

Introduction

Over 400 students responded to our survey

From the end of September, we surveyed students to gather data to support our efforts on four key areas of work:

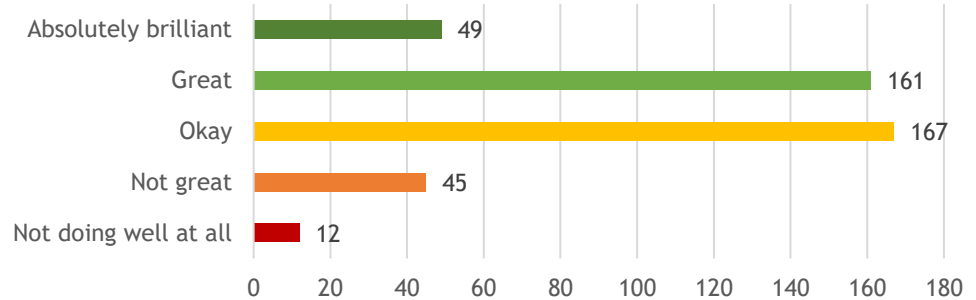
- Retention and barriers to staying on at college
- Smoking cessation
- Mental health
- Physical activity

We had 435 students responding to the survey, which was promoted via an all-student email, social media, and by Class Reps. The responses these questions have generated will support us in our work on:

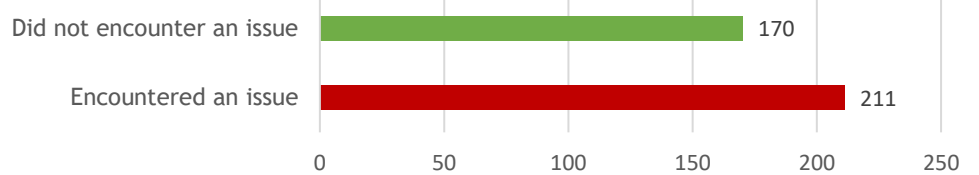
- The Student Experience strand of the College's strategic blueprint
- Increasing our Healthy Body, Healthy Mind Award rating

Retention

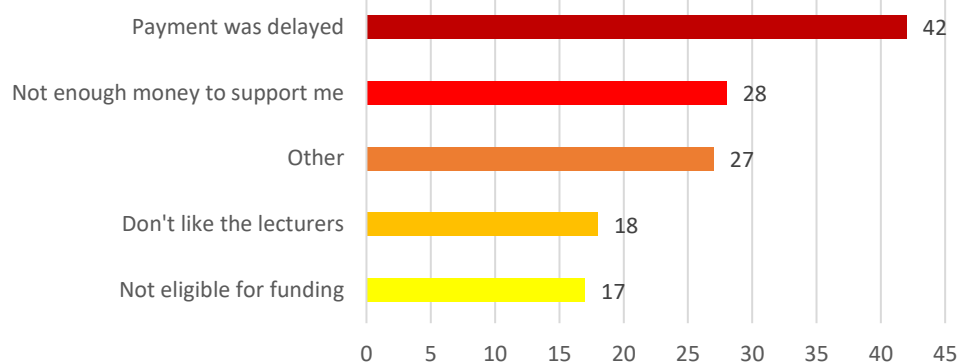
How do you feel you're getting on at college in general?



