

Board of Management

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 15 June 2022
Paper No.	BoM4-L
Agenda Item	5.1
Subject of Paper	City of Glasgow Covid Case Study: <i>Delivering in a Pandemic</i>
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Jon Gray, Director of Excellence/Sheila Lodge, Depute Principal and COO
Date of production	June 2022
Action	For Noting

1. Recommendations

- To Note the report.

2. Purpose

2.1 The attached report provides the Board with a detailed review of the work undertaken by the College in response to the pandemic. The report has been created as a legacy document, highlighting both the extent of the challenges faced and the considerable effort and achievement made in overcoming those challenges.

3. Consultation

3.1 The report has been compiled from contributions from across the College.

4. Key Insights

4.1 During the two years of the pandemic, the College:

- Delivered over 5000 workshops to support teaching staff to migrate to blended learning
- Established over 20 new health and safety protocols
- Recruited, inducted and taught over 25,000 students remotely
- Delivered over 800 courses for employers worth in excess of £700,000, and generated over £50,000 in repeat business in the second year of the pandemic
- Invested almost £1.3m on a laptop loan scheme purchasing 2,000 laptops, and supporting the distribution of over 450 Chromebooks, packaged with 24/7 internet access and one years' worth of unlimited data for Glasgow's most disadvantaged learners
- Supported over 1500 ESOL enrolments, of which many were Asylum Seekers or had Humanitarian Protection status, and by definition were "destitute".
- Ensured the safe occupancy of over 1,000 teaching spaces across the two campuses
- Created, maintained and refreshed over 14,000 signs, laying 4 miles of floor tape to encourage social distancing
- Invested almost £500,000 in increased counselling services and protected the physical health of all through the introduction of homeworking DSE assessment

5. Impact and Implications

5.1 Throughout the pandemic the College has continued to prioritise health and safety of its staff and students. In the year from mid-September 2020 to end September 2021 (the initial critical period of this report) 415 learners and 124 staff were diagnosed with COVID. The College is pleased that the numbers overall were so low, attributing that to the speed with which it took effective measures to mitigate risks.

At the outset, it was the first College to close, and it physically re-opened as soon as possible to ensure the continuity of teaching and meet its purpose to, let learning flourish.

Appendices

Attached report

Delivering in a pandemic

May 2022

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Scottish Government, *Wider Harms of the Covid-19 pandemic on Learners, Students and Staff within Higher Education, Further Education and Community Learning and Development in Scotland, March, 2022.*

17th March 2020 - The move online

An overnight revolution in learning

On 17 March 2020, the City of Glasgow College pivoted overnight from face-to-face to online delivery and in that moment, over 23,000 learners and 1500 staff went on-line.

The impact has been unprecedented and brought with it many challenges. Some of these could be anticipated, whilst others emerged at exceptional pace, reflecting the enormity of switching two campuses, libraries, teaching and student support facilities to online operation.

The challenge for teaching staff, who had largely delivered on campus, fully to reshape and deliver Learning and Teaching was enormous, requiring personal and professional perseverance and considerable support from the College Learning and Teaching Academy over numerous lockdowns.

The immediate challenge for students was largely getting access to digital equipment and the College invested significantly in laptops so that all students in need had access. In this emergency context, the emphasis was on student engagement and ensuring that students were able to continue their learning.

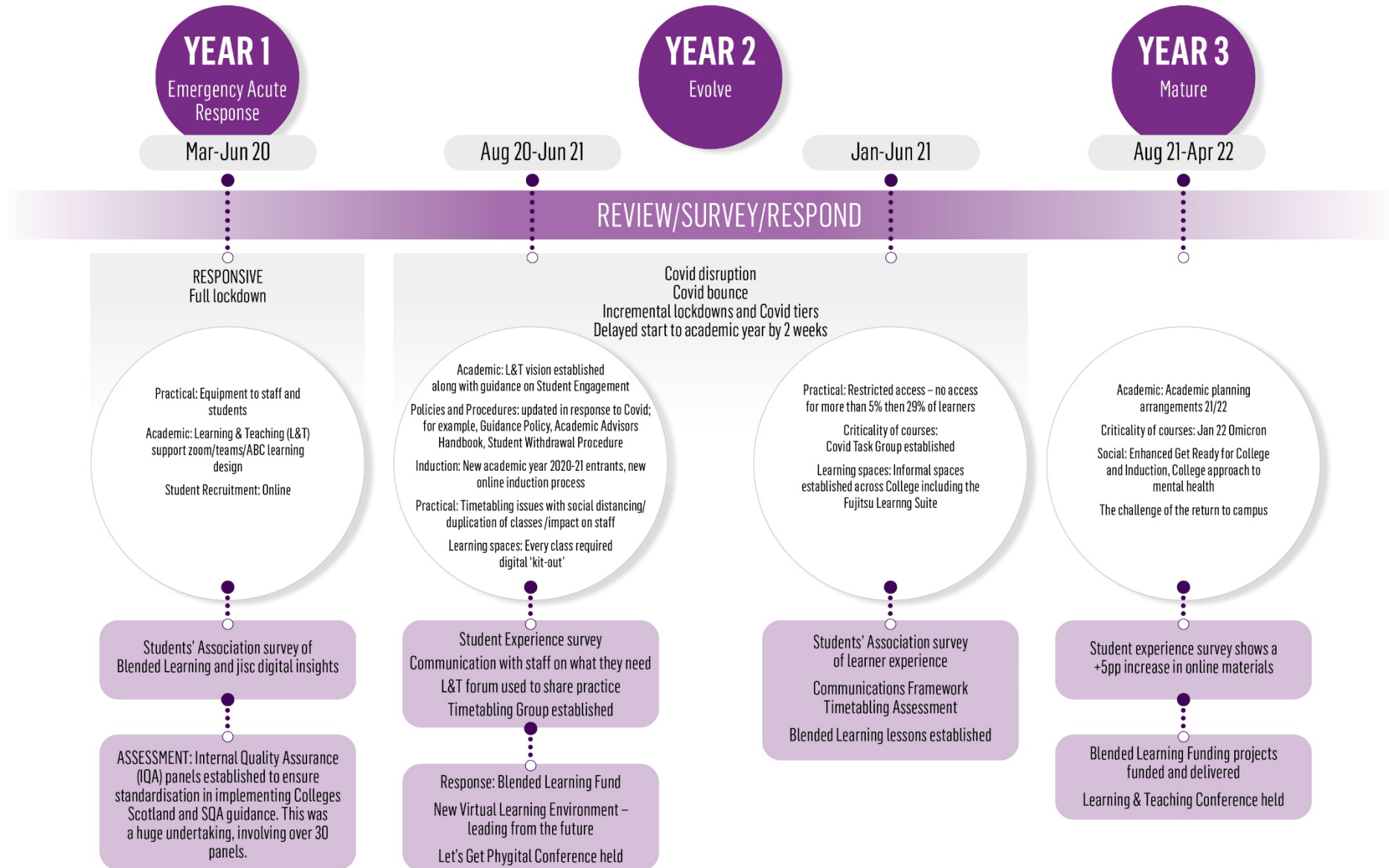
As the college closed its doors on 17th March, student recruitment for entry in August 2020 was at its peak. Hundreds of interviews were still required and all had to move online alongside the continued communication with some 14,000 applicants who had applied to join the College. By August 2020, the College was regularly engaging with almost 20,000 applicants.

With the introduction of tiered lockdown restrictions, and then a repeat of lockdown, the challenge has continued and taken many forms. These are not just about institutional management and student and staff well-being, but relate to the very nature of vocational education.

This report tells the story of the College's response from initial emergency action through to the maturing blended learning approach in 2022.

The adaptations to the learning and teaching experience, which took place in the context of adaptations to the whole campus estate, are summarised overleaf.

COVID CASE STUDY



The Glasgow Context

Glasgow has undergone many transformations throughout its proud history, and throughout many reincarnations the strength and character of its people has always formed the bedrock of this great city.

At the centre of its diverse, modern communities is City of Glasgow College (*City*) and, with approximately 40,000 students and staff, it is Scotland's biggest college and the fourth largest in the UK.

Over the last two years, Glasgow's city and regional economies have been disproportionately affected by the devastating socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 with over 88,000 jobs furloughed – 12% of Scotland's total – and underlying inequalities exacerbated, given 57% of Scotland's 15% most deprived areas are in Glasgow City region.

COVID has also created challenges for the Glasgow College Region, weakening future financial sustainability, disrupting the traditional operating model, limiting future capital investment, creating a backlog of deferred assessments, and compromising the futures and learning experience of nearly 70,000 Glasgow learners.

During lockdowns, College campuses were closed, and in National Tier 3 and 4 restrictions on campus provision significantly curtailed - focussing primarily on practical activities and latterly (in Tier 4) only those that were time critical. This limited the basic acquisition of critical skills, undermining skills competency and put at risk higher levels of proficiency. Apprenticeship placements largely disappeared, and school-College partnerships for senior phase learners were interrupted.

The impact has been personal. Over the last year, in particular, there has been a marked deterioration in the mental health and wellbeing of both learners and staff, with prolonged online emergency teaching and disrupted working patterns taking their toll. With schools and nurseries closed, many students and staff now had additional responsibilities for home schooling. Children at home with parents, sometime lone parents, also needed access to digital devices, space to work, and real-time care and attention.

As the UK economy reopens, the three waves of this crisis have seen the College move from focusing on saving lives, to saving livelihoods and now to saving life chances through a skills-led transformation of local educational services to mitigate and undo the damaging effects of the pandemic.

In these exceptional circumstances, this report reflects on the College's response, both internally and outwardly, in contributing to the region's economic and social renewal.

Planning and Foresight at the outset

Whilst many Colleges were unprepared for the pandemic, City had already revised its business recovery planning, building in emergency contingency and creating fifteen new recovery plans in the process. It meant the College already had a mind-set for recovery.

Arguably it was this planning, allied to strong leadership, that gave the College the confidence to act decisively - to close the College overnight; and within one day, move everything on-line.

To be in this position the College had been honest with itself. Learning from past experience, the College chose to invest to improve. Bringing in external support to oversee the development of a comprehensive business resilience and continuity plan paid off, and with that expert guidance and oversight, assurance was provided that business continuity planning was thorough, detailed, and appropriate to the various curriculum and specialist functions of the College. By giving the work an external focus, it meant the planning was prioritised and engagement across the SMT maximised. Most importantly the work had been done just when it was needed most.

Equally, the recovery thinking had been deep. The transition to remote working was well managed because the College had already been thinking about the scenarios that might force the need to move to alternative and/or remote working requiring specialist resources, in the light of system and function failure; crucially, the College had considered alternatives to maintain business operations and service delivery.

In addition, the College's planning for COP26 (UN Climate Change Conference) meant it had already contemplated closing the College for two weeks in order to deliver remotely. Those two months of planning bolstered the College's resilience and supported the decision to be able to deliver a fundamental shift in its delivery model.

All operations, including finance, human resources, and student support together with core learning and teaching went on-line.

The College response was underpinned by strong leadership. Leadership to act; to make decisions in uncertainty; and to plan during an open-ended period of disruption that impacted on all things, all at once.

The Principal acted quickly. A response team was assembled and the SMT met daily, staying in touch between meetings through WhatsApp.

An expectation was set early on for all line managers to be in touch with their staff and the College was quick to produce common messages and FAQs. While not perfect, the ELT received indications that staff appreciated their extra efforts. This commitment was visible in the actions taken across the two campuses and in the arrangements for re-opening.

A calm measured and compassionate approach made sure that what was challenging was manageable and handled professionally.

On-going resilience was underpinned by a faster cycle of engagement. Board meetings were maintained, and flexible governance was in place to ensure decisions could be made. This was especially important in terms of safeguarding learner and staff well-being.

To stay on course, the College used informal networks and benchmarked itself against other Colleges and universities. It then committed to stay ahead, purchasing additional IT equipment and staying connected with what was happening on the ground. A repurposed Learning and Teaching Academy was also in place to support on-line delivery, which meant teaching staff were up and running in a matter of days.

Teaching was conducted using on-line conferencing software and making maximum use of the College Virtual Learning Environment. Alternative assessment arrangements were put in place and a national conversation opened with the SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) and the Scottish Government over their assessment strategy for practical based vocational courses.

The commitment of the College was evident in the behaviours of its staff. From the decision to give financial support to a staff member who had lost their home, to the recycling of food and resources in support of local businesses and communities, the College led by example. The effectiveness of leadership and management in the College was highlighted and identified as sector leading practice within an HMI practice visit in February 2020.

As it turned out, though, leadership was going to need to be more than just crisis management. The only thing that was certain was that things would not be back to normal quickly.

Moving to online learning

At the outset of the crisis, adopting a phased response meant teaching staff weren't overwhelmed, and the new Learning and Teaching Academy within the College was well placed to support the bold leadership on on-line delivery.

All this meant staff were up and running in days not weeks, with the IT and Student Support team getting equipment to staff and students quicker than was expected.

While the College made significant progress with connectivity and the provision of emergency learning, achieving its own expectations for a coherent and high-quality blended learning experience was more challenging.

At the heart of the challenge has been delivering a safe environment whilst ensuring learners continue to build underpinning subject knowledge.

In support of digital delivery, the Learning and Teaching Academy evolved their CPD programme of activity from 'tech how to' webinars in the early days of lockdown to refocussing on pedagogical approaches to managing and developing digital 'classrooms'. The LTA also developed a sector leading Lecturer Integration Programme which all new lecturers will complete when joining the College. This will include five components, prioritising digital delivery and set the standard expected from the outset.

