

CURRICULUM QUALITY AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

28 MAY 2026

Learning Support and Guidance Update

1.0 PURPOSE OF PAPER

For information

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee with an overview of current activity and developments within Learning Support and Student Welfare and Transitions services. Operational updates are provided within the accompanying appendices.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Student support demand and complexity have continued to increase across both Learning Support and Student Welfare and Transitions services, with a notable rise in the number of learners receiving support. In response, both teams have adapted their service models to maintain the quality of support and support staff wellbeing. More recently, the level of need for support has eased slightly, and staffing pressures have reduced.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)/ACTION(S) REQUIRED

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to note:
- The continued increase in demand, complexity, and safeguarding activity across Learning Support and Student Welfare and Transitions services;
 - The significant rise in the number of learners requiring ongoing support and intervention during the 2025-26 academic year;
 - The actions undertaken to maintain service quality, accessibility, and staff wellbeing in response to operational pressures.

3.2 The committee is asked to support:

- The continued development of a whole-college approach to learner wellbeing, safeguarding and trauma-informed practice;
- The planned programme of staff development and sector engagement activity to build staff confidence, resilience and capability in responding to increasingly complex learner needs.

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 This paper provides an overview of current activity, demand and developments within Learning Support and Student Welfare and Transitions services. Detailed updates are provided in Appendix 1 (Learning Support) and Appendix 2 (Student Welfare and Transitions).

5.0 Summary Updates: Student Support Services

- 5.1 Across both teams, there has been a sustained increase in learner contact, support interventions, and safeguarding activity.
- 5.2 Learning Support continues to provide ongoing support to learners, alongside coordination of Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) provision and adaptations to national process changes.
- 5.3 Student Welfare and Transitions services have experienced increased demand for wellbeing support, safeguarding, and transition support, with a growing emphasis on early identification and targeted intervention.

6.0 Forward Planning and Development

- 6.1 As a college, we must continue to consider how best to respond to learner need while working within the appropriate scope and boundaries of support that can reasonably be provided within an educational setting. Addressing these challenges extends beyond the remit of Student Support Services alone and requires a coordinated whole-college approach to early intervention, wellbeing and learner support. This section outlines the measures implemented to respond to increasing demand across student support services and highlights how the college is adapting to meet the evolving needs of learners.
- 6.2 A programme of training sessions has been introduced for frontline support staff, with a focus on professional boundaries and emotional regulation. As learner needs and experiences become increasingly complex, it is important that colleagues feel equipped and supported to recognise, maintain and protect healthy professional boundaries. This is intended to support staff wellbeing while also helping to sustain the quality and consistency of support provided to learners.
- 6.3 A series of sector engagement visits are being arranged with colleges operating a range of student support models, with the aim of identifying effective practice and opportunities for shared learning. Visits are already planned with Dumfries and Galloway College and Dundee and Angus College, with further engagement proposed with West Lothian College.

- 6.4 The role of the Course Tutor remains a key link between academic provision and pastoral support services. There is recognition across the college that greater clarity and consistency is required around expectations associated with pastoral and guidance responsibilities. In response, a revised Course Tutor guide has been developed to provide clearer delineation between the responsibilities of Course Tutors and Student Support Officers, while strengthening the college's approach to early intervention and learner engagement. The Student Support Officer role is also currently under review as part of ongoing service development. Staff development activity planned for 2026–27 will support a more consistent understanding and application of these roles across the college.
- 6.5 The Student Support Team is currently developing its strategic priorities for 2026-27. Whole-team planning sessions will take place over the summer period to support alignment of priorities across all support teams, strengthen collaborative working, and consider approaches to addressing known operational pressures and service challenges.
- 6.6 In response to the changing profile and increasing complexity of learner needs, the college has engaged with College Development Network (CDN) to explore the development of a two-year staff development programme aligned to the college's strategic aims and values. The programme will support all staff in responding confidently and consistently to emerging challenges within the college environment, including the rise in high-level student disclosures relating to mental health, neurodivergence, safeguarding and additional support needs. Key themes will include professional boundary setting, positive behaviour management, conflict resolution and self-regulation.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Financial Implications

- 7.2 Use of Sprout Trust funding has enabled enhanced wellbeing and food-poverty initiatives.

- 7.3 The College recently awarded a multi-year contract (1+1) to One Step Borders to provide stabilising mental health support to learners. This provision is intended to address a gap for learners whose needs exceed the level of support that can reasonably be provided within the college setting, and who are either unable to access, or are awaiting, external specialist services. This provision is possible through the utilisation of ring-fenced Mental Health and Wellbeing Funding provided by the Scottish Government.
- 7.4 A number of initiatives, including partnerships with external agencies and charities, the development of trauma-informed environments, and the delivery of staff training, have also been made possible through allocations from the Mental Health and Wellbeing budget.