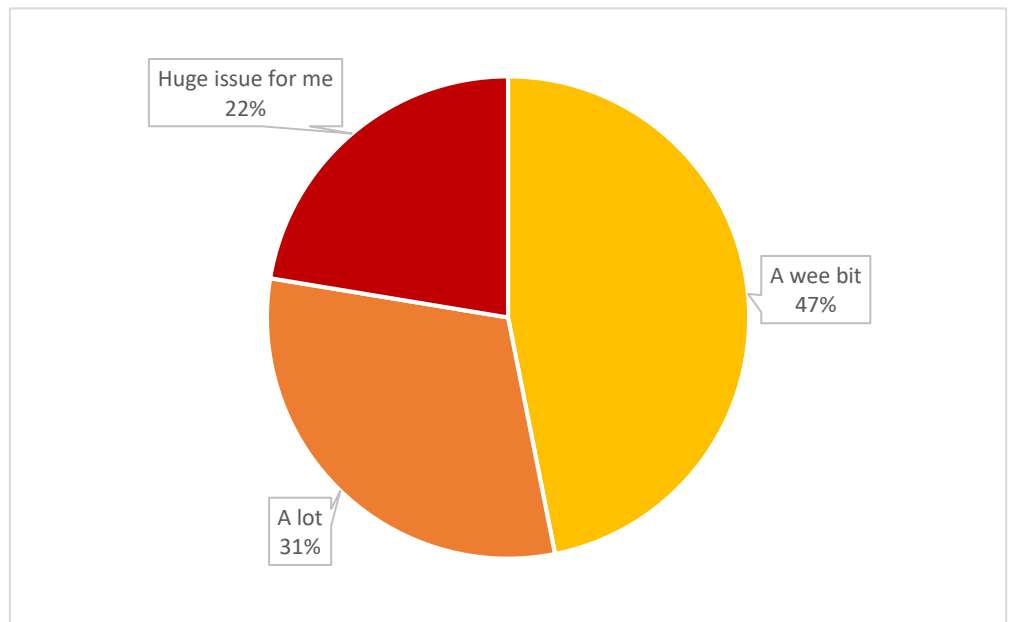
Have you encountered any issues that have impacted on your ability to stay on at college?



Top 5 issues



How much has this issue affected you staying on at college?



Analysis

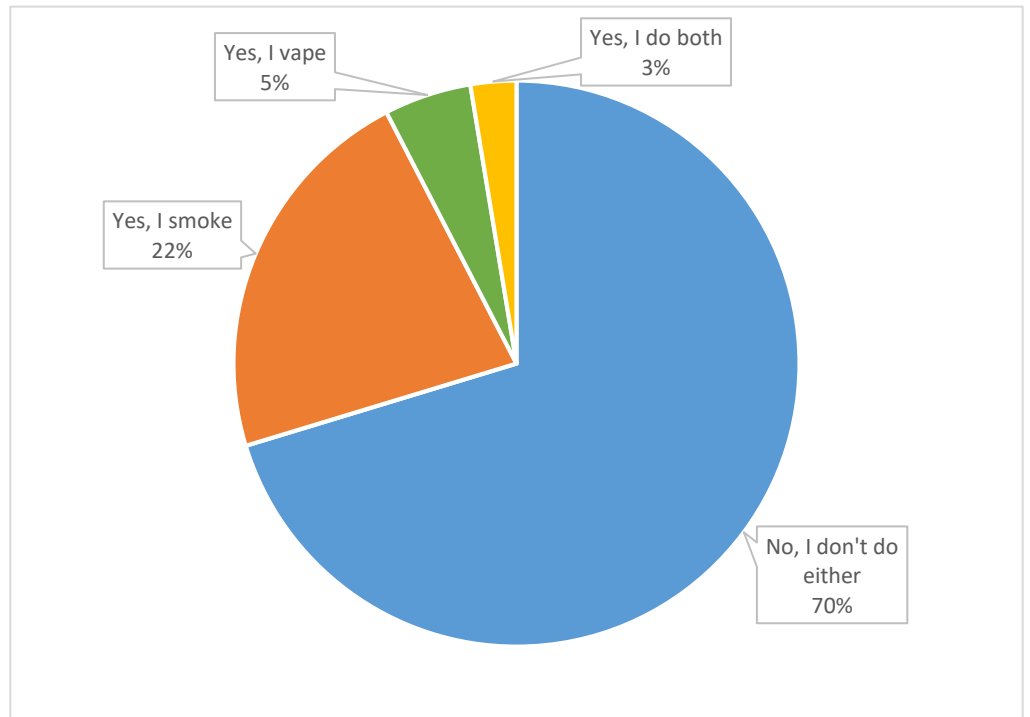
From this data, we can see that of those responding, **over 85% of students are having an overall positive experience at college**. This should be rightly lauded, and could provide a useful further point of research in the future to determine the discrepancies between students' overall experience and the rate of those encountering issues that could have forced them to drop out.