Throughout the initial emergency response, the College continued to think ahead, taking time to prepare the arrangements for the next academic year, its timetabling, staffing and

resourcing. And when the new academic year commenced, and the College reopened, the Senior Management Team (SMT) again led by example by being on site, endorsing a safe environment and showing commitment for learning to continue to flourish.

Recognising that the usual 'face to face' engagement and affiliation events could not take place for the 8,000 Freshers starting in September 2020, the College moved all induction and transition activities on-line. This was a major undertaking and, giving prominence to digital connection and blended learning, the new materials and on-line experience - *Get Ready for College* - would represent a whole new way of learning for most students.

The commitment to on-going planning meant the College was well prepared for re-opening and despite reports in 2020 that only 1 in 5 students with offers were likely to take up their University/College place in the autumn of 2020, conversion rates from application to enrolment at the College were higher than in previous year, at around 92%.

By thinking ahead and early planning, the College was able to establish the protocols needed for the re-opening of two campuses. That foresight established an engine room of protocol development, all of which assisted the College to stay open whilst demonstrating its care and attention to staff and student well-being.

Protocols

The first set of protocols for onsite operations was published by early July 2020. The College made a commitment to updating these in line with Scottish Government guidance and the prevalence of the virus locally. Over twenty editions and updates have been produced to date. The protocols cover all aspects of operation on site, including:

- Key principles
- Risk and Equality Impact Assessments
- Learning & Teaching; Library provision
- Travelling to College; parking
- Entering and leaving the buildings: temperature checks, PPE
- Lateral Flow Testing
- Culture and behaviour; hot desking; meetings
- Hygiene & cleaning; ventilation
- Catering provision; use of kitchens
- First Aid and Fire Wardens
- Deliveries and visitors
- Student Services, IT support
- COVID notification and absence procedures

In addition to making the full protocols available to all staff on the College intranet, a more user-friendly *Staff On Campus Guide* was also produced, as well as a parallel Student Guide. A communication campaign enforcing key messages is looped on display screens throughout the campuses, and signage is posted wherever appropriate. The Students Association helped with a campaign to encourage students to take the stairs rather than the lift, and this made the College policy of limiting lifts to one person at a time workable.

The College's commitment to health and well-being was also visible in the physical environment and in the on-campus experience – from the signage, the state-of-the-art thermometers installed on entrance, and the increased presence of facilities staff. The associated costs borne by the College, run to some £350,000, and continue to climb.

Over an 18-month period the College found itself creating, maintaining and refreshing over 14,000 signs and laying 4 miles of floor tape to encourage social distancing. Moreover, establishing a safe route through the College, to adhere and flex to social distancing rules, also meant an entirely new approach to timetabling. Each individual teaching space had to be reviewed to restrict and flex capacity in accordance with changing guidelines, establishing a maximum capacity for each room both in principle - to inform planning - and in practice, in the form of signage and furniture relocation for each room.

Procurement, marketing, and estates teams were required to collaborate in new ways and at pace. The purchase of screens, for example, along with floor signage, both in short supply, needed to be secured, delivered, and installed with almost military precision. Screening and floor signs were needed to be put in place across the two College campuses and within Halls of Residence, to safeguard health and safety and establish a new internal infrastructure. This was in addition to the installation of temperature scanners and the hundred plus sanitisers, whose placement needed careful coordination.

In the calm before the return to campus, the estates team continued to work to create the new College interior. Daily maintenance continued by our FM partners and all statutory testing was maintained, including water control measures taking place alongside all existing building maintenance services as required to enable the College to be reoccupied.

Ever mindful of its social anchor role, in between the heavy lifting, staff also took the time to distribute thousands of PPE equipment to nine local care homes, reaching out as far as Ayr. This was when national shortages impacted on resident's safety. Perishable foods left over during Campus closures were also distributed on to *Refuweegie*, a community led charity for refugees arriving in Glasgow. The College van was also loaned to them when it lay idle at the College.

The Estates Challenge

Having to consider:

- Filters in the AC? Better grade?
- Any equipment not maintained on re-entering the building?
- Social Distancing Policy/ Procedures
- WFH policy
- Risk assessments: Equip - desks, chairs for home working
- Home working equip provision
- Risk Matrix - building, fire evac, security putting barriers off, first aid, increased lone working?
- Information on TVs and screens throughout campuses
- Mats with signage

- External: Queue barriers, signage
- Temperature checks for access?
- Leaflets/ flyers info for people entering the building?
- Big external floor standing poster info boards (similar to the no smoking boards)
- Masks - if to wear are the college supplying? - desk at front door and reception
- Big poster in walls at main entrances for 'rules' - one way system, 2m
- Smoking and gathering in front of building
- cleaning of bars & glass on swing doors
- cleaning of push buttons on accessible doors
- Table with blue roll and wipes & bin as per supermarkets
- Table with masks to provide to staff and students
- Additional bins and emptying
- Hand sanitiser
- Install screens
- Queue barriers
- Consider having gates left open to reduce cross contamination contact
- 2m markers with tape on the floor
- Signage
- Seating - sofas and computer stations
- Wipes for phones, computers
- How do you sign in/ out visitors and handover badges?
- Remove or cover up every 2nd computer at waiting area/ student services
- Purchase additional walkie talkies - lone working, social distancing
- additional walkie-talkies- cleaning
- Stickers for the floor with feet and 2m rule
- Hand sanitiser
- Table with masks to provide to staff and students
- Put a table in-front of desk to keep people 2m apart
- Cleaning of accessible lift buttons and insides
- Queue barriers and tape in the floor
- Signage
- Hand sanitiser
- Should we consider sharing spaces discouraging people travelling on public transport if people working different times?

Access/ Egress

- Wipe down station - blue roll/ wipes/ hand sanitiser
- Consider shutting internal bike store and providing external racks
- Increased cleaning
- Access/ use/ limit numbers

Faculties to control

- Emptying of lockers from last term students - getting enquiries already
- Each department/area should be responsible for their own Q management i.e. SS, Catering outlets, reception areas
- Desk spacing to give 2m

Physical Preparations on site

Large-scale vinyl in the College's signature purple was installed at all entrances reminding everyone of the need to wear a mask, keep 2m distance, and wash their hands.

The Estates and Facilities teams calculated the safe occupancy of over 1,000 teaching spaces across the two campuses, and each room had a notice giving this number attached to its door so that all could be sure that capacity was not being exceeded.

One-way systems were devised, and physical barriers installed to enforce these and socially distanced queuing systems at any points of contact. Perspex barriers were installed where needed.

In social areas, furniture was removed to reduce occupancy and approved seating plans were enforced by marking specified spaces as 'out of use'. Cleaning schedules were overhauled and more cleaners employed, to ensure more frequent cleaning rounds throughout the day; a sticker door seal system was introduced so that a room could be certified as cleaned and sanitised; and disinfectant wipes and hand sanitiser were distributed to every desk and throughout all public spaces.

Water fountains were closed, but bottled water was provided free of charge. Catering provision was maintained at a reduced level, allowing staff kitchens to be closed. All these measures were designed to reduce the risk of infection on site as far as possible: and to date no cases of onsite transmission have been identified.

The impact at the end of AY 2019-20 was positive.

The College had achieved its highest ever Higher Education Full-Time successful completion rate, up by 5pp to almost 77% - almost 2pp above the national target set by the Scottish Funding Council (the funding body for colleges in Scotland). In FT Further Education there was a similar story, with successful completions up by 3pp to almost 69%. The College had been on an improving trajectory over the course of the last couple of years and the range of activities that had been put in place included a comprehensive Student Engagement Dashboard that allows for easy mapping and tracking of student engagement and targeting of resources. This, coupled with an active student engagement team and the targeting of support to individual students and courses, made a difference when it mattered most.

Despite the restrictions to on campus provision, student on-line engagement had also remained high. Internal usage of *MyCity* online learner services and resources for example, remained above 80% across all four of the College Faculties. This reinforced the results of an Early Engagement survey that highlighted high rates of student satisfaction with the accessibility of online learning. Achieving this level of participation and outcome, while maintaining the quality of the student experience had been a huge undertaking.

New Learning and Teaching Guidance was developed to support new ways of working. In addition, several policies and procedures were updated in response to the changed nature of delivery including Guidance Policy, Academic Advisors Handbook, Student Withdrawal

procedure, Student Attendance Procedure, Student Disciplinary Procedure and most recently the Assessment Policy and related procedure.

The strength of the partnership with the Student Association was evident throughout, actively informing and supporting engagement with learners during the lockdown period.

Key Challenges

While bringing an additional urgency to delivering many of the College's digital ambitions, the pandemic exacerbated the related challenges and introduced significant new ones. Some of these, set out below, are system-wide issues and their resolution will require cross-sector working and leadership from the Scottish Government.

The Digital Challenge

The digital challenge is more than just connectivity. Issues identified include:

- Digital inclusion - access to services and support as well as equipment. The College introduced an innovative laptop loan scheme for those learners without the resource to acquire the necessary equipment. But this comes as an additional cost – estimated at £1.7m
- The sustainability of digital provision may require a new public private partnership to manage the user costs of participation through zero rated provision and data commitments from telecom providers. This highlights the role of JISC, as the UK's digital support network for colleges and universities
- Digital literacy, and the ability for those most disadvantaged to be able to participate in public life
- Digital skills - developing the capacity of the sector to meet current and future employer demand, including from overseas companies
- Digital well-being and the oversight of safe and supportive educational experiences
- Digital capacity and capability and investment in people
- Digital infrastructure
- Licensing – the cost to the College of the additional licences for learners studying at home is anticipated to be in excess of £100,000. This will be a sector wide issue and something the sector will need support to address.

The Assessment and Compliance Challenge

The impact of COVID meant that, overnight, course teams had to adapt learning and teaching materials, timetables as well as convert closed book exams to open book assessments.

The cancellation and disruption affected cohorts differently. Those entered for Nat 5 and Higher provision, for example, are normally part-time and so had less opportunity to generate evidence for assessment, in comparison with full-time learners in schools. Additionally, the College had no prelim evidence for exam-only learners (this was scheduled for the week in which the UK first entered lockdown in late-March). While SQA

(Scottish Qualification Authority) guidance clarifying that prelims did not need to take place, was helpful, the College still had to run prelims since there was no other basis for assessment. The confusion this created among different groups of learners resulted in an increase in learner complaints about fairness.

There were also practical challenges: in many incidences, coursework evidence, to be used as part of assessments, was unavailable as it was locked in College, meaning lecturers had no access to marks and grading information. The College also teaches learners registered at other centres, who sit the exam in College but, for example, are presented by schools. The disruption to timetables in one part of the system therefore affected these learners, whose assessment took place in another.

Given the unique nautical provision, the College also had to oversee the cancellation of all MCA exam diets in March, May and July, delivering an 'exceptional exam' diet for over 140 learners in August 2020, using internal staff in the absence of external invigilators. In some instances where specific health and safety or competence requirements were expected to be met, these elements also had to be deferred. In total the College deferred 4071 units.

Responding to the challenge, the College has utilised and adapted its internal quality assurance processes to support a holistic model for internal assessment. Internal Assessment Guidance was developed, in support of no detriment to the student and equity of opportunity and attainment. In addition, a decision tree was developed in line with SQA guidance to support course teams to implement a holistic approach to gathering evidence and making assessment decisions. Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) panels were adapted to complement and strengthen the work being carried out by course teams and to ensure standardisation in implementing Colleges Scotland and SQA guidance. This was a huge undertaking, involving over 30 panels.

During this time, recertification of ISO9001:2015 was successfully achieved via remote verification process with no requirement for improvements. Assessors complimented the work of the College and were impressed with how the College had collated and presented data for audit.

The approach taken by SQA has brought additional complexities, especially for course teams who require time to be able to adapt. Problems with SQA remain. Guidance on the approach to the inclusion of the graded unit within certain vocational qualifications was slow to appear. How this is interpreted across different subjects and faculties, whilst ensuring parity for learners, remains a challenge. Earlier resolution by SQA and the sector would have been helpful, especially as the College approached the first cycle of assessments with both course lecturers and learners unsure of the agreed approach.

The Well-Being Challenge

From lockdown in March, on-campus counselling transitioned to a telephone service, which was made easier by staff having already been trained in telephone counselling. During lockdown both referrals and engagement dropped and many issues impacting on

learners while on campus (i.e., relationships with other learners, social anxiety, exam and assessment stress) were supplanted by concerns about COVID.

In a survey of 50 class reps, 88% reported that COVID had made a medium to high impact on their mental health and well-being as a student. During this period the College procured *Togetherall* to offer learners (and staff) a safe community to support mental health 24/7; over a thousand logins to the service have been made. Other services offered during lockdown included:

- weekly welfare checks undertaken with most vulnerable learners – those with mental health difficulties/care experienced
- specific support and welfare check for learners in City Halls of Residence
- a series of short 'well-being' videos were created for social media including on social isolation/loneliness, and Let's Talk
- website and social media channels were updated with relevant mental health and well-being information, videos, crisis contact numbers etc.
- promotion on social media of information on gender-based violence
- networking meetings with other Colleges and universities, and student accommodation providers to share practice and development ideas
- live online Yoga and Mindfulness sessions and through CitySA, a range of other physical and entertaining activities: Virtual 5k, Step Count Challenge, Staff Awards Ceremony, Pet Competition
- The provision of a Mindfulness Living Based Course for learners.

