Question 1. *'Think back to your experience during the first few weeks of term, what was it like for you enrolling at college? Was it a positive experience? We want to know about the good, and what could be improved from accepting your course to getting 'settled into college life', how easy was that transition?*

Induction: 37 of the reps present made a specific reference to a positive induction experience at Granton. That they and their classmates on the whole have applied and enrolled into a college course with relative ease. They highlight friendly staff and positive communities within their classes, feeling welcome and liking the way in which people treat each other at this campus.

Several reps highlighted that, while their course is enjoyable, there was some timetable issues the first few weeks of college, specifically around having timetables available or the correct classes printed on them. Class Reps also noted that navigating the Granton Campus as a new student can be disorientating and confusing, and a campus map would be useful, especially to highlight facilities & services as well as teaching rooms.

Many students highlighted that the teaching staff & content of their courses has been of a high standard. Many have been impressed with teaching staff who they feel are experts in their subject areas and make learning enjoyable using varied teaching approaches.

Question 2. *Have you or any of your classmates had an issue at College that has made you/them consider dropping out? If so, what was the issue? If not, what do you think is the biggest reason for students struggling to stay on their course?'*

1. **Funding:** The number one issue coming through from Class Reps at the Granton campus is concerns around funding, all 52 reps present raised that either they themselves or some of their classmates are experiencing delays in receiving bursary, childcare or EMA. Many highlighted that they have had issues getting in touch with student services staff and several students highlighted an ongoing concern with customer service approaches and the attitude of some front facing student support staff, at least 2 Class Reps say these issues have been escalated to the formal complaint stage.

   Class Reps highlighted how frustrated and worried many of students on their courses feel by what they consider to be a negative experience within the college. Even those reps who have been processed or knew of people in their course who had received payments, pointed out how, overall, the process for applying for bursary & support is by far the most difficult part of becoming a student at Edinburgh College. Issues ranged from lost documentation, a lack of communication form staff, and that, in some cases, students didn't feel like their bursary issues or their financial hardship was a priority for support team staff.

Around 10 class reps noted they were aware of students on their courses who had cited financial circumstance as a reason for not continuing their course.

Question 3. '*Last year the 5 issues were identified by Class Reps (see the PowerPoint slide) as the biggest issues facing students. Are these issues still a problem? Have you or your classmates experienced any of them? Please discuss in small groups.*'

Student Mental Health: Students feel that there doesn't appear to be adequate understanding from support staff regarding disabilities and other complex mental health conditions. It seems that there are no staff qualified to deal with the issues or there are no internal support mechanisms within the college.

Students present felt there should be talks provided within their classes of the support that's available to all students regarding mental health conditions they may suffer from.

Funding: Students explained that bursary applications are not being processed quick enough with delays of 8 weeks plus, and they are struggling to pay bills. Furthermore, student parents there are particularly concerned that they are struggling to pay their rent as they've still not received any funding. One example of the impact of childcare funding delays is a childcare provider who is seeking a payment of £1000 directly from the student, even though they applied for their funding in May. Whilst this is an exceptional case, it highlights the real struggle facing certain students.

The college has undertaken a new approach to paying childcare providers directly but the issues raised by Class Reps shows the new process still needs work to ensure it is smooth for all parties involved.

Another specific example of the impacts of a lack of funding is that some beauty students still haven't received their kits yet for their course. These students have no way of paying for them as they have still not received their bursaries, and, in turn, this impacts on their ability to undertake the course.

Poor course organisation: Appropriate room sizes have been an issue in a number of courses and some courses don't have the right room to be able to complete their coursework, for example classes with significantly more students than IT equipment or seats, classes of over 30 students trying to fit into rooms meant for 20 to 25 students.

Timetables & course organisation have also been an issue, for example adventure tourism course timetable has had significant changes on the day of the class, meaning students come prepared to go mountain biking and end up canyoning, resulting in the students not wearing the most appropriate clothes to carry this activity out. The link between 'My Adventure' has been cut with the college meaning they aren't doing any coursework with the class anymore and feel this course is being arranged with little long term course planning.

Students in Art & Design courses have highlighted class cover issues due to staff being off ill, and a lack of notification about class cancellations. Other reps across the curriculum areas noted they had had classes cancelled with little or no notifications ahead of time.