Worryingly, **over 55% of students have encountered an issue that has impacted upon their ability to stay on at college**. The most common issue raised by students is that their funding was delayed, followed by 'other', then 'not enough money to support me' and 'not eligible for funding'. **A total of 26% of respondents encountered a funding issue that could have forced them to drop out**. We hope that the government's Student Support review will go some way to addressing these, but it is clear that college processes have let students down and has contributed to substantial stress and worry as students are left without money to support them.

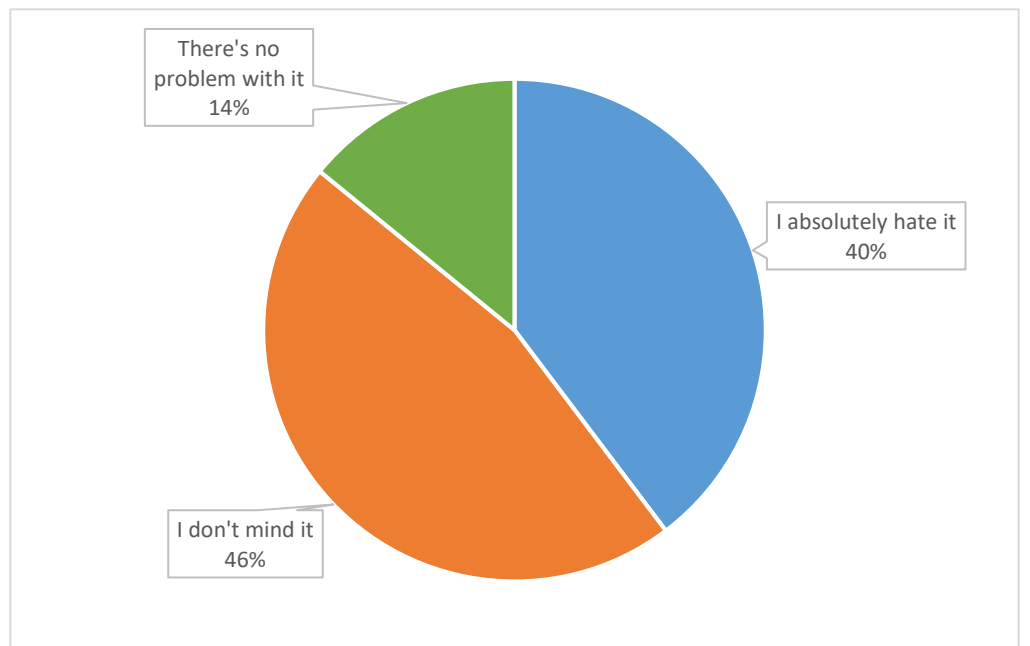
Of those 55% of students who encountered an issue, 53% of those felt it was a significant issue, which means there is a significant power of work to be done to support students better.