In addition, and to counter some of the Learning and Teaching difficulties, teaching staff have: -

- offered guidance on online learning
- ensured teaching includes peer support and open chat rooms
- limited zoom meetings to 60 minutes

The College also prioritised the *track and trace* system as a further opportunity to support vulnerable students. Around 260 students got in touch to confirm a positive test or self-isolation while awaiting results, and support staff ensured that there would be no detriment to student funding while absent, then established regular welfare checks to ensure that students had medical support if required, food if isolating, activities and Wi-Fi to keep them motivated, support with mental health and well-being and, finally, help to re-engage with studies

One Year on: Academic Year 2020-21

Over the course of academic year 2020-2021, challenges continued, especially in sustaining outcomes for learners from the most deprived postcodes and those care experienced learners who faced challenges in relation to access to online learning and stability in the home learning environment.

At the same time, throughout 2020-21, the impact of the pandemic on the College school senior phase cohort continued, and enrolments and outcomes declined because of the impact of social distancing and the re-prioritisation of school timetables. For those joining new programmes, the College also witnessed challenges with retention and completion, reflecting the real difficulty in securing meaningful employer engagement in programmes.

Secondary School Senior Phase Delivery

At the point of lockdown in March 2020, Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) – school focussed skills courses - and Senior Phase planned activity for 2020/21 had already been published and applications were being received from school pupils. Understandably, Local Authorities were eager that colleges-maintained activity and sought confirmation before the end of the school term in June 2020 as to which programmes could be offered online and which on campus. These discussions took place in May/June while still in lockdown, having to reconcile:

- College physical capacity to deliver ‘on campus’ school activity in addition to the needs of deferred students, and new and continuing mainstream students while adhering to social distancing and safety protocols
- Attractiveness of a reduced work placement and a 100% online learning experience
- Pupil connectivity – although many pupils have iPads or equivalent these are not suitable for the delivery of some courses – the FA in Accountancy and Financial Services for example
- School timetables – it was not clear if pupils could be supervised on school premises when timetables required them to be off site.

Given the requirement to confirm the status of courses by mid-June, the College decided to provide all senior phase activity online, prioritising the continuation of Year 2 Foundation Apprenticeships. Mindful of the impact of these challenges, FA enrolments fell slightly in 2020/21 by 13%, from 260 to 226, whilst other senior phase activity has been impacted more significantly with enrolments down 86% from 802 to 109.

During 2020/21 challenges continued:

- Communication – Hard won improvements in communication with Local Authorities and Schools in recent years were once again challenging in 2020/21.
- Remote enrolment – Unforeseen technical issues with enrolments were encountered due to a combination of technical ability of school pupils/Schools, and familiarity with different platforms. Workarounds were found and future improvements can be made in this area.
- Limitations of Microsoft Teams as a learning platform - Email accounts were difficult to set up and Teams functionality for blended delivery is limited. This

latter issue is more difficult to overcome and until the functionality of the Microsoft Teams product improved there is concern for engagement and retention in 2020/21 and beyond.

- Completion and success - Attendance during College timetabled classes is not happening consistently from school premises. Lecturers report concerns about attendance, behaviour, staying on task and the general learning environment when students are accessing online learning at home.
- Student Experience - Key experiential components which were a hallmark of the success of DYW, have greatly diminished the student and learning experience, namely coming on campus to an adult learning environment, and work experience with an employer. It will be a challenge to keep young people engaged in 2020/21 without these components.

In 2021/22 the College committed to provide a similar level of provision as in 2019/20 trying to balance the levels of on-campus and online provision, mindful of ongoing restrictions. Glasgow City Council continue to be the main LA partner, with around 400 places offered across all participating secondary schools: East Dumbarton providing 240 places, East Renfrewshire 40 places and South Lanarkshire 140 places.

Remaining committed to maintaining positive outcomes for the new AY 2020-21 entrants, the College put in place a new online induction process, arranging for 'first formal' online induction meetings via zoom. In total, 171 online inductions were set up for the first 2 weeks of the 20-21 academic term. This was a considerable undertaking and attendance at sessions was close to 100% across all Faculty areas.

Alongside this, the College also made sure to

- Prioritise IT devices and data for vulnerable groups
- Provide access to library and learning support study spaces for those requiring them
- Undertake welfare assessments for vulnerable students including care experienced, carers, those with mental health issues and students with COVID and those isolating. Welfare assessments also include signposting to additional academic support through learning support and/or Faculties.

Access to equipment and connectivity remained a priority; but the sheer pace of change also brought to the fore the issues of digital literacy and digital competencies. In response to the challenges, Faculties piloted different approaches.

The Faculty of Nautical Studies and STEM, for example, established a new learning enrichment zone. Adhering to necessary health and safety protocols, this provided a safe space for peer-to-peer learning support and learning and teaching engagement. The ambition was to tackle isolation and build resilient learning communities, in turn an important step forward in managing the risk of learner retention.

The Faculty of Creative Industries put together multiple online gallery and exhibitions spaces, establishing the first fully online End of Year and Degree shows. These gained the attention of the wider sector and in 20/21 were further developed into innovative street displays in Glasgow to reach out to the wider community.

The Faculty of Education and Humanities pivoted to being fully online, with 90% of its programmes continuing online throughout 20/21. In recognition of its experience, the Faculty led on the development of new guidance on blended learning, focussed on establishing sustainable solutions to key delivery and well-being challenges.

The Faculty of Hospitality and Leisure faced significant challenges due to the practical nature of so many of its courses. To offset this, the Faculty invested in online ‘live’ lessons and the use of video for learning and skills practice. This included innovative industry partnership events, including, for example, with L’Oreal, making maximum use of long-standing industry links. Whilst continuing lockdown restrictions in Glasgow made participation in practical skill delivery a real challenge, efforts were made to sustain student engagement and motivation levels, including, for example, through the publication of the first College Recipe Book.

After a limited reopening of both campuses in the early Autumn of 2020, new Tiered restrictions were introduced by the Scottish Government, severely constraining on site delivery and creating a whole new phase of planning challenges.

With Tier 4 restrictions – the highest - remaining in place in Glasgow until mid-March 2021, all learning, teaching and student support activity remained fully online. From March 15, Scottish Government guidance would allow up to 5 % of students onsite to complete critical practical and time sensitive courses, amounting to just 800 students at any one time.

In order to navigate its way through these ongoing restrictions, the College established a Covid Learning and Teaching Task Group with representation from across Faculties, Student Experience Directorate, Performance, HR and the Student Association. The aim was to consider separate scenarios of different durations of lockdown and their likely impact on the practical delivery of classes and assessment. The group identified four levels of criticality:

Level 1	Students require to complete the course immediately as they are in their final phase or year; non-completion will result in no professional qualification or articulation
Level 2	This course can have a short-term deferral (e.g. addressed in summer)
Level 3	Can be deferred to subsequent college phase or AY.
Level 4	Can be cancelled but there will be commercial implications.

With further lifting of restrictions the college moved to a 29% cap on student’s onsite from 19 April 2021. This amounted to a maximum of 1800 students at any one time across both campuses and became an active challenge for Faculties, requiring options to be developed in consultation with staff and the Student Association to ensure that all students progress.

Learning & Teaching Developments in 2020-21

- **Learning and Teaching Guidance:** The principles of the new Blended Learning model were shared with all staff by way of Learning and Teaching Guidance. This is now continually updated in line with changes from regulatory bodies and the changing nature of Covid Regulations.
- **Digital Access and Student Connectivity:** A clear priority for the college was ensuring that all learners had access to hardware to access the internet and the Virtual Learning Environment. The college invested almost £1.3m on a laptop loan scheme purchasing 2,000 laptops and every student who requested a college laptop, booked a slot and turned up on the day, received a device. In addition, the college also invested in Adobe software licences for students studying in Creative Industries and some STEM areas to allow them to continue learning whilst at home. This again was a significant investment and separate to the Adobe Licence the College holds for onsite computers.
- **Digital Learning Transformation Group** – The Digital Learning Group was established in September with cross college and student representation to improve digital capability within the College, and support the creation of a learning environment where the digital capability of staff and students could flourish. A key project of the group was to develop an enhanced Virtual Learning Environment for academic year 2021/22.
- **Blended learning Fund;** A Blended Learning Fund (BLF) was established to support the delivery of quality online learning and teaching experience and to “Let Learning Flourish’. The aim was to provide additional support to learning and teaching staff in the delivery and development of the new blended delivery model.
- **Support for Digital Learning:** In support of digital delivery the Learning and Teaching Academy evolved its CPD programme of activity from ‘tech how to’ webinars in the early days of lockdown to refocussing on more pedagogical approaches to managing and developing digital ‘classrooms’ and working closely with course teams to enhance delivery.
- **Learning and Teaching Conference:** [*Lets get Phygital*](#) The college hosted a Learning and Teaching Conference on 14 Sept 2021. This was an opportunity for teaching staff, students and wider stakeholders to share practice in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. Keynote speakers included Professor Mark Brown (Professor of Digital Learning and Director of the National Institute for Digital Learning, Dublin City University), and Professor Keith Smyth, University of the Highlands.

With the requirement for physical distancing remaining throughout 2021, all teaching areas on site continued to have restricted numbers. The focus, therefore, was on prioritising onsite delivery where practical assessment and collaborative learning was essential.

To support this, the College transformed many of its learning spaces to allow increased onsite teaching and facilitate streaming of classes. The change involved ensuring a minimum digital 'kit-out' including cameras and desktops in rooms, to allow 'live' streaming of classes where some disciplines found this of benefit to students. In addition, Deans worked with their teams and Estates on how best to re-purpose practical spaces to enhance learning and make use of potential curriculum development opportunities. This will continue to be a key area of activity for the foreseeable future.

Compassion, Health & Well-being and the tracking of cases

In mid-September 2020, as staff and students returned for practical classes on site, the College began to record the numbers of confirmed and suspected cases of COVID amongst its staff and students.

This exercise relied largely on self-reporting by students via a dedicated e-mail address (COVIDsymptoms@cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk), although from time to time they were prompted to report by the Trace & Protect team or by College staff checking an unexplained absence. Staff reports were received daily from HR.

One of the main intentions of this reporting was to allow the College to identify any possible clusters of cases at the earliest opportunity. Occasionally, students who seemed to be in the same class did report confirmed diagnoses around the same time: but further investigation always showed that the students had in fact been in separate groups or had attended on different days. Similarly, with staff there were times when colleagues had been on campus during their infectious period but before they had any symptoms: but they always reported that they had followed the College's protocols, maintaining the correct level of social distancing and wearing a mask during any interaction with other staff or with students.

To date, the College has not identified any cases of on-campus transmission of the virus, although vigilance is maintained. There have been two cases where students in the same household in our Halls of Residence have contracted coronavirus. Interestingly, only some of the students in each flat have been affected, suggesting that the virus was controlled in the Halls, and that transmission might have occurred when the students were socialising off campus.

The pattern of confirmed cases in 20-21 followed very closely the rate of infection in the local community. Numbers rose in October and November 2020 till the second lockdown was instituted; and then they fell from January 2021 into the summer, despite the College having more students on site.

Numbers started to rise again in June, especially amongst students: but then reporting dropped as anticipated over the summer holiday period. It seems that the prevalence of the virus may well have been growing in the wider community during this period, since the return to campus from mid-August 2021 saw a substantial rise in cases, only to be followed by the highest numbers to date in September. The 189 cases reported in that month represent 35% of the total of 539 cases to that point.

In the year from mid-September 2020 to end September 2021, 415 learners and 124 staff were diagnosed with COVID.

The College is pleased that the numbers overall were so low and attribute that to the speed with which it took effective measures to mitigate risks. At the outset, it was the first College to close, and it physically re-opened as soon as possible to ensure continuity of learning for those courses where practical assessment is essential.

Getting vaccinated against COVID has been strongly promoted by the College since the vaccines first became available, and a mobile 'vaccination bus' supported the campaign in

