engineering and construction workshops being higher than anticipated. **We have asked SFC to consider providing further in-year capital funding to the college to ensure both projects meet the needs identified by students.**

## REFLECTION ON PERFORMANCE DATA

It is important that the following figures and analysis are understood in the context of the impact of the pandemic on student retention, success and progression, which has been significant, Comparisons with previous years need to be heavily caveated.

### Recruitment

Demand for courses in 2019-20 was strong at 7,964 enrolments and continues to be so in 2020-21 with 100% recruitment to full time courses. An increasing proportion of full time students live in West Lothian and the college continued to be the top destination for school leavers in West Lothian. Continuing the trend of increasing demand for places, we saw an increase in full time FE and HE enrolments, and in part time HE enrolments. The decrease in part time FE enrolments was a direct result of the lockdown caused by the pandemic.

The demand for part time courses, in particular work-based qualifications, was interrupted by the lockdown at which point there was a precipitous drop in enrolments. Despite this, the college delivered significant levels of work-based learning. We supported 900 employees in 200 companies to undertake SVQs, we had 261 modern apprentices in training including 149 new starts, and, through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund, we worked with 25 companies to train 1,279 employees. Continuing our commitment to the Developing the Young Workforce agenda we increased the number of foundation apprenticeships with 184 students enrolled from schools across West Lothian including 134 new starts. Over the year we trained 2,215 children's hearing panel members across Scotland.

### Retention

Student retention improved in all modes except FEPT, with particular progress made for students on HE courses where we also saw an increased number of enrolments. Retention for female students improved significantly across all levels and modes (apart from FEPT), in particular HEFT. However, male retention decreased significantly on full time courses, particularly at FE level. Students most at risk of withdrawal were 16-19 year old males studying full time STEM HE qualifications, although males aged over 25 studying part time STEM HE qualifications were least at risk.

### Success

Despite five months of lockdown, 77.8% of students completed their course successfully, a decrease of 2.5 percentage points on the previous year. While the decline in student outcomes is disappointing, the breakdown by curriculum area reveals that overall the number of subjects experiencing a decline in performance is matched by subjects delivering an improvement in performance.

Overall, completed success rates for HE students increased although they decreased for FE students. The main contributing factor in the decrease in successful student outcomes was an increase in partial success. Despite the efforts of staff to switch to online delivery following lockdown, 1,280 students were unable to complete their courses and were deferred. FEFT students were most impacted by deferrals. If all full-time deferred students had completed their qualifications

successfully, completed success rates for FEFT and HEFT would have been almost in line with 2018-19. At 62.3% of all deferrals, male students were impacted significantly more than females, and 56.4% of female deferred students were over 25 whereas 63.2% of male deferred students were aged 16-19 years.

Students undertaking practical, vocational courses were most impacted as they could not complete the practical components of their qualifications. The curriculum areas affected most were construction, engineering, motor vehicle, beauty therapy and hairdressing.

The decline in FEFT success was due to a significant increase in partial success, although the withdrawal rate remained essentially the same. For FEPT, the decrease in success was due to an increase in withdrawals, although the success rate was the second best performance over the last ten years. HEFT success dropped by 1.6 percentage points due to a significant increase in partial success, although the withdrawal rate was the lowest in ten years. Successful outcomes for HEPT were the best for eleven years.

Success varied by demographic factors such as age. For example, successful outcomes for students aged 16-19 decreased over the year in all modes apart from HEPT. As slightly more than half of all FEFT students (52%) and 45% of all HEFT students in 2019-20 were aged 16-19, these decreases were a significant factor in overall full time success.

## PERFORMANCE TO OUTCOME AGREEMENT TARGETS

### Credit Target

In 2019-20 the college delivered its highest ever number of credits, 45,831 against a target of 44,752, and continued to exceed our credit target as well as meeting additional non-consolidated credits reallocated by SFC during the year.

### Outcome Agreement Targets

Our Outcome Agreement (OA) volume targets for SIMD10, care experienced, BAME and senior phase students were all met, in fact exceeded:

- For the third consecutive year there was a higher volume and proportion of credits (8.7%) delivered to students living in the 10% most deprived postcodes
- Continuing a three-year trend, a higher proportion of credits was delivered to care experienced students (5.1%) and a total of 180 students identified as care experienced
- The proportion of credits delivered to BAME students (4.2%) continued to increase
- The number of senior phase age pupils studying vocational qualifications at the college in 2019-20 was the same as the previous year, but the overall number of school pupils on college courses increased.