8.0 Learner Implications

- 8.1 Enhanced partnership working, trauma-informed approaches, and targeted wellbeing initiatives aim to improve learner engagement, retention, and overall learner experience, particularly for vulnerable and priority groups.
- 8.2 Ongoing developments to support delivery models, staff training, and transition processes are also intended to strengthen consistency of support and improve accessibility for learners with additional support needs, mental health concerns, neurodivergence, and complex personal circumstances.

9.0 Staff Implications

- 9.1 A range of measures have been introduced to strengthen staff support, including targeted CPD, wellbeing initiatives, training in professional boundaries and emotional regulation, and the development of clearer guidance around pastoral responsibilities.
- 9.2 A range of measures have been implemented to support staff wellbeing and maintain service quality, with changes kept under review and adapted in response to staff and learner feedback.
- 9.3 Planned staff development activity and collaborative working across services aim to improve confidence, consistency of practice, and staff resilience, while supporting sustainable approaches to student support delivery.

10.0 Equality and Diversity Implications/Equality Impact Assessment

- 10.1 Trauma-informed approaches, focus on staff wellbeing and inclusive service design align with EDI priorities.

11.0 Sustainability/Environmental Implications

- 11.1 There are no identified sustainability or environmental implications arising from this paper.

12.0 RISK COMMENTARY

- 12.1 The continued increase in demand for student support and wellbeing provision presents an ongoing operational risk for the college. While services have adapted effectively to respond to rising and increasingly complex learner needs, sustained pressure on staffing capacity and resources may impact the consistency, responsiveness, and accessibility of support if not carefully monitored.
- 12.2 A coordinated whole-college approach to early intervention, staff development, and sustainable service planning will be essential to mitigate these risks and ensure support arrangements remain effective, appropriate, and responsive to learner need.

13.0 CONCLUSION

13.1 Student Support Services continue to play a critical role in supporting learner access, wellbeing, and success. Despite increased demand and capacity pressures, both teams have adapted effectively and maintained a strong focus on inclusive, proactive and student-centred support.

13.2 It is hoped that the Committee is reassured by the breadth of activity currently underway across student support services and the wider college.

Considerable work is being undertaken to strengthen consistency of practice, build staff confidence and capacity, and ensure that support arrangements remain sustainable and responsive to the evolving needs of learners.

Collectively, these actions are intended to enhance the overall learner experience while also recognising the importance of supporting staff wellbeing and resilience in an increasingly complex operating environment.

Amy Brydon

Director of Student Support Services

May 2026

Previous Board or College Committee Approvals:

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Appendix 1. Learning Support Update

373 learners have Learning Support in Place

35 learners have DSA support in place

Support Overview

There are **421** open contact logs – these are learners we have spoken to or supported in academic year 2025/6. Every student contact is recorded, so not all these learners have ongoing learning support.



The open contact logs are split fairly evenly across all curriculum areas:

Creative, Enterprise, Technology and Essential Skills	87
Landbased and Rural Skills	120
Health and Social Care, Early Education, Sport and Supported Programmes	106
Applied Construction and Engineering	101
No Enrolment	7

(No enrolment – ‘test’ learner profiles for admin/training purposes)

- **373** learners have ‘Learning Support in Place’ learner badges. This means they have ongoing ‘active’ support. They have been identified and the badges applied by the Learning Support team.
- **40** of the **373** learners have experience of care (**10.7%**)
- **305** learners are continuing, **68** have withdrawn

DSA (Disabled Students’ Allowance)

- **35** DSAs are now complete:
 - **18** referred to Theorise, **17** supported in-house

Our new team of supply Higher Education support staff includes Study Skills Tutors and Mental Health Mentors. These roles were introduced to support the rising demand for support. Specialist ASD mentoring is still outsourced and we use an external agency to provide support when we have reached capacity in-house.

We are working closely with external partners to strengthen transitions and improve the learner journey for BSL users. Improved links to Education and NHS Borders will help identify potential learners who may require support and BSL Interpreters currently working in college have a wide network of contacts and resources which they are able to share, when appropriate.

We recently ran a Learning Support workshop for Modern Apprentice Assessors in the Health & Social Care and Early Education sector. These assessors support work-based learners. The workshop was an opportunity to discuss the main support needs and barriers to study that arise. We discussed ways of helping learners to work more independently and gave a short presentation on the most up-to-date and effective software and apps that they could use. There was also a discussion on alternative methods of assessment, where written submissions are not a requirement.

We have delivered Transitions Roadshows to local secondary schools - see Appendix 2.