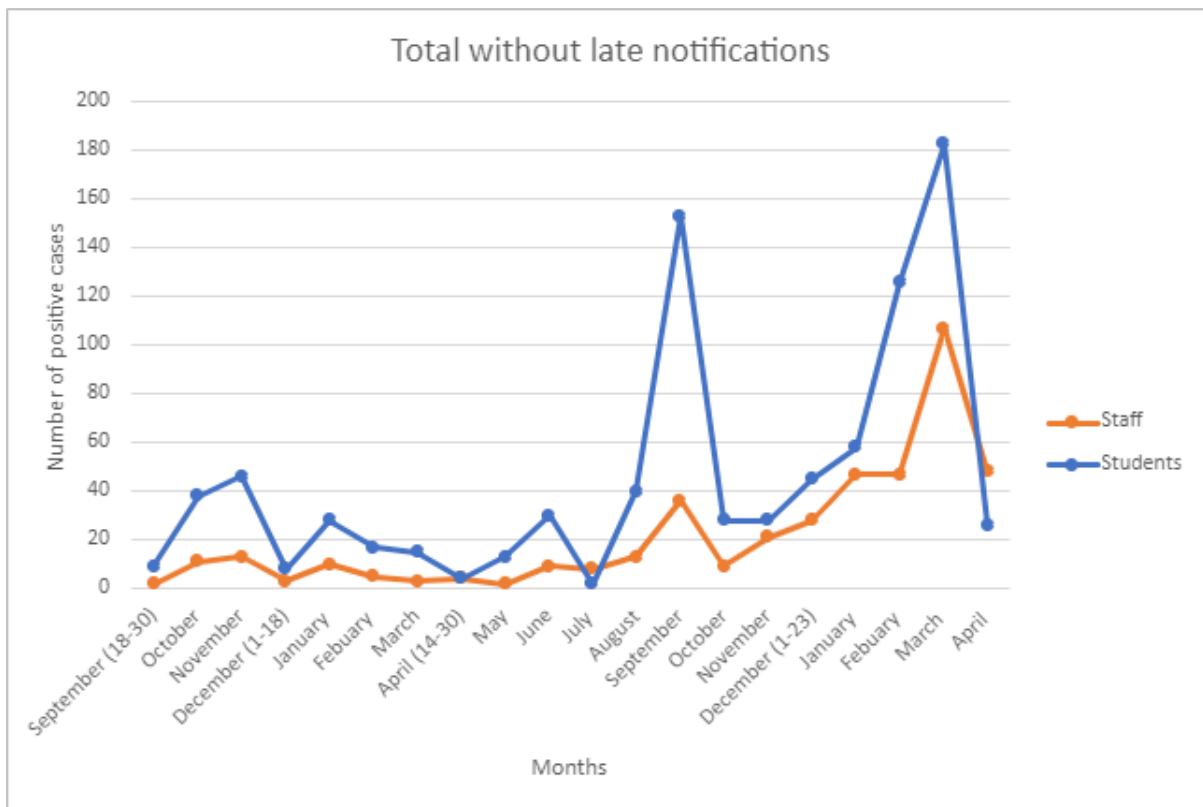
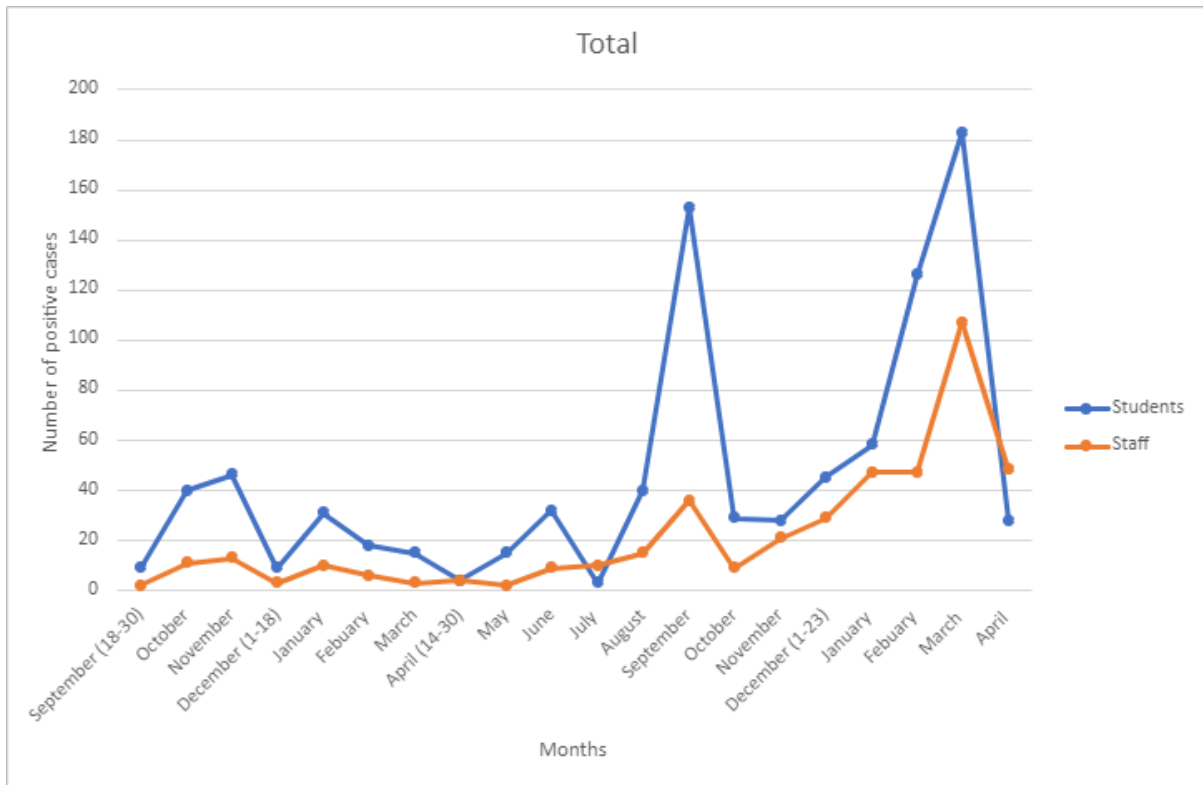
the latter half of November 2021 (offering first or second jobs to students and booster jobs to staff).

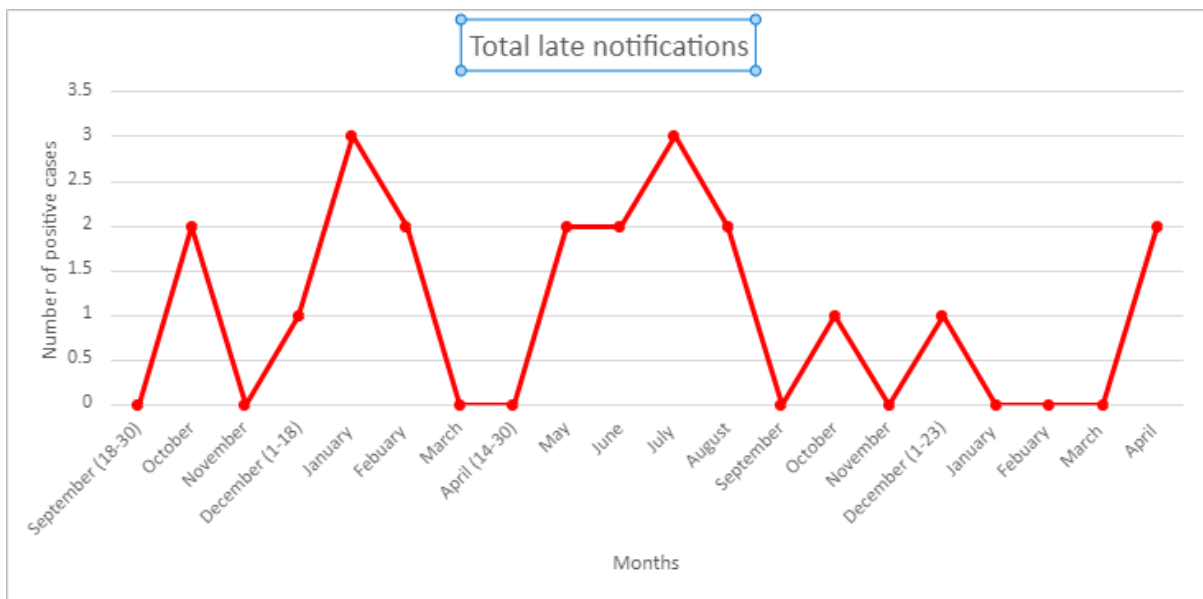
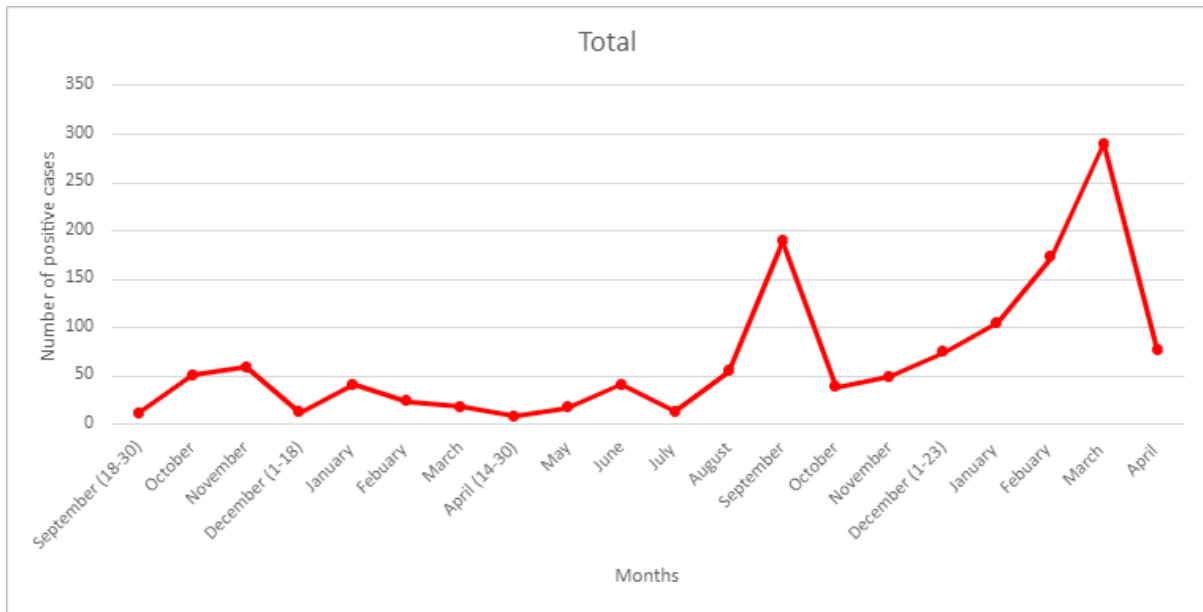
While it is a great relief that the chances of serious illness and death have been much diminished by being vaccinated, people are still becoming ill with COVID and having to self-isolate if they are a close contact of an infected person: and this will continue to disrupt learning for the foreseeable future.

Table 1: Positive Covid Cases by Month

Dates	Total	Staff	Students	Late Notif (students)	Late Notif (staff)	Total (staff)	Total (students)	Total without late notif	Total late notif
September (18-30)	11	2	9	0	0	2	9	11	0
October	51	11	38	2	0	11	40	49	2
November	59	13	46	0	0	13	46	59	0
December (1-18)	12	3	8	1	0	3	9	11	1
January	41	10	28	3	0	10	31	38	3
February	24	5	17	1	1	6	18	22	2
March	18	3	15	0	0	3	15	18	0
April (14-30)	8	4	4	0	0	4	4	8	0
May	17	2	13	2	0	2	15	15	2
June	41	9	30	2	0	9	32	39	2
July	13	8	2	1	2	10	3	10	3
August	55	13	40	0	2	15	40	53	2
September	189	36	153	0	0	36	153	189	0
October	38	9	28	1	0	9	29	37	1
November	49	21	28	0	0	21	28	49	0
December (1-23)	74	28	45	0	1	29	45	73	1
January 2022	105	47	58	0	0	47	58	105	0
February	173	47	126	0	0	47	126	173	0
March	290	107	183	0	0	107	183	290	0
April	76	48	26	2	0	48	28	74	2

Figure 1: Number of positive cases between September 2020 and April 2022





Maintaining health and well-being: Maintaining momentum

Throughout, the past two years, the College's top priority has been the safety of learners and staff. During the initial and prolonged period of lockdown, staff were offered support to improve resilience, digital wellbeing and help to maintain motivation and energy levels. Staff were surveyed to ensure their voices were heard, leading to the most robust wellbeing survey to date, delivered in partnership with Robertson Cooper, and which will shape the next phase of the College's wellbeing strategy.

A newly recruited Wellbeing Officer translated the College's strategy into practice developing, communicating and implementing wellbeing activities and interventions.

The proactive approach taken was further supported through, Mental health first aid training to key staff including student accommodation staff supporting students unable to travel home; Health, Safety and HR colleagues, security colleagues and student engagement teams. Managers were trained in mental health awareness with renowned expert Dr Anna James.

Investing almost £500,000, the College increased counselling services and protected physical health through the introduction of homeworking DSE assessment for all. New guidance on homeworking was introduced. A therapeutic programme of CBT supporting the mental health of managers was piloted, and mental health first aid training introduced to prepare for the challenging times ahead.

A new wellbeing plan was developed, and a comprehensive online staff resource hub provided resources to promote physical health and wellbeing. Guides to keep staff and students physically safe were created and are regularly updated.

An events programme followed to sustain wellbeing and resilience, including health and safety training on risk assessment, fire safety and evacuation, accident and incident reporting, and health surveillance was also delivered to all staff, ensuring robust processes and procedures were sustained.

Critically, the College prioritised health and wellbeing at the highest levels of the organisation. Throughout, the Principal scheduled staff briefings and interactive sessions for all 1500 staff. Leadership teams maintained regular contact with employees; the Health & Safety committee, inclusive of Trade Unions, met regularly; and the College created a Wellbeing Collective - 70 colleagues providing support and maintaining social connectedness.

Given the importance of communication and responsiveness, a dedicated platform to provide mental health guidance and support, was established, providing:

- Free to access counselling / CBT sessions 24/7 through our Employee Assistance Programme (PAM Assist)
- Interactive webinars on mental health themes
- Development sessions for managers on hosting supportive conversations
- A dedicated People Support email inbox providing confidential support

- Focussed medical supervision and health surveillance through Occupational Health telephone and video consultations
- 24/7 online mental health support by Togetherall
- Guide to homeworking
- Individual stress risk assessment process

The College also designed and delivered:

- Resilience workshops
- Virtual space sessions for staff
- Workplace adjustment leadership guidance

And hosted:

- Energy MoT sessions with Dr Sarah Taylor
- Managing Personal and Team Wellbeing with Dr Anna James
- Digital Wellbeing Workshops with Alex La Via
- Wellbeing programme in partnership with Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
- Therapeutic support through the #Bring Your Own Bother programme with *The Talking Rooms*.

Since then, the College has continually adapted to make campuses physically safe, planning ahead using a systematic risk assessment process. Further reassurances have also been provided to those with increased anxieties, through individual risk assessment and health adjustment process, while regularly updating the suite of operational protocols.

Developing an environment that enables and supports world-class employee health and wellbeing is one of the College key strategic aims. Strategic plans are only considered effective when successfully translated to practice. So, when a member of staff openly describes their experience of the College wellbeing support as “literally saving my life”, evidence of the impact of the planned wellbeing provision becomes incredibly real.