Smoking Cessation

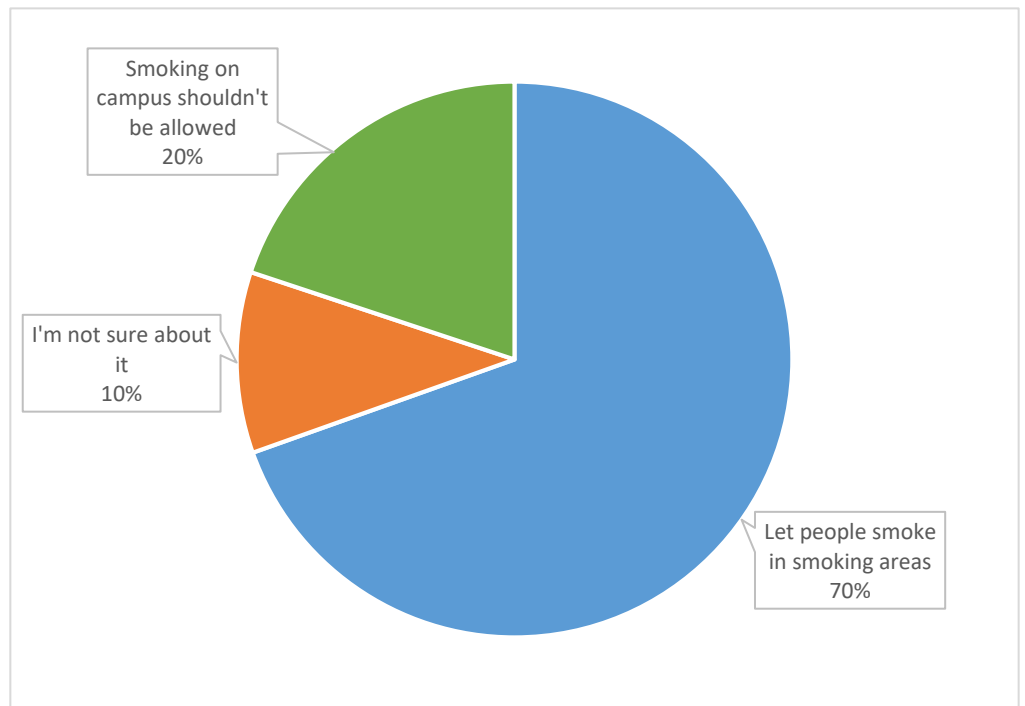
Do you smoke or vape?



How do you feel about people smoking near the college doors?



How do you feel about a smoking ban on campus?



Analysis

The incidence of students smoking is sitting at 22%, which compares to the 2016 Scottish Health Survey adult rate of 21% ¹. A full 70% of students do not smoke or vape at all, and this should be welcomed and encouraged.

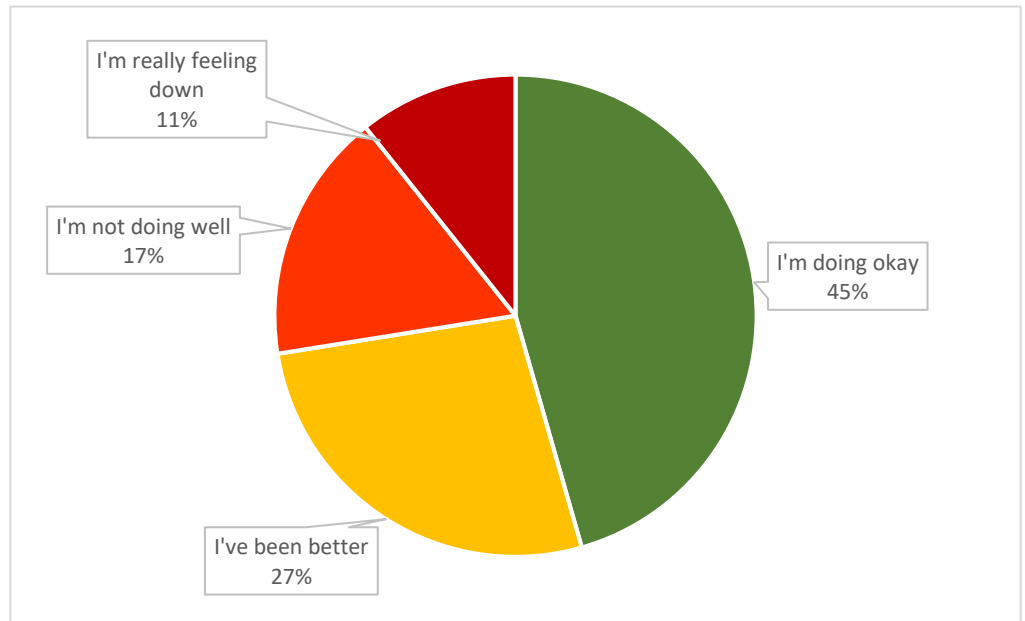
Students and staff often raise with us the issue of students smoking at doorways, which presents an aesthetic and olfactory issue for those entering the college. **With 60% of respondents saying either that there's 'no problem with it', or 'I don't mind it',** this does make enforcement efforts harder as there is less peer pressure on doorway smokers.