Moodle has been a problem for various courses across campus. Students feel that some lecturers don't know how to effectively use Moodle to put up class course content to enhance their learning, resulting in a lack of access to revision materials. Students feel the system needs improved, and greater consistency on utilising Moodle would help students for self-study.

Some Class Reps noted that for students wishing to progress onto university, some do not feel like they are receiving enough support on how to do this, and it is causing stress within certain classes, especially those HND year 2 students who do not have an LDT.

Not enough student support available: There was a general consensus that the students felt some student services staff were not approachable and they feel staff are overwhelmed and overworked. They feel student services require more staff to assist students, especially before and during the induction period when many students are seeking face to face time with support staff to sort out their issues.

It's not clear to students who they can approach for assistance with dyslexia e.g. who can provide students with exam support. Students feel if they have any requirements that need addressed during their time at college, that the student support team should contact the students before they start their course. Students present who declared on their application forms that they have a mental health condition or support need have not received a follow up and are still waiting to be assessed. Class Reps could not speak for their classmates on this one due to the personal nature of people's individual circumstance.

Ongoing IT & resource issues: The Adobe Creative Suite is expensive for students to use and due to the expense, some students are unable to afford to pay for the software, meaning its tough trying to study at home and they have to travel into college to use the resources available to them. Unfortunately, this is causing issues in terms of access due to the college library opening times for students being quite restrictive.

Students highlighted there have been several outages when trying to access and fill out SAM forms since the beginning of term. On some occasions students have received error messages or been denied access to the web forms. Students are unsure if this is course specific or linked to some of the ongoing college IT issues.

Students identified that the college WIFI is suffering from not being able to hold onto the number of devices logging in at peak times. Regularly students have to give up on connecting to it. This is compounded by a lack of computers available throughout the campus, many of the computers in the Learning streets are booked out by staff throughout the day (sometimes they are locked but not being used). When this is the case students are having to self-study from their mobile devices and this approach is a very poor experience trying to work from a small mobile device.

The whiteboards in some of the rooms across the college are poor quality and it's often hard to view coursework on the boards due to the low brightness. Students feel the PCs in the web development class are underdeveloped for them completing their coursework.

There is an issue across the college with a lack of accessibility to PCs and students have identified that people are misusing the PC's to sit on social media websites instead of completing coursework, which is leading to other students not being able to access PCs.

The Class Reps from courses with a strong practical element such as sports, hospitality and some of the construction based courses, have raised concerns about the quality of materials and condition of equipment. They have concerns that equipment needs serious investment and upgrades, as well as facilities. Many seem to be under the impression that much of the colleges resources for undertaking the practical elements of their course are not up to a highest standard for effective learning to take place.

Question 4. *Do you think the College and/or ECSA can be doing to remove challenges, support more students to stay on at College and be successful? Discuss in your groups, write your answers below and we will do a group feedback session at the end.*

Solutions:

1. That within the cookery course, the class could be split up into groups as the kitchens are too cramped and students feel it's unsafe to be able to complete their coursework. Due to the unsafe environment the class feel that more staff is required to cover the health and safety aspect within the kitchens.

2. As the library is often extremely busy, students suggested that the college needs to extend the opening hours so students can access PCs at a time that's convenient for them to complete coursework as not everyone has access to a computer at home.

3. In terms of students having to use their own mobile data to view coursework, they suggested that it would be beneficial if it could be allowed for "modern essentials" such as mobile data to be incorporated into bursary allocations for students.

4. Mental Health First Aid training for staff would be an excellent opportunity for staff who are well intentioned but genuinely unsure on how to approach students who have declared they are having mental health difficulties. An increase in front line staff within curriculum areas who are equipped to deal with these situations would be an excellent step to alleviate an already pressured student services team.

   Class Reps highlighted they would love the opportunity to look at peer to peer support (assuming they could be provided with training), and thought this would be an excellent development opportunity and could help students who feel anxious about approaching college staff.

5. A checklist for 'day one', does a student have their 'Timetable, equipment, uniforms, student support, additional support needs in place? If not, a way of this being actioned, Some sort of central system that tracks this and would allow a coordinated approach from different teams – i.e teaching teams, support teams. This means student issues could be identified more quickly and if the worst does happen and students do drop out at least there would be a trail of standardised data to help identify future solutions on why something wasn't put in place.

Number of Reps Present: 52