Halls of Residence

As with universities, managing health and safety across the college estate, also meant supporting those in halls of residence. The College typically accommodates around 500 learners per year and from the start of lockdown, the accommodation team quickly made the decision to pause rent payments and enable residents the option to terminate lease agreements at their convenience.

This student led approach contributed to the positive feedback received from parents and students – see box below - especially when other providers, both public and private, were slower to act and didn’t display the same level of understanding.

While administrative/reception staff made the decision to work from home, accommodation staff, including cleaning & security, remained on-site, ensuring the safety of

buildings and residents. Overcoming PPE shortages, the team had to negotiate with FES to ensure emergency repairs were carried out and remained committed to uphold a duty of care towards residents.

New procedures were created and implemented quickly in support of the health & safety of residents. Central to this was identifying those with mental health & wellbeing issues and those at risk during self-isolation, providing round the clock access to food and self-care packages, while conversing and carrying out wellbeing checks.

My name is Claire and I am a student at the City of Glasgow College (Nautical). I have also been a resident of Riverside from September to April and I haven't left Glasgow during all this time as my family is in France and, due to Covid, I haven't been able to go home at all.

I am writing to you today to express my satisfaction regarding my stay in the Halls as well as my gratitude towards the Accommodation Team.

From the moment I arrived to the day I left the residence, all the staff have been really helpful, friendly, efficient and supportive.

I have spent the Christmas break by myself as all my flatmates went home. Rachel and the team have been incredibly supportive and always checked up on me, even on Christmas Day! They often told me that if I needed to talk or was just feeling lonely, I could come down to reception at any time and they would be there to have chat.

As you can imagine, spending Christmas on my own hasn't been easy but I felt very well supported and cared about.

More recently, I've also spent my birthday alone and received a lovely card and some birthday treats from the Accommodation Team! Their words and gestures have meant a lot to me.

The flat itself was also very nice and comfortable. We had an amazing view of the Clyde and the City, and had everything we needed. If we had any issues, it was usually solved within the hour! The residence and its facilities were always well maintained and clean. It made us feel safe during this pandemic.

The past few months have been difficult and challenging for everyone, but I've had the best experience I could have wished for, thanks to the College and Accommodation Teams. It certainly helped with my mental health and my wellbeing.

I could not recommend Riverside more and will definitely be staying there again when I come back from my Sea Phase.

Yours sincerely,

Claire

The social and economic recovery

A Civic and Economic Anchor

City of Glasgow College has - and continues to build – an unparalleled capacity to play a pivotal role as a civic anchor institution in the social and economic regeneration of Glasgow, Scotland and beyond.

From the outset of the pandemic, looking outwardly, the College set out to support the regeneration of the City. It's been here before, playing a major role in the City's recovery from the financial crisis of the late 2000s.

In support of Glasgow's communities, it has prioritised those most disadvantaged.

COVID: ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (ESOL)

COVID and its associated remote working has amplified the difficulties in working with ESOL applicants and learners. Application, enrolment, fee-waiver, induction, teaching and learning have all faced additional challenges, in part because of diversity of need, of digital capacity and of digital skills. ESOL learners at City of Glasgow College include speakers of over 60 different languages.

Their familiarity and proficiency in English varies hugely, ranging from literacy learners who have had little or no formal schooling to university graduates aiming to re-join their professions. The socio-economic and immigration background of the ESOL learners is also diverse. Typically there are around 1800 ESOL enrolments; many of these have Asylum Seeker or Humanitarian Protection status, and are, by definition "destitute". This diversity and economic uncertainty presents a significant challenge to student retention, exacerbated by COVID.

In response to COVID, the College has:

- Diversified how it engages with learners including using SMS, virtual telephone and even postal mail to keep in touch.
- Invested over £300,000 to support the distribution of over 450 Chromebooks, packaged with 24/7 internet access and one years' worth of unlimited data.
- Worked with Connect Scotland to provide 100 digital champions to support learners
- Established a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Glasgow Caledonian University for the joint delivery of a Skills Recognition Project for migrants
- Continued its MoA with k2l –on-line tech company- in support of on-line learning, having maintained the partnership and co-design for many years. The partnership won this year's College Development Network digital award
- Focused on Support for Self-Regulated Learning
- Enabled networking and collaboration, providing leadership in the ESOL community across a range of sectors.

Over the course of 2020, the College continued to prioritise community-based delivery. Over 300 learners have benefitted, including Roma learners; refugee medical practitioners; those on job club and employability programmes; and those interested in

developing their literacy and learning needs. Responding to COVID, work has been undertaken to maintain and bolster provision – increasing the number of hours delivered to local job clubs and maintaining partnerships with community groups. For example, the College provided places for 200 graduates from community organisations, including from the Red Cross. Looking ahead, the College is now focussed on building on these programmes to replicate and expand provision.

Digital Inclusion, Literacy and Citizenship

Tackling adult and digital literacy is central to Scotland’s recovery. Recognising this, in AY19-20, the College launched its new smartphone app, Citizen Literacy, as part of its ground-breaking City Phonics programme for adult literacy learners.

This is the first phonics-based adult literacy app to include the four-skill approach; reading, writing, speaking and listening, with an interface especially designed for low literacy users’ interactivity. Citizen Literacy programme is led by the College, in a unique partnership with, [Scottish Union Learn](#), [Micro-phonics Ltd.](#), [ReachWill Ltd.](#), [Claire Collins Consultancy Ltd.](#), and [TRT etc Ltd.](#)

The project is being funded by Ufi Charitable Trust, which supports the use of technology in vocational education, and Nesta, the UK innovation foundation. The app builds on City of Glasgow College’s successful City Phonics programme which is City and Guilds accredited and offers a fresh approach to teaching adults to read and write. Technical leadership on the project is being provided by City of Glasgow College’s newly established Learning and Teaching Academy and uses AI tools to identify and respond to regional accents. Using machine learning, the app gets better the more it is used.

Right now, the partnership is working on developing and releasing its first set of resources for review by the adult literacy community in the UK and wider afield. This includes drafting a ‘white paper’ to raise awareness of the scale and nature of the adult literacy challenge in the UK and to provide a context and background for ideas, activities and an approach towards a solution.

In support of Glasgow’s skills-led recovery, in the first year of the pandemic, the College developed and delivered over 300 digital courses engaging more than 3000 employees.

Taking as its guide the recommendations of 2020’s Cumberford-Little report¹, the College is pursuing coherent tertiary technological and professional education within the region, and is committed to support recovery through:

- expanding learner pathways that provide continuity and progression, from school to further, to higher education, to continuing and lifetime study, and into jobs in a clear, coherent and collaborative learning environment
- coordinating large scale re- and up-skilling capability for those who face the prospect of redundancy. Through tailored, flexible interventions, the aim is to help individuals

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transition from one sector to another; and establish deep and symbiotic engagement with employers to understand and deliver the emerging skills they require

- better alignment of the outreach to communities and neighbourhoods, recognising that Glasgow's vulnerable groups – hit the hardest by this pandemic - are at particular risk of acute and chronic exclusion as the regional and national economic position deteriorates.

Responding to Business

Responding specifically to employer requests for training, over 2019/20 the College delivered over 800 training courses worth in excess of £700,000. Most of the courses responded to a demand for managerial and soft skills. As might be expected, specialist training in health and safety and IT also featured strongly.

Provision matched reported skills gaps, principally in relation to the ability of first line supervisors / managers (and more senior managers) to effectively lead their teams. Feedback received by the College consistently highlighted the positive impact the training had on organisational effectiveness and productivity. The positive impact was reflected in repeat business as employers come back and book additional training, helping the College to generate extra commercial income. In session 2019/20, this equated to over £55,000 and this increased again in session 2020/21.

As part of the College's commitment to Glasgow's recovery, it is expanding its commercial training teams aiming to be first choice for both Government funding initiatives and employer commercial and apprenticeship contracts.

BAE SYSTEMS

Over 2020-21, in a period where opportunities were sparse, together with BAE Systems, the College forged ahead to provide career opportunities for 44 of Scotland's young people across 7 Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks.

Flexibility, communication and a move towards less bureaucratic systems were key to overcoming the challenges of Covid-19.

The College's responsiveness to employer demands was further evidenced by the decisions of Thales and WGM to join BAE, making available additional apprenticeships.

Clearly though, there have been significant challenges. Projected commercial income for session 2019/20, fell with only around 80% of the College target being achieved. Face to face training programmes were either cancelled or postponed allowing time for conversion to remote delivery and to seek approval from relevant Professional/Awarding bodies. The demand for compliance training, particularly for the industries which have been closed as a result of lockdowns, e.g. Hospitality, also dropped significantly with only 55% of income target for these programmes achieved in 2019/20. This then continued in 2020/21 as lockdowns continued to constrain industry.

By maintaining contact with partners throughout lockdown, the College has adapted provision to meet the upskilling and reskilling needs of business. Through the Business Development Team's engagement with employers, a wide range of new programmes have been identified and developed, such as Remote Working, Management and Mental Health Awareness.

The move to remote delivery models for commercial programmes has also opened up new markets and has allowed the College to make more efficient use of its resources as there is no longer a consideration in terms of the geographical location of the client and class sizes are no longer restricted by the size of the available accommodation.

Throughout demand for courses from International Students remained high despite restrictions. Faculties revised their delivery models, delivering the first semester remotely, and moving to face to face delivery when restrictions eased. The College also saw an increase in applications from individual HE students for session 20/21 which supplemented the income from existing partnerships.

Central to the College's commitment are the region's small and medium sized enterprises. Throughout session 2019/2020 the College supported SME growth and focused its innovation work on tackling economic and environmental challenges, utilising the Scottish Government's Interface's Innovation Voucher scheme and other funded projects via Scotland's Innovation Centres.

In addition, the College continued to deliver certified innovation development programmes across the private and public sectors including for: Glasgow Life, Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and Leidos UK.

In taking forward this work the College is making best use of the fact that it hosts the Scottish branch of the Institute of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (Scottish IKE). The College and the Institute have continued to work strategically with industry, initiating and implementing a range of applied research projects and strategic agreements, all aimed at facilitating large scale change in key areas of industry. Notable projects in the past year, for example, include research funded by the Maritime Education Foundation (MEF) to address the dangers of oxygen depletion in enclosed spaces; and partnerships with CIRIA (the Construction Industry Research and Information Association), Zero Waste Scotland and AWS Educate, the latter bringing industry standard training and development in cloud computing to students and staff.

The Emerging Reality

As the tiered lockdowns have gradually come to an end, Scotland's Super College has reopened, acutely aware of the many super challenges that lay ahead.

Through its foresight and leadership, the College has remained confident that it mitigated some of the impact of the pandemic and played its part in minimising the future risks to its staff and students. There's a sense that it has played its part in recovery and that, when needed, it acted.

As we enter the next phases of the pandemic, categorised by continuing stress and anxiety, the challenges for the College are many.

The support from teaching staff will be instrumental in the continued wellbeing of students, which is why the College has increased its provision of staff counselling, and ensured physical health is protected through the introduction of homeworking DSE assessment for all, with new guidance introduced. A therapeutic programme of CBT, to support the mental health of managers, has also been piloted and it's clear that this key group of leaders has appreciated the time & investment made by the College in paying particular attention to their wellbeing as they supported the wellbeing of their teams.

Mental health first aid training for staff in key contact areas has been introduced to prepare a wider support network for the challenging times ahead. Health & safety training on Risk Assessment, Fire safety & evacuation, Accident & Incident reporting and health surveillance has also been delivered to all managers & staff, ensuring robust processes & procedures are sustained.

In terms of learning and teaching, on the 15th of March 2021, the College reintroduced in-person teaching, although the capacity was much reduced. Mindful of the 14 weeks of disrupted learning in practical skills and development, curriculum teams reviewed their delivery, taking account of the critical technical skills required for students to progress internally within the College, onward into Higher Education and or employment.

The operational challenges of working with reduced capacity and continuing social distancing measures were significant. However, the College teaching teams demonstrated again their agility and commitment to students through creative planning and timetabling.

This required lecturers to work out with their contractual obligations, giving up annual leave to offer additional classes over the Spring break, twilight, evenings and into the summer months whilst still maintaining core planned curriculum activity.

The College also committed to support all non-completing students in 2020/21 to extend, defer or repeat their course, including contacting students who withdrew in-year to offer professional careers guidance, ensuring that all students are provided appropriate guidance on options and choices.

As well as supporting the best outcomes for learners, to be successful the College knows it needs to also minimise the financial impact, deliver on the Scottish Government's ambitions

and lead the Scottish Government's review of college and university provision, with its aim of securing coherent and sustainable provision post-recovery. All this will require greater adaptability and agility from all corners of the College.

Supporting each other and strengthening relationships across the College and its partners will be essential. Building shared ownership and maximising transparency will need to be a cornerstone of this next phase.

Internally, the values of the College have never been more important to the bottom line.

With nearly 40% of its income from non-grant (Government) sources experiencing major reductions, a financial loss was experienced during 2020/21. Strong sector leadership softened the blow in securing essential Scottish Government grants; good full-time enrolments in September; increased projected fee income reflecting enrolments and courses successfully being taught online; and lower than anticipated fall in commercial and international income have enabled the College to move closer to a breakeven position.

However, the loss of catering and student accommodation income, the end of furlough and European Social Funds will require the College to enter into a renewed phase of resilience planning. This will require leadership on all fronts and difficult decisions will continue to need to be made especially in relation to; staffing to deliver the increased courses and achieve related fee income; additional short-term staffing to cover assessment deferrals and other provision gaps; and capital expenditure to replace IT equipment and continue to provide laptops to learners.

Lessons Learnt

In the midst of the day-to-day operational challenges, the College dedicated time to reflect on its experience; to review, assess and agree the key lessons learnt.

