

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: 11 of the students described broadly positive experience during the induction process of the college. Comments included that the process was easy and straightforward and they have been made to feel welcome by college staff. 3 students raised concerns about communication, 2 had personal experience of applying for their course as early as March and not hearing anything until a few days before college started. Another 2 Class Reps highlighted how their induction was a positive experience but their original course was cancelled and the first they heard about this was during welcome weeks, these students were supported successfully into another course, which is an excellent example of supporting students, however these students did say they wish that they had been better communicated with throughout the process.

Course Organisation: A broader point but some students said they and their classmates found the campus a tad confusing and with poor signage, a map, especially during the induction process that was accessible and visual would go a long way to orienteering students during the first few weeks.

The engineering & child care students, of which there were 6 present at the meeting, highlighted growing concerns from classes around the organisation of lesson plans and timetables, which is discussed in more detail in the comments in Question 3 of this report.

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:** 4 Class Reps highlighted specific issues with delays in funding, noting that there are students in their class who have either left the course due to not having enough means to support themselves, or being out of pocket because of childcare & bursary issues. Students highlighted how the funding team seem to be stretched in terms of their resources.
- 2. Class Cohesion & Bullying:** 5 students, highlighted there are internal issues within classes and personalities that are making students feel unwelcome, and some Class Reps would go as far to claim this as bullying. These rifts, at the moment, aren't being managed as best as they could, according to the Reps, and there is more work to be done in managing respect and diversity in the classroom, ensuring a safe learning environment for all. There was discussion around how this is relevant to class induction in regards to classes becoming communities. This ties into comments in other conference reports (specifically the Sighthill Class Rep Conference report), which mentioned students wanting more opportunities for classes to bond as a group at the beginning of their College experience.

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 funding: Childcare is still a major issue for many students at Midlothian. August applications have not yet been processed and students spoke of the childcare providers taking this issue up directly with students, being told they could no longer send their children to the provider due to non-payment. This is having a detrimental impact on their ability to come to college which impacts their attendance or forces them to use precious self-certifications.

At least 4 Students said they and their classmates have been receiving generic communication messages from the funding team explaining they had all their information but it would be a 6 week minimum wait.

Students highlighted there was a feeling that while some staff are helpful other staff make students feel like they are a “bother” for approaching them, some students expressed feeling uncomfortable about approaching support staff members at the Midlothian campus because they seem so focussed on their work and do not want students to disrupt them.

Some class reps have highlighted the lack of funding has led them to seek mid-week, part time employment, such as bar work, and the late finishes and increased working hours outside of college, is impacting on their ability to undertake their studies.

Resources & IT: Several students noted the walk-up computers that are standing only are inconvenient and Reps raised issues with this as not suitable for using these computers for anything more than checking emails.

The Class Reps & some of their classmates feel the current laptops available at Midlothian are not up to scratch, some taking 20 to 30 minutes to load profiles & access internet just to print documents.

Electrical Engineering students have been informed they can’t keep a hold of printed materials because of printing budgets being so tight, they aren’t allowed to mark the handouts and these are not being made available online. This is very frustrating and the students in these classes feel they are being disadvantaged from studying at home and in class. The materials on Moodle lack context without the examples from the handouts. However, the Class Reps understand teaching staff are working with reduced budgets but feel this negatively impacts their learning.

A student was informed they were not allowed to record their lecturers, even though their support needs evaluation for their dyslexia recommend this as a reasonable support adjustment. They have been informed by teaching staff that “it isn’t appropriate to record lecturers”. ECSA informed students this is a legal obligation under the equalities legislation and should be escalated further to seek further clarity on this.

Mental Health: All Class Reps present raised the issue that they know of at least one student in their classes who they believe is showing signs of their mental health being impacted throughout their studies including vulnerable students in the ACE courses.

Students raised concerns they felt that some staff are not always understanding of the complex mental health needs of students. One example highlighted a young carer who receives support outside the college but this support doesn’t seem to be translating to in the class room, putting a vulnerable student at risk.

Students feel more training is needed in dealing with mental health issues and how best to support students. The preparation for employment Class Rep highlighted that their class was particularly vulnerable and struggling. ECSA did inform the Class Reps that it was important students disclosed their mental health

issues to the college so that proper support can be put in place. The Class Rep acknowledged he was unaware of each individual student in his classes current support mechanism and was unsure how open students had been in disclosing this to staff, and would pass this back to his students.

Student support: All Class Reps present noted that there seemed to be very small levels of staffing at the Midlothian campus for student support, the staff seem overworked. Class Reps noted several cases of students who have declared additional support needs and 6 weeks into their course have not been seen for an evaluation, which is impacting on their ability to learn effectively as their needs have not been assessed or met yet.

3 students present raised concerns about the current set up of Student Support on this campus. Due to apparent staff shortages, when students are having private meetings with staff, these meetings have been interrupted with staff and other students coming in with queries and questions. This may be due to a lack of resources and time, but students say this made them feel like they aren't free to talk about their personal issues freely.

Finally, at least 4 students cited examples of students being told they would need to wait to have their council tax forms checked & stamped with a "two week turnaround". Students felt this was an unnecessary waiting period and felt this could have been sorted in a much more timely fashion. With a quicker turn around, it would alleviate the short term cost of council tax, by being able to process this faster with the council.

Course organisation: Even though the induction process for enrolling was fairly positive, the specific element of class cohesion was something Reps noted wasn't a tailored experience. For example, classes that were full of continuing students had ice breakers, yet felt they did not need these, while other classes who had mostly new students did not get an opportunity to come together as a class. Students said they would like to have been a more tailored and dynamic approach to this part of the induction process.

The Childcare and Engineering Class Reps took issue with the course expectations in regards to recruitment, especially for school leavers who feel these students have not been adequately prepared to come to college. Many of the students seem under the impression that they would go "straight onto placement" and seemed to have a totally different expectation to that of what is being delivered by the course. This is causing disruption and friction in some classes between students & staff.

The Electrical engineering students raised concerns with the current structure of the workshops, they felt they are self-directed and that staff aren't giving clear instructions on the tasks for the day. "*students are wandering around the workshop dazed and confused, picking up materials and just getting on with something, it isn't teaching us anything*" one Class Rep quoted. This, paired with some classes not being covered and this not being effectively communicated to engineering students, is causing tensions within the class dynamic.

The Childcare students, highlighted they felt the 'review week' was not useful for students and seemed aimed at staff. Students were told they would need to come in for a 1 hour class and many organised and paid for childcare only to come in and be told to leave after 10 minutes. Students felt this was an unnecessary session that did not help their learning and are still confused as to the purpose of this session. These sessions are planned in for 4 times a year and students are wary they will continue to be less than useful in the proceeding sessions.

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. **Health and Safety:** There is a campus based first aider on call but Reps highlighted they felt this could be rolled out to more staff and students and this should form part of the curriculum offering as extra credit courses, or be offered to students who have already achieved coreskills modules. Some students highlighted in the courses they study it would be useful to have part of this.
2. **Class Rules & Management:** Class should be an enjoyable and welcoming experience for all, it needs to be a safe space for students and staff. More discussion in class around positive behaviour (including the new college policy) and escalating ongoing issues to curriculum leaders & managers to ensure as little disruption to class as possible, and mitigating the impact on students' physical and mental wellbeing.
3. **Customer Service training:** Students felt that many staff exhibit a positive attitude with students but at times there can be inconsistent approach from some staff in both academic and support roles. There should be opportunities as part of CPD for staff to receive customer service training to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and resources to deliver a parity of experience for all students who may be accessing services or support during times of distress or vulnerability.

Number of Reps Present: 15