Jacqueline Nimmo

Learning Support Manager

April 2026

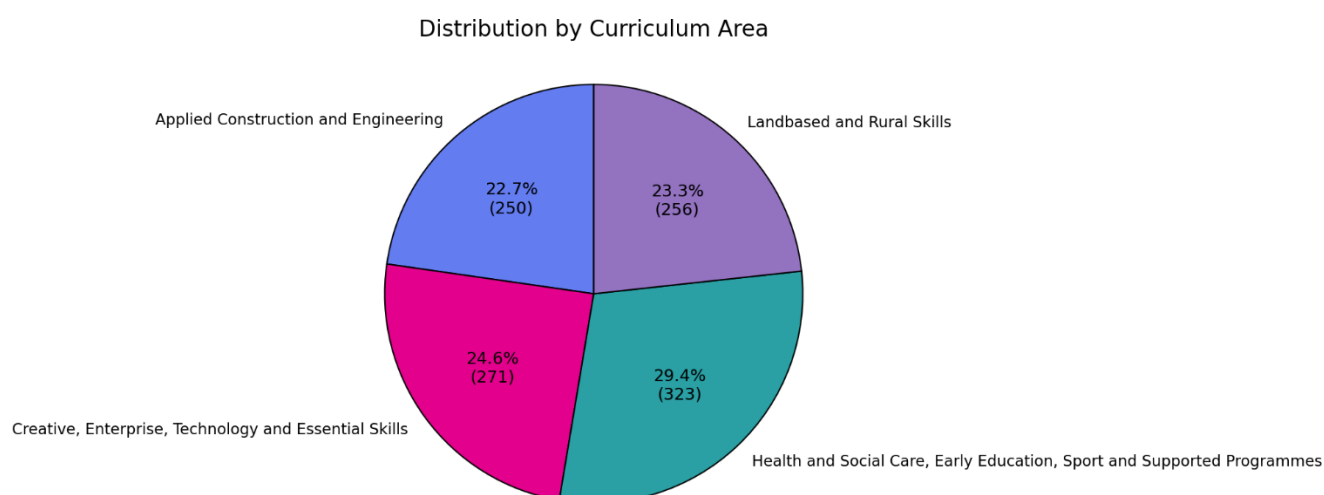
Appendix 2. Student Welfare and Transitions Update

The number of learners with support in place has increased year on year. There was an increase of over 50% from **211** in 2024–25 to **318** in 2025–26 based on year-to-date information.

Support Overview

Student Support Logs

- **1,099 logs** with **5,000 entries** recorded to date.



A total of **5,000 learner support contacts** were recorded. The most common reasons for contact related to **academic issues (1,588)** and **emotional or personal wellbeing (1,082)**, together accounting for over half of all contacts. Significant demand was also seen for **wellbeing check-ins (325)**, **general advice and guidance (299)**.

Support linked to **funding and financial concerns** remained notable, with **246 contacts for funding advice and support** and **168 for financial issues**.

Student Support in Place

- **318 learners** identified as having previously received or currently receiving support.
- Increase of **50%** compared to April 2025
- Withdrawals represent a minority of the supported cohort

- Work is underway to further develop the '*support in place*' flag to improve data quality and inform service planning.

Safety Plans

- **25 learners** have an active Safety Plan.

Current Activity

Staff Wellbeing and Service Delivery

Following a period of staff absence, the team is now in a more settled position. Wellbeing measures that were co-produced by the student support team through a series of workshops and discussions have been implemented and are embedded in practice. Demand for student support has eased slightly, creating capacity for the team to focus on forward planning for the next academic session as new applicants begin to make contact for support.

The team has been actively involved in the new Funding System project, providing valuable feedback to the project team and contributing to its ongoing development.

Over the summer, developments within the Student Advice Centre layout will create opportunities to review the office environment. This will allow the team to enhance the setting to be more trauma-informed and to improve the overall student experience, while also supporting staff wellbeing through a more open workspace with increased access to natural light. Student feedback is central to this planning and the Students' Association are supporting with this work.

Safeguarding

- Significant increase in safeguarding activity year-on-year, with a shift toward earlier escalation:
 - 2023–24: 0 safeguarding / 6 Cause for Concern
 - 2024–25: 6 safeguarding / 36 Cause for Concern
 - 2025–26 (to 23 April): 28 safeguarding / 30 Cause for Concern

Transitions Roadshows

- Transition Roadshows have been delivered in **8 of the 9 secondary schools**, led by Student Support teams with 1 school booked in for May.
- **Over 150 pupils** have been delivered the Transitions PowerPoint providing them with key information around support with an emphasis on Funding.
- Ket transitional Information has been received for **over 200 pupils**, supporting early identification of potential support needs.
- Further visits are planned in **May** to schools to capture **Schools Academy information** and continue engagement with school pastoral teams.

Schools Academy

Schools Academy Feedback for 25-26, total responses: 195

- Most learners reported that their course met or exceeded expectations, with overall satisfaction ratings predominantly at 4 or 5 out of 5.
- A significant proportion of learners indicated an intention to progress to a full-time Borders College course, demonstrating strong progression impact.
- Learners consistently described the Schools Academy as a positive adult learning environment, valuing the practical learning opportunities, supportive staff relationships, and opportunities for social development and confidence building.
- Key areas identified for improvement related mainly to transport arrangements, including late buses, unclear routes, and inconsistent timings, alongside requests for increased practical learning time and some concerns regarding aspects of the learning environment.

Jen MacKenzie

Student Support Manager (Welfare and Transitions)

April 2026