Mindful that true leadership should anticipate and stop problems arising in the first place, across its Faculties and Directorates, the College has established key lessons that it hopes will mean it is even more prepared for the task ahead.

- Ensure Business Continuity Planning is up to date and covers all college functions, including Incident Management (response and control), and Business Recovery Plans
- Ensure Board of Management and Senior Management Teams can function remotely at all times
- Offer compassionate leadership by sharing relatable stories about personal experience and feelings to create a spirit of trust and that we were all in this together. Communication is more than just offering information
- Reassure and communicate with students and staff regularly even when not much has changed
- Gently rebuff denial and encourage change when the situation demands something different
- Make talking about the challenges a priority
- Ensure capacity to pay people on time remotely, taking account of previous paper-based systems that may no longer be available

- Flex and adapt to provide continued wellbeing, welfare and support services at times when primary care services are disrupted
- Rapidly respond to developing needs to support staff and students
- Know what employees want and require, providing the platforms for direct engagement to inform strategic and at times operational direction - maintaining effective links with Trade Unions
- Ensure all staff have the resources to undertake their roles effectively, so that no employees are disadvantaged.

The Task Ahead

Lost Learning and Learning Gain

Halfway through AY 20-21 the College was reassured by the fact that full-time attendance overall was up on the same point last year and early withdrawal down in all categories of Full-Time provision.

Persisting lockdowns, though, inevitably took their toll, and after the successes of 2019-20, the fallout of the pandemic had an impact on student retention, principally for those studying further education.

Overall, though, by the end of AY 2020/21, the College had exceeded the sector average for the numbers of learners successfully completing full-time courses, for both Further and Higher Education (61.6% vs 61.3%) (76.6% vs 72.1%) respectively.

The College had also achieved significantly better than sector average in completion rates for FE part-time courses (84.2% v 76.3%). All of which has reinforced the College's understanding of the real value of the effort made over the last two years.

Comparing itself against a group of similarly sized Scottish colleges, including Edinburgh, Fife, and North East College, the College was pleased to have out-performed all of these institutions in terms of the combined FE and HE overall successful completion rates.

However, given the levels of disruption to learning, and the numbers who were unable to complete, the College feels it is not really appropriate to judge the success of the sector against the successful completion performance targets set pre-Covid by the Scottish Funding Council.

During the continued lockdowns students faced unprecedented challenges in sustaining the continuity of learning, with the result that more than 2000 were required to extend, defer or repeat their studies. The Glasgow area in particular was in higher restrictions more often and longer than most other regions and as such there was also unequal parity of educational experience across the country.

With subsequent and sustained lockdowns making course completion increasingly difficult, the College led the sector in making a commitment to support all non-completing students in 2020/21 to extend, defer or repeat their course.

This included contacting students who had withdrawn in year to offer professional careers guidance, ensuring that all students were provided with appropriate guidance on options and choices. The College did all it could to ensure students were given every opportunity to continue and complete their learning, with staff going above and beyond – offering summer schools and catch-up learning.

On reflection, the College feels the challenges faced are much deeper and wider reaching than the achievement of a single performance target. What is increasingly clear is that the

impact of the pandemic – on both learners and the sector - is continuing and likely to be felt for several years to come.

One of the challenges that has emerged, predominantly through the school sector, is the concept of 'lost learning'. A recent large scale research review conducted by Ofqual (2021) attempted to quantify learning loss in England since the beginning of the pandemic, on the basis of attainment data from commercially developed assessment instruments or systems. Ten research studies were identified, the majority focussed on primary school level and concluded that:

- primary school students were generally a month or so behind expectations
- disadvantaged primary school students were disproportionately behind expectations

The research indicated that the extent to which any of these conclusions can inform expectations concerning likely levels of learning loss for students is unclear. However, if these results are an indicator of our future students the challenge the tertiary sector faces regarding learning loss is potentially 'downstream'.

A further and fundamental element is the wider impact on the social and development aspects of students. The College held a Mental Health Conference in Dec 2021. Dr Anna James (Criminologist and specialist in the management of challenging behaviours and mental Health) presented research on teenage brain development during successive lockdowns.

Key outcomes highlighted lack of recognition of safe boundaries and increase in risk taking behaviours in risky environments and the next section (long Covid) highlights some tangible evidence of that in the College. Suggested mitigations for learning and teaching include the Importance of embedding resilience into pedagogy and preparing learners for future change.

In response, the College has begun the development of a Toolkit to embed mental health and wellbeing in learning and teaching practice. It is suggested that the College and as the sector should conduct research into this important concept to ensure we fully understand the impact of Covid on our current and future learners.

Another view is when considering these learners there is a risk of labelling and creating a 'covid generation' who employers and (worse) students themselves consider as a 'failed generation'.

The College is keen to flip this, so instead of 'Lost learning' we think in terms of 'Learning gain'. Indeed, the College points out the scale of the attributes and skills that young people have gained during this time – especially becoming the leaders in the use of digital skills and literacy.

In some respects, the students are better prepared to enter the workplace and grow into an uncertain future having experienced the most disrupted learning than any other generation in recent times.

This cohort of students have proven to be understanding, compassionate, self-directed, and independent with the capacity to adapt and change learning styles.

Not lost, but more resilient than ever.

Long Covid

To date, the College has yet to truly see Long Covid impacting on its student community. The latest research into Long Covid suggests that the risk rises with age, predominately over 50s and female, so it may not be a significant issue within the student community at the College where the 16-24-year-old age group accounts for approximately 71% of enrolments.

However, as Covid continues to disrupt both the student experience and learning and teaching with increasing numbers of students testing positive and isolating, the College is unsure how this will impact on retention and success in the coming academic years. This will be something that, together with the sector, the College will need to watch closely.

At the same time, the College is also mindful of the wider economic and social harms arising from the pandemic and their lasting impact on its students and partners. These 'harms' have now been categorised by the Scottish Government and their impact considered at a national level, as set out in the attached appendix to this report.

Central to the emergent harms, has been the impact of social isolation with its lasting and damaging consequences for entrenching poverty and inequality.

In planning the curriculum, the College was led by lockdowns and restrictions, impacting face-to-face social interaction. During the disrupted patterns of learning, College staff observed the consequences of social isolation on students and, over time, how this has impacted social development, interaction and peer relationships and social networks.

Those most affected have been those studying further education; aged 16-19, and from lower socio-economic backgrounds, especially those also care experienced and disabled. This has been evidenced by higher withdrawal rates, disrupted attendance patterns, and higher levels of reported anxiety.

As restrictions eased, the College increased its face-to-face delivery mindful of, and to address these harms. Moreover, in planning and designing its future delivery, the College is now making social development a key consideration in its planning of face-to-face delivery through a variety of lecturer led and peer supported blended delivery.

The College appreciates that this is not a short-term issue and that it cannot be complacent. Indeed, mindful of the societal harms also seen in schools, the College fully anticipates that

it will be responding to the social development challenges created by the pandemic for many years to come.

The College is also acutely aware of how the Glasgow economy has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In part this reflects its high proportion of SME businesses and a significant leisure and service industry.

The College has serviced these industries and businesses successfully over a number of years, and so in the short term has been able to maintain ongoing dialogue to respond to needs locally. Working closely with business, developing fit-for-purpose and bespoke training was key to supporting the local workforce to continue to operate effectively and efficiently.

However, as the pandemic continued the negative impact on business became evident and a series of established Glasgow businesses announced closures and high street shops ceased trading either physically or online.

Economic forecasts were pessimistic despite the positive impact of the Job retention Scheme, which had allowed a large number of partner businesses to retain staff and participate in bespoke training with the College.

Positively, and perhaps due to the significant partnership effort undertaken between national and local Government the recession anticipated didn't materialise. Indeed, by the end of 2021, the estimated unemployment rate among people aged 16 and over remained unchanged at 4.1%. Across the UK, employment rates actually rose from 74.6% to 75.5%, according to the Office for National Statistics with HMRC estimates showing 2.4 million pay rolled employees in Scotland in January 2022, approximately 14,000 more than pre-pandemic levels in February 2020.

However, the College and the Local Chamber of Commerce are not complacent that the economic recovery is a short-term concern. Due to the profound impact it has had on an ageing and maturing workforce, the College is gearing up to respond to the emerging needs of partner businesses as the economy flexes to adapt to this new economic normal.

A Long Shadow

At the time of writing this report, the "once-in-a-century" nature of the global pandemic, had been endured for some two years. It has been a public health emergency of enormous proportions with tragic outcomes for so many. One which also risks driving a deep socio-economic crisis. And, of course, coincided with Brexit, leaving UK and Scottish economies especially vulnerable.

To make matters worse, businesses weakened a decade ago by the banking crash of the late 2000s have been further damaged by successive lockdowns, and forecasts suggest a return to pre-pandemic activity levels before 2024 is unlikely. More recently, inflationary pressures arising in part from labour market shortages represent a further threat to public sector finances.

But Glasgow City – and City of Glasgow College – have been here before - and met the challenge. Ultimately, together they overcame the recession created by 2008 sub-prime US

mortgages; and didn't suffer the lost generation of young people that so scarred the 1980s and beyond. Instead, colleges across Scotland were instrumental in protecting and enhancing the life chances of countless young people.

As a mark of the impact of the College, an independent economic assessment conducted by the Fraser of Allander Institute at Strathclyde concluded its activity generated a £6bn boost the Scottish economy over the long-term, equating to £59,000 per graduate.

So, the College stands ready, working with its many business partners, to help Glasgow and Scotland back to its feet once more. To do that the College's focus is on building capacity in the workforce, delivering the skills employers need to adapt and renew their operations; helping Glaswegians – wherever they're from – to take their first steps in learning and progress to degree level study and beyond – or follow one of many other pathways into a job. It's also ready to deliver the skills to help confront the climate challenge – for example, by supporting the Glasgow Region's ambitious 'greening' of its housing stock.

But for this recovery to take place, the conditions in which colleges operate need to be right. So the College is enthusiastic about the recommendations from the Scottish Funding Council's 2021 "Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability", and particularly welcome its focus on the development of a coherent tertiary system in Scotland.

Almost two years ago, the College Principal and his counterpart at Edinburgh College, on commission from senior Scottish Ministers, developed the Cumberland-Little Report. That report now stands not just as the inspiration for the SFC's Review, and the subsequent work of the UK independent Commission on the College of the Future, but also as the blueprint for Scotland's skills response to the pandemic. It is worth repeating here some of Cumberland-Little's fundamental recommendations:

- There should be a new purpose for the 21st century college, focused on world-class lifetime learning, training, and high-quality business support;
- The targets to which colleges operate should be purposeful impact measures, incentivising them to deliver high quality support to employers, individuals, and communities;
- Colleges should receive funding commensurate with the role asked of them. That funding is an investment in Scotland's future, and that of all its people
- We must invest in, and support development of, high quality, cross-silo leadership. That is a pre-requisite for the tertiary system Cumberland -Little proposes, and which SFC endorses;
- Colleges should play (and be funded to play) an enhanced role in supporting business innovation.

With policy support of this kind, Glasgow and Scotland will derive the full benefit of college provision, driving economic activity with a skilled workforce, to safeguard communities and save livelihoods.

Appendix

Wider Harms of the Covid-19 pandemic on Learners, Students and Staff within Higher Education, Further Education and Community Learning and Development in Scotland - 14.03.2022

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE) and the Community Learning and Development (CLD) sector for the past three academic years. During academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 there were significant public health measures in place that affected students for long periods of time. For the 2021-22 session, although the student experience has been closer to what it was pre-Covid, there has still been an ongoing cumulative wider impact on students and learners, where institutions have been implementing voluntary additional measures going beyond the requirements of the statutory guidance. To date, there has been much focus on the direct health harms of the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper considers the indirect, wider harms of the pandemic on students, learners and staff within the FE, HE and CLD sectors from the perspective of stakeholders and drawing on the findings or relevant reports relating to these sectors. Some of these wider harms will not be unique to these sectors and are also likely to have affected other groups.

The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Universities and Colleges (EAG) provides detailed consideration on how public health and related scientific advice can be applied to operational implementation. It provides advice to Scottish Government and the Advanced Learning Recovery Group to support decision and policy making for the FE, HE and CLD sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The EAG met with student, college, university, CLD and union representatives during the autumn of 2022, prior to the emergence of the Omicron variant. This report summarises the findings of these discussions, focusing on the following themes:

- Disruption to student learning
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Social effects
- Financial effects
- Impacts on staff and CLD volunteers
- Ongoing adaptations

This report is intended to be used to support future discussions by the EAG on mitigations of the wider harms' impacts of Covid-19 on FE, HE and CLD.

2. Disruption to student learning

There is now considerable evidence [\(1\)](#) from around the world [\(2\)](#) that there have been disruptions to student learning in further and higher education. This has also been the case in Scotland.

During the past three academic years, in-person teaching and learning has been

subject to a range of protective measures, some of which have led to significant changes to the format and experience of learning, both negatively and cumulatively affecting the quality of the learning experiences of Scotland's students and learners.

The vast majority of students' educational experience has been adversely affected by reduced levels of in-person teaching and learning. However, the most significant deficits are likely to have been experienced by the most socially disadvantaged and vulnerable students and learners, and by those who have studied vocational courses or courses with significant practical elements where there has been a lack of access to work placements. This has resulted in some educational experiences not fully covering the required breadth of knowledge and experience in order for students to develop the necessary skills required for the workplace.