The prospect of a smoking ban on campus has been raised by estates staff in years past, and is also a requirement of the Healthy Body, Healthy Mind award at levels 4/5. **Our data however shows a clear majority of students are against a smoking ban on campus - with 70% of students saying that students should be allowed on campus in smoking areas,** with only 20% of respondents supporting an outright ban.

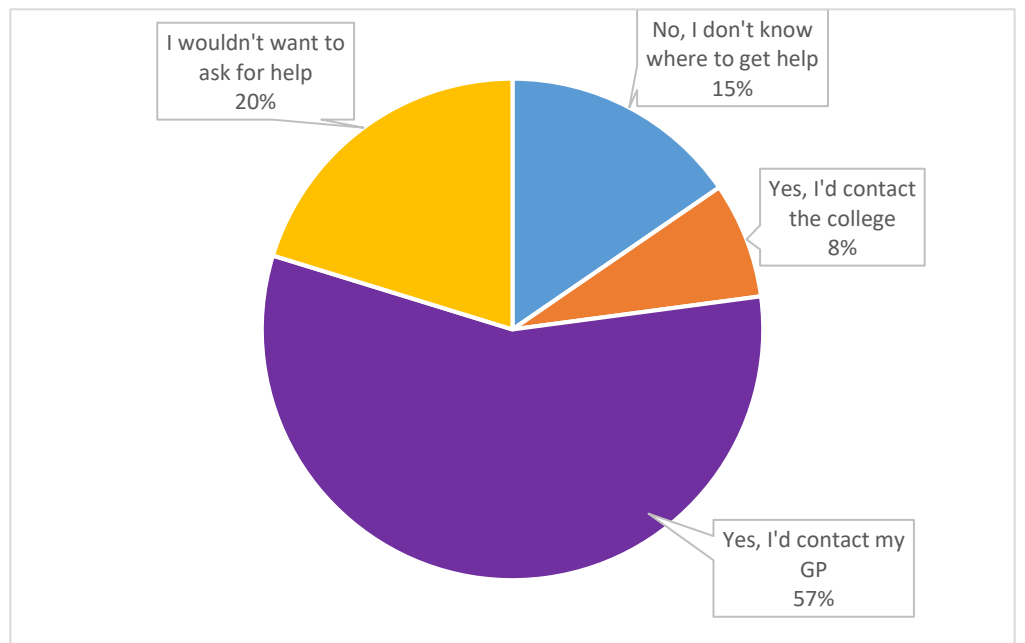
¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/scottish-health-survey> (published 20 September 2016)

Mental Health

How is your mental health just now?



If you had a mental health issue, would you know where to go for help?