Reflecting changes to our curriculum portfolio the proportion of credits delivered to students on STEM courses increased to 25%, again exceeding our OA target.

## Success

Analysis of overall KPIs on student success is included in the previous chapter. The following summarises information for priority groups:

- Overall, successful outcomes for students living in SIMD10 areas decreased over the year from 78.28% to 70.9%. FEFT outcomes of 52.6% are ten percentage points lower than the overall FEFT rate.
- Overall success for care experienced students was 64.2% which was an increase on the year. However, full time success for care experienced students remained broadly the same (58.0% vs 59.3%)
- The proportion of senior phase pupils successfully completing their qualification increased significantly from 69.6% to 75.1%

## Progression

SFC's most recent *College Leaver Destinations* (November 2020) showed that 96.2% of FE qualifiers and 97.2% of HE qualifiers had a positive destination on leaving West Lothian College.

For the third consecutive year 100% of our HNC Art students achieved their qualification and secured offers to study at the most prestigious art institutions in Scotland. Of all our Scottish Widening Access Programme students who moved onto university in 2018, the overall retention for those who were still at university at the end of their first year was 97% - higher than the average percentage for all colleges for 2018 which was 94%.

The proportion of the college's HNC/D completers in 2017-18 moving onto university with advanced standing was 37.0%. Considerable work is underway with universities to extend articulation agreements to support advanced standing onto degrees for our HE students.

Project SEARCH, delivered in partnership with West Lothian Council and NHS Lothian, is aimed at young people aged 16 to 29 who have a learning disability and/or autism. Our students have achieved 100% employment success for three consecutive years, and all 2019-20 Project SEARCH students are on track to achieve employment despite lockdown. The college received a UK award in 2020 for the best employment outcomes on a Project Search programme.

## IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN

As we prepared our 2019-20 Outcome Agreement we could not have foreseen that a global pandemic would force colleges to close their campuses seven months into the academic year. Staff adapted overnight to ensure that our students had the best possible experience in the most difficult of circumstances. What we learned through that experience, and in the academic year that followed, has strengthened us as a college and helped prepare us for a positive future in a volatile and uncertain world.

As we went into lockdown the college was in the midst of a restructure affecting all managers which resulted in most being interviewed for new posts and some leaving on voluntary severance. Although managers did well to continue to support staff

during what was an extremely challenging time for them individually, there was some inconsistency on how deferrals and holistic assessment were applied. The college is in a stronger position now that faculty directors, heads of support services and operational managers have clear remits and apply quality assurance consistently to improve the student experience.

Pre-lockdown, the college was on track for another successful year. Continuing a trend of growing demand for places, enrolments increased and were on track for meeting or surpassing the previous year.

We were continuing to make progress on improving student success. For example, retention for both full time and part time students improved. Factors that had contributed to very good improvements in the previous year were continuing in 2019-20. For example, one area that led to improved retention and success in 2018-19 and was on track to have a positive impact in 2019-20, was enhanced industry and work experience for students. Although this came to a sudden halt on 23 March 2020, the opportunities experienced by students who benefited from this in the months preceding lockdown contributed to increased success in some subject areas.

### **Student Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Supported with funding from SFC we recruited two mental health counsellors in April 2020 to support our students and provided access to TogetherAll, an online support package. Feedback from students has been very positive despite support being offered entirely at a distance. Throughout the year, staff and students continued to carry out excellent work to support mental health and wellbeing.

Partnerships with third sector mental health supporting organisations matured over the year, with our Student Association and staff teams working collaboratively with external partners to tackle stigma surrounding mental health. The association's Recharge initiative to support students experiencing poor mental health was a great success. In partnership with lecturers and student support staff, the association ran a large-scale mental health and wellbeing event in January 2020 in which over a thousand students took part. What our staff, students and the Student Association did on mental health and wellbeing in 2019-20, in collaboration with external partners, was truly innovative and impactful.

## **MITIGATIONS RE THE PANDEMIC**

### **Phase 1 – Lockdown, March to August 2020**

At the start of lockdown, the college donated all PPE supplies to key workers, personal hygiene products to intensive care patients in local hospitals, and set up our campus as a NHS Lothian Covid19 testing centre from April to August. Some of our employees returned to their former health practitioner roles, and many staff and students volunteered to support the NHS, key workers and local communities.