Student, college and university representatives all reported that because of the pandemic's cumulative impact on learning, restoring more face-to-face provision on campus is becoming increasingly important to ensure that course progression is maintained. Many students are demanding more in-person teaching: one poll of over 400 Strathclyde University students (3) showed that 75% of the students surveyed wanted more in-person teaching. The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3, November 2020* (4), sampled the views of over 4,000 students in Scotland and highlighted the deficit in practical skills (e.g. wet labs) and a need to take steps to avoid longer term employability issues for affected students as it might lead to future challenges in the workplace including students not having the required level of skills and experience when looking for a job.

College and student representatives reported that some non-practical courses were delivered online with little or no in-person teaching as a consequence of practical subjects being prioritised. Given that Scottish Government guidance during a large proportion of the pandemic was to work from home where possible, many courses that didn't require students to physically present in a lab, workshop or similar were almost delivered fully online for extended periods of time. This has led to those students being disadvantaged as they have been deprived of learning experiences where face-to-face interactions would have been more beneficial, such as tutorials and group-work.

Specific examples of challenges provided by student and college representatives around in-person teaching included one college delaying the start of the academic term for most students in order to enable deferred students on practical courses to complete their final year. Another example is dentistry students being required to complete an extra year of study, repeating the 2020-21 academic year. Students from vulnerable groups, including those with additional support needs, face significant challenges in their educational experiences and in many cases have been unable to access a consistent level of support. For example, many English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students remained in their own communities due to lockdowns and have not progressed their language skills.

College and student representatives explained that the number of students dropping out of courses has increased. Further increases in drop-out rates remains a serious risk and new entrants who started in January 2022 are another at risk cohort. College representatives indicated that overall numbers of college student enrolments are considerably down in the current academic year and attributed this to issues including pupils staying on at school, more students going to university as a result of increased

attainment since 2019 (5), the greater availability of low skilled jobs and college course numbers being capped due to restrictions such as physical distancing requirements. The February 2022 *Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations* evidences that the proportion of school leavers in Higher Education (at either Universities or Colleges) increased from 44.2% for 2019/20 to 45.1% for 2020/21 while the proportion of school leavers who were in Further Education fell from 28.1% to 23.3% and the proportion of school leavers that were unemployed decreased from 6.0% for 2019/20 to 4.2% for 2020/21 (6). In addition, the statistics show an increase in the proportion of school leavers coming from S6 (62.8% in 2019/20 to 63.2% in 2020/21), suggesting that more S4 and S5 pupils are staying on to later years of school provision.

While concerns about reduced levels of in-person teaching have had a significant negative impact on learning experiences, it is also important to recognise that online learning had a number of benefits. Student representatives stated that the pandemic had demonstrated that many elements of university courses can be delivered online. University and college representatives reported that the blended learning environment has been helpful, accelerating innovation and providing flexibility for some students who found it better suited their circumstances. Other positives included being able to listen to lectures at different times, and that the chat function may be less intimidating for some students and they can also pre-record contributions. The Office for National Statistics survey *Coronavirus and higher education students: England, 19 to 29 November 2021* (7) reported that of the surveyed students who were enrolled in an educational institution during the 2020/21 academic year, 43% indicated that their academic performance has been better since the start of the Autumn 2021 term compared with the previous academic year. University representatives indicated that lecturers have been very creative in adapting to prepare, deliver and assess more online courses. Staff commitment, engagement and effort has enabled online learning to happen. Student engagement with online materials has been positive in many cases. However, it was acknowledged that other students have been disengaging with online learning for reasons including challenges with digital access as well as the absence of in-person interaction.

There is a specific need for support to improve captioning. Since 23 September 2020, all 'time-based media' (video and audio) have been required to either provide an accurate transcript or captioning, or both (video only). This created a substantial workload issue as digital content significantly increased during the pandemic. University representatives stated that pre-recorded and other asynchronous university materials have been particularly useful for international students who were unable to travel for some of the time during the 2020-21 academic year and during the early stages of the current academic year. This resulted in some students studying in different time zones. Looking ahead, these resources should ideally continue to be available to support student transitions.

College and student representatives described how digital connectivity is inconsistent across Scotland and this has been a particular issue for many students from remote rural areas who have been further isolated. One in ten respondents to the Thriving Learners research (8), felt that they did not have adequate internet access where they lived to effectively engage with university and friends online. Some college students are using Smartphones to study online. Student

representatives also reported that access to other learning resources was affected during the pandemic, particularly for remote institutions with students unable to access books in libraries. This has improved but remains a concern.

Although online learning will continue, particularly for large-scale lectures, universities are likely to move towards more face-to-face provision and there are demands for this from both students and staff. During Semester 2 of the current academic year, small group teaching is being prioritised and is most valued by students. Some universities are planning larger group activities (including some on-campus assessments), with many retaining caps on maximum numbers.

University representatives commented that many student-facing services have been delivered online. This, at least to some extent, will continue to be the case in the future as this experience has been positive for many students and they have benefited from a more flexible support service with a greater reach. University representatives also reported that assessment policies have been changed as a result of the pandemic and evidence is emerging of a closing of the race and disability awarding gaps, although further evidence is needed to understand this.

College representatives indicated that in courses that include mandatory placement elements, many students have been unable to undertake those placements, and whilst awarding bodies may have altered assessment models to enable qualification awards, this does not necessarily equip students with the required skills for the workplace. Colleges must therefore evaluate the loss of learning for students over the past three academic years and plan for how this can be addressed, whilst at the same time catering for new students commencing their courses of study, who themselves will have previously experienced lost learning, often from a school setting. They added that school – college partnership links have also been negatively affected during the pandemic, reducing the learning opportunities provided for the cohort of pupils who would have otherwise benefited from these links.

Community Learning and Development (CLD) Learner Impacts

There were specific issues raised by CLD representatives on the disruption to learning due to a lack of available facilities for in-person teaching and training. This was because many providers often let their facilities and rely on the facility owners who, when the situation dictates, are likely to prioritise their own requirements for access at the expense of CLD provision. A survey by Youthlink Scotland [\(9\)](#) in October 2021 found that 54% of respondents had access to facilities that they need, compared to 22% in June. Although this was an improvement on previous survey figures during the pandemic, the provider noted that there remain significant challenges in obtaining access to schools, community lets, leisure centres, faith based centres, other community venues and also outdoor spaces. Hiring facilities costs are becoming increasingly expensive along with many other costs.

CLD representatives cited digital access as a significant challenge and reported that the digital divide is still very real and exacerbating inequalities. Although access to technology is a major issue, not having the skills and understanding to use technology is also a barrier. This is particularly true for many adult learners and they will continue to miss out on learning experiences until this is addressed.

CLD representatives indicated that learning loss is a major challenge for many learners where progression, course completions and destination outcomes have been negatively impacted. For the most vulnerable learners, in some cases, learning regression has taken place during the pandemic necessitating a re-establishing of learner basic ground rules for attendance and behaviours including time-keeping, respectful relationships etc. It is crucial that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that learners who have lost motivation and enthusiasm for learning receive the appropriate support. This includes providing key messages to learners through effective CLD communications and marketing.

Due to the varied nature of work within CLD together with the range of different settings that staff and volunteers are required to operate in, when trying to apply appropriate Covid-19 guidance, some find it confusing. It would be helpful if good practice could be more effectively shared amongst staff and volunteers across CLD in order to promote a more consistent approach towards supporting adherence within the sector.

3. Mental Health and Wellbeing

This section explores how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the mental health and wellbeing of FE/HE students and CLD learners. This paper uses The World Health Organisation's definition that *mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community* (10).

Understanding the determinants of worsening mental health is required. College representatives explained that prior to the pandemic, there was already concern about the deterioration in mental health and wellbeing amongst the student population, particularly in those from more disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups, exacerbated by a lower baseline in terms of mental health support being offered compared with other education sectors. Over the course of the pandemic, mental health and wellbeing amongst students and learners has further deteriorated. The lack of socialising and human interaction/connection as well as academic stresses and in many cases financial hardship have all affected this. Think Positive research, 2020, (11), involving over 3000 students in Scotland, identified that 48.9% of students believed lack of money and financial pressures had a negative impact on their mental health. The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3*, (4) stated that over half of the students surveyed indicated that their mental health was worse than it was pre-Covid-19 and cited a number of challenging wellbeing issues including isolation, loneliness, anxiety, inability to make new friends and depression. These concerns exist nationally. The Office for National Statistics survey *Coronavirus and higher education students: England, 19 to 29 November 2021*, (7) reported that of the students at English Universities surveyed, the proportion of students feeling lonely often or always was 14%, significantly higher than the adult population in Great Britain (6%), but not significantly different to the 16- to 29-year-old age group (10%) and the average life satisfaction score for students was 6.7, which was significantly lower than the adult population in Great Britain (7.1), but was not any different to the 16- to 29-year-old age group (6.7). Another Office of National Statistics survey *Covid-19 Schools Infection Survey, England: mental health and*

Long Covid, November to December 2021, (12) provides further evidence of how within education, the pandemic has particularly affected socially disadvantaged young people of secondary school age and reports that a much greater proportion of secondary school pupils eligible for free school meals had a probable mental health disorder compared with those who were not eligible (28.3% compared with 12.4%).

There has been a cumulative impact on student mental health during this third academic year of disruption affecting many students and learners' capacity to progress. Research recently published by the Mental Health Foundation, of over 15,000 students in Scotland (8) found that 74% reported low wellbeing and more students were dissatisfied with their learning than satisfied; nearly 20% of students reported suicidal ideation in the six months prior to the survey. Higher Education Student Data (HESA) (13) shows that in 2016-17, there were 1,920 entrants at Scottish Providers that declared a mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder, increasing to 3,050 declarations in 2018-19, 3,585 in 2019-20 and 4,495 in 2020-21. In rural student halls, it is reported that deterioration in mental health has contributed to an increase in substance misuse. Particular consideration should be given to student parents at college who require attention as they lack a division between home, work and study. The same goes for college students who are not undertaking practical courses and have had over a year of online study.

Student, college, university and CLD representatives expressed concerns about the level of mental health support available. *The Royal College of Psychiatrists Mental Health of Higher Education Students report, May 2021*, (14) highlights the clear links between student mental health and wellbeing and academic performance. The report includes recommendations to deliver improved and further integrated mental health and wellbeing services for students through increased collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and the NHS. Support for mental health and wellbeing is available via a range of providers and an Open Letter (15) from the Principals and Student Union Presidents of Scotland's 19 universities assured students that mental health and wellbeing was a top priority in the 21/22 academic year with institutions seeking to establish whole institution approaches to support wider wellbeing.

The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3, November 2020* (4) found that around three in five students who sought mental health support, were satisfied with what they received. 23% of students had sought mental health support since the start of the pandemic and 33% were missing face-to-face pastoral support. The additional resource provided during the pandemic to support mental health and wellbeing by Scottish Government was welcomed. However, as it is only a short term measure, it is unclear how in the longer term institutions will be able to fully support those with mental health needs, and to offer equity of access across the education system. With an increasing number of students disclosing mental health issues and disabilities, resources are likely to be further stretched. University representatives described how out-of-hours mental health support could be highly beneficial for those students in need, but few institutions can offer this service. One option might be for organisations to share out-of-hours access to address this need. Where institutions are offering it, there has been a reported significant emotional toll on a typically small staff team that routinely deal with crisis cases.

CLD representatives reported that the reduction in face-to-face activity over the course of the pandemic has had a significant impact on learners' mental health with many experiencing feelings of isolation, anxiety and reduced self-esteem, thus exacerbating already poor mental health outcomes especially in the most vulnerable. The inability and lack of opportunity to build relationships and socialise in a safe space could further create a divide between learners and their community. The *Headlines from the Access to Facilities Survey October 2021* (9) by Youth Link Scotland explains that because of significantly reduced in-person learning due to a lack of available facilities for CLD provision, many young people are unable to access important relationships and much-needed support with health and wellbeing.

4. Social effects

The social effects of Covid-19 have been far reaching. Perspectives regarding the impact on Scotland's student population is reflected within this section, drawing on evidence provided and comments from stakeholders.

The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3* (4) indicated that 75% of surveyed students in Scotland were missing social interactions with their peers and also staff. University and student representatives stated that due to isolation the lack of on-campus activity for many students, relationships are under-developed and students don't know each other or their lecturers like previous cohorts did. Student representatives indicated that the challenges of social reintegration of students on campus for in-person learning and socialising is making it harder for students to adapt to student life.

This could be damaging the social development of many younger adults and 1st and 2nd year students are becoming noticeably less vocal on issues of student life. There have been reports of an increase in discrimination and intolerance towards students with disabilities, particularly 'invisible' disabilities, leading to many feeling compelled to disclose their disability to manage face covering exemption situations. There have been reports about increased levels of general rudeness amongst students and staff as well as the reduced tolerance levels of students towards people's views.

College representatives reported that colleges enrol disproportionately high numbers of students from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds. SFC College data (16) shows that 32.2% of credits delivered on FE courses at colleges in 2020-21 were provided to learners from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. The impact of the associated Covid-19 harms on this cohort has widened inequalities. Many younger students, as well as those with additional support needs, have not had the chance to socialise and develop essential everyday life skills. This has resulted in the emergence of some behavioural issues in students and learners that have not generally been observed in previous year-groups.

Student and college representatives made the point that developing skills for learning, life and work is a key component of students' education, particularly for those who are currently furthest away from the workforce, but the impact of the pandemic has in many cases, severely limited this skills development.

University representatives also noted an increase in social skills deficits being reported, especially in younger students (e.g. those aged 14-16 when the pandemic

started), both in social settings and in learning, as students have not socialised like they normally would have pre-Covid-19. Student representatives reported that there have been limited opportunities to question lecturers or peers through online learning, affecting student mental health. Many younger students demonstrate a lack of safety behaviours and resilience. This is affecting student life, learning and the ability of students to be resourceful. An example of how institutions are supporting students is the University of Glasgow's [the SafeZone App](#) to address general safety concerns for students. Students can use this app to alert the University's security services of an emergency, of a need for first aid, or to access help such as obtaining directions.