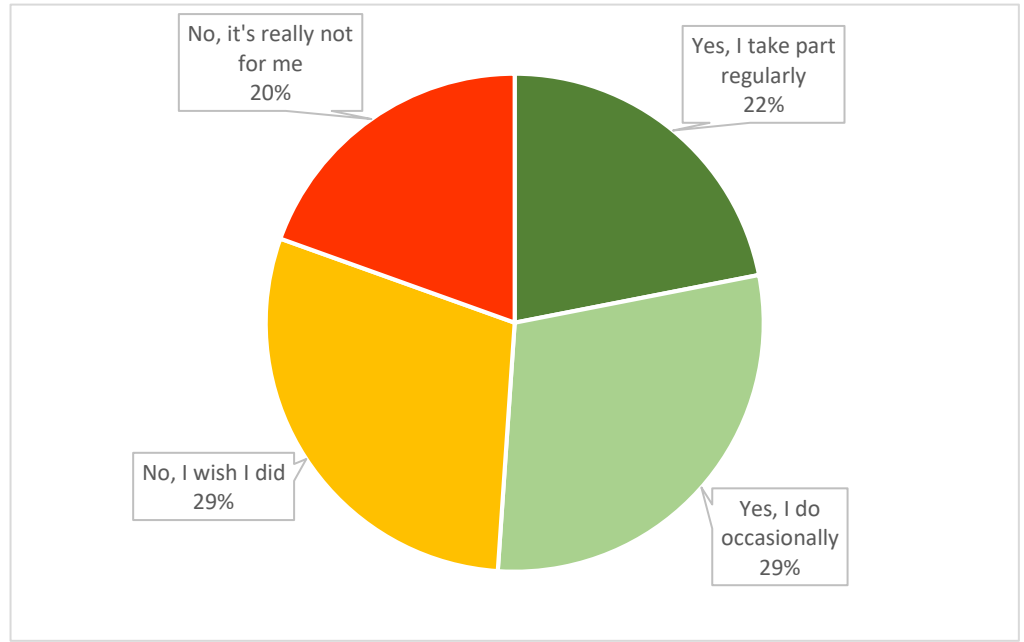
Analysis

Only 45% of students report currently being in a good place when it comes to their mental health, whereas 26% report being in a bad place at that time.

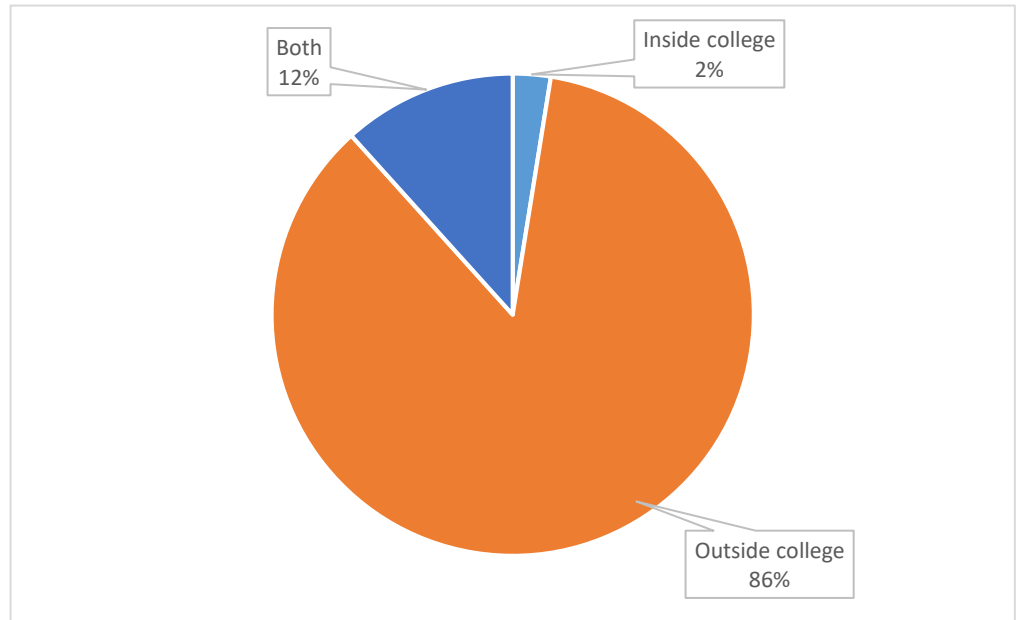
When it comes to getting support with a mental health issue, it is clear that involving the college is not a high priority for students, with only 8% saying they'd contact the college for help. Further research would be useful to investigate why students would not go to the college for help, and on how that affects attainment levels.