Lecturers, support staff and managers adapted well to remote working, using technology to communicate with teams and students, deliver lectures and tutorials, provide pastoral, learning and mental health support, and carry out assessments. Until that point, almost all our courses were delivered face-to-face. However, our lecturers threw themselves into remote delivery and worked hard to help their

students complete their learning entirely online. Fortunately, our August 2019 staff development week focused on digital skills, and projects funded through the college's Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund were instrumental in supporting the move to digital pedagogy. Student assessment practices adapted and comprehensive process implemented to deal with student resulting and recruitment.

Our IT staff helped prepare other staff and students to work and learn remotely, for example by distributing laptops to students to enable them to learn at home and setting up remote workstations for staff. We furloughed staff who were unable to work from home and accessed the UK Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to compensate for loss of income caused by the pandemic and to secure jobs. In preparation for the 2020-21 academic year we invested in 400 laptops for lecturers and students.

Throughout lockdown weekly management team meetings took place to monitor, assess and adapt to an evolving situation. Regular meetings with local trade union representatives were helpful in monitoring and adapting safety measures. Feedback from staff on how the college has supported them and our students through the pandemic has been consistently and increasingly positive. Our annual staff survey, with an 81% completion rate, showed significant improvement in all areas surveyed. This was externally reinforced by an interim *Investors in People* mid-term review in November 2020.

## **Phase 2 – Restrictions, August to December 2020**

We planned a safe return to campus from August in consultation with local trade union representatives. There have been three wholesale changes to timetables so far in the current academic year – one to make space for deferred students, the second to accommodate Level 4 guidelines on 27 November on restricted blended learning, and then the preparation for online only for the early weeks of January to accommodate and plan for the consequences of the relaxation of guidance over Christmas.

We supported campus-based learning for students and apprentices who needed to learn practical skills. Qualifications in subject areas such as business, computing and social science have been taught wholly online, and students in subject areas like childhood practice have experienced a blended approach. So far in this academic year we have allocated 368 laptops to students, funded by college resources and additional funding provided by SFC to address digital poverty.

Lecturers asked for time and resources to be available on return from their summer break to enable them prepare for the blended learning approach required by the pandemic. We therefore delayed the start of the academic year to allow them time to prepare materials, all lecturers received new laptops in September 2020, and we standardised on Microsoft Teams as our online videoconferencing platform, with access to training provided and encouraged. To support the move to blended learning we seconded a lecturer into a new role to advise on how to adapt pedagogy to support blended learning. A Learning Continuity Group, under the stewardship of a faculty director, comprising key staff and a representative from the local authority's digital learning team, supports those involved in blended and online delivery. Bespoke training materials, developed initially for staff, were adapted and rolled out

to students to enable them to gain the necessary digital skills to learn online effectively.

### **Phase 3 – Lockdown, January 2021**

The economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic has led to challenging times for students. Increasing numbers are struggling financially and students already experiencing poverty are finding it harder than ever before. Many have lost part-time jobs, some have partners who have been made redundant, and others are homeless. In response to feedback from staff, we introduced a free hot breakfast for students so that hunger does not prevent them from focusing on achieving their qualification.

Our Student Association and support staff work with local charities and social enterprises to help students facing financial difficulties. In the lead up to Christmas they worked with The Larder and the West Lothian Financial Inclusion Network to provide hot meals to students and their families. For students with children, who faced additional financial pressures over the festive period, the Student Association accessed help from River Kids and West Lothian Financial Inclusion Network so that no child went without a Christmas present. And, with the support of the West Lothian School Bank, students were able to get school clothes for the new term for their children.

In January 2021, we received 90 Chromebooks and iPads through the Connecting Scotland fund which are currently being distributed to eligible students. We have purchased additional laptops for new students starting on courses from January

College buildings are now closed until at least mid February. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, we have furloughed staff who are unable to carry out their job from home. With schools and nurseries also closed, there are considerable challenges for many staff and students to be able to fulfil their work or study commitments while looking after or home schooling their children. There is no doubt that this will impact on the learning experience.

**We are also witnessing increased anxiety from students, aggravated in particular by the delay in the SQA deciding how qualifications will be assessed in the context of interrupted learning caused by the pandemic.**

## **PROGRESS SO FAR IN 2020-21**

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Recruitment to 2020-21 full time courses was very good and we are on track to meet our credit target. We are ready to deliver the additional credits due to be allocated imminently for Skills Boosts and Accelerated HNCs through the Young Person's Guarantee and the National Transition Training Fund. The college is also supporting and promoting Pathway Apprenticeships, and Kickstart placements to fulfil our commitment to the Young Person's Guarantee. Applications and referrals for all of these additional programmes are going well and now being processed.