College and university representatives reported that equity of rules to deal with Covid-19 across all areas of society would be helpful. Students find it confusing how they can visit what they might consider high risk settings such as pubs and night clubs, and yet experience tight restrictions within perceived low risk settings within education. On a similar theme, a 16-year-old school pupil who may also be attending college, has different sets of rules to a 16-year-old who has already left school and is attending college. Strong messaging and effective communications is therefore required to overcome the potential for confusion. These discrepancies may also be problematic when trying to encourage Covid-19 compliance on campus. Student representatives indicated that college and university students are confused and in many cases anxious about the Covid-19 rules. Consistent, concise and well-timed communications to students is required in order for messaging to be effective.

Student representatives indicated that there are some international students who have not received a recognised vaccine and struggle to be eligible for the Covid Status app (to access mass events and night clubs, for example) resulting in confusion among students about what they are able to participate in, thus affecting their opportunities for socialising.

5. Financial effects

Covid-19 has produced a major shock to economies around the world and Scotland's economy has been affected. There are significant financial implications for institutions and us all as individuals. This section describes the financial effects within the university, college and CLD sectors.

Student representatives indicated that many students across Scotland lack sufficient funds to continue with their courses of study, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The November 2021 'Thriving Learners' report, [\(8\)](#), found that 21.5% of students surveyed worried about running out of food, nearly a quarter ate less due to a lack of resources or money and 7.2% were in households that ran out of food.

Overall, food poverty among students, particularly older students, is a rising concern. NUS Scotland's research from July 2021 (17) found that 12% of Scotland's students are using foodbanks, 27% rely on credit cards, and 9% use bank loans. 72% of students expressed concern about their ability to manage financially. Student representatives explained that the number of cases of student homelessness has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Super Priority Visas and increased costs have harmed students financially, especially international students.

Many students are working more hours in employment than are recommended.

University representatives indicated that there has been an increase in the number of staff and students disclosing disabilities and learning needs, resulting in increased support costs. HESA data [\(13\)](#) shows in 2020-21 that 42,135 university students in Scotland had a known disability (15% of all students). This is an increase from 2019-20 when 14% of all students had a known disability. SAAS data for 2020-2021, [\(18\)](#), shows 5,290 full-time students received Disabled Students' Allowance totalling £10.7 million. An increase from 2019-2020 (5,175 students and £9.8 million). Emergency student funding provided last year was welcomed and made a difference to student retention and engagement. However, only a minority of students had received support from their institutions through discretionary funds.

College representatives reported that the delivery of online learning during the pandemic has brought a focus on digital poverty. Along with financial support from the government, institutions have provided the hardware and data that students need for online learning. However, many students, particularly those from the most disadvantaged groups, simply do not have a safe, nor even adequate place to complete their online learning, and associated costs such as Wi-Fi can be prohibitive. Student representatives indicated that some students are no longer attending online lectures because of Wi-Fi, Pay-As-You-Go data and equipment costs. There are also financial implications for institutions in ensuring digital access for all within future cohorts. There are cost implications associated with IT support including improving captioning and other technologies that should be considered in the context of Scotland's Digital Strategy where new ways of working are to be designed to meet the needs of the user.

College representatives shared the concern that some individuals will have lost the opportunity to learn new skills at a key point in their lives. This will affect their future career progression and ability to earn. More widely, it will have an impact on the pipeline of skills required by Scotland's economy. It is important to consider how, at some point in the future, those who have missed out on educational opportunities due to the pandemic can be re-engaged with education later on in life.

CLD representatives reported that many learners have been financially adversely affected by the pandemic. Common issues affecting learners as well as those who financially support them include furlough, unemployment, lack of part-time work availability, unpaid course completion grants, and inability to access childcare.

6. Impact on Staff and CLD Volunteers

Throughout the course of the pandemic, university and college staff and CLD staff and volunteers have encountered challenging and unfamiliar situations. This section describes those challenges and the associated impacts.

Union representatives reported that the workload of staff and the way in which people work has become considerably more demanding during the pandemic. There are additional concerns in relation to women, race, carers and disabled staff as some of them have left employment during the pandemic due to these extra work pressures. In the HE sector, there are concerns that due to increased workloads in

teaching provision, research time is reduced. 50% of 1,000 Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) members (mainly from the FE sector) who were surveyed in November 2021 (19), worked overtime due to their institution's approach to online learning. Unions identified understaffing as a fundamental issue.

Union and college representatives reported that pre-pandemic, there were already morale issues in HE due to high workloads, pension cuts, job insecurity and other factors, leading to poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes among staff. Along with a perceived lack of recognition felt by some, these issues have been exacerbated during the pandemic with the additional Covid-19 safety fears of many staff and particularly frontline workers (cleaners, estate staff, accommodation staff). With the return to campuses of increasing numbers of staff, students and learners' unions have particular safety concerns for clinically vulnerable staff, especially those who cannot work from home.

Many lower paid workers perceive that little or no consideration is given to their health, or changes to their working practices. 36% of the EIS survey respondents (19) said their institution had checked on their personal wellbeing during the pandemic. UCU also conducted a survey of their members in Scotland in August 2021 (20) and 68% felt their employer was either somewhat supportive or very supportive of staff and the challenges faced over the past academic year.

Workforce resilience is an emerging issue. Union surveys (19) state that 70% of EIS respondents felt that the changed working practices introduced during the pandemic raised their stress levels and 75% of UCU Scotland surveyed members experienced an increase in stress or anxiety, (20). Staff are becoming less confident about their existing skills due to a combination of changes to educational delivery particularly around digital skills and a lack of opportunity for staff to put new skills into practice. College, CLD and union representatives reported that the move to online teaching has been a learning curve for many staff, where they require equipment as well as on-going training in a very uncertain and changing work environment. Union representatives reported that the provision of suitable equipment for staff varies significantly across institutions. 73% of 1,000 EIS members surveyed, (19), supported hybrid working in a post-Covid environment and that it has benefited some staff including those with disabilities.

Hybrid working, for some, has led to a decrease in the distinction between home-life and work-life and some people are working flexible but longer hours. There are concerns that freedoms gained through flexible working may be lost once staff return to the workplace and also concerns about increasing face-to-face activity in universities and colleges. 41% of 994 UCU Scotland members surveyed (20) were anxious about returning to in-person on-campus working. Some members found online working supportive and productive due to stricter time limits on meetings, fewer interruptions at home etc. Some staff find preparing for online teaching to be more resource intensive.

Union representatives stated that staff-student relations have been challenging during the pandemic. There have been reports of incidents in libraries in particular, where support staff have been placed in stressful situations such as having to ask students to comply with face coverings and not congregate in groups. Staff-staff relations are also a concern, particularly when considering career progression for

members working from home who are more isolated. Support staff members and local management should be working closely together building strong relationships in order to ensure that adherence to protective measures remains high and to maintain a COVID-safe environment.

CLD representatives reported that many staff have been financially adversely affected by the pandemic. Union representatives indicated that employers should be offering job security to staff during the pandemic and zero hours' contracts are a concern for many staff and the impact of inflation on stagnant salary levels is an issue. They also stated that staff should have had access to a fund similar to the student support fund that was provided during the pandemic. Staff are also worried whether the environment they are working in is COVID-safe as the interpreting of Scottish Government Covid-19 guidance within CLD settings can be challenging.

Union representatives reported that some support staff, such as cleaners and security staff, are often offering support to students in precarious situations where specialist support may be more appropriate e.g. supporting students with very poor mental health. The support available to staff in the HE/FE sector varies and is often more extensive in larger or better resourced institutions. Management should ensure they regularly check-in with staff, especially those who are working from home as there is a risk that staff feel more isolated and receive less support, particularly women, who are more likely to be impacted. The same variability of provision also applies to staff seeking access to occupational health support and needs to be addressed. There are concerns about the wellbeing of people who continue to work from home while being unfit for work due to illness.

7. Ongoing Adaptation

The pandemic has been with us for over two years and attention is turning to managing the virus on a longer term basis while keeping the level of infections as low as possible. Adaptation approaches should alleviate the impact of the virus, but it is important for the HE/FE/CLD sectors to consider the wider harms outlined above and consider how addressing these, with support from other organisations, can help with recovery.

University, college and CLD responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic, have led to some positive impacts on educational delivery as the sector has quickly adapted to a changing environment. These positive developments should be noted by the sector and used to inform future planning and delivery.

During the pandemic, university representatives indicated that institutions have collaborated well with professional bodies, other institutions and students in decision-making to minimise Covid-19 impacts on students and maximise safety. This has led to a general improvement in communication with students as well as improved planning and sharing of experiences within the sector, within subject areas, and with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Union representatives have also identified that there is an opportunity to collaborate to further develop sector wide policies on mental health, for example. It is important to retain this level of collaboration in order to maintain high levels of adherence to Covid-safe measures in order to avoid further protective measures needing to be introduced that could have the potential to have a significant negative impact on the wider harms.

University representatives reported that some positive effects and learning from the Covid-19 pandemic are summarised in the *Scottish sector learning from the Covid-19 pandemic* report (21). e.g. working with students to improve communication and involving them in planning and decision-making. This has helped inform decision making on responding to challenging issues faced by students. Examples of this include the no-detriment policies (22) in summer 2020, and the ongoing assessment support measures during the 2020-21 academic year, for which many universities had to substantially rewrite their assessment regulations in light of the requirements of Professional Bodies. It is important for institutions to share best practice and the developments of new policies via QAA's Enhancement Theme and institution led projects including building student communities online, addressing digital poverty and using technology in learning, student transition points, resilience and developing student peer-to-peer initiatives.

College and university representatives reported that upgraded technology, and staff and student online skills development was accelerated by the pandemic. These advances offer an opportunity to capitalise on this rapid development of online learning provision, in order to shape and improve future educational delivery. Suitable development training sessions and online resources have been created within institutions and shared across the sector. So to have pedagogical principles and frameworks for good educational practice online. Union representatives have added that provision of digital training and digital support for staff needs to be consistent across institutions and further support with captioning would be welcome. Union representatives also made the point that training for managers to support cultural change as a result of these adaptations was also welcome. They reported that during the pandemic, there has been reduced demands on the sector from some organisations, such as the Scottish Funding Council, which is a positive development.

College and University representatives agree that good practice and innovations in online and blended learning should be retained and included in future curriculum planning informing future practice in teaching, learning and assessment. This could include digital alternatives to practical training and assessment to enhance the educational offer to students. In some cases, innovations had evolved from students teaching staff about technology.

CLD representatives reported that there have been positive effects in terms of the provision of online activities, as some learners participate in these who may not have engaged face-to-face. Learners with disabilities as well as those undertaking ESOL courses are among those who have benefitted.

Given the importance of social interactions, student representatives indicated that facilitating safe, socially distanced, in-person student gatherings through the procurement of larger venues may be beneficial as part of future planning.

There has been high vaccine uptake among the student population as well as staff, and institutions have supported and encouraged this. The latest Public Health Scotland data shows that 83% of individuals aged 17-21yrs have had their first vaccine, 73% have had their second vaccine and 64% of eligible 17-21 year olds have had their booster vaccine. Antibody rates for 16-25 year olds in Scotland are

estimated to be 91% (23). Student representatives reported that having vaccine buses or clinics on campus could be beneficial to increase vaccine and booster uptake further. This and other protective measures such as testing, where high levels of adherence are maintained, will be key to ensuring Covid-safe environments that are resilient to further pandemic shocks.

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Appendix
A. Chronology

	Date	Representatives	Additional documentation provided
A	26 th October 2021	University Representatives: Dr Lois Fitch Veronica Strachan Brian Green Prof Moira Fischbacher-Smith Dr Kirsty Conlon	<i>Additional input: impact of Covid-19 on students; plans for next semester; and positive impacts of the pandemic – Universities Scotland Submission</i>
B	28 th October 2021	CLD Representatives Marion Allison Jackie Howe Mick Doyle Tim Frew Ann Kirkwood	<i>Expert Advisory Group– Questions on ‘Learners and Consideration of Wider Harms’ 4 Harms CLD response Marion Allison – CLD Submissions</i>
C	9 th November 2021	College Representatives Andy Witty Liz Connolly Jonny Pearson Shona Struthers	<i>Submission to Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on Students and Consideration of Wider Harms – Following Discussion Held on Tuesday 9 November 2021 – Colleges Scotland Submission</i>
D	17 th November 2021	Union Representatives Mary Senior, University and College Union Lena Wånggren, University and College Union Alison MacLean, Unite the Union David Belsey, Educational Institute of Scotland Lorcan Mullen, UNISON Scotland	<u>UCUS Report of COVID-19 survey of members Supporting Staff Wellbeing in Higher Education, Education Support</u>

E	23 rd November 2021	<p>Student Representatives</p> <p>Lottie Doherty, President of St. Andrew's University Students' Association</p> <p>Joshua Sutcliffe, Vice President of Dundee University Students' Association</p> <p>Matt Crilly, President of National Union of Students, Scotland</p> <p>Rose Dodgson, President of Edinburgh College Students' Association (NUS rep)</p> <p>Bernie Savage, President of City of Glasgow Colleges Student Association</p> <p>Lori Templeton, Vice President of City of Glasgow Colleges Student Association</p> <p>Francesca Meneghetti, Depute President, Orkney College UHI</p>	<i>Education Committee Briefing, NUS Scotland- NUS Submission</i>
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