Physical Activity

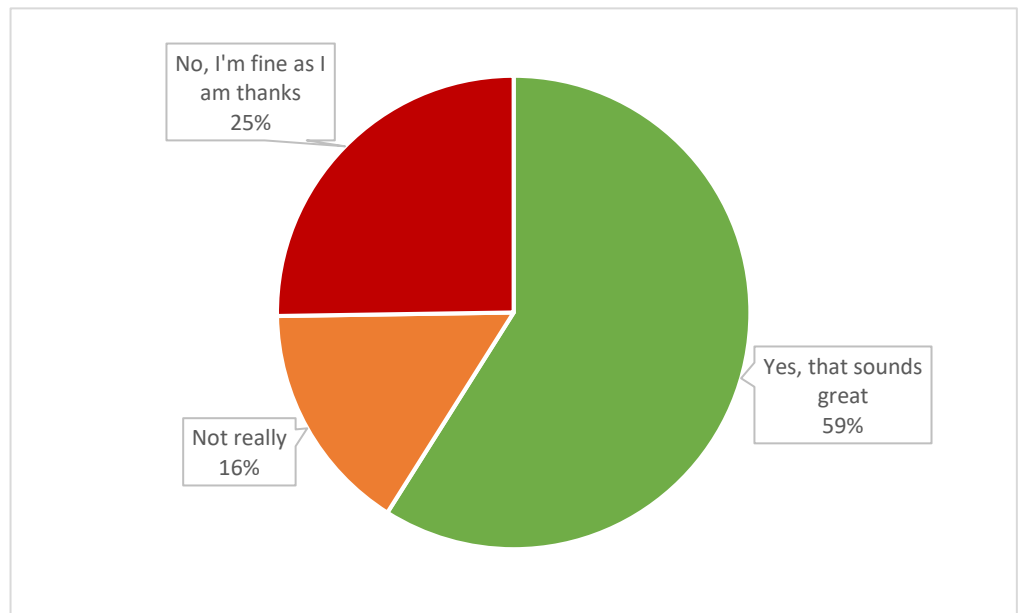
Do you take part in any physical activity?



Do you take part in activity inside or outside of college?



Would you like to be more active?



Analysis

Just over 50% of respondents report that they take part in physical activity, albeit that half of those only take part occasionally.

The vast majority of those who take part in activity do so outside of the college - with only 14% of active students taking part in activity in the college.

Nearly 60% of students want to become more active, so the College and ECSA have a job of work to provide more activities for those students to take part in. Further research into what that might look like considering the resource constraints we have would be useful, as well as investigating potential barriers to participation.

Conclusion

In the right direction, but a lot to be done

While overall retention is improving, our data shows there are many areas that the college still needs to improve upon. Over 55% of students have encountered an issue that could have forced them to drop out of college (with a quarter of all respondents encountering a significant barrier), but at the same time only 15% report having an overall negative experience.

By improving systems and processes to make them more student-focused, we can work together to ensure that no student is forced to overcome unnecessary barriers put in place by the college.

Student mental health is an area for concern, with only 45% of students reporting that they're in a good place at the moment. With only 8% of students saying they'd contact the college for help with an issue, there is a significant number of students who need help but won't ask for it from the college. We need to investigate why that is so as to enable them to on and achieve their goals.

Nearly 60% of students want to become more physically active, but we face resource limits which stop them - only two sites have gym halls, and Midlothian Campus has no suitable space at all. Mental and physical health are intrinsically linked, so if we are to improve student mental health, we need to create more opportunities to improve the physical.

**Graham Smith
Communications & Events Coordinator**

29th November 2017