Despite the need to respond quickly to a rapidly changing external environment, the college continued with our forward planning. Our 2021-22 curriculum plan was

designed by a wide range of stakeholders at a large virtual event on 23 October event in which 100 internal and external stakeholders took part. This enabled us to launch our 2021-22 portfolio on 8 December, more than a month earlier than most colleges. Recruitment is going well.

Based on current information, early withdrawals are down on last year. All college teams are working well to remove barriers to our students' learning experience. Very good progress has been made in helping deferred students complete (although there are still considerable numbers yet to do so). From August to November, students on courses with a high proportion of practical work had the opportunity to attend campus workshops. Placements for all HNC Childhood Practice took place prior to the festive break, although it has been very challenging to secure placements for health and social care students.

## **Supporting Economic Recovery**

The college is responding very well to the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic. In partnership with West Lothian Council's economic development team, and as part of *West Lothian's Action for Jobs Plan*, we have maximised the additional FWDF funding for small businesses with the council matching this with a further £150,000.

In June 2020 during the first lockdown, the principals of Edinburgh, Fife, Forth Valley and West Lothian Colleges formed a four-college collaboration to develop a multi-region response to economic recovery supported by new joint delivery models. We created a suite of strategic initiatives that we discussed with the chief executives of the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland. Following positive responses from both, senior leaders from each of the colleges worked with peers from SDS and SFC to flesh out eight propositions in light of current bespoke labour market intelligence provided by SDS.

These propositions were presented to the chief executives in September 2020, and the Scottish Government agreed to progress with two proposals, Skills Boost Academies and Fast Track HNCs, funded through the Young Person's Guarantee and the National Transition Training Fund. Such was the support for the value of these propositions, they are being rolled out to the wider sector through identified funding mechanisms.

## **Student Voice**

Our Student Association conducted its first student evaluation survey of the academic year in November 2020 which was completed online by 800 students (an increase of 218 on the previous year). A third of full time students completed the survey and overall feedback was positive. For example, of those who responded to the question *How is your college course going?* 54% responded *Great*, 44% said *Okay* and 2% said *Not good*.

Asked *How are you finding working online/blended courses?* 34% said *Easy and comfortable*, 58% said *Comfortable but difficult*, 7% said *A problem*. In response to the question *If you are learning online, are you being taught in a way that supports the way you learn?* 62% said *Yes*, 31% said *Some* and 7% said *No*. In response to the question *Do you feel supported by your lecturers?* 75% replied *Yes* and 21% said *Some of them*.

When asked what they were finding difficult the two areas of biggest concern for students were mental health and the lack of suitable space to study at home or in college. The former is being compounded by significant heightened anxiety amongst students (and their lecturers) about the uncertainty how the SQA and other awarding bodies will deal with their interrupted learning. The latter reinforces the college's need to expand flexible study spaces on campus, a process that will begin this summer but will be limited by the lack of available capital funds.

Workshop facilities in the critical curriculum areas of construction and engineering need urgent expansion and upgrading to enable the college to satisfy growing demand from industry to deliver additional apprenticeships, and to improve the learning experience of students in these subjects. Planned work last year was postponed due to lockdown. **This work is now underway and scheduled to be completed by April 2021, although this could be at risk depending on government restrictions on the construction sector. It has come in significantly over budget (£620k vs £350k) posing a financial risk for the college in 2020-21. The college has requested additional in-year capital funding from SFC for this vital work.**

### **Looking towards 2021-22**

It is important to understand the scale of the challenge facing students during this pandemic, and the significant impact that interrupted learning caused by the pandemic will have on attainment. The college has been innovative, creative, responsive and caring in the ways that we have supported our students, staff and the communities we serve.

While responding to the ever-evolving public health emergency, we have still invested time in building for the future in what qualifications we deliver and how we deliver these. We carried out a significant management restructure during the first lockdown and, despite this, kept our managers motivated and focused on supporting their staff and students. Our staff responded magnificently to the lockdown and have continued to do so over the past ten months. This has given our Board of Governors great confidence in the future of the college and on our ability to fulfil our vision of a highly skilled, enterprising and resilient workforce.



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